

Clarion

The Canadian Reformed Magazine
Volume 51, No. 21, October 11, 2002

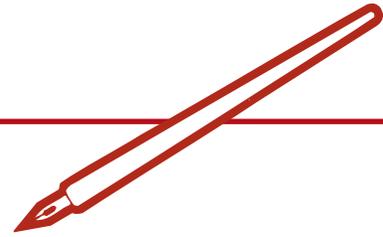


Numbers

10:1-10

*Thanksgiving
in our Ministry*

INSIDE!



By N.H. Gootjes



Thanksgiving is First

Thanksgiving occupies a special place in the cycle of the yearly celebrations. It may be the least of the feast days, but it is the first among them all. In a sense, it is the most original and most fundamental among all the Christian days of commemoration. That may sound strange when it is compared to the other festive days. We commemorate on Christmas day the birth of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Is that not a greater work of God than the abundance of food He grants us, and the opportunities to work and have our living? And Pentecost refers to the coming of the Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts. Is that miracle of God's closeness not much more important than the food on our tables?

Thanksgiving could be celebrated in paradise!

No one will want to take anything away from the greatness of God's mighty works of salvation. We should certainly continue to commemorate them. Yet, we should still recognize Thanksgiving as the first and original celebration of God's work for us. Consider for a moment the beginning of this world. God created everything, the world, the plants, the animals, and even the man Adam and his wife Eve. At that time, Christmas could not be celebrated, for the Christ had not been born. Passover did not exist, for Israel had not yet been led out of the country of Egypt. But Thanksgiving could be celebrated, for God had planted a garden for Adam and Eve (Gen 2:9). They could live off the land, for it provided its fruit even before they had begun to work in the garden. That means that in a world without sin, they could (and would!) be thankful to God for sustaining them. Thanksgiving could be celebrated in paradise!

Destined to give thanks

In that garden, the man had to work. God placed him there "to work it and to take care of it" (Gen 2:15). This was the first "job" God assigned, working the soil of the garden so that it would produce nourishment for himself and for the wife God had made for him, and, if things would have developed normally, for their children and grandchildren. Beginning with paradise, the human race was destined to give thanks to God for the abundance of food and other resources He provided so lavishly on this earth.

It did not work out that way, for Eve and Adam sinned. Actually, they sinned on the point of their food, by eating fruit from the one tree God had specifically excluded. As a result, God banished them from the garden. However, He did not forbid them to use the food his earth produced. They found fruit trees, grains, vegetables, and many other things that were edible. The end of paradise was not the end of their food supply, of working with the earth and taking from the earth the good things it brought forth. God had created a great abundance of good things for us, and we still profit from them. There is much reason for thanksgiving, when we see the harvests and enjoy the good things the earth has produced.

Teach thanksgiving

That was recognized in Israel. David composed a psalm about this work of God, to teach the people of Israel to praise their God. It is He who cares for the land, and who provides water for it. In Israel, water was always a problem; there was only one river, the Jordan, which always had water. The fields were mostly dependent on rain to be fruitful and provide the food for the people. David knew how much his nation was dependent on God, and taught them a song to praise God for his continued care:

You care for the land and water it,
you enrich it abundantly! (Ps 67:9).

The harvest is dependent on God giving rain:

You soften it with showers
and bless it with crops.

You crown the year with bounty,
and your carts overflow with abundance (Ps 67:10, 11).

God's people have always been taught to praise God for the food they receive. It comes to us out of God's hand.

Christians should not forget that our Saviour is first of all the Creator.

And this should be recognized, not only by Israel, but by all nations. When Paul went out among the nations and received the opportunity to speak of God, he emphasized God's care, even for them. When he received the opportunity to evangelize in Lystra, he said about the living God:

Yet he has not left himself without testimony:

He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons:

he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy (Acts 14:17). The gentiles who were not given the many revelations God had given to the Jews, yet knew God. God had made himself known to them by giving them harvests. God could expect their gratitude for the gifts He had given, which allows them to live in this world. Instead, they had made gods for themselves, gods like Zeus and Hermes, and worshipped these.

Who receives thanks today?

And that is still the case, today. Zeus and Hermes are forgotten, just as Baal and Dagon are forgotten. They are no longer worshipped, and thanked for the rain and the abundance of food. But that does not mean that the only true God receives the grateful admiration of the people in this world. We, as western people, admire the wonders of technology and the improved strains of grain we have been able to develop. We pat ourselves on the back for the abundant food supplies we can enjoy, forgetting that we can only work with God's created world and are always dependent on the blessing of the God of heaven and earth.

We need to return to the beginning of our praise of God. He is the God of heaven and earth. He made this world, and all we are allowed to eat goes back to his creation. And He is powerful enough to prevent us from receiving any food

What's inside?

In this issue of *Clarion*, we take note of the fact that we find ourselves near the traditional Thanksgiving weekend in Canada. It is a time when Christians reflect over the rich blessings of our Almighty God and faithful Father. Both the editorial and the meditation column demonstrate to us the rich reasons for our thanksgiving.

This issue is also put together shortly after the thirty-third anniversary meeting and the twenty-eighth convocation of our Theological College in Hamilton, Ontario. We have the principal's report, the presentation of the Women's Saving Action, and the address of Prof. G.H. Visscher of that evening. Coincidentally, but very appropriately, Rev. G.Ph. van Popta's *Observations* column and a short article by Rev. J. Van Rietschoten underline the tremendous need and importance for more students at our Theological College.

The column, *Education Matters* by Keith Sikkema, continues the discussion on parental involvement in children's education. The author makes clear that our schools not only thrive on parental involvement, but it is required by God that parents do this.

Rev. W.L. Bredenhof continues his two-part article on the disturbing relationship between pride and idolatry. We have a press release of Classis Ontario West, and a nice overview of the first year of the Trinity Canadian Reformed Church of Glanbrook.

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Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd., Winnipeg, MB

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 Phone: (204) 663-9000 Fax: (204) 663-9202
 Email: clarion@premier.mb.ca
 World Wide Web address: premier.mb.ca/clarion.html

SUBSCRIPTION RATES	Regular	Air	
FOR 2002	Mail	Mail	
Canada*	\$39.50*	\$65.00*	
U.S.A. U.S. Funds	\$42.00	\$54.00	
International	\$64.00	\$97.00	

*Including 7% GST – No. 890967359RT

Advertisements: \$12.50 per column inch

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada, through the Publication Assistance Program (PAP), toward our mailing costs.

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Agreement No. 1377531
 PAP Registration No. 9907
 ISSN 0383-0438

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Useful Link: www.canrc.org

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at all, as He proved in the Flood. Is our world much better than the world of Noah, which God decided to destroy? The answer is obvious to all who watch the news, hear the people speak and observe what they do. It is the goodness of God that we have again received a plentiful harvest, and have available all we need for our daily needs, and much more.

Return to true thanksgiving

The world should return to the beginning: astonishment and admiration for the God who still provides us with the food we need, and actually, with much more than we really need. That may open their eyes for this God who did so much more by sending his Son into the world. We Christians should surely never forget the beginning of this world. Before God revealed himself as the God of salvation, He proved to

be the God of our life. He planted trees in the garden of Eden so that Adam and Eve could eat, while fulfilling their tasks in his service. Although we sinned already at the very beginning of this world, God continues to provide for our daily needs. We Christians, should not forget that our Saviour is first of all the Creator. We should not forget Thanksgiving, for our daily bread is the first and basic gift of God. And we receive so much more than our daily bread.

Let us celebrate Thanksgiving by giving thanks to God who, in spite of the sins we and all people commit, continues to do his first work for us.



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By J.G. Slaa

Give Thanks to the LORD

"Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good. His love endures forever." Psalm 136

In Jewish tradition this psalm is known as "the Great Psalm of Praise." We could also call it the "Great Psalm of Thanksgiving." It begins with the words: "Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good," and ends with the words, "Give thanks to the God of heaven." The command to "give thanks," although left out of verses 4 and following, should be applied to every verse. For example, verse 4, which says, "to Him who alone does great wonders," is to be understood as "Give thanks to Him who alone does great wonders." Verse 16, which says, "to Him who led his people through the desert," is to be understood as "Give thanks to Him who led His people through the desert." It is indeed the great psalm of praise and thanksgiving.

The Psalmist calls us to express thanksgiving and appreciation to God for what we have received through Him. In so doing, we confess and acknowledge something about God and his works. What is it? His covenant love and mercy!

The song was likely designed to be sung antiphonally in the temple worship. The first line of each verse pursues the theme of the psalm: God's covenant acts. The second line, "For His mercy endures forever," is a refrain or response, breaking in on the song and supporting the theme. The first line would be sung by some of the Levites, the second by the choir as a body, or by the congregation together with the Levites. The insertion of this second line again and again may seem like a vain repetition and bring cumbersomeness to the song. However, the purpose of repetition is to drive home a point and to ensure memorization. What better thing to be repeated again and again, and to memorize, but that the goodness, mercy and love of the LORD endures forever? What better thing to recall that every act of the LORD in the history of redemption is

an act of his love toward us? It is the love of the LORD that we should constantly remember and never forget! It is the love and loyalty of the LORD that compels us to show true thankfulness.

He is God of gods and Lord of lords (2-3). This means that God is "mighty and awesome" (Deut 10:17). He is supreme. It sets the tone. This is why God can be so faithful and true.

He is a God of wonders, from the least things to the greatest (4). He is the God of creation (5-9). God made the heavens, the earth, and the waters. He created the sun, moon and stars. Creation is no mere mechanism, but it is the work of God's steadfast love. God made it and sustains it. Even though this world became subject to sin, God maintains it for Himself. His plan endures.

God also redeems a people for Himself (10-16). The Psalmist describes how God's covenant love fell upon the family of Jacob and the people of Israel. What a glorious history, summed up here in a few words! God put forward a glorious display of power to free his people from the bondage of Egypt, leading them from death into life. He led them through the Red Sea on dry ground, while drowning the obstinate Pharaoh and all his hosts. He preserved them in the wilderness. Here then are various proofs of divine power, goodness and faithfulness. All the other miracles and blessings the reader is left to recall: the bread from heaven, the water from the rock, the care of the flocks, the lack of disease, the preservation of the clothing and the protection from the heat and cold. Later, God preserves them from harsh treatment by kings. Even though his people were sinful and subject to the evil one, God provides for them. He is faithful to his promise of salvation. He never lets go of his own. Having begun a good work in them, it remains in God to complete it to his glory.

Reading this history of the redemption of Israel, we think of our own redemption. Yes, how the covenant mercy and faithfulness of God comes to its fullest expression in our Lord Jesus Christ! He came to free us from the death grip of sin! He died on the cross for our sins! Despite our own sin, God continues to shine on us with his covenant faithfulness. He remembered us in our lowly state; He rescued us from our enemies. It is wholly undeserved. He gives purpose and hope to our lives. Indeed, what reason for our thanksgiving!

The author represents every age as proving the goodness and mercy of God. In all the deliverance that God gives to his people, there is the accompanying gift of the forgiveness of sins. It is fulfilled in Jesus Christ and in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit! The gift of Jesus Christ as the ultimate expression of God's unfailing loyalty to his people.

Finally, God gives food to every creature (25). He gives and sustains life. He gives us physical food and all our material needs. God, who loves us, provides for us in every way.

Here we have then a beautiful thanksgiving song of the covenant. It speaks of God's covenant faithfulness. It speaks of his lasting love, that was not altered because of our sins. God will complete his plan of salvation for his people. We must never forget. As we confess and repeat God's mercies that have shone on his church through the centuries, we are moved to thanksgiving. It truly is a great thanksgiving Psalm. Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! His love endures forever. 

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Pride and Our Idol Factories: The Disturbing Relationship Between Pride and Idolatry (2)

By W.L. Bredenhof

The relationship between pride and idolatry: scriptural data

It is no secret that pride is a sin that tempts especially those who are in high positions of power and authority. To get to those high positions, it sometimes almost seems that pride (sometimes masquerading as “self-confidence”) is a prerequisite. That is not always the case, but more often than not it seems to hold true. The same goes for many of the men who held high positions in the Scriptures. This morning, we’re just going to consider one of those figures.

1 Samuel 15 is a pivotal chapter in the story of King Saul. This is the point at which it becomes clear that Saul is not the King in the messianic line. Saul is rejected by God. How did it happen? Well, it all started when Samuel came to Saul and told him the Word of the LORD, “I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt.” Then God told Saul to attack Amalek and utterly destroy everything, including the animals. It was a simple, straightforward command from the LORD. There were no complicated instructions involved. Attack and destroy everything. Period.

Saul took 200,000 soldiers and 10,000 men of Judah. He attacked the Amalekites and killed most of the people. But he spared Agag the king and he also kept the best animals. Only the lousy animals were destroyed. God noticed this failure on the part of Saul and so He sent Samuel back to Saul. Saul’s greeting to Samuel is recorded for us in 1 Samuel 15:13, “Blessed are

you of the LORD! I have performed the commandment of the LORD.” Then Samuel right away asked what all the noise was about. Saul said that they had kept the best of the sheep and oxen to sacrifice to God – but everything else, he assured Samuel, they destroyed. Samuel rebukes Saul for his blatant disobedience – and then Saul has the nerve to keep on making excuses in verses 20-21. It’s like he didn’t even hear what Samuel was saying to him. He had done the right thing and Samuel was mistaken.

Really, what his pride led him to do was to recreate God.

That’s when Samuel gets blunt with Saul and tells him “rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king.” Saul finally gets it, or appears to, and then tries to repent, but by then it is too late.

Did you notice those words, “arrogance is like the evil of idolatry?” Those words right there illustrate for us the very close connection between these two sins. How did this relationship work itself out in 1 Samuel 15? Saul was arrogant. Verse 12 of this chapter tells us that Saul set up a monument for himself. In his arrogance and pride he thought that he could arbitrarily change one of God’s commands. Really, what his pride led him

to do was to recreate God. He didn’t like a God who would kill the king of his enemies. He thought a God who liked war-trophies would be more to his liking. He didn’t like a God who commanded the death of perfectly good animals for no good reason. So, he recreated a God who would be happy to have his people have those things. Incidentally, it appears that his remark to Samuel that the animals were to be used for sacrifice was either a white lie (some of the animals would inevitably be put to that use) or an outright excuse. At any rate, what is clear is that Saul in his pride had also recreated God. He didn’t like God the way He was. So, Saul’s pride went hand in hand with idolatry, sin against the second commandment.

This relationship is also illustrated in other Scripture passages. Let’s take a brief look at Zephaniah 3. The beginning of this chapter is concerned with the wickedness of Jerusalem before the exile into Babylon. Though it is not said so explicitly here, we know from other places in this short prophecy (i.e. 1:5) that the wickedness of Jerusalem included outright idolatry – not only the self-willed worship of Jahweh, but also the blatant worship of other gods besides Him. We catch a whiff of this when we read in 3:4 that “Her priests have polluted the sanctuary. . . .”

This idolatry went hand in hand with pride. This is clear in verses 9-12 of chapter 3. God says that He is going to bring into existence “a meek and humble people, and they shall trust in the Name of the LORD.” In other words, such a people are not in existence at

this moment. God promises to take away from Jerusalem those who are rejoicing in pride and are haughty. The idolaters are prideful and their lot is destruction at the hand of the LORD. From this brief glance at Zephaniah 3, we can see that idolatry and pride are usually, if not always, found together.¹

So far, we've looked at two Old Testament passages. Let's now turn and look at one New Testament passage that illustrates the same thing. Let's look at 2 Timothy 3:1-5. Paul here warns Timothy about the coming of dangerous times. He outlines what men will be like. Among other things, he informs Timothy that men will be lovers of themselves, and lovers of pleasure. They will also be lovers of money. All of these things point to idolatry. But then notice also the many expressions Paul uses for the sin of pride: boasters,

We tend to the sin of pride.

proud, headstrong, haughty, having a form of godliness perhaps, and maybe we could also add unthankful. This text here almost appears as if it could be summarized with those two words: men will be prideful and idolatrous. In this case, we should also note that the idolatry again works in violation of both the first commandment and second commandment – just like with the preceding two examples. The idolatry consists of making other gods – themselves, pleasure, money. But these men also claim to be Christians – and claiming to be such, they cannot but be recreating God to their own liking.

From these three Scripture passages, we get a clearer picture of how this relationship functions. And it is disturbing – most of all because we know that we also often fit the picture. We tend to the sin of pride – and to make matters worse, we set up our little idols, including a God who can fit our lives and who will accept us as we sit on our little throne. Realizing this hurts. This is who we are and we know that it is wrong – it alienates us from the true God and sucks the joy out of our Christian life. And before we can address that, we need to look a little bit closer at how the dynamics of this relationship often work out in our lives.

The dynamics of the relationship investigated further

So, at this point, we're going to shift gears a little bit. I'd like to make some observations on how this relationship works out. These are observations from our own lives, rather than observations made out of the Scriptures. Still, we will use what we have already learned from the Scriptures to help us analyze and understand why we do these things.

It seems that there are two different ways that this relationship between pride and idolatry can be worked out in our lives. Now, before I outline those two ways, I should say that it rarely works out this neatly in real life. Life rarely falls into neat and tidy categories. I want to emphasize that quite often these two dynamics blend to varying degrees. But, as we're going to see, they have one major thing in common.

We all know people who are or who seem to be very unaffected by what others think of them. There are certain people (and maybe we're like that ourselves) who just really couldn't care how other people perceive them. The only one who matters is me and my opinion. I am not going to let myself be guided or controlled by other people. I could not care less what so and so thinks. They're just people. This type of person very easily falls into pride because there is a total focus on the self. Scarcely anybody else matters. The feelings of other people mean nothing and so we just trample all over them. This type of person never feels guilty about anything he or she may have said, because being wrapped up in themselves they never catch on that they might have hurt somebody.

The world in which we live encourages this way of thinking and acting. Perhaps you have noticed the wide variety of "reality" TV shows around today. Some of these shows involve people voting others off the island or out of the house. Some of these shows have a man or a woman selecting a spouse or lover from a group – which inevitably means turning down others. Oftentimes, the rejection of others is done with much glee and relish. Hurting other people's feelings has become a form of entertainment.²

We may have to look closely at ourselves to see if this prideful dynamic exists in our lives. Because, if it does, if this is our way of life, this is idolatry. We make ourselves into idols – and so

we break the first commandment. We also recreate God into someone who doesn't want us to care about how other people think and feel. We make God into someone who wants us to look out for number one and number one alone. We don't even think that God would be offended with our prideful idolatry of the self.

Perhaps you can already guess the second way in which this dynamic works itself out in our lives. It's the problem that Edward Welch points to in his excellent book, *When People are Big and God is Small*. Some people have their lives totally controlled and dominated by what other people think about them. They care too much about others and their perceptions and impressions. This is the "fear of man." How do you know that suffer from this? Welch provides some questions to ask yourself:

- Have you ever struggled with peer pressure?
- Is self-esteem a critical concern for you?
- Do you ever feel you might be exposed as a fake?
- Are you always second-guessing decisions because of what other people might think?
- Do you get easily embarrassed?
- Do other people often make you angry or depressed?
- Do you avoid people?³

I think many of us are going to answer "yes" to these kinds of questions. At some point or another, most of us fall prey to the fear of man, even if we found ourselves in the first type of person I described.

Hurting other people's feelings has become a form of entertainment.

Why do we fear people? Why do we fear man? Oftentimes it's because we're afraid of other people. We are afraid that they could expose or humiliate us. We're afraid that they will reject, ridicule or despise us. We're scared that they will attack, oppress or threaten us.⁴ And those people often include our brothers and sisters in the Lord! What this all boils down to is that we're frightened that someone will come along and knock us down a notch. We're worried that people will see us for who we really are and then our good image is gone.

Really, what we're talking about here is pride. Our fear of man has pride at its root – that may be hard to accept, but if we think about it biblically it makes sense. The fear of man is closely connected with low self-esteem as well – and then there's a connection to pride again. Welch puts it really well when he writes this:

Low self-esteem usually means that I think too highly of myself. I'm too self-involved, I feel I deserve better than what I have. The reason I feel bad about myself is that I aspire to something more. I want just a few more minutes of greatness. I am a peasant who wants to be king. When you are in the grips of low self-esteem, it's painful, and it certainly doesn't feel like pride. But I believe that this is the dark, quieter side of pride – thwarted pride.⁵

So, when someone puts us down, it's not really our self-esteem that we're concerned with. Rather, isn't it the case that we often say that our pride gets hurt? "She hurt my pride!"⁶

And, once again, we cannot escape the connection with idolatry. In this type of dynamic, we make gods out of other people and, in an odd way, also ourselves. Other people and their perceptions of us are what will determine whether we will be feeling well or feeling down on any given day. Someone comes along and puts you down and your day is shot, maybe even your week. That person has become a god in your life, controlling you. And we ourselves have to be praised and made to feel well in this dynamic. So, in a way, we have also made ourselves into a god. We want to be "worshipped," if you want to put it like that. And the result is that the God of the Bible gets recreated again. Perhaps we make Him into the God who wants us to have self-esteem and feel good about ourselves. To put it bluntly: a God who wants us to have pride. Or, because of all our disappointments, we mould Him into a God who is distant from us and doesn't really care about us. Do you see how this dynamic also works itself into violations of both the first and the second commandment?

And that is where the two dynamics I've been speaking about converge. Both forms of pride lead to idolatry. Both dynamics give us a false conception of who God is. This is the disturbing fact about the relationship between pride and idolatry: through this we are slowly led away from God. Satan, the world, and our flesh lead us away from

the God of the Bible – and as that happens, we are in danger of losing our hope for eternal life in Jesus Christ. If the God in whom we believe is no longer the God of the Bible, the Triune God, then who is it who will redeem us from the wrath of the true and living God? That is the truly disturbing thing about this relationship between pride and idolatry, especially for us who say we are Christians! That's why it is no exaggeration to say that pride is a deadly sin.⁷

I trust that every one of us here claims that beautiful title of Christian for herself. So, how do we address this very serious problem? How do we close down the idol factory that exists by nature in each one of us? The answer is a simple one and maybe even a little obvious. Perhaps some people will find it trite. But if you are one who loves the Lord Jesus (and we all claim to, don't we?), I trust that you will submit to what the Scriptures teach. The Bible tells us that we must *fear God*.

If you are going to shut down your idol factory, then you have to keep busy with the Word.

We must *fear Him*. That means, among other things, that we must have a reverent submission to Him that leads to obedience.⁸ The Bible says that we must *fear God*. That means the one true God who has revealed Himself fully in the Scriptures. That means that we must give ourselves wholeheartedly to the study of the Bible. For some of you, perhaps your study year is now over. But that doesn't mean that you can stop studying the Word. If you are going to shut down your idol factory, then you have to keep busy with the Word – that's the only way you're going to know who the true God really is and what He wants for your life. We're all very busy, but if are to avoid the disastrous implications of the relationship between pride and idolatry, we must make it a priority to study the Word for ourselves – each of us individually, family devotions do not count!

Another important way to close down the idol factory and the pride that keeps it running is to look to one another. In a real way, when we do this, we are looking to the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. He is the one



Called and accepted to the church at Denver, CO, USA:

Rev. D.M. Boersma

of Pretoria, South Africa, working as missionary in Shoshanghuve, SA.

• • •

Declined the call to the church at Neerlandia

Rev. R.J. Eikelboom

of Calgary, AB.

at work in the communion of saints. So often we don't trust our fellow believers in the church. We've been hurt so often and betrayed that we no longer open up. How can we begin addressing this? First, we have to know in ourselves the very problem we're talking about – pride. If someone confides in us and bares their soul, does the whole church need to know about it – and what would be your reason for making such a disclosure and betraying the trust placed in you? The second thing we have to realize is that we have to begin trusting the work of the Holy Spirit in our fellow believers. For too long we seem to have ignored the fact that He is at work in the lives of others in the church – not just in me. Do we trust Him to help us admonish and encourage one another? If not, what are we saying about his presence in the church? Think about the implications!

¹ Another passage where this relationship is clearly illustrated is Isaiah 2, esp. verses 6-18

² For this thought, I acknowledge my debt to my colleague, Rev. R. Aasman.

³ *When People are Big and God is Small*, Edward T. Welch, Phillipsburg: P & R, 1997, pp.14-17.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p.23.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.32.

⁶ For more on "self-esteem," cf. "Loving Yourself?," R. Schouten, in *Clarion* 41:10, p.205.

⁷ Consider also Deut. 31:16, 20 where idolatry is equated with covenant-breaking.

⁸ *When People are Big and God is Small*, p.97.

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So What Does Separate the Sheep from the Goats?

A Closer Look at a Misunderstood Parable (Matthew 25:31-46)*

By G.H. Visscher

Mixed flocks of sheep and goats, we are told, are quite common in the East. And especially when the animals are dirty and the light is dim at sunset, it takes a bit of an experienced eye to separate the sheep from the goats at the end of the day.

So too at the last judgement, it may not be so obvious to all observers – even to the participants themselves (verses 37-9, 44!) – as to who belongs to the righteous and who belongs to the unrighteous? So the question needs to be asked: what does separate the sheep from the goats? What will separate the righteous from the unrighteous on the last day?

The concern of my address this evening is the fact that there seems to be widespread misunderstanding among us about this parable.¹ Often when we are being encouraged to support works of charity, reference is made to this text and we are told that we need to be charitable to the poor, the hungry, and the imprisoned and the like because what we do to them we do to Christ. The Lord Jesus identifies with them all, so we had better as well. That is, after all, what separates the sheep from the goats.

It becomes somewhat of a “social gospel” among people who do not usually give much ear to voices from that corner. And it seems, if I may say so, more like justification by works among a people who really are quite steeped in the principles of grace.

Now let me make it clear from the outset: it is not that Christians do not need to bother with such works of charity! They do. Children of a charitable God become charitable themselves. But the question is: is this what *this* parable teaches? This parable is a picture of the final judgement, and of the one question that is going to be asked of all in that judgement. Is this really *the* ques-

tion that is going to be asked of everyone on the last day: what have you done for the hungry and thirsty, the sick, the strangers, the imprisoned? Or is there another question?

Detail and context

Rather than snowing you under with many academic details this evening, by means of these questions I would like to show to you something of what we are busy with at the Theological College. The foremost subject in the Old and New Testament departments is exegesis. And, among other things, we teach the students that there are two aspects that are very important for proper exegesis.

Sometimes, one little detail is what unlocks a passage. Exegesis is not unlike detective work.

The first one is *detail*. Details matter. Sometimes, one little detail is what unlocks a passage. Exegesis is not unlike detective work. It is a matter of asking the right questions – especially about those details.

The first detail I would refer you to is the fact that in verse 40, these people who are hungry and imprisoned and the like are referred to as: “brothers” of the Lord Jesus. “whatever you did for one of the least of *these brothers* of mine. . . .”

The second detail is the fact that in verse 45, these same people are referred to as “*one of the least of these*. . . .” From the fact that both the word “least” and the word “brothers” is mentioned together in verse 40, it is evident that it is one group that is being referred to here. The Lord Jesus characterizes those who are hungry, sick, imprisoned and the

like as being his brothers, even the least among his brothers.

Who are they?

Who then are these lowly brothers? Besides the matter of detail, there is also that of *context*. It is context that is ever so decisive as to what to make of such details. And the first context here is Matthew’s own gospel.

To whom does Matthew usually refer when he speaks about “brothers” of our Lord Jesus? At the end of Matthew 12, Jesus’ earthly mother and brothers are not far off (12:46) when he refers to his present and would-be disciples in exactly this way. “Who is my mother, and who are my mother and my brothers? Pointing to *his disciples*, he said, ‘Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my *brother* and sister and mother’ (12:49-50). Similarly in chapter 28, the risen Jesus is clearly speaking about his disciples when he says: “Go and tell my *brothers* to go to Galilee. . . .” Moreover, only two chapters before this, the Lord Jesus tells the disciples that they “are all brothers” (23:8).

And what about that phrase of verse 45: “*one of the least of these*. . . .”? Is this not also a reference to the disciples? In chapter 18, for instance, the Lord Jesus is speaking to his disciples – those disciples who always want to be considered great and significant – that they need to be like children (18:3). To be sure, sometimes the phrase “least of these,” “one of these little ones” refers to children (18:5, 10), but other times it refers to the disciples (18:4, 14) who will only be great in the kingdom if they are content to be the “least” of the kingdom (25:40).² Strikingly, in Matthew 10, these two are again linked together. Consider 10:42: “if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to *one of these little ones* because he is my *disciple*. . . .”

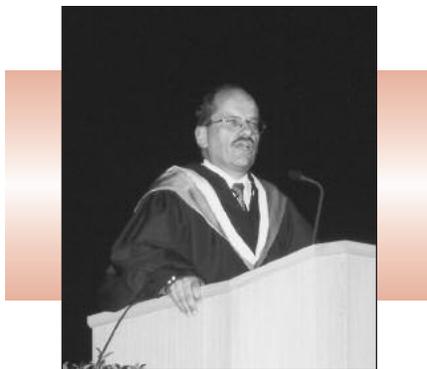
Let me refer you to one more detail. Notice that the King in the parable does not just say that all those who are hungry, thirsty, estranged, naked, sick and imprisoned are his brothers, but the King says: whatever you did to them, you did to me (40) and whatever you did not do to them, you did not do to me (45)! In other words, the Lord Jesus *identifies*, *unites* Himself with these mistreated brothers. Think about that. Although the compassion of our Lord surely goes out to those who are burdened and troubled in this broken world, where else in the gospels do we get the message that the Lord Jesus *identifies* and *unites* Himself with such people in general? Nowhere! But do we not read regularly that the Lord Jesus does identify himself with, unites himself with another group of people, namely, his disciples?

Messengers of the gospel!

It seems therefore that there is something else that is separating the sheep and the goats here. Namely, this: *the Lord Jesus is referring to deeds of kindness and charity done towards His disciples as they go out with his gospel.* The references are not as general as we assume at first glance; they are very specifically about those *who are called to go out with the gospel.*

Consider once again Matthew's words in chapter 10. There we read about how the Lord Jesus sends his disciples into the world. How does this take place? Are they being sent into a world of hotels and restaurants with expense accounts? No, money is unavailable, restaurants non-existent, and whatever hotels there are, are places of ill repute to which the disciples would and could not go. The Lord Jesus sends them out without gold or silver, without tunics, without a bag, without food (Matt. 10:9, 10), with nothing other than His message and His blessing. And so, Matthew 10 is saying that the great challenge before the people of Israel and all whom they confront is: *how will they receive these men whom Jesus sends out? Will they support them? Take them in?* People will be considered worthy (10:11) and homes will be blessed (10:12, 13) when they receive such gospel messengers; but towns and homes will be cursed when they turn them away (10:14-16). Many will show themselves to be unrighteous when they drag the gospel messengers before the local council, flog them in the synagogue, or toss them into prison (10:17).

And so you see the real point of this parable. In this section of the eschato-



logical discourse (24:1-25:46) the Lord Jesus is emphasizing various themes of his prior teaching. Given the opposition that he is facing here, is it surprising that he should warn and comfort the disciples in this way about the opposition and hardship they will suffer? Spreading the gospel will mean sacrifice in many ways. But along with this there is the promise that ultimately people will be judged eternally on the basis of how they have treated these brothers of our Lord, these "insignificant ones" who spoke to them the Word of God. *Will they give them food, drink, clothing? Will they come to their aid when they are sick, or in prison, or when the world treats them as strangers?*

You see: *the refusal to offer hospitality is ultimately a refusal to believe.* The refusal to accept the *messengers* of the Lord Jesus Christ is the refusal to accept the *message* of the Lord Jesus Christ, and even the Lord Jesus Himself.

There is this tendency to universalize the suffering that the Lord Jesus is speaking about.

Yes, the Lord Jesus identifies with them. Matthew 10 again, verse 40, very pointedly: "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me." Even the famous passage about a cup of cold water does not apply generally to all the thirsty of the world; our Lord says: "And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward"(10:42).

In liberal circles, there is this tendency to universalize the suffering that the Lord Jesus is speaking about. In Christian circles there has also been a tendency to generalize the suffering as being all suffering that Christians undergo. But neither of these positions will

do. When we listen to this parable of Matthew 25 carefully and consider also Matthew 10 where our Lord really is putting forth its principles, we realize that this suffering is *on account of the gospel.* This suffering is suffering that is experienced *because someone who is a disciple of Jesus Christ is going forth with that gospel.* They are the least in the kingdom, because the teaching of our Lord gets through to them; it will only be those who are content to be the least who will go forth with the gospel. Perhaps they are also the least because the world surely will treat them as the least – stripping them of possessions, imprisoning them, killing them, and opposing them in every possible way! It is suffering that was first experienced by the apostles; subsequently in the Christian church there have been countless officebearers who have suffered and sacrificed for the gospel. Even if one chooses to use the word "disciple" in the wider sense (along the lines of Matt. 12:50), the suffering is still not entirely generalized but is suffering that is brought about by that discipleship and on account of the gospel.

But let us not draw the wrong conclusions. The gospel is not saying that we can remain cold and inactive with respect to the unfortunate and suffering of the world. The beloved children of the Father overflow with love themselves. The second greatest commandment is to love our neighbour as ourselves (Matt 22:39), and there are other passages which make it clear that we cannot be insensitive to the plight of the poor and suffering (e.g., Luke 16: 19-31). But the point is: this is not what the Scripture is saying *here.* Here we are being told that hearers of the gospel show their faith in the message of salvation in a highly significant way when they receive the messengers of the gospel with hospitality and works of love. And unbelievers display not just character flaws and personality deficiencies when they mistreat the messengers. They show unbelief!

Beyond Matthew

It is a theme that you find also beyond Matthew's Gospel.³ Think of a foremost persecutor of the messengers of the gospel, Saul. When he comes to stand before the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus, what is the question that is asked of him? Notice, it is not "why do you do this to *them*?" but it is: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute *me*?" In the very language of this parable, Saul, the one who persecutes the messengers of the Lord Jesus, persecutes Jesus! (Acts

9:4-5; cf 22:7-8; 26:14-15). And it is striking, once Paul becomes a messenger of the Lord Jesus, he experiences the same. In 2 Corinthians 11:23ff, when he catalogs his own hardships as an apostle of Christ, it all follows the lines of Matthew 25. Hunger, thirst, sickness, persecution, imprisonment, estrangement from people and the world, he experiences it all. Here perhaps we come to understand the words of Paul in Colossians 1:24: "I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church." The Sender and the Sent are One. He identifies with his followers. The persecution of the Christians is the persecution of the Christ.

I do not mean to pretend that this interpretation is new. Others have said it before me. Actually, there is a very old reference to this parable in a second century document called Second Clement. Clement uses the language of the parable in several ways, especially when the unbelievers cry out at the judgement: "Woe to us, for you really did exist, and we did not know it nor did we believe and obey the elders who preached to us of our salvation."⁴ Here then, precisely this interpretation was already given already in the second century; the unrighteous realize that they are found unrighteous precisely because they did not receive the word of the elders as the Word of God.

So we see then what difference careful exegesis makes. A superficial examination of the text may lead to one application, but further study leads us to another.

Application today

If the parable had this gospel focus then, it has the same today as well. The parable calls us this evening to consider first of all *missionaries* and so many others who are facing hardship and persecution for the sake of the tremendously important task of spreading the gospel. Those are the suffering members of humanity that it calls to mind in the first place.

Then, it calls each of us to examine *ourselves* too as to how we are responding to the gospel as it comes to us through the ministers of the Word, and the other officebearers. Let us not be too quick with our judgement, too harsh with our criticism. Be careful for how we react to them – says our Lord Jesus – is how we react to Him! "What you do to them, you do to Me!" The parable reminds those who seek to wear out officebearers with belittling criticism and underhanded ways that there

is a day coming when they will answer for such actions! The Reformed way is to leave the supervision of officebearers precisely to those ecclesiastical bodies that are appointed for the task. True faith shows itself in receptivity to the Word, respect for its messengers, and therein honor to Jesus Christ Himself.

And it calls all those who go forth with the word – also *these young men* before us this evening – to consider the high nature of the task before them. If we are to be treated as representatives of Christ, one with Him, that must have its effects on our walk and our talk as officebearers. Ours is the high task to represent the ascended and exalted Christ. Ours is the great privilege to bring a Message that will be so decisive, even for eternity!

A superficial examination of the text may lead to one application, but further study leads us to another.

And it calls me this evening – if I may end on a personal note – to give thanks as I embark on a new task. I have fond memories and gratitude for parents who directed me exactly on this path – a path on which the gospel is central and foremost. I am grateful also to my wife, Teny, and our children who recognize that same primacy of the gospel and so have been a blessing for me in so many ways. Moreover, I can only express gratitude to the congregations who have treated me in such a way that I really have not experienced the kinds of hardships that the parable speaks about. To the congregations of Houston, Ottawa, Surrey, Burlington West and Burlington Waterdown, I express deep gratitude for unmerited kindness and generous support – again, not because of the person, not because of me, but because of precisely these principles of the gospel.

How gracious our God is to us that we have a federation of churches in which the Word receives such primacy of position that we also have a Theological College. To us at the College is given a sacred trust. Many might abandon the Gospel, considering it of little effect in this world. That too is unbelief. But ours is the challenge to hold it high, knowing that it is not some kind of social or political gospel that has power, nor

is it personal ability or charisma that will do it. Only the pure, unadulterated gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is "the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Rom 1:16).

May we be blessed by receiving many more messengers of that great Gospel. May we encourage that precisely by treating the messengers as we would treat the One who sends them. For one day soon, He is coming and He will separate the sheep from the goats, the righteous from the unrighteous precisely on the basis of this question.

**Inaugural address at the College evening of September 6, 2002.*

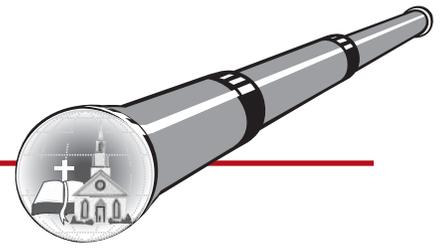
¹This misunderstanding appears to be widespread. In recent years, there have been several excellent studies which defend the view presented here. Some of them are: J. Ramsey Michaels "Apostolic Hardships and Righteous Gentiles," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 84 (1965) 32-44; L. Cope, "Matthew XXV:31-46: 'The Sheep and the Goats' Reinterpreted" *Novum Testamentum XI* (1969) 32-44; Graham N. Stanton, "Once More: Matthew 25.31-46" *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992) 207-231. See also J. van Bruggen, *Matteüs: het Evangelie voor Israël*. CNT (Kok, 1990) 432-435. A good survey of the various approaches is found in G. E. Ladd "The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats in Recent Interpretation" *New Dimensions in New Testament Study* Edited by R.N. Longenecker, ed. (Zondervan, 1974) 191-199.

Though unconvincing, the best defense of the position opposed here is probably by C.E.B. Cranfield "Who are Christ's Brothers (Matthew 25.40)?" *On Romans and other New Testament Essays* (T.& T. Clark, 1998) 125

²A different word is used in Matthew 25 (*elangchistos*) than in 18 (*micros*) but it should be noted that the difference is negligible as the former is a superlative form of the latter.

³One can think also of John's letters where he urges some not to admit those who deny the doctrine of Christ (2 John 10-11) and commends others for rendering service to faithful brothers (3 John 5). Messengers of the true gospel (and those of the false gospel) were very dependent on their hearers for housing, support, and the like.

⁴2 Clement XVII.5. Compare also passages of the early Christian document, *Didache* (or: *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*) XI-XIII in which the church is told how to support traveling gospel messengers and how to distinguish true prophets from false; e.g. *Didache* XII.1-2: "Let everyone who 'comes in the Name of the Lord' be received. . . If he who comes as a traveler, help him as much as you can, but he shall not remain with you more than two days, or, if need be, three. . ." *The Apostolic Fathers*. (Loeb Classical Library, volume 1).



Where Have All the Pastors Gone?

By George van Popta

In the late 50s, Pete Seeger wrote *Where have all the flowers gone?* It was a very melancholy song, made famous by Peter, Paul and Mary, about young girls, who used to pick flowers, marrying young men. The young men went off to war and ended up dead in foreign graveyards. The flowers are gone; the young girls are gone; the young men are gone; nothing left but the graveyards. A real hurtin' song.

There is something else to be melancholy about. Another stanza could be added to the song. A stanza that asks, "Where have all the pastors gone?" Awhile ago I wrote about how almost every North American denomination is suffering a shortage of ministers. There is no over abundance in the Canadian Reformed Churches either. As far as our sister churches in The Netherlands goes, the shortage seems to be reaching chronic proportions. Dr. John P. Elliot, executive director of *Christian Observer*, reported the following in *Presbyterians-Week*:

Dramatic Shortage of Reformed Pastors Expected

Despite a year long campaign to attract new students only six have enrolled for their first year of study at the Theological University of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (Liberated) in Kampen, The Netherlands. Kampen II launched a campaign in 2001 with the goal of recruiting 25 students.

The (Liberated) Reformed Churches have 302 ministers serving 126,456 members. Some 55 congregations have vacant pastorates. A large number of pastors will begin retiring in 2010. As a result the shortage is expected to rise dramatically.

In an interview with the *Nederlands Dagblad* Kampen's Greek professor J.A. Meijer underlines the fact that real numbers are even worse than they appear to be at first sight. Two of the six new students are women. And the faculty knows from experience that only half of the men who enroll will become ministers. The Reformed Churches can realistically expect only three freshmen to enter the ministry. Since 12 students enrolled in 2001, the two classes combined will probably produce no more than nine pastors.

Over the past 12 months Kampen II has made serious efforts to publicize the school and find potential candidates. Last spring 25 interested candidates visited Kampen for an information day. The school also received many responses from men who had already

completed university education and were interested in full-time ministry.

Meijer continued "After all that effort we did not expect this response." Professor Meijer further notes that potential theology students are aware of what is going on in the church. Many pastors are on forced leave and "That has not escaped the notice of these students."

In an interview with *Christian Renewal* the Liberated Reformed Synod's new moderator,

Dr. Erik de Boer, points to the dramatic rise in the number of pastors who leave the ministry or who are forced to leave their congregations. He estimates that up to 30 percent of the denomination's pastors have been in some sort of difficulty over the past few years. In his own classis two of the eight pastors have been released from their congregations.

"Twenty five years ago congregations were willing to accept the weaknesses of their pastors. They viewed them as God's servant, with all his strengths and weaknesses. Congregations today demand much more from a pastor and are less willing to be patient with him. If the minister does not live up to the expectations of a part of the congregation, a body of resistance may develop. A shift in the church council may tip the balance against a minister," according to de Boer.

Our Dutch sister churches are running an eighteen percent vacancy rate with more ministers slated to retire soon

than new students entering Kampen. We are doing a little better currently running a twelve percent vacancy rate; however, a number of our ministers plan to retire within the next couple of years while there will probably be a mass

exit from active ministry, including all the professors at the College, between the years 2010 and 2020. The ranks at the College are very thin. International students who plan to return home to their countries of origin are numbering almost as high as national students. Added to the vacant pulpits is the need for missionaries. Several churches are working to send men out on the work of mission. Further, we are still growing by an average of a congregation per year.

Conservatively, we need twenty men graduating from our College in the next four years. With an average of five graduates per year, we will only be holding our own. At best, we will only attain one third of that. If the congregations do not triple the number of men going to the College, the math suggests we may be facing up to fifteen vacancies

Let us pray for an explosion of students at the College.

four years from now. This ought to be of no small concern to the churches.

What ought we to do? As in all of life, we need to pray and work. Also in this we need to depend upon the Lord. He will raise up faithful preachers for the church and the world. We do not depend upon the numbers but upon the Lord. We need to pray the Lord to provide preachers. At the same time, the Lord requires us to work, also in encouraging young men to take up the wonderful task of preaching the glorious gospel. Has your congregation produced a minister? If not, why not? Is your minister praying regularly that young men of the congregation would see it as beautiful work to perform? Elders, are you speaking with promising young men about this calling? Parents, are you talking with your sons about the great need for preachers?

Let us pray for an explosion of students at the College. The churches should not be saying, "College, send us ministers!"

Rather, the College should be telling the churches: "Send us your young men!" If the congregations send the blocks of wood, the professors will carve the blocks into arrows.¹

Let us once and for all time rid ourselves of the notion that there will be no places for the graduates to work. Do not worry about "a glut of preachers on the market." There is enough work waiting to be done. Our country, our world, needs preachers of the gospel.

¹In the 16th century, John Calvin's Theological Academy in Geneva had 1500 students, yet the school could supply only 1/10 of the ministers the world demanded. Calvin wrote everywhere, "Send us wood, and we shall make arrows!" 

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Ministers Work Only One Day a Week

By J. VanRietschoten

The conversation goes something like this: "Jimmy, what would you want to become?" "I want to be a minister." "Now why would you want to become a minister, little fellow?" "Ministers only work one day a week." Out the mouth of babes!

Jimmy said it because he was not mature enough to see past that one day of the week. Many grownups think the same as Jimmy and some grownups say it, just like Jimmy: A minister works only one day a week.

Before I became a minister I listened to many ministers working that one day of the week. Twice a Sunday I saw and heard a minister at work.

I entered the Theological College of our churches and was interviewed by one professor and one governor of the College. The governor was the late Rev. W. Loopstra. Rev. Loopstra asked me what aspect of the work of a minister I was looking forward the most. I had to think that one over. I almost answered that I looked forward the most to the preaching and the teaching. I realized that I was not mature enough to know what all would be involved in my work as a minister. Therefore I answered that

I hoped to know what aspect I loved the most after I had become acquainted with all the aspects of the work.

Before I entered the College I had to study hard besides providing for our family. During the three years of studies at the College I studied and worked day and part of the night. The professors and lecturers did exactly the same: day and part of the night.

The intense studies during the training for the ministry cover all the aspects a student will later meet in pastoring a congregation. All these aspects quickly bring home to the student the realization that he is being prepared for seven days of work.

At the College you continue the studies of Hebrew and Greek which you began in university. You are drilled in how to use this knowledge of the original Bible languages for understanding the Holy Scriptures. The drilling goes on and on. The knowledge you acquired through language skills must be used for frequent sermon preparation.

Your first sermon proposal comes all too soon after you have began the studies. Hours and hours of preparation make you realize as a beginning

student what awaits you once you are a minister. That one day on the pulpit will cost you many hours of preparation of not one but two sermons. How will you manage all this besides teaching the church classes, the many types of visits in the congregation, the meetings you have to chair?

The studies during the training years are broad and deep. After you graduate and accept the call to service you find that the professors laid a good foundation. Nevertheless, they have merely whetted the appetite. Besides all the work in the congregation, a minister has to build on the foundation that has been laid by the professors. Once you become a minister, you soon find out that you do not just study for that one sermon but that you have to study broadly all the time.

You think Jimmy still wants to become a minister after he has found out that it takes all you have and more? If Jimmy is prepared to become a servant he will. 

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Principal's Report

By J. De Jong

With thankfulness to God who leads and governs all things, we can recount the completion of another year of study and training at the Theological College. The year began with a chapel on September 11, 2001, and just as the chapel was nearing its completion, the news of the attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City broke. Much has transpired in the world since that date, also in terms of retaliation. But this has made us all the more conscious of our dependence on God's favour, and his government in our lives. We are indeed grateful that He has allowed us to complete another year of work without hindrance.

Faculty

Our current professor of New Testament, Rev. Prof. G.H. Visscher, has completed his first year of teaching, and finds his new role very challenging and rewarding. He had grown into the work very well, and will also be using time this summer to proceed with his studies at McMaster University. We also look forward to his inaugural address later this evening.

Our senior emeritus, Dr. J. Faber has had a difficult year in terms of his health, but is thankful for God's guidance and strength in his life, and the support of many brothers and sisters throughout the federation, and beyond. May the Lord continue to provide all that is needed!

Students

Tonight we may witness the graduation of three students: Mr. Edwer Dethan, Mr. Walter Geurts and Mr. Julius van Spronsen. Ed Dethan hopes to return to his native country, Indonesia, this fall, while both Walter and Julius have been preparing to enter the ministry here in Canada. We wish our graduates every success in their work!

We may welcome four new students to the College this evening. The



first is Mr. Hendrik Alkema, currently a member in Hamilton. Second, we welcome Mr. Richard Horlings of Attercliffe, Ontario. Both of these brothers will be taking the M. Div. programme at the College. Then we may also welcome two students from Korea: Hyuk-Ki Kim has been admitted to two years of study at the College and Kyung-Min Kim will be with us as an auditor for one year. We welcome them this evening!

The academic year

The year opened with our annual convocation last September, in which Prof. J. Geertsema gave a farewell address on *Is Conversion after Apostasy Impossible? A look at Hebrews 6:6.*¹ The following Monday we set down to work, with an orientation period for our new group of students.

This year was highlighted by a number of important celebrations. Dr. Gootjes celebrated his twenty-fifth year in the ministry, and his predecessor, Dr. J. Faber, was able to celebrate his fiftieth anniversary in the ministry. We also witnessed the retirement of Prof. J. Geertsema with a special reception at the end of December, 2001. Our sincere thanks to Prof. Geertsema for helping out with the training in the first semester this year.

It was a pleasure to welcome Dr. Arjan de Visser of South Africa to the College in the first part of January. He

was travelling through part of the USA, and we were glad that he was able to take some time to visit us in Hamilton. He introduced the work of the mission in Soshugovane to us. His talk generated much interest and a lot of questions. We value our contacts with South Africa, and we hope that these can be intensified in the future.

Dr. N.H. Gootjes was invited to Korea to give some guest lectures for the Independent Reformed Church in Korea. It was a memorable time for him and his wife. He also spoke at the June Ministers' Conference in Ontario on *The Active Obedience of Christ*.

Dr. C. Van Dam lectured on the office of elder in December 2001 at the John Knox Bible institute in Campeche, Mexico, and he represented the College in the annual speaking tour this year, visiting the churches of Alberta from May 1 to May 6.

Staff

Our thanks goes to Catharine Mechelse for her continued services in the administration of the College. We are also grateful for the faithful and very helpful service of our librarian, Ms. Margaret Van der Velde. She has seen many changes take place in her area of work, but she does a fine job of keeping abreast of the latest developments in her field.

Once again, I would also like to express our gratitude for the faithful service of our sisters across the country who do so much for our library through the Women's Saving Action. Every year we are able to purchase a good number of acquisitions through your kind services. May the Lord continue to bless your efforts, and please accept our sincere thanks for all your work!

Pastoral training

The Pastoral Training Program is continuing to proceed very well. This year, Dave de Boer spent his summer



Edwer Dethan,
Walter Geurts,
Julius van Spronsen.

Edwer
Dethan
speaking
on behalf
of the
students.



Students and Senate.

internship in Edmonton, working with Rev. R. Aasman. A number of second year students were linked to local pastors for their one-week in house training. We thank Rev. J. De Gelder who has been coordinating the internships for our students, and monitoring their development in this area.

Future planning

The work of the Governance Committee has proceeded steadily throughout the year. Much time and effort has gone into the production of our Board and faculty handbooks, and we hope that this will be of assistance to new Board members entering the service of the College.

Farewell

This Convocation brings me to the conclusion of my principalship at the College. I would like to thank the members of the Board, and in particular the chairman, Rev. Richard Aasman, as well as the members of the Finance and Property Committee for the assistance and cooperation that I received. Special thanks to the incumbent principal, Colleague Van Dam, who as regis-

trar and vice-principal provided a lot of assistance and support.

Last but not least thanks also to my wife Margaret for her support and assistance during these last three years.

Conclusion

God has been good to us in allowing us to carry on with the work of the College for another year. We are grateful for your prayers and support, as well as the support from the brotherhood in Aus-

tralia. We are thankful to be able to train additional students this year.

May the Lord in his mercy continue to grant labourers in the harvest and grant a steady growth in and among our churches, spiritually first of all, but also in strength and numbers – all for the glory of his holy name!

¹ J. Geertsema, *Clarion*, Volume 50, nos. 21 and 22, (October 13 and 27, 2001) 473-474; 495-497. 



Students, Senate, and Board of Trustees.



Presentation of the Women's Savings Action at the College Evening

September 6, 2002

By Dinie Gootjes, Chris Nienhuis and Joanne Van Dam

Mr. President, Members of the Board and Faculty, Graduates, Brothers and Sisters,

No matter how you look at it, the work of the Women's Savings Action is a weighty matter. Let's face it, change weighs a lot. And over the years that is what most of you have saved and many of you still save for the library of the Theological College. You take those heavy pennies, nickels, dimes etc. out of your wallet to lighten it and you put them in a Women's Savings Action tin or other container. One penny may not weigh very much, but twenty pennies weigh forty-eight grams, and 100 pennies weigh 240 grams. So when the volunteers collect all the donations from the addresses on their list and they get together with the representative for the counting session it is indeed a very weighty matter. One hundred dollars worth of pennies, or 10,000 pennies weigh twenty-four kilograms. That's heavy. And then when you think that many larger congregations will collect around \$200 worth of change, you are looking at about forty-eight kilograms. Yes, all those small amounts really do add up – to a humongous weight. Over the last number of years, more and more of you have given dollar bills and cheques. These feather light dollar bills and cheques are in many ways the special delight of the representatives and their helpers. They may not weigh much on a scale, but they do weigh heavy in the total amount. As we have seen, the representatives and their teams carry a lot of weight for the

Women's Savings Action, both literally and figuratively, and on this College Evening we want to publicly thank each one of them for this labour of love.

Everyone at the Theological College eagerly looks forward to the day when the weight of the contributions from the congregations can once again be exchanged for the weight of books. Books are heavy. Ever carried a box of books? There are small books and big books and lots of books in between, but together they weigh a lot. When packing books for a move you make sure you use small boxes. Teachers and professors and students from elementary school to the Theological College – whether carrying briefcases or backpacks – they all know books are heavy. Bookshelves have to be sturdy to hold the weight of the books. The floors of the library building had to be specially reinforced to carry the weight of the books. At the present time the library contains about 25,000 volumes. We won't even hazard a guess at how much they weigh!

Not only are books are heavy. But more importantly, the subject matter of the books is weighty. Why? Because it concerns the work of the Lord. When we as women of the church support the library of the Theological College, we want to show how much we care that there will be well trained future preachers and teachers of the Word. We want to keep the library up to date, to help to meet the challenges of our postmodern age. In this day and age when so much information can

be accessed via computers, it is sometimes thought that it is not so necessary to buy those heavy books. However, there are no indications that books will ever be replaced by computers. The printed page has advantages that a computer does not have. Certainly in an academic setting books will never be obsolete and electronic means will never replace books. Just as the tradesman needs his tools, so the professors and students will always need their books.

And now it is time to hand over a pledge for the library for the coming year. This envelope may not weigh very much, but this work for the Lord does weigh heavy on us. We know that our contribution for the library is the main source of funds for the purchase of books and periodicals. During this past year a total of \$28,416 was collected. And we thank everyone who has faithfully contributed whether collecting change or giving dollar bills or cheques. It is all appreciated. We know that it is all done with love, showing how much you care. You have made it possible to hand over a pledge for \$27,000; this year we have added as well a pledge for the purchase of the standard edition of the complete works of Martin Luther in the original German. We know that the money is carefully spent and the work of the Women's Savings Action is never taken for granted by the College community. We enjoy putting weight on those bookshelves and we thank the Lord for his abundant blessing making it possible. 

Trinity Canadian Reformed Church of Glanbrook

August 26, 2001 – August 26, 2002

By Erica Hekert

It's August 26, 2002 today. For us at Trinity Canadian Reformed Church in Glanbrook it's our first anniversary! No big hoopla or hoorays to commemorate the occasion but rather quiet and reflective gratitude for the wonderful things God has done for this small church in the country.

What follows are the highlights in the year of the church in Glanbrook.

Sunday, August 26, 2001 – institution of Trinity Canadian Reformed Church

"... you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Tim 3:15).

The day arrived. . . that day when we would branch off from the Hamilton congregation and begin as the new congregation of Glanbrook. I entered the gym at Guido de Brès that morning with mixed emotions. I was somewhat scared and even saddened. Since the time I was born (1981) I went to the Hamilton church where my parents were members. I went to, and I babysat in the nursery there, I took catechism classes there, went to Young People's there, and later, publicly professed my faith there. It was a place where I had many friends. Hamilton church was home to me, a place where I belonged, a place of comfort. Would Glanbrook church ever feel this way?

At the same time, a certain excitement filled me, the feeling of excitement that is felt when one enters the unknown. What were we to expect? Would it be completely different than that to which we were accustomed? It was my assumption that many others felt the same way. The transition would be exciting, yet difficult.



The small church in the country.

My emotions were put to rest when Rev. Cl. Stam began his sermon. Based on 1 Timothy 3:15, the sermon focussed on how God strongly commands the church to conduct itself properly. Rev. Stam spoke of the strong spiritual bond that forms between members of a congregation and that a bond in faith is the only true and lasting bond. As believers, we are all members of one household, God's household. God wants us to feel at home in the church. Rev. Stam also spoke of how God's Word is the foundation of the church because it is the place where truth is found. This truth must be heard by the world, and the church must strive to meet the needs of its neighbours, and thereby, show God's love.

This made me realize that although we would no longer be members of the Hamilton congregation, the bond that we have with Cornerstone church is a

bond of faith, one that is not easily broken, a bond that is expressed in love. It also helped me realize that the institution of a church in Glanbrook is a blessing from God's hands. His church has grown, thus allowing for further growth by reaching out to others in new areas.

Following the service, the chairman of Glanbrook's consistory, br. R. VanAndel, spoke a few words, and read letters from various neighbouring churches, who all expressed happiness for us. With the words of Psalm 121:5-8, br. T. Zietsma sent best wishes and a prayer for guidance on behalf of the congregation of Hamilton. He, too, reflected on the spiritual bond that is prevalent among us. Representatives from other churches also wished us well. Following these kind words the congregation enjoyed a social hour and received hearty congratulations from numerous visitors.

The blessings that we continually receive from God's hands were once again brought to the congregation's attention in the afternoon service, when Dr. J. DeJong preached about our status as adopted sons. Not only did he speak about our status before and with the adopted sonship, but he also mentioned our duty in the sonship, connecting it to the institution. Because there are fewer people in the congregation, we must each be willing and ready to pitch in so that the work will be done, because this too is part of our duty in the church.

Overall, the day was one that illustrated how much God loves us and cares for us. He constantly showers us with blessings, though we are totally undeserving.

I'm not sure what the future has in store for the congregation of Glanbrook, or whether I will ever become used to the "newness" of it all. I don't know how the study societies will turn out or whether we will eventually have our own church building but I do know that God will bless what He has started in his church of Glanbrook.

Sunday April 14, 2002 – installation of new pastor Rev. Doug Vandeburgt

"My message and my preaching were not with wise and pervasive 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" (1 Cor 2:5).

Sunday, April 14, 2002 marked another one of God's blessings in our lives as another well-anticipated day arrived! After months of waiting, our minister and his family finally arrived and we could witness the installation



Charmed by Glanbrook's Children's Choir.

of Rev. D. Vandeburgt, the first pastor of Trinity Canadian Reformed Church of Glanbrook.

Walking into church in the morning, I could feel a heightened sense of anticipation. Church was almost full and it was barely 8:45. It was clear that members of the congregation were happy. I certainly was. Although I knew we had been blessed with willing and able preachers during our time as a vacant church, I was still looking forward to having our own pastor lead our congregation. Looking around, I also noticed many guests who had come to offer support and participate in our joy.

The congregation was honoured and also thankful to have Rev. Stam conduct the installation service. Rev. Stam preached on 2 Timothy 1:6-7, reminding the congregation and also Rev. Vandeburgt that we must "fan into flame the gift of God." He explained to us that

although the glowing embers are there, there is a danger that they will die out altogether. Together, with God's blessing, the congregation and the minister must remain intensely busy with God's Word, continually keeping the flame alive. It was a powerful sermon, demonstrating how we should all work together to keep God's love and glory alive.

The afternoon service was also a time for celebration. It was the first sermon Rev. Vandeburgt addressed to his new congregation. He spoke humbly and powerfully about what defines a minister and what his main task is, which is to proclaim the whole counsel of God. He pointed out that Paul, in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, declares that true preaching must be focussed on God, not to entertain or win the approval of those who listen. When Christ is at the centre of the preaching, then we can be assured that the Spirit is at work. As a congregation, we must respond in faith to the proclamation of the Word and daily repent and believe.

Following the afternoon service, Mr. R. VanAndel expressed thanksgiving to God that things had turned out so well. He also gave special thanks to Dr. J. DeJong who served as Glanbrook's counsellor and to all the ministers and students of the Theological College who have always willingly preached in Glanbrook. He read letters that had been received from surrounding churches expressing their congratulations. Numerous representatives from neighbouring churches approached the podium and expressed their best wishes for our "young vibrant congregation." As recipients of these best wishes, we once again were reminded of the bond of faith and support that exists in our federation



Welcome Evening. Rev. and Mrs. Vandeburgt, Leah and Joel. Where's Seth?



Welcome Rev. Vandeburg and family.



Yes . . . we like it!

of churches. Altogether, it was a wonderful day, one that demonstrated the amazing gifts that God has given to us.

Saturday, April 27, 2002 – welcome evening for the Vandeburg family

“Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:11).

Two weeks later the congregation expressed an exuberant welcome to the Vandeburgs through song, poetry, humour and gifts. Br. R. VanAndel began the evening with prayer and reading from 1 John 4:7-12. During the

evening we were charmed by the musical talents of many members in Glanbrook. The children’s choir sang several songs, one directed especially to the Vandeburg family and their arrival in Glanbrook. We enjoyed several selections from the Glanbrook Choir and another member sang a beautiful solo. In the course of the evening the Vandeburgs received a church family photo album that will give the Vandeburgs a glimpse into the lives of each family in the church, a book about the history of Binbrook, and several items to decorate their home. By the time the evening was over the Vandeburgs

knew us a little better and we learned a whole lot about them, too! We topped off the evening with refreshments and fellowship.

On this evening, the congregation demonstrated their happiness, thankfulness and love towards the family. It is my hope and prayer that in the months and years to come, our congregation may continue to become closer through the grace of God.

August 26, 2002 – our first anniversary!

Rejoice in the LORD always! (Phil 4:4).

It is amazing to see how things have changed in a year and, more importantly, to see how richly God has blessed us. We, as a newly instituted church, started off uncertain and have blossomed into a vibrant congregation. We have moved from our original meeting place, Guido de Brès gym, and are now worshipping in Knox Presbyterian Church in Binbrook. God heard our prayers for a pastor and led Rev. Vandeburg to come to Glanbrook. Every Sunday the Word and Spirit enrich us. Bible Study groups and other committees are active. Our congregation has also grown. There have been numerous births and we have had new members join from other congregations. Our heavenly Father has most certainly blessed us! My He continue to bless the good work He has started.



Rev. Vandeburg chats with the eldest member of Glanbrook’s church.



Involved (2)

By K. Sikkema

Having considered the fundamental reasons why parents should be involved in their children's education, I now turn to some benefits of this involvement, and ways in which involvement can take shape. It is necessary to remember that pursuing the benefits in their own right would lead us on the wrong track, since the fundamental reason for involvement is the task God gives to parents regarding raising their children. In much secular literature, the reasoning does not proceed from the family and its responsibilities either, but from a perspective of school effectiveness.

Benefits

Secular research has found definite benefits of parental involvement in schools. In many jurisdictions, governments even insist on formal parental involvement through channels like School Councils or Home and School Associations because of these benefits. It has been observed that parental involvement promotes children's success

We do well to impress on them early that high achievement and success are not goals to be pursued or gods to be served in their own rights.

in school, especially when the school culture and values closely match the home culture and values. In our Canadian Reformed schools, culture and values can generally be expected to closely match those in the homes, and this feature of and by itself sets the stage for good student achievement. Of course, the children will still have to work to achieve and to be successful, and they need to understand what that work is and where it will lead. We do

well to impress on them early that high achievement and success are not goals to be pursued or gods to be served in their own rights, but that we have a call from God to develop our talents to the best of our ability in his service: that is our cultural mandate. When parents are involved as they ought to, they may also expect God's blessings to follow. Here, it no longer matters whether the achievement is high or low, but what matters is that God is served.

It has also been found that public school programs to involve parents in their children's education are not always successful. In 1997, researchers Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler of Vanderbilt University put it this way, "... even well-designed school programs inviting involvement will meet with only limited success if they do not address issues of parental role construction and parental sense of efficacy for helping children succeed in school." In other words, people should not expect too much from programs that encourage parents to become involved in their children's education, unless two criteria are met. The first criterion is that parents must feel strongly that they should and can be involved in a range of activities that involves them in this education. Thus, parents who do not see the need to be involved, or who see no way of becoming involved, clearly miss out – and so do their children. On the other hand, these programs are more likely to meet with success and improved learning if the parents jump at obvious opportunities offered to get involved. The second criterion is that parents need to believe that their involvement actually will help their children's learning achievement. Thus, parents who think that their effort makes no difference – for whatever reason – will indeed make no difference: it becomes what social psychologists call a "self-fulfilling prophecy." Again, they and their children miss out. However, parents who believe that time spent with their children over school work does make a difference, and act accordingly, will find themselves rewarded.

Similarly, in an editorial, the *St. Catharines Standard* of October 16, 2001, referred to a Fraser Institute study, which draws the conclusion that for children to do better in school, the less-son parents need to learn is "to become more involved in their kids" education: Talk to them about what they are learning, help them if they have any problems and maintain a good rapport with their teachers. The heading for the article summed it up quite well: "Children can't learn if parents drop out." As Christian parents, we would give thanks to God for blessing our efforts to do the right thing by being involved. How beautiful it is when a student with limited abilities still gets C's and B's or other positive grades and comments on a report card because parents understand and accept their calling!

Parents who believe that time spent with their children over school work does make a difference, and act accordingly, will find themselves rewarded.

How to be involved

Parents often ask teachers what they can do to help their children do well in school. The short answer is that they should get involved. A 1991 study by Epstein and Dauber of Johns Hopkins University shows that this involvement can take place at different levels. It begins with providing a safe, interested, and positive home environment that supports school learning. It proceeds with frequent communication from school to home and from home to school, for which school agendas can be used effectively. Another level of involvement includes volunteering in the classroom or at special events, being an audience, or helping out the teacher. (Perhaps teachers could look for more ways to involve capable parents in classroom activities, which would extend a direct benefit for the students). It gets a little more involved with the next

level, which includes helping children with assignments at home. Teachers can help parents here by sending along the necessary instruction to make sure the help is given properly. A next level of involvement is as a member of the PTA, Board, or committee. The latter level may not automatically mean that children will do better, but if there is commitment on the part of the parents to be involved in this way, there also is likely commitment to be involved in one of the other ways. Finally, in some contexts, it can take the form of providing or facilitating connections with community services.

Not all involvement or attempts at involvement are automatically effective. A parent could be spending many hours on the school board, and have zero effect on his child's performance at school by neglecting the child's daily experiences, or by becoming a gadfly on the board by constantly harping on pet peeves rather than promoting the well-being of the whole community. A parent could be very interested in what goes on at school, and question her child about all the details of the school day, and subsequently destroy any and all positive effects of this involvement by proceeding with a tirade on the stupidities of the teachers and the school's policies. Other parents may set out to help their children with homework, but proceed to give answers to questions, rather than helping with possible strategies to find the answers. For any involvement to be effective, the parent needs to be in line with the school's expectations, approaches, and methodologies.

To encourage parent involvement, schools may set up magnificent schemes; however, if it must occur at the wrong times, or if it requires skills or efforts parents can't (or think they can't) provide, or if other hidden barriers are set up to keep certain parents from participating, much of the effort goes to naught. Recently, the *British Journal of Sociology of Education* published an Irish study in which blue-collar parents were excluded from school involvement against their desires simply because they belonged to a class of people that is statistically not very interested in education, and were made to feel uncomfortable when trying to address an issue with a teacher or principal (March 2002, pp. 35-49). A study done in a Hamilton (Ontario) public school underlined the importance of reciprocal communication from home to school and school to home, and of

the relevance of informal personal chats for establishing social contact and removing barriers to future communications. Effectiveness takes a mutual and accommodating effort. If, on the other hand, school personnel are not "approachable," the benefit of any parent involvement in their children's education may not even come in sight, regardless of whether the school is Reformed, Irish, Public, or Roman Catholic. To be approachable, and to facilitate informal chats, it would probably also help if teachers actually live in the community they serve. For teachers employed in a Reformed school, it is well to expect, to facilitate, and to encourage parental involvement.

"Children can't learn if parents drop out."

Finally, research has also found that supporting communities make a great deal of difference. Such communities are those in which there are a lot of contacts within and between the various families, children, and other adults, and where voluntary networks exist to help each other out, to encourage each

other, and to comfort each other – and it does not even have to be about school. Such contacts are called "social capital" in the bestseller of Robert Putnam of Harvard University, *Bowling Alone* (2000). In the church, the Lord has blessed us with just that kind of social capital: the communion of saints.

Conclusion

It will not do to shrug off the above examples as "foreign" or "public." Nobody is perfect, and we all stumble, but we also have a high calling which sets the moral standard of what is right. Promoting sincere efforts to be as involved as we can, both as teachers and as parents, is right and should be done properly. Our schools not only thrive on parental involvement, they require it because God requires it. In addition, let us give thanks to God for uniting us in Christ as a communion of saints, by doing it. Even secular researchers point at the blessings that come with doing what is right.

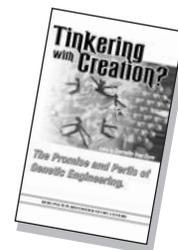


Mr. Keith Sikkema is a grade 8 teacher and vice-principal at John Calvin School in Smithville, Ontario.

Tinkering with Creation?

The Promise and Perils of Genetic Engineering

Edited by Cornelis Van Dam



The possibilities of human ingenuity and scientific advances seem to be limitless in our day. Plants are genetically modified to produce food that meets predetermined criteria. Basic building blocks of life are being manipulated for healing diseases and improving health. However, the same basic techniques are used to produce cloned animals and there is much talk about doing the same with humans. Such scientific activities raise many questions.

Are we in this age of genetic engineering tinkering with creation and playing God? What are the proper perimeters and limits for human inquiry so that the distinction of Creator and creature is maintained?

Other questions arise. With respect to genetically modified foods, is any risk involved in consuming them? What safeguards are in place and how should we as Christians approach this area? When it comes to medical research, questions arise as well. What should be our attitude as Christians to these new developments and techniques?

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Press Release of Classis Ontario West, September 11, 2002, convened by Trinity Church of Glanbrook, Ontario

On behalf of the convening church, the Rev. D. Vandeburgt opened the meeting with Scripture reading and prayer. He reflected briefly on the first anniversary of September 11. He also noted that Grand Rapids Church has received a minister in the person of the Rev. J. Ludwig. He wished Pilgrim Church of London the Lord's blessing in seeking to fill its vacancy.

The credentials were deemed to be in order and classis was constituted. The following brothers served as moderamen: Chairman, Rev. Cl. Stam; Vice-Chairman, Rev. G.Ph. van Popta; Clerk, Rev. J. Slaa.

Since Classis Ontario West is a new classis, it was necessary for the Form of Subscription to be signed by the ministers of the classis. Pilgrim Church at London, the archive-keeping church, prepared a new booklet. It was passed around and the ministers signed it.

Next we dealt with a report from Ancaster church, the administrating

church for the fund for needy churches. Classis approved the report which recommended support for Grand Rapids church for the year 2003. Since Grand Rapids had been declared a needy church by the last Classis Ontario South and it was agreed at that time that both Classis Niagara and Classis Ontario West would support Grand Rapids, the clerk will inform Classis Niagara of our decision.

Ancaster church also submitted a financial report and an audit report indicating that all is well with the fund. Classis received this with thankfulness.

Classis Central Ontario sent us a letter regarding observers to and from the United Reformed Churches recommending a rotation schedule be set up organizing the visiting of observers. The letter is passed on to Kerwood church, our coordinating church for organizing such representation. Kerwood will take up contact with brothers in the neighbouring classes.

Ancaster church was given advice in a discipline case.

Brother Art Witten, who had visited Classis Southern Ontario of the United Reformed Churches, June 2002, as an

observer from our classis, submitted a favourable report.

A report was received from Ebenezer Church of Chatham, administrating church for fund for needy students. The Theological College had requested support for a brother from one of our sister churches in South Africa who would like to study at our College. The request was denied because it was not supported by sufficient information. More significantly, the fund for needy students was set up to support needy students from the churches in our classical area and not from foreign countries.

Grand Rapids church was appointed to convene the next classis at Cornerstone in Hamilton on December 11 (alternate date, March 12). Moderamen will be: Chairman, Rev. D. Vandeburgt; Clerk, Rev. Cl. Stam; Vice-Chairman, Rev. J. Slaa.

An opportunity was given for personal questions. Censure ad Article 34, CO, was deemed not necessary. After the Acts were adopted and the press release approved, the chairman closed the meeting with prayer.

*G. Ph. van Popta
Vice-chairman, e.t.*

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John and Carolin VanWoudenberg

A brother for Nathan, Ben, Corrine, and Tim
26 Burton Road, Guelph, ON N1H 8A7
jvanwoudenberg@canrc.org

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Our gracious Father has given us a beautiful gift

ALYNE APOLLONIA TORENVLIET

Born September 14, 2002

Gerard and Deborah Torenvliet

Liam's sister, second grandchild for Aly Woudenberg, and eighteenth grandchild for Fred and Apollonia Hofsink
46 E Forester Crescent, Nepean, ON K2H 8Y4

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow. Hymn 6

God has again blessed our family and entrusted to us one of His covenant children. We have named her

KIMBERLY MADELINE

Born July 12, 2002

A little sister for Shannon and Lauren

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