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Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE



Ascension

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- *Ray of Sunshine*
- *The Reformed School as Answer to the First Petition*



By N.H. Gootjes



Ascension

Jesus Christ's ascension was a spectacular event, although not many people were present to witness it. His disciples had walked with him to Bethany. And there He rose from the earth and was taken up before their eyes. This event belongs to the core of the Christian message; its importance is recognized by its inclusion in the Apostles' Creed.

This ascension is a great miracle, and our increased knowledge of the forces at work in this world has not diminished it in any way. Jesus Christ conquered the forces of gravity to which we are daily subjected. We need special inventions like balloons and airplanes to lift us up away from the earth, and we need much more powerful rockets to bring us outside of the atmosphere. However, Jesus Christ, without any show of force, left this world. His ascension is another miracle, proving his supremacy over nature, a power over nature which is in a class by itself, far exceeding our powers.

It is one of the most crucial events ever to have taken place in this world.

Yet, the importance of this event goes far beyond proving Christ's ability to perform miracles. A miracle by itself is not sufficiently important to be mentioned in the Apostles' Creed. It does not mention other miracles, such as Jesus Christ walking on the lake, multiplying bread or even his raising people from the dead. In the creed, Christ's ascension is mentioned among the major events in his life, together with other core events such as his virgin birth and his death on the cross. It is one of the most crucial events ever to have taken place in this world.

And yet, the ascension did not always receive the attention it deserves. We cannot expect the Apostles' Creed to go into details, explaining the ascension, but we may expect more explanation in later confessions, particularly in the Heidelberg Catechism. The remarkable fact is, however, that even our catechism does not elaborate on the significance of Christ's ascension itself. It emphasizes the fact that "Christ before the eyes of his disciples, was taken up from the earth into heaven" (Lord's Day 18, 46). But that is all that is stated here about the ascension itself; for the following sentence goes on to explain that he is in heaven for our benefit. The importance of Christ's heavenly position is extensively explained in the last answer of Lord's Day 18 and in the whole of Lord's Day 19. However, the significance of the ascension itself is not explained.

Instead of elaborating on the meaning of the ascension, the catechism concentrates on the question whether Christ is in heaven or on earth (Lord's Day 18, 47 and 48). That was a burning issue at the time, in connection with the Lutheran doctrine of Christ's presence in this world. These debates resulted in a strong defence of the ascension in the catechism. That was an important issue, which was very much debated at the time. For us the result is more important: in the explanation of Christ's ascension in Lord's Day 18, the fact of his ascension is strongly maintained, but the significance is not spelled out.¹

Aspects of ascension

On further consideration, one of the most important results of Christ's ascension is the fact that *we can no longer meet Him here on earth.*² There was a time when Jesus Christ lived and worked in this world. The gospels describe in some detail how He walked around in Palestine from one place to another. The people from Capernaum could go out to see Him, to listen to Him explaining the kingdom of God and its consequences. On other occasions He was surrounded by crowds so that He could teach them. They also could carry sick people to Him so that He could heal them. He was so close to the people that a woman who wanted to touch Him could do so.

He who was rejected on the cross is now welcomed in heaven.

The ascension put an end to this accessibility, for He distanced himself from them (Luke 24:51). When we today want to listen to Him, we cannot travel to the river Jordan to listen to Him and be baptized. The reason is not that He has passed away, for He is alive and active. Rather, the reason is that He is no longer on earth. By his ascension He put a distance between Himself and us which we are unable to bridge. If we now want to know about his teaching and his will, we have to read the book in which his words have been recorded. His ascension forces us to concentrate on his written testament, the revelation he made known and preserved for us in the accounts of several eye witnesses. We have to apply the recorded events and teaching to our own lives. His ascension is one of the most important reasons why Christianity is a book religion.

Another important aspect of Christ's ascension is his *return to the Father*. He had come down from heaven to fulfill

his Father's will. As a result, he had lived for many years away from the Father, in the earthly realm. Although he maintained the relationship with God in heaven, he was far removed from Him. On earth, He had to take up his task of living a life of human obedience to God, at the same time suffering the punishment we deserve. We receive a glimpse of his extreme suffering from the side of God when he said: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me" (Matt 26:46). This appeal to God makes known that God had abandoned him, leaving him to a life without communication with God. At that time, God showed him that He no longer wanted to have anything to do with Christ.

However, when He ascended into heaven, Jesus Christ did not simply return to the place where He had come from originally. He returned to the God who had abandoned Him when He hung on the cross. But on the occasion of his ascension, God did not turn him away but received him. Jesus Christ's ascension, leading to his entry in the heavenly realm, is a sign that God approved of his work. He who was rejected on the cross is now welcomed in heaven. He can again assume the glory He had with the Father before the world began (John 17:5).

A third important aspect is that glory is restored to Jesus Christ. During his earthly life, nothing of the glory He had as Son of God was visible. Nor did his environment show any trace of the glory He had been accustomed to. He was not born in a palace but in a small room. He did not grow up in splendour, but as son of a carpenter. He did not stand out among the boys of Nazareth.

Even when He made a name for himself by his teaching and by his miracles, He did not display his innate glory. The gospels are clear on this point, and it is confirmed by his suffering, when he was humiliated, despised and ridiculed.

What's inside?

The ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ was not just an amazing miracle, it was important to his work of salvation. The ascension is Christ's glory and a tremendous blessing for the church. The editorial by Dr. N.H. Gootjes and the meditation by Rev. D.W. Vandeburgt reflect on the significance of the ascension.

What does it mean to be Canadian Reformed? Is it something positive and attractive? Is it that way for our young people? An article by Rev. B. Luiten of the Netherlands speaks very positively about this.

Our column, *Education Matters*, contains an article by Prof. C. Trimp who is from the Netherlands. He makes an important connection between the first petition of the Lord's Prayer and the education of our children.

I think we have something of a record in this issue of *Clarion*. There are ten letters to the editor, many of them dealing with the same issue. Reactions to articles in our magazine are much appreciated. We all learn from them.

In this issue we have two press releases, two book notes written by Dr. G. Nederveen, and our column, *Ray of Sunshine*.

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At that same time, he mentioned his future glory: "Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began" (John 17:5). This prayer was fulfilled on Ascension Day when God brought Him to heaven, and gave Him the name above every name (Phil 2:9). He was hailed as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, and the Root of David (Rev 5:5). Therefore He could ascend to heaven to be again accepted in God's presence. As Hebrews says about Jesus Christ: "But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right hand of God" (Heb 10:12). After the shame of the cross, when Jesus Christ cried out to God for not being recognized, God recognizes Him. Now He is exalted to the place of the highest glory.

Ascension Day was a great day in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ. Although as a result of this we can no longer

meet Him here on earth, we rejoice in his glorious place next to God. We know that He is no longer among us. But we rejoice in his ascension, for if anyone deserves being with God in heaven, it is our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

¹It could be objected that Lord's Day 18, 49 discusses the benefit of Christ's ascension. However, a careful look shows that this answer deals with the benefits of Christ's being in heaven, rather than with Christ going to heaven.

²See the article by A. Weiser, 'Himmelfahrt Christi,' I: Neues Testament,' in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* vol. 15 (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1986) 330-334.



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By D.W. Vandeburgt

Ascension

"Who may ascend the hill of the LORD?"

Psalm 24:3

When I sat down to write this column centering on the topic of the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, I was drawn to Psalm 24 and the question posed there by the worshippers of God, *"Who may ascend the hill of the LORD?"* This psalm brings the reader back to a time of Old Testament worship. One can imagine the worshippers getting ready to ascend the hill upon which Jerusalem was built. The question they ask is, *"Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place?"* The answer is, *"He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false."* The kind of worshipper that the Lord seeks is someone whose deeds and heart are pure. This someone must love God and his neighbour.

Today we no longer worship in the manner of the people of Old Testament times. We do not gather together in order to make the ascent up to the temple in Jerusalem. That temple no longer exists for Jesus Christ has ascended to the heavenly temple of God. Yet, we must still ascend, for God seeks our worship in his holy place. Such is also the generation of those who today seek the face of the God of Jacob. So we must ask each other the question, *"Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place?"* And the answer remains, *"He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false."*

What does this mean? The question that any honest worshipper will ask at this point is this: *"Is there anyone who qualifies?"* If the require-

ment is absolute moral integrity then indeed, no person can make such a claim. But this psalm is not asking for absolute moral integrity. This psalm is not making our perfection a prerequisite for seeking the face of God. This is clear from verse 5 where the blessing the worshipper receives is described. This blessing is *vindication from God his Saviour*.

"Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place?"

The answer is,

"He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false."

If perfection is possible a Saviour is not necessary. But here the Lord God is described as a Saviour granting vindication precisely because there is no perfection among the mass of sinful humanity. And yet when out of that mass of sinful humanity there comes to God in worship those who admit their sins, who believe in their Saviour and confess Him in word and deed, then they shall receive blessing from the Lord and vindication from the God of Jacob.

You will receive the blessing of absolute righteousness as you seek the face of God with a heart and a life that are filled with love for Him and your neighbour. You will receive it because the Lord God is a gracious Saviour. You will receive it because there is

One who has ascended the hill of the Lord in absolute moral integrity. You will receive it because there is One who with his perfect holiness now stands in God's holy place. You will receive it because of Jesus Christ. He is your Saviour. When He ascended into heaven He brought with Him that once-for-all perfect sacrifice that He offered for the sins of his people. The gates of heaven opened to receive the King of glory who had conquered sin and Satan at Golgotha.

When we celebrate the Lord's Supper the warning is given that all those who either in word or conduct show themselves to be unbelieving by leading an offensive life shall not take of the food and drink of Christ. Who then are to come to the table? Is it those with absolute moral integrity? Is it only perfect people? No, it is people who show in their lives that they desire the absolute perfection that God graciously gives in the Saviour, the ascended Lord Jesus Christ.

As we remember at this time of year the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ let us reflect on how this ascension encourages us to be a generation of God's people that rightly seeks his face. Let us show in our lives that daily it is our desire to seek the things that are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. It is such people the Father seeks to worship Him. When we lift our hearts to the ascended Christ there remains also today the promise of his blessing.



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Typically Canadian Reformed

By B. Luiten

For some time now we may rejoice in a new spirit among our youth. Young people display much faith and enthusiasm. They also want their faith and experiences to be really their own, not just an imitation. This is a good thing; it is a gift of the Holy Spirit for a confused world. At the same time there is another trend. Though the motivation to publicly profess the faith is strong, there is less conviction in the choice for the Canadian Reformed Church. "I do want to make profession of faith, but I do not know whether I am doing it here," is a more frequently heard reservation these days. Young adults break out of the "Canadian Reformed confines" as it is called. They want to explore what is beyond the "confines." And not only young people do this.

The confines?

This intrigues me. What, then, are these Canadian Reformed confines? Well, this is not kept under wraps. "Canadian Reformed" is identified with narrow, restricted, somewhat outside the real world, also when it comes to other Christians. Why would we be the only ones to have the truth? Why would only our ecclesiastical arrangements be the right ones? Moreover, we have this self-assured way in which we propose or oppose things (as long as we are in our own circles, that is). And then there are the debates about matters that do not touch the essence of our faith. And so forth, and so forth. . . .

The peculiarities?

Both younger and older people in our churches frequently brand so-called typically Canadian Reformed characteristics as peculiar. "Never mind what is typically Canadian Reformed; what matters is that we hold on to what is Reformed," is an often voiced sentiment. Those who sometimes express it are not among the least.

We sense that this statement means something like, "Forget about our peculiarities; rather, let us be truly Reformed." And who would not want to agree with this? Nevertheless the question remains, "What is typically Canadian Reformed?" Is it the sum of our peculiarities: our self-assuredness, our sensitivities, and our bloopers? Is that the sum of typically Canadian Reformed characteristics we should not mind?

Both younger and older people in our churches frequently brand so-called typically Canadian Reformed characteristics as peculiar.

But isn't that odd? When we want to highlight the most important characteristic of a person, the one that most pointedly represents the essence of the person, do we then concentrate on incidentals? I do not think so. Occasional bungling does not make the man or the woman. Highlighting what is typically Canadian Reformed in this way will call up resistance. Whatever peculiar conduct may justifiably be criticized, if we want to identify what is typically Canadian Reformed, we should look for the quality that overrides all others.

Freedom!

The nice thing is that when you explain what is typically Canadian Reformed, people often go in reverse and react enthusiastically. What is this typically Canadian Reformed quality then? It is having God as your first priority in life and that there is nothing and nobody that can assume this position. And that you let yourself be guided by his Word, which exceeds all other words, and therefore also all thoughts and opinions of people. When you are Canadian Reformed you are liberated of everything and anything that intends to surpass God and his Word.

The (Church) Liberation in 1944 of our Reformed sister churches in the Netherlands, which indirectly gave birth to the Canadian Reformed Churches, was about baptism and being born again, but in this context that's not very important. It could have been about anything. What was typical of the Liberation was that part of the church did not accept certain decisions of the general synod of those days as binding to them, despite its insistence. According to them, the decisions went beyond what Scripture says. Doing this was legitimate as the Church Order included, and still includes in the Liberated Churches and their "offspring," the following principle: we accept ecclesiastical recommendations as binding, but not if these recommendations go beyond what God has told us in his Word. We stuck, and still stick, to this principle with the intent *to give God and his Word room to be in first place and thus to ensure He will receive all honour.*

Digging out this truly typical characteristic often works as an eye-opener. Being typically Canadian Reformed is actually not that weird. It is not narrow or stuffy; it is cool! We want to go for this.

We learn to understand how the Liberation generation (your grandparents) has listened to God's answer to the question "Who is first in your life?" and in doing so has sacrificed much. They went for God's answer, because it allows you to dedicate your life to Him without any restrictions from outside.

Foundational

Having God in first place is therefore not peculiar. What is typical for Canadian Reformed Churches cannot be found in all kinds of curious opinions or pronouncements by men of consequence, whether they represent us or not. If this were true, then what is typically Canadian Reformed would indeed be something like an add on, an extra

that you can do without. On the contrary, the freedom to place God above anything and anybody else is fundamental to our existence as Canadian Reformed churches. Already the Great Reformation of the sixteenth century, involving a break with Rome, was experienced as a liberation needed to restore the unrestrained preaching of God's Word. We learned from Professor Klaas Schilder that also the Secession of 1834 (a separation from the Dutch Reformed state church) did not occur because of peculiarities. No, typical for the Secession was the break with the highest (government appointed) church council so that the Word of God once more could take first place. This typical characteristic is not an accessory that you can do easily without; it is something foundational, that the Church of Jesus Christ has had to reassert time and again: "In this place we take on the yoke of Jesus Christ, and his yoke only. For that purpose he has bought us and set us free."

Being typically Canadian Reformed is actually not that weird. It is not narrow or stuffy; it is cool!

Now this freedom is not a Canadian Reformed specialty. Most obviously we share this foundational principle with the Free Reformed and United Reformed Churches. Although they may say it in somewhat different words, being free, and wanting to stay free before God, is what it's all about. This desire is characteristic of all those who belong to Jesus Christ, all over the world. Because of this common characteristic, we can recognize those who are of Christ, whether we are in China, Saudi-Arabia, or the Sudan.

Often in the midst of great trials, these Christians may receive and profess their freedom before God. When we experience this foundational principle, Canadian Reformed "confines" appear to be very broad – the church that acknowledges only Jesus as her Lord can be found anywhere.

Therefore is it wrong when people say we might as well scrap what is typically Canadian Reformed. What is typically Canadian Reformed is totally misjudged by these people. Moreover, the understanding of our freedom is not promoted by this sentiment, and

worldwide recognition is made much more difficult.

Remaining Liberated

So, as far as I am concerned, we will continue to value dearly the freedom we regained in the Liberation to place God and his Word over anything and anybody else. It is this freedom that was preserved through the (church) Liberation of 1944 in the Netherlands in which our grandparents resisted the oppressive synods. These grandparents were denied the freedom to put God first and subsequently liberated themselves from this oppression so that they could remain truly Reformed. Maintaining this freedom will be our challenge as well, in the times to come.

This freedom is not something that only exists as an idea in our minds. I am afraid that in day to day life we are losing much of this freedom to think and act based on God's Word. Perhaps this is characteristic of the times we are living in. It is clear that people nowadays base their thinking and decisions more on their own feelings, and consequently do not submit to a higher authority. One would expect the opposite in the church, as this church is free to follow her Saviour and confesses to submit everything to Him. However, despite this confession, all kinds of individual approaches are prevailing.

Our discussions about worship are a good example of these individual approaches. Scripture has a lot to say about what would or what would not be good to include in the worship services. A number of liturgy or worship committees have produced well-founded reports on this matter. But what do we do with their efforts? What freedom is there to act on these reports? In many congregations the resistance remains very strong and there is so much stifling protectionism. Why is this? It is because people are stuck in a rut of personal experiences and feel there is no need for change. Many matters are dismissed in this way.

On the other hand, there are also those who feel that proposed changes do not go far enough. They believe that to experience a genuinely contemporary service with some room for involvement and passion you have to go church shopping.

These different individual approaches increasingly clash, resulting in discord, frustrations, and even discipline and withdrawals. Without taking sides, I would like to say: let's remain

true to our Liberation. Concretely, value nothing (in particular not your feelings, or your experiences and desires) more highly than the Word of God. For as soon as something else takes first place, we remove the freedom that God gives us.

Typically Canadian Reformed means that there is always the freedom to raise a matter that originates in the Word of God. And others should form an opinion about that matter based on that same Word of God and not on tradition or the urge for renewal. Nor should the matter be declared a "can of worms" and be shelved with the other "cans." As soon as a different basis is used, we are no longer free or typically Canadian Reformed in the true sense of the word. After all, the goal of the Liberation was not to safeguard certain traditions or to push for certain changes.

One expectation

When I say these things, and that happens quite often lately, it is remarkable how much resistance arises. And that may well be the case now. Resistance in the sense of, "We must not expect things from changes! It will be the end of the church if changes must preserve her." Taken at face value, I appreciate this comment and I agree wholeheartedly. It is also typically Reformed: we expect the preservation and the strengthening of the church of our Saviour from his Spirit and Word. We do not expect anything from man-made changes. If we did that, our churches would starve to death.

Typically Canadian Reformed means that there is always the freedom to raise a matter that originates in the Word of God.

If we have agreed on this, we should add something else. If we indeed do not expect the preservation and strengthening of the church from anything but his Word and Spirit, we should not expect it from existing man-made forms and traditions either. If these things were to preserve the church, she would also starve to death.

Whether something is an old way or a new way of doing things in the church is of little consequence. Therefore, neither the old nor the new way should be considered a holy cow. In stead, biblical arguments should win

the day, also in more practical matters. What if no conclusive biblical arguments can be made? Well, then I come to the key point I want to make that in a truly liberated church, which exclusively adheres to the Lord and his enduring Word, it should be possible that old and new ways alternate or exist simultaneously.

This typical characteristic of a liberated church is important for good relationships, including those across the generations. There will always be an emerging generation, which does want to serve the Lord, but has not had input in the way this is done. It is vital to involve the youth and to incorporate their choices. If for vague and faulty reasons this is not done, we allow the situation to arise that a whole generation feels itself locked into a pattern it could not choose nor would have chosen in our present days. Consequently, the church that considers herself liberated will be experienced as stifling and oppressive. This situation may even result in the question, "Who actually governs here, God or man?" If the answer is not obvious to everyone in the

church, the first step towards withdrawal is easily made.

Can we cope with our freedom?

The ideal situation we could derive from the words of Jesus about the teacher of the law who became a disciple of the kingdom of God. Such a person, as a host, "brings out of his store-room new treasures as well as old" (Matt 13:32).

Therefore, neither the old nor the new way should be considered a holy cow.

People will feel comfortable with old treasures, whereas new treasures will invigorate them. If they only hear old treasures, things could become monotonous and predictable. Hearing only new treasures could lead to estrangement and insecurity. But a good mixture is the ideal situation. Then we will see the church of all times, in our own times renewing herself in unexpected ways and yet remaining familiar.

This is the freedom we have received from the Word. Can we cope with this freedom, or do we treat it as a

can of worms? Many things will depend on this question in the near future. If our own preferences dominate the discussions, we'll see others only in a negative light and factions and preferences will become more important than the church.

That's why I am writing this plea: that we may rise above such situations. And that should be possible if, with God's help, we may experience again what it means to be a truly liberated church, ruled by God alone and thus free from any form of human domination. We will not bow for human domination, nor should we want to exercise it. Then fear, distrust, and partisanship can make room for recognition in faith and acceptance of one another. Canadian Reformed: together free in Christ! 

Rev. B. Luiten is a minister of Zwolle, Netherlands. He wrote an article entitled "Typisch Vrijgemaakt" which was translated by Henk Van Beelen of Langley, BC. Brother Van Beelen makes the transition from the Dutch situation to the Canadian situation, reflecting this in changing the title from "Typisch Vrijgemaakt" to "Typically Canadian Reformed."





By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

*Above all, my brothers, do not swear – not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your “Yes” be yes, and your “No,” no, or you will be condemned.
James 5:12*

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.” Here in the third commandment we are instructed how we must use the Name of the Lord in our lives. The use of God’s Name is certainly a great blessing and privilege in our lives. We are also warned that the abuse of his name is not something that will go unpunished.

Throughout the Bible, God had made himself known in many various ways, and with many different names. A name is more than just a label, for it not only describes who a person is, but also what he does. In Exodus 3 we can read of the account of Moses and the burning bush. In verses 13 through 15 we read that Moses said to God, “suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?” God said to Moses, “I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” God also said to Moses, “Say to the Israelites, ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers – the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob – has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation.” The Catechism also speaks of the holy Name of God, which means that God’s Name is without any blemish, that it is pure, special and unique. There is no name like it anywhere in heaven or on earth.

The Old Testament Name “Yahweh” means the God who is always there, always, in saving power and covenant faithfulness. It is such a great Name that shows us action, and salvation. God is always doing things, for the glory of his Name, for the benefit of his people. The Name of God and of his Christ has been so wondrously revealed to us in his Word, and in the mighty acts of salvation. The psalms are filled with his Name. God chose to make it known first to his covenant people; He is no stranger to us. God in his boundless love asks of us to simply and joyfully acknowledge or recognize his name.

We may use it in all fear and reverence, so that we may rightly confess Him, and call upon Him, and praise Him in all our words and works.

When we speak about God’s name then we must do it with awe and wonder and in a tone of respect, realizing that we are talking about the holy God, the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth; the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our Savior and King. Others should be able to hear our respect in the way we speak about God. Take his name on your lips, and bind it in your hearts, and thus let it be the focus in everything we do and live for on this earth. Christ is our example, and our Savior. He has showed the glory and greatness of the Name of God, even in his suffering and trials, when He said, “Thy will be done.”

Thus as his church today we must all the more strive to never abuse the holy Name of God. The catechism teaches us that there is no sin which is greater or provokes God’s wrath more; than the blaspheming of his name. This is why He has commanded it to be punished with death. In the world around us, this is done so much, and therefore we may not be silent bystanders; but wherever we can, we must avoid it for the sake of the Name of God in our lives. By cursing and swearing, it shows that there is no living relationship of faith with God. We too must be careful in our walk and talk that we always show our utmost respect for God’s Name. Remember that God’s Name has been pronounced over us, as it was signed and sealed to us in baptism. He is our covenant God and Father, and thus let us all strive to show forth the glory of the Name of God; to hold highly the Name of Christ. For his name is enduring and all who profess Him will surely share in his eternal glory.

*But let the just with joyful voice
In God’s victorious might rejoice;
Let them exult before Him!
O sing to God, His praise proclaim
And raise a psalm unto His Name;
In joyful songs adore Him.
Lift up your voice and sing aloud
To Him who rides upon the clouds
High in the spacious heavens.
The LORD, that is His glorious Name.
Sing unto Him with loud acclaim;
To Him be glory given.* Psalm 68:2

Birthdays in June:

- 17: JOAN KOERSELMAN will be 46**
Box 1312, Coaldale, AB T0K 0L0
- 20: DANIEL STROOP will turn 22**
193 Diane Drive, Orangeville, ON L9W 3N3
- 30: BEVERLY BREUKELMAN will be 41**
2225-19th Street, Coaldale, AB T1M 1G4

Congratulations to you Joan, Daniel, and Beverly. It is our hope and prayer that our heavenly Father will bless you in this new year with much health and happiness. Have an enjoyable day together with your family and friends. Best wishes and till next month,

Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman
Mailing correspondence:
548 Kemp Road East
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The Reformed School as Answer to the First Petition¹

By C. Trimp

In our schools, children are introduced to and led on an excursion through the world God created – a world of people and nations; of countries and oceans; of animals, plants, and flowers; of numbers, weights and measures. The students are led around in order that they may learn to find their place in this world of God.

Naturally, the great question always returns: how do we give the students a handle on all those matters they find around them? How can we lead them in such a way that they are not overwhelmed by this sheer volume of objects and phenomena? How can help them to uncover some of the *order, laws and functions* and to understand the *purpose* the Creator has for all of this? After all, the essence of life's great voyage of discovery (in which the school provides such indispensable assistance), is to show everything in its place, and to exhibit its right order, its connections, its developments, and its history. Having experienced this in our youth ourselves, we know well how this works: we learn – first at home, and then at school – the names of the objects and phenomena around us.

Naming things

This naming of objects and phenomena starts at an early age, even before the children begin to ask questions. By the time they enter elementary school, they have mastered many names. At school, this process of acquiring names continues rapidly; this we call "A" and *that* is called "B." We start by naming ordinary concrete objects in their immediate environment, and gradually, we take them a little further away from those familiar objects, until we eventually address more abstract concepts. Slowly but surely, the school transplants our children into a world filled with many, many names. From then on, they no longer live in a silent, speechless world filled with any-

mous objects and chaotic phenomena, but in a *world filled with names*.

We can also express it in this way: the name of an object or person is its face that is looking at us. It is the side of a matter or a person that is turned toward us and with which we make contact. A name is always about *communication*. On an uninhabited island, a person does not need a name. We have a name with a view to our spreading out in society: this is our name, this is how we can be reached, this is how we can be contacted, and this is how we can be asked to join in a group. Because of names, contact and society can be established.

The same applies to things. Once we know the name of objects, we can assign them a place in our world, and they can function in our lives. As we can describe them more accurately and distinctly, objects lose some of their mysterious character. Clearly, by naming people and objects we get a certain hold on God's immense creation; we gain a form of control over it, and a measure of power.

When someone gives us his name, contact becomes possible. At that moment, our fellow man has surrendered something personal to us, and we establish contact. This person is no longer just a face – he begins to function inside our horizon. When you, if requested, provide your name to a police officer, you realize very well that it implies that you place yourself to some extent under the authority of this servant of justice.

King under God

I now think of the story we read in Genesis 2. Adam receives an introduction to God's creation when the animals are presented before him. He is the just-anointed vice-regent, king under God, who may rule over the creatures and subdue them. But how could Adam ever rule over this magnificent creation? First of all, of course, by naming and characterizing God's creatures! By naming the animals that present themselves, Adam functions as image of God, as the king over Creation. God entrusted this task to man, and found pleasure in it: He presented all the creatures to Adam to see what he would name them.

This is how man started to rule the multitude of creatures and to establish relationships between himself and the world surrounding him. By giving names, he garnered a grip on creation and proved at the same time his superiority over the creatures. Just as God is not *under* but *above* the marvelous world of the stars, "and calls them each by name" (Ps 147:4), so Adam stood *under* the dome of heaven and *amidst* the fauna surrounding him.

Thus, when at home and at school we orient our children in this world, in order that it will not be a mute and speechless world for them, we are teaching them their most beautiful task: to have dominion over creation, and be image bearers of God in this world. We strive to give them a handle on the world that surrounds them, in order that they may begin to understand their place and task in it. In the end, they walk into a world full of names they know.

We must clarify that when the children leave school, they do not enter paradise. Rather, they enter a world and a society that buzzes with names. This includes names of God's good creatures, but also names of much that rebels against God and rejects Him, names of the great and famous of this earth, names of favourites in the world of sin, and also names of blasphemy – as we read in Revelation 17. It includes names of people who declare themselves to be god, or who are worshiped like a god. This world also, this world of sin, is turning its face toward us and our children and seeks a relationship with them.

There are concentrations of powers in this world which are not from God, and their names infiltrate all nations. There are concentrations of political and societal power, the power of a large portion of the entertainment industry and its heroes, of sex—as it is called nowadays, and the idolizing of sports. All day long they all blare their advertising into the world, and force themselves upon us, including the minds of our children. It is not just the beast, but especially also *the name* of the beast that is the great adversary of God's people, says Revelation 13.

Secularization

When we think of the dominant phenomenon of *secularization* of our

society, we really observe the retreat of the Name of God, the Creator: His name is no longer heard nor acknowledged in the created reality. It is replaced by other powers, and by different names. They include the names of elements of creation, torn away from God and then idolized. They include names of financial, political, and technical powers controlling prosperity. They include names of the great things and famous people of this world. All these names threaten to separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ by their sheer grip on life and the spiritual climate of our life. It is striking that the apostle Paul speaks in one breath about “all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age, but also in the one to come” (Eph 1:21, NASB). Is not secularization exactly this – that all those names are mentioned in isolation from the Name of God and of his Christ? The Name of God, and of Christ are neither blasphemed nor mentioned, but simply taken out of use – much like a coin that lost its currency. It is into *this* world of great names, authorities, and powers that our children enter.

Now we are ready to see how immensely up-to-date the first petition is, in which we pray for the primary need of God’s people: “*Your Name must definitely be hallowed.*” God’s Name is entirely special and completely unique. That Name must rise above everything in impenetrable radiance. It is simply intolerable if this is not the case, as it would disrupt the entire creation.

After all, it is the unparalleled fact that God has not kept Himself anonymous, but has given Himself to us. He did so in mentioning his Name in his Word and in his work. When the catechism speaks about this in Lord’s Day 47, it mentions God’s wisdom, power, goodness, righteousness, mercy and truth. Thus, the whole world testifies to the great Name God has made for Himself as Creator, Saviour, Judge, Redeemer, and Sustainer of life. Lastly, God gave Himself completely in his greatest work: the sending of Jesus Christ, who is the centre of his creation, and who received a Name that is above every name in that creation (Phil 2:9). Therefore, whoever does not honour, see, or understand the Name of this God, effectively commits suicide, forfeits his position, and tumbles into a senseless life.

What we pray for

Now we pray every day, “Our Father, Your Name must be hallowed.”

Lord, do this first of all Yourself: shut the mouths that give praise to others; open the mouths that do not yet know your praises; give us children who can recount your praises, in order that they may eternally glorify and praise You and Your Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit – the one and only true God. This is what we pray in church for each child that is baptized.

This is how, in the first petition, we pray against secularization, against that prevailing spirit of our age – for in our society the Name of God is taken out of use.

Thus we pray for the gift of a Reformed school as an instrument in the hands of God: we pray that it will not neglect to know the one Name which is given above every name, amidst all the names that are taught. We pray for schools, in which the children get a grasp of creation, as *images of God*; and not as deified, autonomous human beings who aim to take control of the earth in *their own* strength and have a right to a liveable existence. We pray for God’s active involvement in the hallowing of his name. Simultaneously, we pray for our own involvement, in order “that we may so direct our whole life – our thoughts, words, and actions – that Thy Name is not blasphemed because of us but always honoured and praised” (LD 47).

Clearly, by naming people and objects we get a certain hold on God’s immense creation; we gain a form of control over it, and a measure of power.

Thus we pray for wisdom in raising our children; and we pray for teachers who are able to point out in Scripture and in all of God’s work, in history and in geography, how highly exalted *this* Name is above every name. Pointing *that* out is exactly the aroma that lends the entire meal its flavour: the salt that keeps the food from spoiling.

Certainly, we can teach the children in Grade one the words of Psalm 75:1, “We give thanks to God; we give thanks, for your Name is near; men tell of your wonderful deeds,” but then this Name has to be *brought near*, and we have to *tell* about that Name in this country. Failing that, life in our country deteriorates to a senseless, empty life that is filled with boredom. Consequently, the country will get engulfed with the idols of money, technology,

and science, and many other names will clamour with loud and intrusive advertisements for our heart, while the one and only Name fades into obscurity. That is why the first petition is also the best for our children, as a prayer for a Reformed school and Reformed teachers. It is a prayer for wisdom to bring the Name of God near to the children – amidst all the names taught in their many courses.

Gifts of God

We mercifully received many Reformed schools from our God. That is a tangible answer to our prayers – a monumental gift of grace from God to our society. But *one* thing should have our attention constantly: whether we are ready to receive God’s gifts. We need not worry about *whether* God will give, but about our readiness to grasp what He gives. “He was unable to perform miracles because of their unbelief,” we read in Scripture. That is a bitter statement about love, which has no place to go.

But we continue to pray – for the crucial work of the teachers. After all, it is not to be taken for granted that it will continue. We pray for teachers that they may be instruments of the Holy Spirit in our children’s growth in words and language, and in their development of concepts and critical judgement. We pray for this, in order that the eyes and ears of the children may be opened for God! Then the teachers will be links in God’s history, on the way to the return of Christ. We continue to pray for the teachers, that they themselves may also always be filled with amazement, for how could they tell about God’s awesome miracles without standing in awe themselves? We pray that our teachers may always receive the spiritual resilience, clarity, and enthusiasm for their work, and that they may not be slowed down by drudgery or dejection.

We may also congratulate ourselves with the schools we received. Blessed are the parents, whose prayers God clearly wants to hear and answer!

¹ Originally published in Dutch, in *Petahja*, December 1969. Translation by Joop Harthoorn and Piet Groenwold; edited by Keith Sikkema.

Prof. C. Trimp is professor emeritus of the Theological University of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated).



Press Release of Classis Central Ontario held on March 14, 2003 in Burlington, Ontario

1. On behalf of the convening church of Burlington-Waterdown br. W. Horsman called the meeting to order. He read Psalm 46 and led in prayer. He then asked the brothers to sing Psalm 46:1, 2. He welcomed the delegates, as well as two visiting brothers from Zion URC in Sheffield.
2. The credentials were examined by the delegates of the convening church of the previous Classis and found to be in good order. Three churches had instructions.
3. Classis was then constituted. Officers were: Rev. M. Jagt, chairman; Rev. J. DeGelder, vice-chairman; and Rev. W. DenHollander, clerk.
4. The following memorabilia were mentioned:
 - Rev. J. DeGelder could celebrate his twenty-fifth anniversary in the ministry;
 - Rev. J. Huijgen accepted the call from the church in Burlington-Waterdown;
 - Rev. and Mrs. M. Jagt received a son;
 - Br. W. Geurts had not received a call yet;
 - The Church of Toronto is still searching for a second missionary;
 - Rev. W. Den Hollander attended the ICRC Regional Missions Conference in Asia, and visited the mission field in Papua New Guinea.
5. The proposed agenda was adopted, with the addition of some correspondence and the instructions.
6. Classis was informed of the decision of Classis Northern Ontario of December 20, 2002 not to adopt a rotating schedule for sending observers to the assemblies of churches with whom we are in ecclesiastical contact, as was proposed by Classis Central Ontario of June 14, 2002. Classis received this decision for information.
7. Classis was also informed that Classis Ontario West of December 11, 2002 has forwarded the proposal of Classis Central Ontario of June 2002 to the Church at Kerwood, which has been appointed to make

arrangements for sending delegates to the assemblies of churches with whom we have ecclesiastical contact. Classis received this reply for information.

8. The Church of Burlington-Waterdown reported that the books of the previous treasurer of Classis Central Ontario, br. J. Dykstra, for the period August – November 2002 have been audited and were found to be in good order.
9. In the question period according to Art 44 CO two churches asked for the concurring advice of Classis to proceed with the second public announcement according to Art 68 CO. Advice was given in closed session.
10. In closed session Classis dealt with an appeal.
11. The Church of Burlington-Waterdown requested pulpit supply for the remaining months before the arrival of Rev. J. Huygen. This was granted and a schedule was adopted.
12. Classis appointed the Church at Flamborough as convening church for the next Classis, scheduled for June 13, 2003 (or September 19, 2003). Suggested officers are: Rev. G. Nederveen, chairman; Rev. W. DenHollander, vice-chairman and Rev. M. Jagt, clerk.
13. Question period was made use of.
14. Censure according to Art 34 C.O. was not needed. The chairman expressed his appreciation for the brotherly cooperation.
15. The Acts were read and adopted, after which the Press Release was read and approved.
16. The chairman requested the singing of Psalm 46:3, 4, 5 and led in thanksgiving prayer. He then closed Classis Central Ontario of March 14, 2003.

*For Classis Central Ontario of
March 14, 2003
Rev. J. DeGelder,
vice-chairman of that Classis*

Press Release Classis Ontario West, held at Hamilton, Ontario, on Wednesday March 26, 2003

1. Opening

On behalf of the convening and hosting church at Hamilton, Rev. Cl. Stam calls the meeting to order. He

reads Psalm 90 and welcomes the delegates. He then leads in prayer.

2. Constitution

The credentials are examined by the convening church. All churches are lawfully represented. He welcomes as guest Rev. J. Ferguson from the OPC Presbytery of Ontario/Michigan. Classis is constituted.

The following officers are appointed:
Chairman: Rev. G. Ph. van Popta;
Clerk: Rev. D. VandeBurgt;
Vice-chairman: Rev. Cl. Stam.

3. Agenda

There are no instructions from the churches. To the agenda the following items are added:

- a. request from the Church at Hamilton re classical preaching appointment of Rev. Stam;
- b. request from the Church at Kerwood re ecumenical contacts;
- c. letter from the Rev. R. Potter (RCUS inter-church relations committee).

The agenda is then adopted.

As memorabilia the chairman mentions that Rev. R. Pot declined the call of the Church at London, and that the Church at Kerwood recently celebrated its fiftieth anniversary.

4. Examination of student I. Wildeboer to speak an edifying word

All necessary documents are present and in good order. The examination proceeds. Br. Wildeboer presents his sermon proposal on Isaiah 62:10-12. After discussion of this proposal, the examination is continued. Rev. Cl. Stam examines in doctrine and creeds (Canons of Dort). In closed session the examination is evaluated and found to be sufficient. Br. Wildeboer is given the right to speak an edifying word for the period of one year (May 20, 2003 – May 20, 2004). Classis sings Psalm 119:17, thanksgiving is offered and br. Wildeboer is congratulated.

5. Examination of br. R. Bredenhof to speak and edifying word

All documents are available and found in good order. This examination proceeds. Br. Bredenhof delivers his sermon proposal on Genesis 21:1-7. This proposal is declared sufficient. Rev. Cl. Stam examines in doctrine and

creeds (Belgic Confession). The examination is judged to be successful.

Br. R. Bredenhof is given the right to speak an edifying word in the churches from May 20, 2003 to May 20, 2004. Classis sings Hymn 53:1, prayer is offered, and br. Bredenhof is congratulated.

(Note: br. Wildeboer will have his practicum in Langley while br. Bredenhof goes to Guelph).

6. Address Rev. J. Ferguson (OPC)

The Rev. J. Ferguson of Covenant OPC (London, Ontario) addresses Classis with some kind and supportive words. He indicates his pleasure at the examinations that were conducted. Rev. van Popta responds with words of gratitude.

7. Request Church at Hamilton re classical pulpit arrangements

The Church at Hamilton requests that Rev. Cl. Stam be excused from the classical pulpit appointments during

the period of one year because of other commitments. After some discussion this is granted, provided that adjustments are made to secure the current schedule.

8. Overture Church at Kerwood

The Church at Kerwood proposes to be appointed as church to streamline delegations to URC classis meetings in Ontario. This is decided. It is decided to propose to the other classes in Ontario that two observers be sent for the four classes in Ontario to the URC classis in Southern Ontario.

9. Question period (Art 44 CO) is held

No advice is needed by the churches.

10. Report re RCUS

The Church at Kerwood reports on a letter received from the RCUS (Rev. Potter), indicating that the RCUS schedule does not allow for a representation at the March Classis Ontario West. The

RCUS hopes to send a delegate in June/September 2003. The Church at Kerwood will arrange future requests.

11. Appointments

Classis makes the following appointments:

Next Classis: Kerwood (convening and hosting church).

Officers: Versteeg (chairman) van Popta (clerk) vandeBurgt (vice-chairman).

12. Personal Question Period is held

13. The Acts are read and adopted

14. The Press Release is read and approved

15. Closing

The Rev. Van Popta requests Classis to sing Psalm 90:1, 7, and leads in thanksgiving and prayer. Classis is closed.

For Classis, Vice-chairman, e.t.
Cl. Stam 

BOOK NOTES

By G. Nederveen

The Acts of the Apostles, Volume Two; by C. Van den Berg I.L.P.B., (London, ON, 1999), pb. 159 pages

This study guide deals with the second half of the book of Acts, chapters 15-28. Each chapter contains three sections: 1) Notes on the text, which is basic retelling of the main events in the chapter interspersed with commentary; 2) a Summary; and 3) questions for Discussion.

For the purpose of this review I have perused chapters 1-4 (Acts 15-17) and chapters 12-15 (Acts 23-27) and my overall impression is that this is a helpful guide for anyone who wishes to study the book of Acts chapter by chapter. Reverend Van den Berg inserts interesting details and insights in his commentary. For instance, he gives as background information on Felix (Acts 23) that he was in office from A.D. 53-55 and had worked his way up from slave to governor. However, Felix was heavily criticised by the historian Tacitus (pp. 102, 106).

Another example of an interesting comment is found in connection with Acts 16:13-15. Van den Berg remarks that since there was no synagogue in Philippi, this meant that there were very few, if any, Jews in that city because "if there had

been ten, they would have been obliged to have a synagogue" (p.17).

A few times I wished for more clarity. Let me give two examples. With regards to Acts 15:16-18 we read, "James points out that, according to Amos, the dwelling of David which has fallen (in the days of David and Solomon it was an impressive palace, but later came to ruin) would be rebuilt and restored. This would be a period of glory for David's house and dynasty." My confusion is the part in brackets. What purpose does it serve? Was Amos predicting the restoration of the beautiful palace, or the dynasty? Is it not the latter?

The other point on which I would like to see more clarity is regarding Acts 15:29-31 where Van den Berg writes, "That we are God's offspring means, according to the Bible, that in the beginning God adopted man as his child and made man in his image and after his likeness (cf. Gen 1:23)." My question is: Was God's relationship to Adam and Eve before the fall into sin a relationship of adoption, or is adoption a term we should use for God's children after the Fall?

In spite of these observations I am convinced that this study guide can be used with much benefit. The questions for discussion are good aids to get a dis-

ussion going. They will make you think about God's mighty work recorded in Acts. Discussing some of these questions will help you grow in the conviction of the faith. The strength of this study guide lies in the fact that the author sticks close to the text while at the same time he gives ample cross-references and referrals to related scripture passages.

Medieval Panorama, Robert Bartlett, ed. Thames & Hudson Ltd., London, 2001 Cloth 336 pages Price: Can \$77.50

This unique book is filled with beautiful pictures and details of Medieval art and architecture. It consists of a twenty page Introduction followed by eight main themes. Each theme begins with a brief description followed by twenty or thirty pages of wonderful details of paintings, stained glass, tapestries, sculptures in marble or ivory, interiors and exteriors of building, all referring to the theme. If you love medieval art and history, you will enjoy this fabulous book. It is like visiting a huge museum in the comfort of your favourite chair. 

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

To the Editor:

Fair, Balanced, and Representative. Please judge for yourself. In his article br. Nap is trying to sell the impression that Rev J. Huijgen might not have given reliable information of the sister churches in Holland. Following the Bereans he will check out Rev. Huijgen. The Bereans however used the Scriptures while br. Nap based his view on informants in Holland. We read in his article that Rev. Huijgen might have acquired a pair of *Reformanda* glasses. Here we are at the heart of this case. In our observations we all use a different pair of glasses, be it *Reformanda* glasses or Nap glasses or the informants' glasses. We immigrated three years ago and read all available literature about the Dutch sister churches. We were not shocked by the articles of Rev. Huijgen. They were in accord with our view of the sisterchurches in Holland. But also we wear our own customized glasses.

To come to a more balanced judgment we should acquire two more pairs of glasses. First we should also look through the glasses of the synod. According to the homepage of our sister churches, one of the decisions of this same synod was that in the weeks before Easter there would be a period (four weeks) of Confession of sins and Humiliation (*Schuldbelijdenins en verootmoediging*). The need of this period was the inability to establish a Christian lifestyle within the church concerning four areas: 1. The problems in the churches about divorce and remarriage; 2. The sad necessity that there had to be appointed a committee that has to deal with sexual abuse in the pastoral relations; 3. The many conflicts between congregations, consistories and ministers; 4. The many conflicts between church members caused by modifications in the liturgy.

Secondly, we should look to the situation in our sister churches from a scriptural perspective. According to the

brothers who informed br. Nap, there is more faithfulness in these churches than Rev. Huijgen depicts. If these churches are on a slippery slope, do the members always notice that? Did the members of the CRC notice that twenty years ago? Will the informants of br. Nap provide us the reliable information to come to a balanced judgment? In my opinion we do better to carefully observe how the body of Christ is developing. A vital well-fed body will grow (Acts 2:40) and develop a kind of resistance to the attacks of threatening circumstances outside the body. So will also the body of Christ. From this perspective we will look to some developments in our sister churches in Holland.

1. The 2003 yearbook of the Dutch sister church shows us that there is not a substantial growth in numbers anymore. The expectation is that the numbers will slide back within the next years.
2. There is no growth in holiness. Many congregations suffer under the wave of divorces and remarriage, which is hitting the church. Herein we see a slide back to live a holy life.
3. There is no growth in hunger to worship. Church attendance is sliding back especially in the afternoon services. This, in spite of the modifications of the liturgy to make the service more attractive.
4. Many churches have a hard time to fill the vacancies in the consistory; often these vacancies are filled by appointment instead of election. Frequently ministers for various reasons have to be released from their congregation. There is a slide back in the desire to become a minister. Very few young men express their desire to attend the Theological College in Kampen. As far as I know, there are only four new male students this year.

There are enough sad developments to recognize that the Dutch sister churches are indeed on a slippery slope. Br. Nap's suggestion that we should extend them a helping hand might not be misplaced. We also have to be thankful to them that they proved that a road paved with desirable things such as more hymns, women voting, liturgy modifications and much more does not lead the church away from the slippery slope. We therefore don't have to go this road anymore. We can save our energy to focus on the priorities.

John de Boer
Langley, British Columbia

Dear Editor:

In the article titled "The forgiveness of sins" (vol. 52, #4) Rev. P.G. Feenstra takes Dr. Neil Anderson to task for what he considers a denial of biblical truths. In my opinion, the statements attributed to Anderson that Feenstra puts forward as evidence to support his conclusions, are taken entirely out of their context. Anderson in his work offers hope to those who are in bondage to a particular sin (i.e.; a persecutor, a blasphemer, or a violent man, an abuser) or a victim of such horrific sins.

Who we are in Christ offers us hope. Commenting on Romans 6, John Stott states that the "necessity of remembering who we are" is the way "Paul brings his high theology down to the level of practical everyday experience," and he continues his summary: So in practice we should constantly be reminding ourselves who we are. We need to learn to talk to ourselves, and ask ourselves questions: "Don't you know? Don't you know the meaning of your conversion and baptism? Don't you know that you have been united to Christ in his death and resurrection? Don't you know that you have been enslaved to God and have committed yourself to his obedience? Don't you know these things? Don't you know who you are?"

We must go pressing ourselves with these questions, until we reply to ourselves "Yes I do know who I am, a new person in Christ, and by the grace of God I shall live accordingly."

Must we see ourselves as Feenstra says of Paul, that he remains the chief of sinners even after his conversion. If we do indeed see ourselves as such, there is only one thing for us to do and that is what Paul did before his conversion. I say and so will Dr. Anderson, Rev. Feenstra and all believers with the apostle Paul "Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation: the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Cor 5:17)

To quote Dr. Anderson: "Because of lack of repentance and ignorance of the truth, many believers are not living like liberated children of God. How tragic!"

Ron Hoogerdyk
Coaldale, Alberta

Dear Mr. Editor:

Recently renewed attention has been drawn in this magazine to the need for men to prepare themselves for the ministry. Several congregations are vacant, and a review of the current ministers indicates an increasing number that are advancing in years. New congregations are being instituted and evangelism is actively pursued.

The Rev. J. VanRietschoten recognized this in his article "Church expansion and growth," *Clarion* Volume 51, No. 7. He observes that: "this leaves us with a need for more ministers. Our prayer must be that the Lord would lead more men to the conviction that they should prepare for the ministry of the gospel."

Also the Rev. J. van Popta in *Clarion* Volume 51, No. 21 deals with this concern in more detail in his article "Where have all the pastors gone?" and asks: "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." Rev. van Popta is genuinely concerned when he takes his readers to task: "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 a beautiful work to perform? Let us pray for an explosion of students at the College."

Now, I have a couple of questions. Why should the Lord listen to these prayers when we have a man who has been eligible for call for almost a year, and who is still waiting? Why should young men be willing to go through four years of difficult and extremely demanding studies when they see this as a possible future?

I am appalled to see brother Walter Geurts still waiting for a call. Consider that his home consistory supported his desire to study when they issued an attestation that included an assessment of his suitability for the ministry. Consider that he has successfully completed his studies at the Theological College where his professors concluded that he completely satisfied all the requirements for a Master of Divinity degree. Consider that he successfully completed the Pastoral Training Program including a three-month internship under the supervision and guidance of Rev. J. DeGelder. Consider that he was thoroughly examined by ministers and elders of six consistories, meeting together as Classis Central Ontario on June 14, 2002, and who then declared him eligible for call in our churches. Consider that he has led worship services all over south-western Ontario fruitfully speaking an edifying word in the churches for over two years. Consider that he has taught catechism classes in at least two Burlington congregations to the satisfaction of their respective consistories. Why then, considering all of the above, has he not received a call? No one knows, but unfounded rumours abound. It is to the shame of our churches that this situation exists. Having listened to two excellent sermons from our brother this past Sunday that were thoroughly Reformed, full of the comfort of our Lord's covenant mercies, I felt compelled to write this letter. May it serve to the same end as the above mentioned articles.

Respectfully
Gerard J. Nordeman
Burlington, Ontario

Dear Editor,

Whether Mr. Nap's article (*Clarion*, 11-4-03) does justice to comments made by Rev. Huigen is something to which Rev. Huigen can best respond.

My concern relates to Mr. Nap's unjustified attack on *Reformanda's* "tactics."

Under the heading "Abuse from the right," *Reformanda* is accused of being "sharp and harsh" in its criticisms of recent church developments. We are told that *Reformanda* works "behind the scenes" and that in this organization "there is a convergence of all kinds of suspicions concerning almost any development in the Reformed churches." The churches, it is said, are being "victimized" by *Reformanda*. How? *Reformanda* is critical of the churches for "deliberately and consciously allowing deviations in issues like: the selection of new hymns, unity talks with other denominations, and discussions about the fourth commandment." Moreover, we are told that they attack "the integrity of specific people and titled individuals," "eagerly project themselves as the (only) watchers on the walls of Zion" and "willingly put on Jeremiah's cloak." They are guilty of "cataloguing concerns" (whatever that means) and we are told that "*Reformanda* majors in expressing and presenting criticism, but does little in providing contributions for the development of Reformed churches living in the twenty-first century."

I have read *Reformanda* for years and have seen no evidence of unchristian "tactics." There is nothing sinister about *Reformanda*. The small group of dedicated, but concerned church members involved in the magazine and related activities do not work "behind the scenes" but openly. Nor do they "eagerly project themselves" as the church's only watchers or "willingly" lament the situation in the churches. What they do is study the church issues in the light of Scripture and confession, write about them, and where necessary call the churches to reform themselves by heeding God's Word. This strikes me as a sound contribution to "the development of Reformed churches living in the twenty-first century." Although quoting much from elsewhere, Mr. Nap is perpetuating an injustice by republishing the unsubstantiated allegations against *Reformanda*.

Moreover, polarizing two groups as "the right" and "the left" wingers, and then taking a position somewhere between the two, may give the impression of a balanced and sensible approach. But that doesn't make it scriptural. The question is not whether someone can be categorized as being

with “the right” or “the left” or the majority but whether one submits humbly to the authority of God’s Word. It’s this desire to submit to God’s Word that I believe characterizes *Reformanda’s* concerns.

So let’s not vilify *Reformanda* for its straight talk as it continues to apply the Berean example to which Mr. Nap correctly refers. And let’s act justly by substantiating our allegations. Then we may even find that what we’ve painted as an evil “tactic” is actually a commendable, scriptural act. I thank God that, despite its relatively small readership, and buffeted from various sides by the church media, *Reformanda* doggedly persists in seeking to apply the norms of Scripture and confession to issues affecting our Dutch sister churches.

*Jelte Numan
Mt. Nasura, Western Australia*

Dear Editor,

I am reacting to the Editorial and the Readers’ Forum in *Clarion* of March 28, 2003. Since a common thread runs through both articles, I will deal with them in one response.

I think that an open discussion on the pastorate in our churches may well be a good idea, but I would want to plead for a little more balance and restraint than was evident in the two pieces in question. Dr. J. DeJong, to begin with him, seems to conclude from one specific situation that there is malaise in the calling process in our churches; at the very least, he perceives a tardiness among us in this area. My question is whether this assessment is based on field research, and also whether the implied accusation is fair. It seems to me that in his admonition Dr. DeJong kicks in an open door. Over the years many of our churches have done exactly what he suggests, namely call candidates and help them become ministers. But there is also the fact that churches have to make sure that the “fit” which Dr. DeJong speaks of, is indeed there. Especially when the candidate or minister may settle in for life, for better or for worse.

This brings me to another point, which is that some attention could have been given to the many churches in our federation, in looking for an experienced minister, go from one call to the next and get decline upon decline. My point here is not to question the reasons for the declines, but to propose

that there is more to a reforming of the “calling process” than Dr. DeJong suggests. There is very little movement in the ministerial “pool.”

Some brief remarks with respect to the piece by Filia Pastoris. No doubt her personal situation is agonizing, and my heart goes out to her and her family. But doesn’t she also fall into the trap of extrapolating from the specific to the general, in the process making a caricature of the Canadian Reformed Churches? I feel justified in making this comment because she says she wants to be told that she is wrong. In my opinion, she is. Firstly, there is the problem of what I believe to be an unwarranted extrapolation, and in the second place, I do not believe it has been proven that the dearth of students in Hamilton is to be blamed on “rumblings of discontent” in the churches. For an objective assessment, Filia Pastoris needs to step back from her personal case.

What the two articles brought home to me once again is that we need a better conflict resolution mechanism, and, even more so, a conflict prevention program. Often, when the conflict becomes dismissal, positions have become so polarized that reconciliation is hardly possible any more. It should have been attempted much earlier. Another area that needs attention is our tradition of a “pastorate for life.” I know that to suggest changes here is almost iconoclastic, but one wonders if it is not the fear of failure that keeps some promising young men from studying for the ministry. The idea that the pastorate is forever, and the stigma attached to failure, must be addressed. Why should good men (and congregations) suffer endlessly when the “fit” just isn’t there?

*Peter Oosterhoff
Beamsville, Ontario*

Re: editorial “The calling process” Volume 52, Number 7

In his editorial, Professor J. De Jong expressed concerns regarding the calling process of ministerial candidates. In my opinion, his subject matter leans towards a concern for the odd individual who, having invested a fair amount of time and effort and accomplished his academic goal, does not receive a call to serve the church rather than whether the calling process is faulty.

I view the situation from another perspective, that of a church calling a candidate. It is true that a candidate

still has much to learn – especially the practical part of his ministry and that usually comes only with experience. Calling a ministerial candidate has its challenges to the church and its consistory, perhaps more challenging than if calling a serving minister because of the unknown questions. Can the candidate take his academic knowledge and apply it in practical terms? Is his character such that he can work effectively with his consistory and for the edification of the congregation? The church must be very careful that it does not call just anyone who has succeeded in his academic quest for in our church federation, once called and ordained, the minister is well protected through the church order. I support the church order on this for there is also a need for this protection. Yes, the vacant church should reflect seriously on the manner in which they are exercising their calling options but it is not a requirement that every candidate be offered a call, a call from God extended by the church to serve the church, God’s people.

I believe that elders take their tasks seriously in their ministry of the Word and the deacons likewise in their ministry of mercy. In their collective wisdom, there may be a time when it is better for the congregation to be without their own pastor for a short period than to accept or make do with what is available from the pool. I doubt that consistories think that once a student graduates he knows it all, or is fully trained. Consistories know that a young man, called to the office of minister, or even to the office of elder or deacon, has much to learn. Experienced office bearers are prepared to share with the young men their practical knowledge but it is also necessary that the young men are receptive.

Neither can it be argued that the churches are sceptical about calling candidates. If we look at the number of candidates that have come through our theological college, then it must be acknowledged that the churches wholeheartedly support the training received by the theological students. It is a rare occurrence when a candidate does not receive a call. Last year one candidate received six calls!

Prof. De Jong’s editorial ends with a plea for the churches to give it a try. It is very evident that the churches are prepared to call a ministerial candidate, if deemed suitable.

But I can't agree with him on giving every candidate a try. The church is not a roulette wheel where we take our chances with someone. In most "professions" there is a probationary period and there is much value to having such a period of time to evaluate. However, becoming a minister of the word is a call, not a profession (although perhaps there is a growing perception that the ministry of the word is becoming such). In harmony with this thought our church order does not allow for a probationary period, nor does our church discuss a position such as associate pastor. Because of this the church exercises due diligence when calling a minister, and especially when calling a candidate. That is their pastoral responsibility to their congregation.

In his editorial Prof. De Jong has not convinced me that the calling process is faulty. Neither is there a reason for concern because a candidate has not yet received a call. God will lead a church to call the candidate when He determines it. For the odd individual ministerial candidate, that call to serve the church in the manner he desires to serve may never come but this should not determine that our present calling process is failing the churches.

Henry van Delden
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Dear editor,

Please allow me to respond to two issues that appeared in recent issues of *Clarion*:

1. In the March 28, 2003 issue someone with the pseudonym "Filia Pastoris" repeatedly asks the readers to "...please tell me that I'm wrong." Well, to be frank, you are wrong when you do not place your name under a list of grievances of what can be perceived as potential allegations and/or accusations. In such serious matters one does not cowardly hide behind a pseudonym but instead follows the biblical way in addressing the people involved about any perceived problems. It is disappointing that the editor allows an unsigned submission like this to be published.

2. Challenging the reader in *Clarion* of April 11, 2003 to "Please judge for yourself to see whether our delegates' report with impressions of the state of our Dutch sister churches was fair, balanced and representative" please consider the following comments.

The author of *Reader's Forum* leaves the impression that the report did not fairly represent the situation in the Netherlands, based on the response he received from the chairman of the latest synod, the editor of a magazine, *de Reformatie*, and a member of synod who wrote reports for the press. I am afraid that the response he received from these three brothers is not the best way to get a fair picture of the situation. The responses from these brothers did not address the alleged unbiblical position of the "dissenters." Instead, they characterize the people who are concerned and paint them as being "sharp and harsh," "a group working behind the scenes," they "victimize," claiming to be "the only watchers on the walls of Zion." In short, you get the impression that these "dissenters" are people who are busy destroying the church.

Now let's put that scenario in a North American perspective. When some ten years ago concerned members of the CRC became very vocal and called for a reformation, similar to what some of the brothers and sisters now do in the Netherlands, they were painted in the same way as "people who are destroying the church." If at that moment you or I had wanted to get an objective opinion of what was going on with these concerned members we could have asked three people for a fair, balanced and representative opinion of the situation. We could have asked the chairman of the latest CRC synod, the editor of CRC publication *The Banner* and a member of synod who wrote press releases. I have a pretty good idea of their responses. They would have painted those dissenters as "sharp and harsh," "working behind the scenes," "claiming to be the only ones on the walls of Zion," "destroying the church."

Guess what, those same people that were accused of destroying the church are now our brothers and sisters in the Lord, in the process of uniting with us into one church. So much for a learned opinion from three respected brothers. It appears that the important thing is not who you ask, even though he may be the grandson of Klaas Schilder. Instead, what do you ask and what is the response based on, that's important.

What that tells me is that the opinion of three brothers from the Netherlands may represent the majority of the church members but it may not repre-

sent a biblical view on the situation in that church. To quote one of the examples: sure, for hundreds of years there may have been people with an unbiblical view on working on Sundays and those views may have been tolerated. However, what the latest synod did was deciding that working on Sunday may be defended as a biblical view but the command that working on Sunday is wrong also may be preached from the pulpit. Is it any wonder that "those dissenters" are saying that in that way the churches lose their Reformed character?

The author writes that the Dutch churches are "grappling with major challenges." However, it appears that what they fail to do with those challenges is address them in a solid, biblical fashion, based on good Reformed tradition how the Bible should be interpreted. If our sister churches reject the call to repentance from those who expose those "major challenges" I am afraid that "those watchers on the walls of Zion" will end up where the former concerned members of the CRC are now: obligated to leave a church that is no longer faithful to its call to be a true church.

Before rejecting the report from our delegates to the Dutch churches one would need to show, on biblical grounds, that the churches in Holland are faithfully dealing with the issues at hand and show, again based on biblical grounds, that the concerned members are dealing with these same issues in an unbiblical and schismatic manner. Let the Dutch churches face the challenges in a biblical way, refuting those who reject to subject themselves to God's Word. So far, that debate has not taken place.

Jack Vanderveen
Houston, British Columbia

A Matter of Preference?

It is with sadness and dismay that I read the editorial by Rev. Cl. Stam in the issue of April 11. There is nothing against it, but, on the contrary, everything is in favour of it when the members of the churches are informed about discussions with other ecclesiastical bodies and when the so-called divergences are being described and discussed. But there is nothing in favour and everything is against it when these so-called divergences are minimized and made relative, being reduced to a question of "preference."

Discussing the concept of the covenant as it is formulated in the Westminster Confession, Rev. Stam put over against that what we confess. No, he did not write “what we confess,” but he reduced the matter to a simple “preference.” The Canadian Reformed Churches “prefer” to say that the covenant is established with the believers and their seed. Is it a question of “preference?” No, Mr. Editor, it is a question of faithfulness to the truth!

The roots of the Canadian Reformed Churches go back to the Netherlands. Do I have to remind Rev. Stam and all of us of the struggle against the theory that the covenant is with the elect only? No one has to remind me of it that the struggle went against the super-Scriptural binding to that theory. But it was against the binding to a *wrong theory* that we (and I may include myself) had to free ourselves from that yoke.

Except in times of sore deformation, the churches have never refused to be bound to scriptural truths, and it was not the being bound as such that we rejected. It was a question of obedience as we were bound to a theory that was not scriptural. And now our people are being led to believe that it was a matter of “preference?” How sad and how detrimental.

W.W.J. Van Oene
Abbotsford, British Columbia

Editorial Comment:

While the Rev. Cl. Stam is free to react to this letter if he so wishes, it would not be right if it is to be printed without any kind of editorial comment. In this regard I find it exceedingly sad that a colleague of the Rev. W.W.J. Van Oene’s stature sees fit to criticize another colleague so severely for the fact that he uses one particular word with which he takes issue (namely the word “prefer”). His letter gives the impression that the Rev. Cl. Stam has somehow forgotten our past as churches and our struggles relating to the covenant. Surely when our readers have another look at what the Rev. Cl. Stam wrote in his editorial of April 11, 2003, they will see that such a charge is both extreme and ill-founded.

J. Visscher, editor

Yes, You are Wrong! Dear Editor,

The question of a *Filia Pastoris* “Please tell me I’m wrong” (Issue of March 28, 2003) begs for an answer. I would like to assure her (and others) that she is wrong! In thirteen points she described how you can get rid of your minister, implying thereby that these abusive situations exist. That these things happen I will not deny, but they are exceptions and are certainly “not the way we do things.” This does not paint a fair picture of what our churches are like and what kind of treatment students for the ministry can expect!

I have been a minister for a good number of years now in different congregations, some of which also had or got a bad name, before or after. I must honestly say that throughout all those years I have been treated very well by all, experienced much love and respect from the congregations and much patience with my shortcomings. Sure, it is no easy task and not all people are equally pleasant, but yet it has been most rewarding and a great privilege to be allowed to serve the Lord in the capacity of minister of the Word in his church and kingdom. And yes, you can confidently recommend it to your sons and grandsons!

Cornelius Van Spronsen
Surrey, British Columbia

Dear Editor: “This is not the way we do things”

This is a direct quote from the letter written by a sister or a daughter of a pastor (Filia Pastoris) in the March 28 edition of *Clarion*. Brother Editor, the sister is correct. This is not the way we do things. A letter written in such an accusatory tone is not what I would expect to read in “The Canadian Reformed Magazine.” Who was edified by this letter? Whose reputation did we build up or maintain? When the Heidelberg Catechism deals with the ninth commandment and we apply answer 112 to this letter, then I can only conclude that the editors made an error when they determined that this letter should be printed. Question and answer 112 teaches me about defending my neighbour’s honour and reputation. But this letter only leaves us with questions.

Was the reputation of the *Clarion* improved with this letter? Did the subscribers learn anything or were they pastorally corrected? Was the honour of a pastor at stake? Or perhaps a specific

congregation was properly reproached by the sarcasm? Was this letter directed to your congregation? If that was the case, did the sister first attempt to correct your congregation before she publicly maligned and accused you?

Brother Editors, please help me understand. I would expect that either I should learn something when I read the *Clarion* or my view should be corrected. Or, what I read is news. But with this letter I only learn that someone who does not wish to be identified has accused me of wanting to get rid of my pastor. Or perhaps she was accusing your congregation or you’re the neighbouring congregation. And I would expect that this was written for the benefit of Christ’s congregation.

Brother Editors, I believe you must accept some responsibility for the havoc and hurt that was been done to the body of Christ with this letter. Please do consider printing an apology and also please do consider asking the sister to also apologize for accusing me, or if not me, at least someone, somewhere, rashly and unheard.

John Voorhorst
Coaldale, Alberta

Response:

Several of these letters to the editor question the appropriateness of permitting the writer to use a pseudonym. Seeing the very frank nature of the article, this was deemed to be the best approach. It also challenges our readers to deal more directly with the article and its contents.

Now br. Voorhorst seems to think that these contents are directed at a very specific congregation; however, let me assure him that such is not my reading of this article. I think that it is sufficiently general and can be applied unfortunately to any number of church conflicts, both past and present.

Like my colleague, the Rev. C. VanSpronsen, I recognize that thankfully this sort of conduct is not the norm in our churches, but the fact that it does occur is sufficient reason for sadness. It is so very distressing that when congregations and pastors fight, the arguments do not remain principled but often become deeply personal. So to all who are not “fighting fair” (if there is such a thing) I could say “if the shoe fits, wear it.” But I would much, much rather urge you to “speak the truth in love” (Eph 4:15).

Editor, J. Visscher