

Clarion

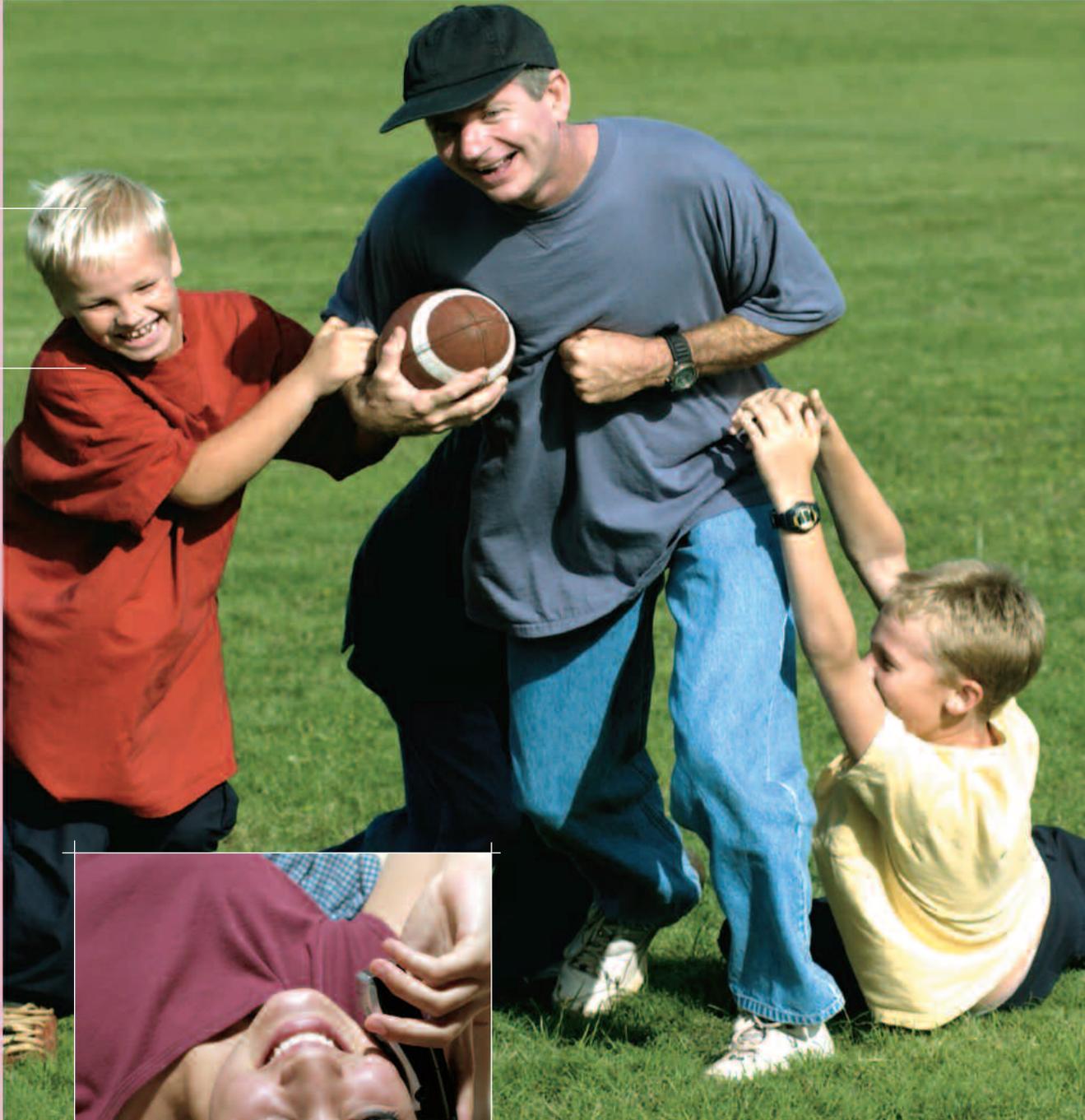
THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

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*Leave It to the
Pastor*

*The Darkness
is My Closest
Friend*

*A Possessed
Culture?*



*Where have our
children gone?*



J. Visscher

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Leave It to the Pastor

We do not empower the elders when we take all of the serious or special cases off their hands and give all of them to the minister.

Years ago there used to be a family television show with a comic twist called *Leave It to Beaver*. It starred a cute and impish young boy by the name of Beaver who always seemed to be getting into trouble of one kind or another. Happily, by the end of every segment everything would get resolved and somehow Beaver would manage to come out of it unscathed. No doubt if you search your television listings you will be able to come across a broadcasting station here or there that is still showing reruns of that old series.

We live in a day and age wherein there is little regard for biblical eldership, let alone for the idea that these men are vested with divine authority.

In any case, by now you are probably wondering, “What does this all have to do with a magazine like *Clarion*?” Well, as I go about meeting and speaking to ministerial colleagues from here, there, and everywhere, it strikes me that some churches and church councils have a “leave it to the pastor” philosophy and approach.

Unrealistic expectations

What do I mean by that? It has to do with the fact that in these churches the pastor is expected to do just about everything. Preaching and teaching, of course, are at the top of the list. In turn these are closely followed by visiting, counselling, evangelizing, chairing meetings, preparing agendas, writing letters, putting together the weekly bulletin, and so forth. Why, I even know of one ministerial colleague who used to prepare the bread for the Lord’s Supper celebration.

At the same time as the pastor is doing everything, however, the elders are often doing the bare minimum. Their main focus is on making sure that the annual home visits get done, and on attending the regular consistory meetings. They do not worry about the special cases in their ward or district, because the minister will take care of them. They do not make extra visits to older or sick members because the minister will take care of that too. They do not bother to invite over the members in their ward either, because the minister and his wife will see to that. In short, the minister is there to take care of everything.

You have a problem

Now, I would suggest to you that if this is a picture of how your local pastor and your body of elders functions, your church has a serious problem. Indeed, you have more than one. In the first place, you have a pastor who will soon be run ragged and probably looking for the next call out of town.

Have you ever seen before and after pictures? I mean, for example, of American presidents. There are pictures showing what they looked like when they entered office and what they looked like after they left office. One of the most startling was Abraham Lincoln. He entered the Oval Office as a fit and hardy man, but close to the time of his assassination he looked greatly aged and wrinkled. Now, some pastors go through the same kind of metamorphosis. They come to a congregation looking hale and healthy but by the time they leave they look old and exhausted.

Elders and involvement

But if in this scenario one problem has to do with the tired pastor, another has to do with the underutilized elders. Elders who see their task as limited to an annual home visit are hardly taking their office and calling seriously. They need to be much more involved in the lives of their ward members. They need to



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know them, have regular contact with them, and be there to support, guide, and encourage them. They need to be familiar with the basics of the Reformed faith and be committed to passing them on. They need to have an eye for the weak and the strong, for the married and the divorced, for the faithful and the straying. Indeed, elders who take the care of their ward or district seriously will find that they have a lot of continuous work on their hands.

In addition to being very involved themselves, elders need to be sensitive to the office and calling of their pastor. Does he receive the time that he needs to prepare his sermons? Does he have the opportunity and resources for proper teaching? After all, preaching and teaching are his prime tasks.

And as for visiting, that too is part of the elder's work; however, I would suggest to you that the elders should sit down with the pastor and together they should agree on a visitation plan. As part of this plan it may be wise to assign sick visits primarily to the pastor seeing that he can access the area hospitals during the day. The same applies to counselling visits and bereavement visits. As for other special visits, they should as a rule be done by the elders with the minister serving as back-up or as special support. We do not empower the elders when we take all of the serious or special cases off their hands and give all of them to the minister.

Visiting the elderly

What about visits to the elderly? The longer that I am in the ministry the more I become convinced that some ministers spend too much time with this age group. Why, in some churches if the minister does not stop in for his weekly visit with the elderly, the complaints are sure to pour in. In the meantime the work that really needs to be done and the visits that really need to be made are overlooked. So, one of the first things that a new minister would be well advised to do when he comes to town is to inform the elderly, and indeed the whole congregation, about his priorities. They can expect him when they have a serious problem or sickness. They should not count on him as a regular tea visitor.

Of course, I am aware too of the fact that church members tend to rate visits. By this I mean that if the pastor comes it is considered to be a real visit; whereas, if the elder shows up it is in some ways a second rate appearance. What a wrong notion! But how does one go about dispelling it? The only real answer is education and more education. Specifically, biblical

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education is needed. The congregation needs to be taught about the special place, task, and responsibility that the elders have in the church. They need to see these men and their office in a new light.

This is no easy challenge. By and large we live in a day and age wherein there is little regard for biblical eldership, let alone for the idea that these men are vested with divine authority. Why, the whole concept of office has worn thin in the church. There is little stress on the office of all believers, and the special offices do not fare much better. How conscious are believers of the fact that they have been vested by God with the threefold office of prophet, priest, and king? How seriously do they take the fact that the same God has placed elders over them who are charged with their spiritual well-being?

The congregation needs to be taught about the special place, task, and responsibility that the elders have in the church.

Eldership needs renewed emphasis. By means of preaching and teaching, the church would do well to instruct its members in how to see the elders and in how to interact with them.

Over-achieving ministers

Yes, and here too the minister can play a leading role. In those churches where the minister is expected to do everything, it is not always right to blame the elders alone. At times ministers have been and continue to be their own worst enemies. If your pastor thinks that he has to do everything and then he proceeds to try to do everything, he is a large part of the problem. In such a situation he desperately needs to stand back, take a good hard look at what he is doing, and touch base with the biblical model of church leadership. Thereafter he



needs to sit down with the elders and show them a better and more God-pleasing way. It is the way of shared responsibility, proper teamwork, clear priorities, careful delegation, and mutual empowerment.

A better model

Only when the elders and minister work closely and clearly together will the church be well served and will God's way of governing the church be properly honoured. Only in this way will the minister be able to survive and flourish and only in this way will the office of elder truly come into its own.

So, if you are a pastor, let me ask you, "How do you see yourself and how do you do your work in the congregation?" Remember, even Moses had to learn the secret of delegation.

And if you are an elder, let me ask you, "Do you expect your minister to do what you should really be doing?" Remember, the secret to being an effective elder is to embrace all of the duties of your office willingly and cheerfully.

Finally, congregation, let me ask you, "Are you praying for these men, supporting them, and helping to make their work a joy?" (Heb 13:17)



D.Ph. Poppe

The Darkness is My Closest Friend

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MATTHEW 13:52

“You have taken my companions and loved ones from me; the darkness is my closest friend.”

Psalm 88:18

The Psalms are often shocking in their honesty. They show us that sometimes God’s children have difficult lives. Now of all the Psalms, Psalm 88 is the darkest. Unlike the other Psalms, this one does not end on a note of hope, praise, or thankfulness. Heman concludes his Psalm with the words, “The darkness is my closest friend.”

A friend is someone with whom you share deeply. Friends are faithful when others are not. They celebrate the joys of life with you and mourn with you in your grief. In this Psalm Heman concludes by saying that the darkness is his closest friend. He says this because his soul is full of trouble (v 3). He is also estranged from others (v 4-5). This isolation is explained in verse 8 where he says, “You have taken from me my closest friends and have made me repulsive to them.” In verse 18 he picks up on this again, “You have taken my companions and loved ones from me.”

On top of this he is also isolated and estranged from God. In verse 6 he tells us that the Lord’s wrath lies heavily upon him. He’s overwhelmed by God’s anger and it puts him in the darkest depths. In verse 14 he takes it a step further, saying that God has rejected him and hid his face from him. And in verse 16 he says that God’s terrors have destroyed him.

Heman experiences a deep terror and sorrow, and is utterly alone. There is no one who really understands, no one who really cares, no one who can help. When he looks at his life he says, “Yeah, I’ve got one friend. His name is darkness.” He is living in his own private little hell, and no one really cares.

This is an appalling Psalm because it describes the life of a believer. Psalm 88 was inspired by the Holy Spirit, and included in the Bible. God is telling us here that even though He comes to us with a message of hope, peace, and joy, these are not the experience of every believer. Sometimes Christians suffer intensely in a broken world. Some Christians are depressed and suicidal; they feel abandoned by family and friends and even by God Himself. Some Christians feel that the darkness is their only friend.

If you have ever felt that the darkness is your closest friend, the Lord is saying to you: that does not mean that you are not a Christian. Psalm 88 confronts us with the reality that being in a covenant relationship with God doesn’t mean we will escape the brokenness of a fallen world.

So how are we to move forward if we find ourselves in Heman’s situation? In the first place we should appreciate the darkness of this Psalm. Those people who are deeply depressed or troubled can find real solace in this Psalm because it gives an accurate portrayal of their feelings. By including this Psalm in the Bible, God shows us that He really does understand the most desperate cries of the human heart. Even if there is no one else who understands, He does.

We should also notice that Heman takes his darkness to the Lord. In verse 1 he says, “O Lord, the God who saves me, day and night I cry out before you. May my prayer come before you; turn your ear to my cry.” God is teaching us here that if we are severely depressed, suicidal, anxious, or if we are surrounded by

terrors, then we can take that to Him and He will help us. This is an important thing to bear in mind. Sometimes we face the seductive temptation to turn our back on God. If we have sinned terribly or if we are severely depressed, we can think that the Lord doesn’t care about us any longer. But in Psalm 88 God teaches us there is still hope. Our Father hears with patience and mercy the most desolate cries that come to Him. He never minimizes or mocks or misunderstands our struggle. The darkness doesn’t blind his eyes, or prevent his care. The Lord wants us to understand that there is no thought so distorted, no emotion so powerful, no circumstance so horrible, no action so twisted that it stands outside the reach of the Redeemer and his grace. He promises, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Heb 13:5).

The reason God hears our cries is because of his Son Jesus Christ. When Christ was in this world, He suffered very intensely. He too was despised and mocked. He too was abandoned by family and friends. He experienced a darkness and terror much deeper than what we experience, for He was subject to the full wrath of God against sin. Our Lord Jesus was rejected and forsaken by his Father. The Bible tells us that Christ has suffered and been tempted in every way as we are (Heb 4:15). But He came through his darkest hour victorious. He defeated sin and the devil and so is able to set his people free. It is for Christ’s sake that God will hear us and help us.

J. Wiskerke van Dooren

Lord's Day 36

Mrs. J. Wiskerke van Dooren published a Children's Catechism in Dutch. This has been translated with her permission.



We have now reached the third commandment. In simple words the commandment says that you may only use the name of your Father in heaven if you think of Him with respect. It is a terrible sin to use God's name to make yourself look cool, or as an exclamation.

It is sad, but many boys and girls, and older people too, like to use God's name when they are talking. Then God's name is used as an exclamation. Even worse, some people use the Lord's

name when they are mad, to be forceful. Don't say this aloud, but they use God's name followed by the word "damn." They are saying, "May God damn me." That means, "If what I am saying is not true, may God send me to hell." Saying God's name in these ways is called abusing God's name. It is a great sin, and it makes God very angry.

People blaspheme on the radio and the television. Sometimes they even mock God. I am sure your parents turn the program off when that happens; that is what the Lord wants. For Him, the worst thing anyone can do is to defame his name, speaking about God with contempt.

Did you know that an Israelite who blasphemed God had to be executed? He had said that God was powerless, and could not really help them. This man was not allowed to live with God's people. Are you shocked? Are you thinking that you are glad such a punishment no longer happens? Well, be careful. Today if someone blasphemes God, and is not sorry but does it again, will receive a greater punishment. After he has died, he is not allowed to be with the Lord. The punishment from biblical times helps us today to hate cursing God.

Don't abuse the name of God. Don't make your heavenly Father sad. If you do abuse his name, ask God humbly for forgiveness. And you will receive forgiveness! God is merciful.

What to do when you hear someone blaspheme? Do you say nothing, or walk away? You must be brave, and dare to say something. If you do nothing, your silence is as bad as their cursing.

God's name is sometimes used to get your own way. Someone may say, "No, I didn't do it, I swear." Even though they leave out God's name, God does not want that either. We are also not allowed to lie. When you say yes it should be yes. And no should mean no. And let us always speak with respect about the Lord.



D. Moes

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Part 3: Living the Christian Life – Learning to Love

This is a very important lesson because Jesus told us that the world would know that we are his disciples by our love for one another. Paul tells us that if we do not have love, we are nothing but noisy gongs and clanging cymbals. John tells us that if we do not love, we do not know God. Thus, it is of vital importance that both individually and corporately we learn how to love. Lead this session with great sensitivity because the group members are more likely to be more open with each other now than they have ever been and able to talk about deeper areas of their lives, particularly their relationships.

You and yours

Have the participants share together in small groups something about their relationships within the family and with close friends. Get them to discuss who are the people that they have been closest to in their own life (perhaps parents, siblings, spouse, friends, children), and why they think so many people find these close relationships difficult. End the exercise by having the groups share their answer to the final question. Then, look together at the section on the handout entitled “Relationships: learning to love and to be loved.”

Bible study

Invite the group to study I Corinthians 13 quietly on their own at first. Have them read the chapter through once as it is written. Then, have them read the verses 4-7 a second time substituting the name “Jesus” for “love.” Then, have them read these verses a third time substituting their own name for “love.” Be prepared for people to discover some uncomfortable truths about themselves as they read the

passage for the third time. Now have the group discuss this passage in small groups and share what they have learned about Jesus and themselves. Also have them discuss what they learn about love in marriage and in family life, what the chapter teaches about growing up, and which verse of the passage speaks to them most clearly. Draw the small group discussion together and share some of the findings.

Building good relationships and barriers in relationships

Use the notes in the handout and expand on these with your own input, or have members of the groups share some of their own experiences. With regard to building good relationships, explain the importance of spending quality time together, sharing yourself, appreciating each other, listening to each other, and allowing other people to be themselves. Regarding barriers in relationships, have the participants share how pride, lack of forgiveness, fear, and jealousy hinder the building of good relationships.

What happens when things go wrong?

Many people in your group will probably be carrying hurt from relationships that have gone wrong. Some of the hurt may be surfacing at the present time. But some hurt will stay below the surface, for there are so many good things happening in a new relationship with God and with other Christians. After that initial period, however, these wounds sometimes begin to surface and God begins to deal with these deeper areas of people’s lives. What you say in this part of the lesson, therefore, may not apply immediately to the group, but it is essential information

for them as they look ahead over the next couple of years (and in many ways to the rest of their lives) to God setting right and healing what is wrong inside. What you are able to share will depend to some extent on your own experience of these things in yourself and in other people. Testimony, openness, and vulnerability on your part will almost certainly enable the group to go deeper in its discussion and allow group members to admit to hurts and wounds in different areas of their lives at a later date. The important things to stress are the great love of God and the way in which God’s work in our lives continues over many years. The participant’s handout contains excellent information to help you facilitate this part of the lesson.

Growing closer to God

Point out that growing as a Christian is about coming to love God more and coming to realize more and more deeply how much God loves you. Have the participants share together in small groups whether there are any people that they need to forgive, how they will go about that, and how easy they find it to believe that God loves them.

After all the input, give the participants the opportunity to talk together. Then, draw the groups together into an open discussion and question time. Continue the discussion afterwards on an individual basis with anyone who would find this helpful.

If you would like to view the outline for this lesson, go to www.reformedevangelism.com and follow the links. Next time, we hope to introduce the final lesson of this introductory course to the Christian faith. It will be about “Sharing the Faith.”

A Possessed Culture?

Rev. W. L. Bredehof has accepted the call to co-pastor the Canadian Reformed Church at Langley, British Columbia
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Missionaries and missions scholars do a lot of thinking about culture. This is especially because so much mission work is cross-cultural. Much of a missionary's work is trying to find the most effective way to communicate in a different cultural context. As a missionary does this, he is also faced with the reality that cultures are stained by sin. For example, many Brazilians apparently love their Carnival, many natives apparently enjoy gambling, and so forth.

One temptation is to look at this situation and regard other cultures with disdain. At the end of the day, a Babine person can no longer be Babine if he wants to be a Christian. He has to give up almost everything that made him distinctively Babine, except perhaps for his language. Likewise, a Brazilian has to stop being a Brazilian if he wants to be a Christian. This is a real temptation, and the sad truth is that many have historically gone this route. In that old way of thinking, becoming a Christian means giving up the old culture.

Possessio

Reformed missionaries of the last fifty years have often taken a different tack on this issue. Taking their cue especially from the Dutch missiologist Johan Bavinck, Reformed missionaries have recognized that all cultures need to come under the lordship of Christ Jesus. Bavinck used a Latin word to describe what he had in mind: *possessio*. As the gospel permeates a people and a culture, Jesus Christ takes possession of that culture. Babine Christians can maintain

their Babine identity, as can Papuan, Brazilian, and whatever other ethnic group's Christians. But their culture will be changed or transformed by the power of the gospel. By the power of the Spirit and Word, the Lord Jesus will slowly but surely bring changes to a people's culture.

By the power of the Spirit and Word, the Lord Jesus will slowly but surely bring changes to a people's culture.

In that last sentence, I would ask that you take note of the word "slowly." I ask this because it is very important as we consider how the Lord Jesus is bringing changes to our own culture. In the Canadian Reformed churches, the vast majority of us are of Dutch immigrant ancestry. This is our culture. Though we are Canadians, we do have a distinct sub-culture within our churches. Being of Dutch immigrant ancestry, most of us can claim ties to the Christian faith going back over centuries. We would all like to believe that our ancestors protested the martyrdom of Boniface, a pioneering missionary to the Frisians in the Middle Ages. The gospel came to pagans in The Netherlands and transformed their culture in many ways. When the light of the Reformation burned strong and bright along the dykes and canals, that

transformation was continuing. It continued through further Reformations in 1834, 1886, and 1944. Eventually, the process was handed down to us as immigrants to Canada or the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of immigrants.

Again I would emphasize that a key word in all this is "slowly." We often expect to see quick results on the mission fields. We want to see newly Reformed believers immediately doing what took our own ancestors many generations to do. Our own impatience betrays a lack of understanding about the process of the gospel transforming a culture. Furthermore, it also may indicate a sense we sometimes have that the gospel has already done its work in our midst – that the transformation of our own sub-culture in the church is an accomplished fact.

I would like to point out three facets of our sub-culture that seem to indicate a need for further transformation. I do so with a hope that we will be able to accept this as constructive criticism offered by someone who has lived in and outside of the culture. Hopefully the acceptance of such criticism will enable us to be more patient and understanding with those cultures which are only just recently coming into contact with the power of the Word and Spirit.

Task-orientation

Partly as a result of the immigration experience and partly because of our Dutch cultural heritage, we highly value hard work. In fact, we would be happy to

hear others describe us as hard-working. Hard work is not a bad thing in itself. After all, the Scriptures also place a lot of value on hard work and emphatically proscribe laziness. However, some take all of these things in an unhealthy direction. For instance, the fourth commandment regarding a day of rest has sometimes been interpreted as meaning you shall work six days and no less. With this kind of interpretation, holidays come with a load of guilt. If you're not working and you're not busy, you must be lazy. As Jesus Christ transforms our own sub-culture, we increasingly recognize that God's people in the Old Testament were given abundant time for recreation outside of the Sabbath. Why would God require something more burdensome for his people in the new covenant era?

We may have a sense that the transformation of our own sub-culture in the church is an accomplished fact.

Another aspect of our being exceptionally task-oriented is that we often place work before relationships. For many of us, at the end of the day, success is a matter of how many things we managed to get done rather than how much we were able to invest in relationships with others, especially with family. This may partly account for the relatively high number of people who have been abused as children in Reformed circles. We were so absorbed with our work that we neglected to shepherd and protect our children. The Lord Jesus will continue to work among us so that we recognize that

relationships are far more important than the list of things to do that we make for ourselves each day.

Stoic suppression of feelings

The Bible tells us in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 that believers are not to "grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope." However, because of our cultural norms, some of us have understood this to mean that when a loved one passes away, we are not allowed to cry at all. We may not express our feelings of sadness and loss – to do so would be to grieve like the rest of men. But if we travel around the world, we quickly find fellow believers in other cultures who very easily express their emotions of sadness with tears and vocal, open grieving. The problem is that we have looked in the Scriptures for a justification for our cultural norm. We found it in one Bible passage; meanwhile, we have ignored the numerous other passages which speak about grieving openly. We have even forgotten the shortest and most easily memorized text of the Bible: "Jesus wept" (John 11:35). And in so doing, we have stood in the way of the most natural way God has given to deal with a loss.

In a similar manner, we have also stood in the way of believers speaking openly about their faith and their joy in the Lord Jesus. Our stoic attitude justifies this with thinking, "They'll know we are Christians by the way we live our life. We don't have to speak about what God has done for us and the joy we have as a result." The same people who think this can be found singing Psalm 96:3, "Declare his glory among the nations, his marvellous deeds among all peoples." And verse 10, "Say among the nations, 'The Lord reigns...'" We are called to speak and declare, but our cultural norms tell us to keep quiet and keep it to ourselves. As Jesus Christ takes hold

of our culture more and more, we will recognize that we are robbing God of glory with this old way of thinking.

The problem is that we have looked in the Scriptures for a justification for our cultural norm.

Finally, many voices in our sub-culture say that we may not or cannot express our feelings of love. Fathers need not say "I love you" to their children. Even husbands and wives may have difficulty expressing their feelings about one another in a verbal way. "They know how I think, so why do I have to say it? I show it to them." However, as Jesus Christ works with the Spirit and Word in our circles, we must increasingly see that our heavenly Father is very vocal and expressive about his love for his people. John 3:16 is the most obvious example and many others could be found. Now, if God our Father expresses his love for us in explicit verbal ways, why would we not do the same with those we love deeply in our lives? The power of the spoken word should never be underestimated!

Pride is good for me – bad for you

The last facet of our culture that needs transformation is pride – a subject about which I've written before. We are still much more accustomed to the language of pride than to the language of thankfulness. We are proud of our accomplishments. We are proud of our churches. We are proud of our nation. But where is it a scriptural notion for believers to be proud? As Calvinists, we should know better! Our whole life,

everything about us, is to be directed for the glory of God. We have no right to be proud of anything. Rather, thankfulness should be the theme of our lives.

Strangely enough, we recognize that pride is usually bad for other people. Many of us will not praise our children, because we don't want them to get fat heads. We will not give credit and praise to others, because we don't want to see them become proud. This is strange because the Lord Jesus gives praise to his people. Almost all of the churches in the first three chapters of Revelation receive praise from the Lord. If the Lord

gives praise to his people when they are doing something right and good, why should we have a different standard for our relationships? People were created with a need for affirmation, and for children it can be especially damaging when they don't receive that from their parents. It is damaging also in the bigger sense of keeping these children from living out their full potential for the glory of God.

Conclusion

I know that there has been some generalization in what I've written

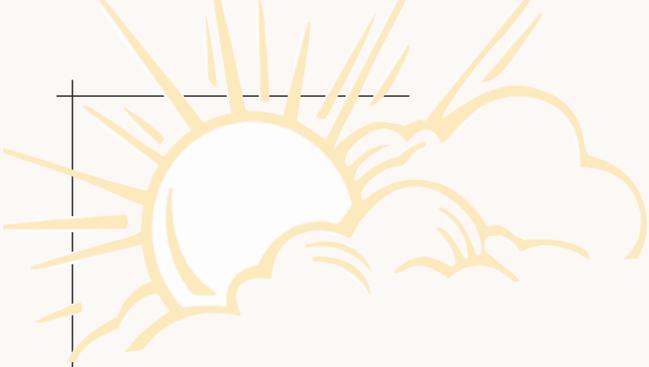
above. Nevertheless, it comes from observations that I've made in Canadian and American Reformed churches across the continent. There are surely brothers and sisters who have already recognized these shortcomings in our sub-culture and are working on addressing them in their own lives and those of others. But for the remainder, all I ask is your humble consideration of whether or not these things are so. If they are, can we agree that Christ's transformation and possession of our sub-culture is, as yet, incomplete?



Milk factory, Charm, Ohio



Photo courtesy J. Wanders



Ray of Sunshine

By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

“How lovely is your dwelling place, O LORD Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.”

Psalm 84:1, 2

Psalm 84 is probably very familiar to most of you; it is a psalm in which the author longs to be in the temple. For whatever reason, he was not able to be in the temple to worship God or to sing praises to his name.

At times we may find ourselves in a very similar situation: that we are unable to make it to church for reasons of sickness or other handicaps. How do we feel? Do we long to be in church when we cannot make it? The author of this psalm is even envious of the sparrows who build their nests in the temple, as well as the door keeper who guards the house of God. The author is not just showing an outward love, like the Pharisees, that he had to be in the temple. Rather, he longed to be there to worship God with sincerity of heart, and in a spiritual manner.

The author realizes that the temple was the place where God was pleased to dwell among his people so that they could have communion with Him and be richly blessed by Him. This could only be done by a true and sincere faith through God's grace.

We also learn how we must lean with our whole heart upon God. This can only be done when we put off our pride, and truly humble our hearts. As we walk through life, with all its difficulties and sorrows, we must make sure that it leads to God and to the strengthening of our faith. At times we may face many struggles and tears, but we are not alone; God will carry us through this as verse 7 so beautifully says: “They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion.” The love for the temple shown in this psalm is ultimately a love for God, and a sincere desire to praise and honour Him. He enables his people to go from strength to strength.

This promise has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ; by his death and resurrection Jesus has given the Holy Spirit to those who believe in Him. Thus, our hearts have become the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. We may joyfully continue to sing Psalm 84 knowing that “the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favour and honour; no good thing does He withhold from those whose walk is blameless” (v 11).

Let us never carelessly neglect to worship God, or think that we can do without, or only worship God when it pleases us.

Trusting in God and his promises will give us the courage to go on. We shall go from strength to strength as we listen to the faithful preaching of God's Word. For then we will be equipped to live as people who are the temple of the Holy Spirit. God gives us the means to walk along his paths, but we must do the walking. When we obey Him, He will not hold anything back that will help us serve Him. All praise and thanks to God alone, who has given us his Holy Spirit to work and dwell within our hearts! Let us never take this for granted, but always humbly thank God for the rich blessings that we daily receive!

*O Lord of hosts, O God of grace,
How lovely is Thy holy place,
How good and pleasant is Thy dwelling!
O how my soul longs earnestly,
Yea, faints Thy holy courts to see
Mid festal throngs and music swelling.
My heart and flesh cry out to God;
To Him I spread my hands abroad.*

(Psalm 84:1)

Birthdays in June:

- 17** **JOAN KOERSELMAN will be 48**
Box 1312, Coaldale AB, T0K 0L0
- 20th** **DANIEL STROOP will be 24**
193 Diane Drive, Orangeville ON, L9W 3N3
- 30** **BEVERLY BREUKEMAN will be 43**
2225-19th Street, Coaldale AB, T1M 1G4

Congratulations to you all who are celebrating a birthday in June. May God graciously grant you an enjoyable day together with your family and friends and with good health and happiness for this new year.

Till next month,

Mrs. C. Gelms and Mrs. E. Nordeman
548 Kemp Road East, RR 2, Beamsville ON LOR 1B2
Phone: 905-563-0380



Matthew van Popta

Matthew van Popta is a seventh grade teacher at the John Calvin Christian School in Burlington.

Where Have Our Children Gone?

A Review of Neil Postman's *The Disappearance of Childhood*



Initially, the question posed in my title may seem very strange, especially coming from a teacher. But, if one looks closely, are children actually children? What defines a child? Are children different now than they were one hundred years ago?

What prompted me to do some thinking and writing about these questions was a book written by Neil Postman, a brilliant McLuhanistic-like social commentator, called *The Disappearance of Childhood*. The very title of the book seemingly suggests a conundrum. How could childhood disappear? Numerically speaking, there are more children now than ever before. Of course Postman is not stating that there are no children anymore, but rather that children are not acting like children anymore; their childhood is disappearing.

The development of childhood

In lucid, common-sense style, Postman begins his book by tracing the development of childhood in Greek and Roman cultures. The author searches to discover the answers to questions such as: Where did the idea of childhood come from? Why and how did it come about? Why is childhood disappearing?

Throughout the Middle Ages there was complete non-interest in children. Postman argues that this attitude or social tendency changed with the introduction of the printing press. He states that the printing press created a

new definition of adulthood based on reading competence and a new conception of childhood based on reading incompetence (p 18). There were no children because there was no means for adults to know exclusive information. The printing press created a new symbolic world that required a new conception of adulthood, one that excluded children. This invention defined childhood as the period in one's life when one learned how to read in order to become a civilized, literate adult who could comprehend complex information. Once this initial separation was achieved, other areas followed. The clothes of children became different, their language (slang) was different, books on pediatrics were written, and children's literature came about. Complementing this was the rich content of secrets that society began to keep from children as the idea of childhood continued to develop. Control of these secrets meant control and power over children. This control was not malicious; in fact, more often than not, such control was exerted for benevolent reasons. It is important to note that childhood did not spring full grown from the printing press; Postman acknowledges that though it is a crucial element in the formation of childhood, it is not the only one.

The erosion of childhood

All of this of course begs the question "Why?" If by 1850 childhood was a social principle, why and how is it

disappearing now? We can trace the beginnings of the erosion of childhood back to the invention of the telegraph, which occurred in 1840. The telegraph began the process of making information uncontrollable and pointless (p 71). Childhood is an outgrowth of an environment completely controlled by adults who decide the quantity of information a child has access to; information was made known in stages they could assimilate psychologically (p 72). The maintenance of childhood rested on the control of information and sequential learning. The telegraph made information uncontrollable; quantity, not quality, became the overriding concern. Childhood would have remained intact if the electronic revolution stopped there, but of course, this was only the beginning. The way people communicated began to change: first the telegraph, then the camera, phonograph, movies, radio, television, and now the internet. The printed word requires the reader to respond to the content, but pictures usually just call for an emotional response rather than a thinking one. When communication can be achieved by pointing with a finger, the mouth grows silent, the writing hand stops, and the mind shrinks (p 74). This observation was made, believe it or not, in 1935!

Why do these inventions cause the idea of childhood to disappear? The first reason concerns the accessibility of information. Growing up is a process of finding things out. This whole system

collapses with the introduction of electronic media, but especially with the invention of the television. Watching television not only requires no skill, but develops no skill (p 79). Have you ever heard of someone with a TV viewing disability? No one gets better or worse at watching TV. Television also presents information to everyone. There is full access for everyone to all the information and knowledge television has to offer. A ten-year old can watch shows intended for adults. With full access to information, there are no secrets and no shame; without these, childhood cannot exist. Just as there is no need for lawyers if everyone knew what lawyers know, so the distinction between children and adults disappears when they both know the same information. The shows our children are watching are physically causing them to lose their childhood. I am not advocating that all children should be completely sheltered and protected from all the secrets of the adult world, but simply stating that television is the absolute worst medium for children from which to learn these secrets.

The solution

I could go on with the tirade against television and its other socially destructive attributes, but Neil Postman does a wonderful job of that both in this book and others he has written, such as *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. What I would like to pay some attention to is the solution to this problem. What can we do to help our children keep their childhood? Is this even a problem in our Reformed circles? Does the disappearance of childhood matter to us? In our Christian communities do we value children enough to care? In my brief experience as a teacher I think it is a problem. Generally speaking, our children are watching the same TV shows and videos and listening to the same music as kids from public schools. It is hard as a teacher to keep kids interested in the war of 1812 when they have seen *The Matrix* and its two sequels repeatedly.

What about the role of children or childhood in the Bible? Although it is

clear that the modern concept of childhood did not exist in the Bible, this does not render our discussion irrelevant. One only has to look at how Jesus treated children to realize their inherent value and importance. Christ even held up a child as an example of simple trust and faith for the disciples to follow. Children are not mentioned that much, but their importance as receivers of information and knowledge about God cannot be overlooked. Parents are instructed to teach the next generation. I would argue that, to some extent, our children's capabilities of receiving and working with this knowledge are being eroded, because of the way childhood is disappearing through the electronic media in our culture. That is why this whole discussion is so important. There is no doubt that the erosion of childhood is a problem not only in society, but in our Christian communities as well.

Children are not acting like children anymore; their childhood is disappearing.

In his book Postman asks whether or not there are any social institutions strong enough to resist the decline of childhood. He cites that there are only two institutions that have a proper interest in children: parents and the school. Although the role of parents is often diminished through the electronic media, one cannot deny the impact – good or bad – parenting can have on a child. Knowing (and sometimes controlling) who their friends are, what they are watching on TV, or typing on MSN and listening to their CD or MP3 players will go a long way to keep your children from becoming miniature adults. Postman believes that the family is not strong enough to stand up to the dissolution of childhood, but we of course, realizing the eternal consequences, have a different view of

children and consequently our parenting will be different too.

The school is also a valuable institution in the fight against the erosion of childhood. One of the main purposes of Christian education is to transform covenant children into covenant young adults who know God's Word and world through the learning process. Postman rightly points out that the school only functions if there are important differences left between adults and children (p 151). If you do not need to be educated to be an adult, why should children even go to school?

I would like to add a third influence into the mix here: the church. Our religious beliefs greatly influence and strengthen our schools and give proper purpose to parenting. God's Word gives us a worldview, a perspective, and a reason to combat the influences that are dissolving childhood. We say that we love our children; let's not let them embrace a culture that is so damaging, not only to their childhood, but to their spirituality as well.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I realize that the so-called solutions have perhaps only raised more questions. I don't pretend to have all the answers. I do know that the disappearance of childhood is a problem even in our Reformed circles. One possibility is to limit the amount of exposure children have to electronic media. Going hand and hand with this action would be to also restrict and control what your children are exposed to. This is time-consuming and tedious, hard work for parents. However, I think you will agree that our children are worth that effort and whatever else we can do; God desires to use them to build up his church. My advice would be to read this book and take it for what it is worth. Though there are some comments that you will undoubtedly raise your eyebrows at, as I did, Postman does make many relevant remarks. One cannot help but agree with one of his final statements: wherever one looks, one sees more evidence that childhood is disappearing.

Reviewed by N.H. Gootjes

Dr. N. H. Gootjes is professor of
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In Memory of Dr. Jelle Faber

Edited by J. Mulder

There is no doubt that Dr. Faber had an important place in the Canadian Reformed Churches. He was called to Canada in 1968, to teach at their newly established Theological College in Hamilton. He gave himself to this work with his whole heart. He loved teaching, and generations of students were trained under him and the other professors of the first hour. However, he was not only involved in teaching; he was also asked to contribute to many other ventures within the churches. He promoted the establishing of Christian schools, and later he stimulated the Teachers' College in order to provide the youth of the church with good Christian educators. He was involved in many aspects of the life of the churches.

He was highly respected by the churches for the work he did and for the enthusiasm he radiated. I am sure many cherish their own characteristic stories about him. I have my own. One is that he asked me in the middle of London, England, whether I had decided to become his successor. Some time before he had sent me a letter with the invitation, but I had responded that I had to think about it. Then it happened while we were on vacation in England that he and his wife attended the same worship service of the Free Church of Scotland (this was not arranged!). After the morning service he came straight to me, and his first words were: "What did you decide?" No introduction, no small talk, straight into the heart of the matter.

That is how he was: straightforward, to the point, and with a great love for the churches. It is therefore very appropriate that a publication appeared in his memory, edited by Rev. J. Mulder in consultation with the family. The heart of the publication consists of five sermons that he preached recently, one very appropriately on Lord's Day 10 of the Catechism, and four on Bible texts. Although it is somewhat regrettable that there are typographical errors, the sermons are an excellent sample of the way he preached. They show

how he studied and worked for the congregations.

His sermons are followed by several parts of the memorial service, including the message by Rev. C. Stam, a commemoration by one of his early students, Prof. Van Dam, and an insightful description of Dr. Faber as father by one of his daughters. We are grateful that these contributions could be published together. Above all we are grateful to God who provided the churches with someone like Dr. Faber when they needed him most. God be praised for the gift of Dr. Faber.



In Memory of Dr. Jelle Faber

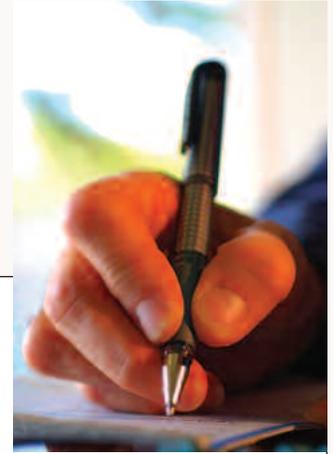


Editor Rev. J. Mulder

This spiral-bound publication of 59 pages includes five sermons of Dr. Faber, also his last one on I Peter 1:3-5; a brief biography, the order of the Memorial Service, the message on I Cor. 2:2 presented by Rev. Cl. Stam, the words spoken by Dr. C. Van Dam and Dr. Christine van Halen-Faber etc.

Order by sending cheque for \$15.00 CDN to the editor:
2500 Brant Street, Unit 6, Burlington, ON L7P 4L9
Tel: 905-332-3285 Email jmulder@canrc.org

*All proceeds will be directed to the Faber-Holwerda Bursary Fund
which provides students at the Theological College who have sudden or special needs
with some additional support.*



RE: The Coming of Christ (Volume 54, No.5. February 25, 2005)

We commend Rev. W. den Hollander for writing about a topic that is often avoided due to its controversy about literal versus allegorical interpretations. However, the article left us with some questions and concerns.

Rev. den Hollander seems to classify the term “rapture” as errant, calling it “an unscriptural notion.” Instead, he claims that Christ’s people will “go out to welcome Him” or “go out to meet” Him. Rev. den Hollander’s scriptural basis for this is found in the parable of the wise virgins, a parable used not to describe the manner in which Christ will return, but rather, a warning for us to be ready for the imminent return of our Lord and Saviour. Why does Rev. den Hollander use this passage and not what Christ says in Matthew 24:40-41 when describing how the end times will be: “Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.” In this passage, Christ is very clear that it is not our doing or our “going out,” since we “are taken” in an instant. Likewise, the idea of a procession is not reinforced in Matthew 24:31, where Jesus says: “And they [angels] will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.” If we were to go out in procession to meet our Lord, certainly Christ would have indicated that in these vivid descriptions!

Rev. den Hollander even goes as far as to write, “We will meet Him, but not to be caught up, abducted, or evacuated to heaven.” This is in direct opposition to 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 where we read, “We who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.” The Greek word *harpagesometha* is used here to describe the action of being caught up. It comes from the derivative *harpazo*, meaning to seize, pluck, pull, or take by force. This implies an external force, not our own doing, in which by God’s power, not our own processional walking, we will be raised to meet our Lord in the air. This is the same verb as used in Acts 8:39, where “the spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away” after having baptized the eunuch. If we do not question the manner in which Philip apparently disappeared here, why dispute God’s power at the end times with his elect?

One of the comforts and strengths of the Reformed faith is that there is a return to the Scriptures to seek the truth. Because there is an uncomfortable controversy around the term “rapture” (which actually refers to being lifted up and carried away, according to Webster’s Dictionary), we should not be afraid to interpret God’s words as they are. If the Scriptures say that we are to be caught up, who are we to minimize that glorious act and power of God? What exciting news! We will be caught up to meet our Lord and remain with him forever! No wonder Paul instructs us to comfort and encourage each other with these words!

*Yours in Christ,
Ed and Gwen Kampen
Orangeville, Ontario*

Response

It is too bad that Ed and Gwen have the impression that my focus was on the controversy about literal versus allegorical interpretations. It was not. As a result they also missed the point of the meditation. My focus was on the errant connotations premillennialism has given to the term “rapture.” As I wrote in my meditation, these are fantasies. I also made references to a few sources in which these fantasies are worked out vividly. In that context the premillennial understanding of “being caught up” is qualified as “abducted, evacuated.”

With regard to the notion of active versus passive (“being caught up” versus “going out to meet our Lord”), Scripture uses both. Ed and Gwen correctly adduce some examples of the passive. In my meditation I also write of going out “drawn by the trumpet,” and that “the Spirit of Christ will catch us up.” However, I also write that Paul’s presentation conjures up the image of a triumphal entry. Hence I further illustrate this with another example of such a going out to meet the Lord in the parable of the ten virgins. As in many points of faith, this too is an example of God being at work for one hundred percent and we being active for one hundred percent as a result of God’s work in us by his Holy Spirit. I hope these comments clarify Ed and Gwen’s misunderstandings.

W. den Hollander

Press Release of the meeting of the combined committees of the Canadian Reformed and United Reformed Churches to propose a common church order

Held March 14-17, 2005 at the United Reformed Church of Dutton, MI

Present were: Dr. Nelson Kloosterman, Rev. William Pols, Rev. Ronald Scheuers, Rev. Raymond Sikkema, and Mr. Harry Van Gulp, representing the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA), and Mr. Gerard J. Nordeman, Rev. John VanWoudenberg, and Dr. Art Witten of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC). Dr. Gijsbert Nederveen was unable to attend due to pastoral duties requiring his presence in the congregation.

Dr. Kloosterman opened the meeting with a brief meditation on Joshua 9, and prayer.

The minutes of the November 9-11, 2004 meeting were reviewed and approved, as were the agenda and timetable for the next three days.

Correspondence from two Canadian Reformed churches interacting with the committee's reports to the respective synods was acknowledged. Feedback from the churches is much appreciated. Comments will be taken into consideration when the committee deals with the relevant articles.

In a review of the articles thus far adopted, some words and sentences were modified and improved for grammar, punctuation, and style. This process included an effort to maintain consistency in phrasing and spelling of words. The matter of including a Glossary was discussed. However, it was decided that it has no place in the Church Order. Perhaps a commentary might be a more appropriate place.

The discussion on the matter of authority and governing as it relates to the broader assemblies was deferred to the next meeting.

The article dealing with the relationship of the church with the state

was finalized: "As the task of civil government includes protecting the freedom of the Christian church, so it is the responsibility of the church to respect the government as instituted by God. In order that the church of Christ may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness, and that the witness of the gospel may be protected and advanced, the office-bearers must lead the congregation by their admonition and example. They shall ensure that prayers for the government are regularly offered, that members render due honour and lawful obedience to the civil authorities and live as good citizens under Christ, thereby promoting the true welfare of the land in which they live."

In order to clearly indicate that the consistory and the churches together have a responsibility to provide for needy theological students, the article titled "Preparation for the Ministry" was modified to include the following: "The council of his church shall see to it that his financial needs are met, with the assistance of the churches of classis, if necessary."

Wording of appendices dealing with licensure, candidacy, and ordination examinations was agreed upon. The brothers Pols and VanWoudenberg were asked to draft an examination for an ordained minister who has asked to join the federation.

It was decided to omit from the proposed church order the stipulation of Dort Article 37 about who presides in the consistory and to leave it at the discretion of the consistory. Today many elders are very capable at presiding and at times it might be better for an elder to preside rather than the minister.

About the organizing of a new congregation, Dort Articles 38-39, the following article will be proposed: "Where a congregation is to be organized under its first consistory, this shall take place only under the supervision of the neighbouring consistory, and only with the concurring advice of the classis."

The question of who, from outside the federation, may be asked to preach was discussed at some length. It was agreed that the consistory must give its consent before any minister may preach the Word or administer the sacraments in the congregation. Such consent may normally be given only to ministers of the federation and to ministers of churches in ecclesiastical fellowship. Exceptions to this require the approbation of classis.

To the article dealing with classis, a sentence was added that a minimum of three churches may convene as a *classis contracta* exclusively to approbate a call, or to release a minister who has accepted a call and to appoint a counsellor for the ministerial vacancy.

An article about ecumenical relations was formulated after extensive deliberation. The churches in the federation are encouraged to pursue ecumenical relations with congregations outside of the federation which manifest the marks of the true church and faithfully demonstrate allegiance to Scripture as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity. Each church shall give account to classis of its ecumenical activities with churches not in ecclesiastical fellowship. A church must receive approbation of classis before such ecumenical relations progress to include preaching exchange and fellowship at the Lord's Supper.

The last hour of the third day was used to review the agenda for the next meeting. As the committee is starting to work on articles in the section dealing with Worship, Sacraments, and Ceremonies, several brothers agreed to prepare proposals for the next meeting. Articles 53-55 (Doctrine): Nordeman; Articles 56-60 (Baptism): Scheuers; Articles 61-64 (Lord's Supper): Kloosterman; Articles 65-70 (Special Services): Witten. Several items as yet to be done were also listed.

The next meeting will take place D.V. June 28-30, 2005 at the Ebenezer CanRC of Burlington, ON. (Note: Date and

venue was subsequently changed. The next meeting will take place D.V. August 8-10, 2005 at First URC, Chino, CA. In order to minimize the cost involved a weekend stay-over will be included with a public meeting to be organized for the evening of Friday, Aug. 5. The agenda will include the Canadian Reformed brothers telling the gathering about the Canadian Reformed churches and a question and answer time where questions can be asked about this ecumenical process.)

Appreciation was expressed to the Dutton URC for its hospitality and the assistance received from the church's secretary, Beth Bouman. Dr. Kloosterman, in his closing remarks, stated his thankfulness to the Lord for the brotherly manner in which the committee could proceed with its labours and the amount of work that could be accomplished. To God be the praise and glory.

*For the committee,
Gerard J. Nordeman*

Press Release of Classis Ontario West, March 9, 2005 at Hamilton, ON

Opening

On behalf of the convening church at Grand Rapids, Rev. J. Ludwig calls the meeting to order. He requests that Psalm 47:1,2 be sung after which he reads from Matthew 7:15-29 and leads in prayer. He then welcomes all present, especially the students from the Theological College and Rev. C. Heiberg from the Sheffield URC.

The credentials are examined by the convening church. All churches are lawfully represented. Classis is constituted. The following officers are appointed:

Chairman: Rev. H. Versteeg

Clerk: Rev. J. Ludwig

Vice-chairman: Rev. D. Vandeburgt

Rev. H. Versteeg thanks the church at Grand Rapids for their preparations for Classis and the church at Hamilton for hosting. It is noted that Hamilton has extended a call to Rev. R. Schouten.

There is an instruction from the church at Hamilton seeking Dr. de Visser

to be appointed as their counsellor. The agenda is adopted.

Rev. Pot signs the Subscription Form for Ministers of the Word in Classis Ontario West.

Examinations

All necessary documents for the brothers are present and in good order for the examinations (Art 21 CO) to proceed.

Br. H. Alkema presents his sermon proposal on Matthew 7:24-27. In closed session Classis decides not to continue with the examination.

Br. R. Horlings presents his sermon proposal on Psalm 125. In closed session Classis decides to continue the examination. After being examined in Doctrine and Creeds, Classis in closed session decides to give this brother permission to speak an edifying word in the churches from May 20, 2005 to May 20, 2006. In open session Psalm 135:1 is sung and Rev. D. Vandeburgt leads the prayer.

Br. D. Oh presents his sermon proposal on Revelation 2:8-11. In closed session Classis decides not to continue with the examination. At this point Rev. C. Heiberg, fraternal delegate of the United Reformed Churches, brings greetings from the Sheffield URC.

Question Period

Question Period (Art 44 CO) is held. Classis appoints Dr. de Visser as counsellor for the church at Hamilton.

Correspondence

A letter is received from the church at Chatham as administrating church for the Needy Student Fund. The letter contains an attached financial update from the treasurer and explains why at such a late date Chatham is seeking Classis to approve an increase of the current assessment by \$5.00 per communicant member to \$17.50 per communicant member. Classis approves the increase.

A letter is received from the church at Ancaster. In this letter the consistory requests that Rev. G. van Popta be released of all classical duties during his sabbatical which commences on January

Church News

Telephone Number Cancellation

Rev. C. Bosch's former study number 905-634-3421 as listed in the Yearbook has been eliminated since 2003. The sole surviving number is 905-632-4409.

Called by the church at Kelmscott, Australia:

Rev. A. van Delden

of the church at Rockingham, Australia.

1, 2005 and ends June 30, 2005. Classis agrees to this request.

Reports

Classis accepts the auditors' report from the church at Ancaster for the fund for Needy Churches.

In closed session the church visitors, Rev. Ludwig and Rev. Versteeg, present positive reports on visits they made to the Ancaster, Glanbrook, and Hamilton churches in the classical region.

Appointments

Hamilton is appointed as convening and hosting church for the next Classis, on June 8, 2005. Officers are appointed: Rev. J. Ludwig (chairman), Rev. H. Versteeg (clerk), Rev. J. Slaa (vice-chairman). Rev. J. Slaa is appointed as an alternate church visitor during Rev. G. van Popta's sabbatical.

Personal Question period is held. The chairman notes that censure is not needed and he expresses his appreciation for the brotherly co-operation. The Acts are read and adopted. The Press Release is read and approved. The chairman closes the meeting by having the brothers sing Psalm 113:1,2 and then leading in prayer.

*For Classis,
D. Vandeburgt (vice-chairman)*