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*Temples of the
Holy Spirit*

*Pentecost:
Bringing Unity
to the
Confusion*

*A Lesson
in History:
The Baptism
of '44*



*As Israel traveled through the desert. . .
God constantly dwelled among them.*



W.B. Slomp

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Temples of the Holy Spirit

Only through the Holy Spirit can we learn to be content no matter what difficult circumstances or difficult people we have to deal with

All of us right at this very moment are in one kind of difficulty or another. There are difficulties in our personal lives and difficulties with other people. We usually attribute our problems to unforeseen circumstances or to difficult people: "If only this or that hadn't happened to us, then we would be a lot happier." Or, "If only this or that person were different, and not so hard to get along with, then things would be much better between us."

You can imagine that God's presence in their midst made a tremendous impact on them

So, it is our inclination to want to change our circumstances or to change other people. The fact of the matter is, however, that there is a very little we can do about changing our circumstances or about changing other people. There is, however, a lot we can do about changing ourselves. That change has to come about from within. Ultimately it is the work of the Holy Spirit. Only through the Holy Spirit can we learn to be content no matter what difficult circumstances or difficult people we have to deal with. God gave his Holy Spirit to the church at the time of Pentecost. He gave that Holy Spirit so that He could take residence in us. Now we may be temples of the Holy Spirit.

God's presence and the tabernacle

What exactly does that mean? How does that make a difference in our own lives? We can only understand this if we look at it first of all from the perspective of the Old Testament. When Israel was rescued from Egypt God made his dwelling among them (Exod 25:8).

He pitched his tent among them. As Israel traveled through the desert and the people moved their own tent from the one location to the next, they did so also with the tent, known as the tabernacle, in which God dwelled. God constantly dwelled among them. They were reminded of his presence by the cloud that rested above the tabernacle by day and by the fire in the cloud by night.

It was a beautiful symbol of his deep interest in their plight as they made their way through the desert and as they encountered various dangers and temptations along the way. He showed them that He was intimately involved in their lives and that He greatly cared about them.

However, God did not dwell among them in the same way as they dwelled with each other. No, God is a holy God. Because of his holiness they could not just drop by and enter his tent as if He were just another friendly neighbour. No, the only way that the people could have access to God was through sacrifices made by the priests on their behalf. There had to be atonement for their sins. The priests themselves were given elaborate instructions as to how to conduct themselves in the tabernacle. They had to make extensive preparations. Because of God's presence in their midst, the people themselves had to be fully aware of their own conduct. Since God is a holy God, they too had to be holy in their conduct.

The impact of God's presence for Israel

You can imagine that God's presence in their midst made a tremendous impact on them. The Israelites found themselves quite vulnerable in the desert because of the many enemies that surrounded them and because of the austere conditions. But they knew that God was among them. They knew that He was not some ordinary creature, but that He was the Almighty Creator Himself, who was unique and holy and all-powerful. As they went through the desert,



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they were often under attack and found themselves in difficult circumstances. Nevertheless time and again God came to their rescue. He rescued them from their enemies and gave them food and drink even when this seemed impossible to acquire.

When the Israelites came into the Promised Land they no longer lived in tents, but exchanged them for more permanent homes. And so it was only natural that also the Lord God would have a more permanent home among them. For that reason Solomon was commanded to build a permanent temple for God to dwell in. God remained in their midst and continued to show his greatness and his holiness.

God's presence in the New Testament

In the New Testament God's presence amongst his people becomes even more significant. God sent his Son to dwell among us (John 1:14). While the Lord Jesus was on earth, He showed the great power of God in the many miraculous things that He did and in the words that He spoke. How great it was to have Him walk on earth. He healed the sick and the lame; He forgave the sins of many and showed his great compassion and mercy to all those who would listen to Him and obey his voice. The greatest blessing of his presence was that He took upon Himself the sins of all those who heeded his presence.

But that was not the end of God's presence here on earth. Once the Lord Jesus was seated at the right hand of his Father, He made his presence known through his Holy Spirit. On the day of Pentecost He sent his Holy Spirit to the church and to the members of the church. Now God is spiritually present in the hearts of all his children.

The wonderful difference the Holy Spirit now makes

What a difference that makes today in our lives! Paul says in 2 Corinthians 6:16 that now we are the temple of the living God. He then quotes from Leviticus 26:12 and reminds the Corinthians that God had said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."

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Paul was keenly aware of the presence of the Holy Spirit within him. When he wrote his letter to the Philippians Paul was in some very difficult circumstances and had to contend with some very difficult people. In the first place he found himself in prison. He did not know what was going to happen to him. He had no earthly comforts to speak of. Even some of his friends abandoned him and attacked him. He writes in chapter 1:15 that there were some who were envious of him and they preached Christ out of rivalry.

When you are full of the Holy Spirit then you cannot help but rejoice even in the midst adversity

Paul knew that he could not change his circumstances and that he himself could not change those people who opposed him. Paul, however, could do much about his attitude in the midst of all this. Rather than complaining about those who oppose him, or complaining about his dire circumstances, he rejoiced. He rejoiced in the fact that God was with him and that the Holy Spirit lived in his heart. He rejoiced in his wonderful salvation through Jesus Christ and in the great hope that he had for the future. That is why he writes at the end of his letter to the Philippians, "I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want" (Phil 4:12).

When you are full of the Holy Spirit then you cannot help but rejoice even in the midst of adversity. The Holy Spirit enables you to be joyful even when the whole world around you may be falling apart. For then you know that in spite of everything God is with you. As the Lord Jesus said just before his ascension, "Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt 28:20).



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Pentecost: Bringing Unity to the Confusion



MATTHEW 13:52

Genesis 11:1-9 and Acts 2:5-13

On the day of Pentecost God did a mighty work that reversed the mighty work He had done ages before at Babel.

After the great flood, the human race began to grow again. God had preserved Noah and his family. Noah had three sons, Ham, Shem, and Japheth, each of whom had a wife. From them the human race began to increase once again.

Everyone spoke the same language. They all lived together in one place. They stuck together. This was against the command of God as we read it in Genesis 1:28 where God had said to Adam and Eve: "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." God had repeated this command after the flood to Noah in Genesis 9:1. There we read: "Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth.'"

Man disobeyed God. God wanted man to trust Him – to spread out over the earth and to have confidence that He would take care of them. Instead, the people sought strength among themselves. They built a city with a large tower in the centre of it. They wanted to stick together, to find their strength in human unity rather than in faith in God and obedience. They wanted to build a name for themselves. The tower was a monument to their disobedience, their self-determination, their arrogance, their conceit – to themselves.

God saw what they were doing and that there was no limit to their rebellion against Him. He decided to divide them by confusing their language. Imagine: a foreman would tell a worker to get a bucket of mortar; the workman would bring back a plank of wood instead. The people no longer understood each other. In this way God scattered them. The people gathered together into different language groups and moved on out away from each other. The place was called *Babel*, which is a Hebrew word for "confusion." Interestingly, it sounds similar to the English word "babble." Hence we have

different languages. That we have English, Croatian, and Chinese is because of what happened at Babel.

But God did not give up on man. If you look at the rest of Genesis 11, you will see that it gives the family line of Shem to Abraham. From Abraham came the Jewish people, and from the Jewish people came Jesus, the Saviour for the world. Jesus Christ poured the Holy Spirit out upon his disciples on Pentecost. They spoke about the mighty works of God in all the languages of the earth.

On the day of Pentecost Jews from the four points of the compass (from what we today call Iran and Iraq, Turkey, Northern Africa, and Europe) were in Jerusalem. The babble of languages of the known world was represented. The Holy Spirit whom Christ poured out made the disciples proclaim in all the languages the mighty deeds God had done through Christ.

God was reversing Babel. At Babel, God divided rebels and scattered them. On Pentecost, God began the work of bringing the nations of the earth together again. In the time of the Old Testament God restricted his saving work to the line of Shem and especially the Jews. He did this to bring forth Jesus the Saviour through whom God would once again open wide his arms to the world.

Today the mighty deeds of God are proclaimed in almost all the languages of the earth; in English as well. Christ has taken us up too in his Pentecostal work. The mighty works of God are spoken of in the English tongue. In Christ God has defeated our arrogance, our self-exaltation. Instead, He makes us praise Him and his wonderful works in our native tongue.

Revelation 7 tells us that the day is coming when all redeemed mankind will stand together before the throne of God. We will be part of a great multitude that will defy numbering, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues. Together, in all the languages of the earth, we will sing: "Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb." For we do not glory in our human abilities and power. We glory in the Lamb of God and his Spirit.

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High Notes in the History of the Hymns: “Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty”

Reginald Heber, who was born in 1783, became a well-respected Anglican bishop. A prize-winning poet in his youth, Heber began his career as a dedicated parish priest in England; at the age of forty he was ordained Bishop of Calcutta, India, where he died in 1826. His career as hymnist flourished during the first, English phase of his life, though most of his songs were published posthumously.

Aware of the success of hymn-singing among the Dissenters, Heber desired to change the nearly exclusive psalmody in the Church of England. However, his attempts to convince the Bishop of London in 1820 to introduce hymns on the grounds that it would be wiser to control than to resist them were unsuccessful. Nevertheless, given a keen desire to make the entire worship service as meaningful as possible, Heber promoted the integration of the readings, sermon, and singing in the standardized Anglican worship services. For his own parish he composed short hymns that were to be sung between the delivery of the sermon and the recital of the Creed. The title of the collection of hymns he wrote and compiled is *Hymns Written and Adapted to the Weekly Church Service of the Year* (1827). “Holy, Holy, Holy” was written for Trinity Sunday, which is the first Sunday after Pentecost.

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty!
Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee:
Holy, holy, holy, merciful and mighty,
God in Three Persons, blessed Trinity!

Hymn 4:1

“Holy, Holy, Holy” was inspired by the text of Revelation 4:6-11, which appears as a reading in the *Book of Common Prayer*, and of which the most relevant lines are: “And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal ... and round about the throne were four beasts ... and they rest not day and night, saying, ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.’ The four and twenty elders fall down before him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne. . .” (KJV).

Unlike religious poets of the previous generation, Heber does not write heavily allegorical hymns; he makes only occasional use of imagery. Thus, as in most of his other compositions, so too in this hymn Heber employs plain language with direct meaning. The comparisons of secular and sacred love that often permeate earlier hymns also do not appeal to Heber: he does not address the Lord Jesus Christ as “friend” or “lover.” Instead, Heber conveys a strong sense of the dignity and majesty of God. In fact, the holiness of God is the theme that unites the verses of Hymn 4. The enthusiastic individualism in the compositions of the previous generation is replaced in Heber’s songs by communal worship. In the first verse of our hymn this congregational adoration is expressed by the words “our song shall rise to Thee,” as if Revelation 4:6-11 is interpreted in the context of a Sunday morning service.

Heber was influenced by the ideals of the Romantic period in which he lived. Christian Romanticists often viewed God as a sublime being who has not revealed Himself fully to mankind and therefore remains obscure. In Hymn 4 this notion is

expressed in verse three with the words "Though the darkness hide Thee; / Though the eye of sinful man Thy glory may not see." It is important to note that these clauses do not appear in Revelation 4:6-11 which serves as the song's scriptural basis. In the context of the hymn these words serve to underscore God's holiness and perfection in contrast with the sinful condition of fallen humanity.

Hymn 4

Text: Reginald Heber, 1827

Tune: John Dykes, 1861

Commonly Performed: Trinity Sunday

As befits a song performed on the Sunday that draws special attention to the Persons of the Trinity, the key motif in "Holy, Holy, Holy" is the number three. This motif is introduced in the first line with the obvious "holy, holy, holy" followed by the no less obvious three names for God: "Lord, God, Almighty." The verse ends with the simple, direct expression, "God in Three Persons, blessed Trinity!"

In the second verse the change in subject from "our song" to "the saints" signals the shift in the plane of activity from the human to the heavenly realm. There too, however, the three-fold character of God appears, in the words "wert", "art", and "evermore shalt be." These words not only recall the "Three Persons" of the last line in verse one, but they also anticipate the tricolon "in power, in love, and purity" that ends the next verse. In the final verse the praise of God is extended to include all creation, in "earth and sky and sea". The repetition, in the final verse, of lines one, three, and four of the first verse completes the circle, thus ending the song.

The simple progression of thought and the recurring phrases appeal especially to younger children, for whom this hymn is a favourite. It was



dear also to the great poet Lord Tennyson, who requested that it be sung at his funeral in Westminster Abbey in 1892. In some denominations, such as the United Methodist Churches, "Holy, Holy, Holy" is sung before the celebration of the Lord's Supper, while in others it is prescribed as a morning hymn.

The tune was composed by John Dykes in 1861, though there has been some debate whether it was authored or reworked by him. Dykes composed about three hundred hymn tunes, some of which rank among the best of the Victorian period.

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Knowing God: Knowing the Father

Lesson 3: God, The Father of the Kingdom

In the previous installment we thought about God as the Father of Jesus and discovered how Jesus is a revelation of the Father's love. In this installment we want to think about God the Father of the kingdom and discover how Jesus came to proclaim the kingdom of God. In the gospel we hear Jesus saying, "The time has come. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15)

What is the kingdom?

Ask the group to think of words and images Jesus used to describe the kingdom of God. Point them to the images listed on the handout from Matthew 13. During the discussion draw out the following points:

- The kingdom of heaven is both a realm and a rule.
- When Jesus says the kingdom of heaven has come close, He means that the power and the values of the kingdom of heaven are now already breaking forth into the present.
- The power and values of the kingdom manifest themselves in the lives of human people when they submit to Jesus' rule and follow Him where He calls them to go.

Citizens of the kingdom

Citizens of the kingdom of heaven are those who acknowledge Jesus as king and submit to his rule in their lives. When they do, they begin to embody the values, power, and concerns of the kingdom of heaven. A classic passage where Jesus gives us a profile of what citizens of the kingdom look like is in the beatitudes of his Sermon on the Mount. It has been called his "Citizen's Charter." Have someone in the group read Matthew 5:3-12. Give a brief explanation of each beatitude. Allow for questions and discussion.

The kingdom and the church

When Jesus was on earth He brought the kingdom close to the people. In fact, He was the embodiment of the kingdom with his Person and work. Now that Jesus has ascended into heaven, the church's task is to continue the mission and ministry of Jesus. This means that the church's task is to bring the kingdom close by embodying the values, concerns, and power of the kingdom of heaven (see, for instance, LD 48). Have the group discuss how their local congregation is doing this. The group will probably need some

help in getting into this exercise. Point out that the group can evaluate the life of the congregation in the light of the words and images that describe the kingdom as well as the Citizen's Charter of the kingdom. Ask the group to present its findings under these headings:

- Our congregation is close to the kingdom when . . .
- Our congregation is far from the kingdom when . . .

The Holy Spirit and the kingdom of God

When Jesus commissioned his church to continue his mission and ministry He breathed on them and gave them the Holy Spirit (John 20:21-22). On the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was poured out on the church. This shows that Jesus continues his mission and ministry through the church in the power of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who makes alive those who are spiritually dead and liberates those who are enslaved to the devil, the world, and their own sinful flesh. It is the Holy Spirit who enables the congregation to embody the values, lifestyle, and concerns of the kingdom and who enables unbelievers to do the same. Point out that the more the congregation

as a whole and the members of the congregation are led and transformed by the Holy Spirit, the more the congregation and its members will come to know God, the Father of the kingdom.

Suggestions for prayer

Ask the group to write out a short three-line prayer of thanksgiving for what they have

learned about God in the lessons so far. The prayer should include:

- one line about God's creativity explored in lesson one of this unit;
- one line about God's loving character embodied by his Son explored in lesson two of this unit;
- one line about the in-breaking of God's kingdom into the present explored in this lesson.

If people feel comfortable, have them pray their three-line prayer of thanksgiving. The facilitator rounds off the prayer.

If you would like to view the outline of this lesson, go to www.reformedevangelism.com and follow the links. Next time, we plan to introduce "God, the Holy Trinity." Thanks for reading.



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A Lesson in History: The Baptism of '44 (Part 1 of 3)

It's standard fair amongst us: *God claims for Himself the children He gives to believers.* That statement leaves no doubt about the identity of your children and mine: inasmuch as we are believers, our children belong to God, are his possessions. So our children have a Father in heaven who cares for them even in infancy, have a God who forgives their childish sins, a God who renews them. Even death cannot take them from their Father's hands; if it should happen that the Lord would take one of our children out of this life, we as parents would have no reason to doubt our children's destination. Yes, this is comfort.

There was a time not so long ago, though, when precisely this comfort was denied to parents. Some sixty-five years ago the Second World War was ravaging Europe, including The Netherlands

where so many of our parents and grandparents then lived. As wars go, our grandparents saw their families threatened by shrapnel and sniper fire and bombs and famine. Particularly the famine affected the vulnerable, including the children, with the result that our ancestors brought infants to the baptism font in church only to bury numerous of them within a year or two.¹ That made the question very real to our parents and grandparents: were these children God's children or not and hence saved or not?

Today we would say that of course those children belong to God; after all, God claims for Himself those children whom He sovereignly gives to believers. The thing was, though, that in the decades before the war broke out there was quite some discussion in

the Dutch churches about the identity of the children of believers. There were those who insisted that children of believers belong to God; when they die they go to heaven.² Others were equally insistent that children of believers do not all necessarily belong to God, do not all necessarily go to heaven when they die.³ The opposition came largely from the disciples of Abraham Kuyper, who contrasted covenant with election.

Internal and external

The discussions came to a head when the churches met at synod. In 1943, just as the war was most difficult, the Synod ruled on the place of children in the covenant and stated that all children of believers were not necessarily truly God's children. That statement of the Synod put our grandparents in limbo; could

they not believe that their youngsters, if they should die in the war, would go to heaven? So it was that our forbears had specific reason to weigh up carefully what Synod said.

What was it that Synod said? The learned brethren at that synod divided the covenant into two parts, said at bottom that there were two covenants. They spoke of an *internal covenant* and an *external covenant*. What they meant by these phrases was this: the covenant (God's bond of love with sinners) could *truly* be made with you; if that was the case then you were *in* the covenant, internal. It could also happen that the covenant was *not truly* made with you, that it only looked like the real thing; in that case you were *out* of the covenant, external.

Now, where did this distinction come from? It must be said first that throughout the centuries of church history this distinction of internal and external covenant had been made more often;⁴ the brothers of Synod 1943 did not think that they presented anything new. But then again, there isn't anything new under the sun, not in heresies either, and so one is bound to look at Scripture: what has God revealed, what has God told his people to believe?

The brothers of that synod felt that they had scriptural bases for their teaching. They read in the Bible, for example, that God had made his covenant with Abraham and his seed, including, therefore, both Jacob and Esau. They knew further from Scriptures that Jacob later in life believed the gospel and went to heaven when he died, while Esau later in life did not believe the gospel and upon death went to hell. And does Paul not say in Romans 9 that "they are not all Israel who are of Israel" (v 6)? So the brothers at this synod

concluded that Esau was not truly *of the covenant*. God had never truly made his covenant with this grandson of Abraham, never really established with him his bond of love. True, Synod went on to say that while Jacob and Esau were babies, toddlers, youngsters,

God claims for Himself those children whom He sovereignly gives to believers

you could not notice that one was not really in the covenant while the other was. That didn't become apparent until later in life, when faith was obviously present with Jacob and absent with Esau. Well, they said, there you have it: internal covenant and external covenant, complete with scriptural grounds.

Presumption

Then the brothers of this synod went a step further. For if you can't know until later in life whether your child belongs to the internal covenant or to the external covenant, if you can't really know whether your new-born baby truly belongs to God or not, why in the world should you bother with baptism? The answer Synod gave was this: you should *assume* that your new baby is truly a child of God; you should *assume* that your baby belongs to the internal covenant, that God loves your child. Then they worked out a whole theory surrounding regeneration, about how you as parents should presume that God has already planted the seed of faith in your child's heart so that in fact your baby is already regenerated and that seed of faith

will later in life grow into living faith so that your child actually believes the gospel. And on the basis of this *assumption* – the assumption that the seed of faith is already in your child's heart, the assumption that your child is a Jacob and not an Esau, the assumption that your child belongs to God and not to Satan – on the basis of those assumptions, said Synod, you should bring your child to the baptism font to receive the sign and seal of the covenant. This teaching came to be known as "presumptive regeneration."

Cold comfort

But think about it now: as hunger lurked at the door of your grandparents' house, and as shrapnel and sniper fire and bombs and the other horrors of war threatened the home, what comfort did the teachings of the church leaders in Synod 1943 give? As your grandparents had to bury the infant who fell victim to the ravages of war, what comfort was there in the *assumption* that this little Johnny was in the internal covenant, in the *assumption* that this little child belonged to God and not to Satan? In assumptions there is no comfort.

Small wonder, then, that our parents and grandparents had to look into the Scriptures themselves to see whether this teaching as presented by Synod 1943 was in fact true. And what did they find in Scripture? The Lord willing, we'll look at that next time.

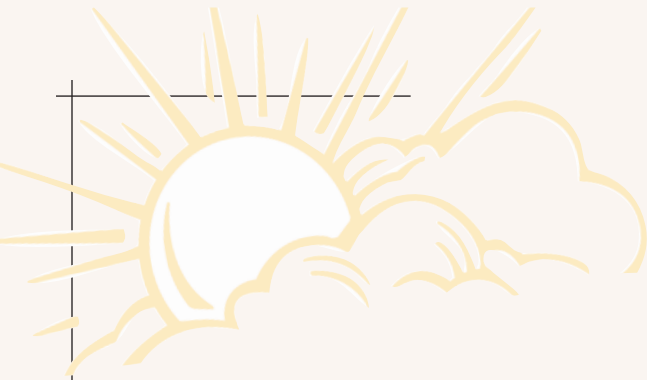
¹ See J. Kamphuis, *Een Eeuwig Verbond* (Haarlem: Vijlbrief, 1984), p 95.

² Kamphuis (p 35ff) mentions J.C. Sikkels, S.G. deGraaf, A. Janse, and K. Schilder, who all insisted that the congregation must be seen as a *covenant people*.

³ Kamphuis (p 43ff)

⁴ Kamphuis (p 21ff and p 99)





Ray of Sunshine

By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak."

Matthew 26:41

We have now come to the petition "Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one." The words used in the text are spoken by the Lord Jesus to his disciples hours before He was led away by his enemies. One might think that Jesus' instructions to his disciples could easily be done without any difficulty. He simply asked them to stay awake and pray for Him. The temptation facing the disciples was that of denying Jesus (Matt 26:31-35) and their failure to share in Jesus' suffering.

The weakness of the body is something that we, with the disciples, struggle with. That is why our Lord Jesus gave us the Lord's Prayer. He loves us and wants us to live our lives free of the temptation of this world. He wants us to pray every day: "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one." How often do we pray these words without realizing how much it means to God to have us delivered from temptation?

He loves obedience to Him, but God also knows how easily we can be tempted. The world with all its desires can easily lead us astray. It all looks so attractive. Our minds can easily drift to thinking of going places we know we should not but feel tempted enough to go anyway. Every day our mind wanders from one thing to the next. Sometimes we are restless, bored, tired, and feel unstable. Our emotions are also full of sin. The devil works hard at making us feel that we do not belong to Christ. The comfort here is knowing that Christ rules supreme.

Our Saviour knew what He was talking about when He speaks about the spirit being willing but the body weak. He knew and felt the temptations of which He spoke. His prayer to his Father shows that He really struggled to do the will of his Father. It was not easy for Jesus to follow through on what was asked by the Father. He prayed to his Father for the cup to be

removed from Him. He suffered on earth and was tempted as well. Hebrews 2:18 says, "Because He Himself suffered when He was tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted." We know that God is faithful. He tells us in his Word in 1 Corinthians 10:13b, "He will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." We have an amazing and loving God. He still carries his church today. He has given us the Holy Spirit to help us to be delivered from the evil one.

Our Father knows our weaknesses and thoughts as well as our desire to fight against sin. He knows our frame, that it is weak. It may seem like an endless battle to fight against sin every day, but God has promised to help us. He helps us by giving us the Lord's Prayer. He gave us this prayer because God wants to redeem his people from sin and lead them into life everlasting.

We are farther along on the road today than the disciples who first heard this petition. We may feel tired, despair may fill our hearts, and each one of us might have a certain sin to contend with. Satan has his ways to increase our temptations. Through all this tempting of the devil (but also the world and our own flesh) our spirit will learn to follow the leading hand of the Holy Spirit if we pray for strength. Then we learn the truth of the "secret" whispered to Paul many years ago: "My power is made perfect in weakness," (2 Cor 12:9). Our secret is the treasure we have in knowing about Christ's work. He who once shared our human nature with its weaknesses has now passed through the heavens and is sitting at the right hand of his Father. He is now living where there are no more temptations but only eternal rest. From heaven he reaches down to walk with us and carry us through all our trials and temptations. We

must continue to focus on being renewed by the Holy Spirit so that we may live lives of obedience to Him. Our covenant God has promised to help us! Until we are there with our Saviour let us continue to sing the words of Hymn 27:1.

*If God is on our side, against us shall be none.
He did not spare His own, His well-beloved Son,
But gave Him up for us that He might save us truly.
Will He with Him not give us all things free and fully?
Who then will yet accuse those whom He has elected?
'Tis God who justifies in Christ, the Resurrected.*

Hymn 27:1

Birthdays in June:

17 JOAN KOERSELMAN will be 49
Box 1312, Coaldale, AB T0K 0L0

30 BEVERLY BREUKEMAN will be 44
2225-19th Street, Coaldale, AB T1M 1G4

Congratulations to you both as you celebrate another new year to your life. May you have an enjoyable day together with family and friends. May our heavenly Father be with you and grant you both good health and much happiness as you continue in his service.

Till next time,

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



Keith Sikkema

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



Peregrine Survey

The Lord continues to bless our schools and our communities in various ways. This is evident in expanding facilities and programs for some schools and also in the maintenance and development of and the enthusiastic support for what we have received. At the same time, we also note challenges relating to the nature of our schools. One role that is being challenged in our schools and communities is that of gatekeeper: who and what determines what goes out and comes in; who and what determines how strongly an influence will be embraced or resisted?

Maranatha Elementary, Fergus (195 students) anticipates ongoing growth and double grades in the near future. The students were involved in a number of community activities. They accumulated 140 containers of peanut butter for the Fergus Pantry, helped the Lions' club with road clean-up, laid a wreath at the Fergus Cenotaph, and continue to sponsor a child in a developing country. In addition, together with students of Emanuel High School at Fergus, they raised \$15,111.32 in a walk/bike-a-thon for textbook purchases. As the high school has recently expanded to include grade 11 again, such funds are gratefully applied.

Our schools are increasingly involved in activities that raise money for causes that go beyond

our own community. For instance, several schools participated in the Terry Fox Run on September 16, 2005: Covenant (Neerlandia) raised \$2389.65; Cornerstone (Lynden), Credo Christian (Langley), William of Orange (Surrey), and John Calvin (Yarrow) raised some \$13,000; and Covenant (Flamborough) raised over \$5000.

It is wonderful when our students and communities can extend the blessings the Lord gives us to others

In addition, Credo Christian High students raised over \$4000 for CRWRF projects in Mali. It is wonderful when our students and communities can extend the blessings the Lord gives us to others and learn effective ways to do so. The value of these efforts goes well beyond the money raised. At the same time, there is an occasional disconcerting rumour about some people in our communities who share in but not of or with the Lord's blessings even within the communion of saints. If we are extending efforts to help others outside but in the process lose some inside, what are we doing wrong?

Cornerstone, Lynden (108 students) is having a discussion group on Foundations of Reformed Education, a distance-education program from Covenant Canadian Reformed Teacher's College. The school also has a Running Club; the goal is to accumulate enough miles to make it across the country. The latest update had them in Pierre, South Dakota, with visits to New York, Savannah, and Los Angeles in the planning.

The Credo Christian High School Foundation was founded in 2004 as a charity to support Christian education at CCHS. This foundation seeks to improve provisions for CCHS students that fall outside the school's operating budget and invites donations for that purpose. To date it has financially supported various sports programs and passed on other donations in the form of vehicles, equipment, supplies, and books. The school's principal muses on the "family dinner deficit" and its contribution to childhood obesity, teen substance abuse, poor academic performance, and increased household stress:

Do we have difficulty getting together for family meals and do we presume that what was given in the past is also the norm today? The Reformed community has always placed a high premium on connecting at

family meal times. It has been a good time to share the joys and challenges of the day as family. More importantly, it has also been the anchor of our family devotion time. . . In the busyness of life, it is my prayer that we as Reformed community place a high premium on our family time, establishing and maintaining traditions that firmly anchor us in relationship with the King of Kings.

While Carman's board had proposed to lower the quorum required to make decisions at membership meetings, the proposal did not pass. Whether it is about a quorum or another membership decision, the chairman's comments are noteworthy: When the membership makes a decision, all the members of the society should respect that decision and take responsibility for that decision. Volunteers in the Carman school will now be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement similar to what the teachers sign. Without a doubt, there is an incredible amount of personal information in a school that should be kept confidential, and an agreement as meant here can prevent difficulties.

Hamilton's Timothy has finished renovating and moving into its new facilities. The joint effort of many volunteers caused them to "experience a feeling that was wonderful after working shoulder to shoulder with a fellow brother/sister. That feeling can only be described as the communion of saints. . . ." Timothy welcomed many to its open house on January 6: "Our new facility continues to get rave reviews from

our neighbours. Many came out [for the open house], expressing their appreciation for the improvement of the grounds and the politeness of the children." Congratulations, and may the Lord continue to bless your growing school!

Our schools and our communities develop over time. The school's operation, its scope, and its outward projection are always in flux due to internal needs or developments and external forces. One instance in which our schools are affected from beyond our community would be when boards receive requests for admission of non CanRC/URC children. As our schools are intended for children from our own communities in the first place, and at least in part as a response to baptismal vows, it is important that they maintain a character in which this is safeguarded.

What foundations make education "Reformed"?

Yet, there are situations in which admission of children from other families can be and has been justified in a process that involves a thorough discussion with the school board. One question that arises in that context is how one should calculate the cost of tuition for students from outside this community. One school society calculates it by dividing the total annual school expenses by the number of families that send children to the school. Consider that families from outside the CanRC/URC circle often do not

Church News

Called by the Gereformeerde Kerk (Nieuw Vrijgemaakt) of Berkel en Rodenrijs/Bergschenhoek, the Netherlands:

Rev. J. Huijgen

of Burlington-Waterdown, Ontario.

Called by the church of Aldergrove, British Columbia:

Rev. J. Folkerts

of Winnipeg, MB (set aside for a term of mission work for MERF by the Providence United Reformed Church).

have the cloak of a supportive covenant community that helps us keep tuition down. At the same time, voices will be heard that one should not raise barriers of extra-high tuition for those who are not Canadian or United Reformed.

We have no choice but to deal with border-line and gate-keeping issues. What defines this community? What defines this school? What foundations make education "Reformed"? How should one view a decision made at the membership meeting? What kinds of families may send their children? Who or what guards our gates and how is this or should this be done? Do we leave it for some, or is it an issue for us all? In the end, of course, we would not merely seek the praise and approval of men, but of God.

The Education Matters column is sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Teachers' Association East. Anyone wishing to respond to an article written or willing to write an article is kindly asked to send materials to Clarion or to Otto Bouwman obouwman@cornerstoneschool.us

Press Release of Classis Northern Ontario, March 24, 2006

Rev. C. Vermeulen welcomed the brothers and invited all to sing Psalm 19:3, 4 and read Proverbs 8:1-21. In prayer he asked God to grant the brothers such wisdom as this passage of Scripture describes.

As the credentials from the churches were all in order, Classis could be constituted and the officers were appointed: Rev. P. Feenstra as chairman, Rev. P. Aasman as vice-chairman, Rev. Vermeulen as clerk. An agenda was adopted.

The chairman observed that all the vacancies in our classis have been filled with the acceptance of the call by the church of Brampton to Rev. M.H. Van Luik, the church of Fergus South to Rev. D.G.J. Agema, and the church of Orangeville to Rev. E. Kampen. Rev. Vermeulen had been called by the churches of Taber, Alberta and Houston, British Columbia, and Rev. P. Aasman to the church of Taber, Alberta, but these calls were declined. Rev. J. VanWoudenberg had received a call to the church of Willoughby Heights. The churches in Fergus and the church of Brampton had celebrated significant anniversaries. Prof. Ohmann, past professor of Old Testament studies in the Theological College in Hamilton, had been called home by the Lord.

The books of the Fund for the Needy Churches were reported to be in good order.

The brothers testified that the ministry of the office-bearers is being continued. One of the churches requested the assistance of Classis to deal with the decision of a major assembly. Four churches asked for advice with respect to

discipline for members who were delinquent in doctrine and conduct.

Classis acknowledged receipt of an invitation to the fiftieth anniversary celebration of the churches in Fergus and also the regret of the Chairman of the Interfaith Committee of the Reformed Churches in Quebec that they were unable to send an observer to this classis.

The church of Fergus North was appointed to convene the next classis on June 23, 2006 and was requested to extend invitations for observers from the United Reformed Churches and the Reformed Churches in Quebec.

Question period was held. Censure (Church Order art. 34) was not needed. The Acts of Classis were adopted. The press release was approved for publication. The chairman requested the brothers to sing Psalm 27:1 and led in prayer of thanksgiving. Classis was then closed.

Press Release of Classis Pacific East, March 30, 2006

On behalf of the convening church of Vernon, Rev. J. Moesker called the meeting to order at 9 a.m. sharp. After leading in prayer, he read Matthew 20:20-28 and invited those in attendance to sing Hymn 64:1, 2. He mentioned the following matters of note: Rev. M.H. Van Luik has accepted a call to the church of Brampton. His work in this classis over many years was remembered with thankfulness. The Lord took Prof. Ohmann to Himself in glory. His work at the College over the span of many years was appreciated greatly. Rev. C. Van Sponsen's presence as guest at Classis was acknowledged.

The delegates from the church of Lynden checked the credentials.

All was found to be in good order. The church of Chilliwack mentioned that their minister was on sabbatical and could therefore not be in attendance. None of the churches had given an instruction to her delegates.

Classis was constituted. According to the decision of previous classis, Rev. W. Wielenga was appointed to chair, Rev. C. Bouwman received the position of vice chairman, and Rev. R. Schouten was instructed to carry out the duties of the clerk.

Rev. Wielenga as chairman thanked the convening church for the preparations made for this classis. The agenda as proposed by the convening church was adopted.

As first item of the agenda, Classis considered five appeals and gave appellants its answers.

The church of Chilliwack requested Classis to grant Rev. Van Luik honourable release from his work in classis due to his accepting a call to the church of Brampton. Classis granted this release, effective August 13, 2006. A certificate of release was prepared and signed and will be given to Rev. Van Luik.

Classis received a report from Classis Treasurer covering the year 2005. The report was noted with gratitude and the treasurer was thanked for his work in relation to the past year.

As the church for the inspection of the archives was remiss in discharging a duty, this church was instructed to bring her report to the next classis.

Church visitation reports were heard concerning the churches of Abbotsford, Aldergrove, and Chilliwack. These reports were received with gratitude.

The questions required by Art. 44 CO received the attention of the

meeting. All churches answered in a satisfactory manner.

The church of Yarrow was appointed as convening church for the next classis. Suggested date is June 13, with September 14 as alternate date. Classis suggested the following officers: chairman Rev. Bouwman, vice chairman Rev. Schouten, and clerk Rev. Moesker.

Various brothers were appointed to fulfill various functions within the classis.

Delegates to Classis received an opportunity for Question Period and sufficient answers were given to the questions asked.

In relation to Article 34 CO the Chairman ruled that no censure was required. He expressed gratitude that the meeting could conduct its work in good harmony.

The Acts of Classis were read and adopted, as was also the Press Release.

The chairman requested the brothers to join in singing Hymn 64:3, 4. He then led in prayer of thanksgiving and committed the churches of the classis to the care of the Lord our God.

On behalf of classis,

C. Bouwman, vice chairman e.t.

Press Release of Classis Pacific West, March 28, 2006

On behalf of the convening church at Willoughby Heights, Rev. E. Kampen opens by asking everyone to sing Psalm 29:1, 2, 3. He then reads Mark 10:32-45 and leads in prayer. All the delegates are welcomed and a special welcome is extended to four fraternal delegates from the OPC, one fraternal delegate from the URC, and Rev. C. Macleod who has accepted a call to the church at Smithers for missionary work among the native people of NW

British Columbia. Rev. Kampen also takes a few moments to note various matters of memorabilia.

The delegates from Surrey Maranatha examine the credentials. Everything is in order and all the *primi* delegates are present. There are instructions on the credentials from Cloverdale and Surrey. Classis is declared constituted. The executive is as follows: chairman – Rev. J.M. Van Spronsen, clerk – Rev. T. Lodder, vice-chairman – Rev. J. Van Vliet. The agenda is adopted after a few alterations.

The necessary documents are present for approbation of the call to Rev. Macleod. Classis proceeds to the colloquium (Art. 5B2 CO), led by Rev. J. Visscher (doctrine) and Rev. Kampen (church polity). In closed session it is decided that Rev. Macleod's colloquium is satisfactory. Furthermore, the documents are perused and all is in order. Therefore, Classis decides to approbate the call. In open session Rev. Macleod signs the subscription form. Psalm 134 is sung and intercessory prayer is brought before the Lord for him and his family. His installation will take place, DV, on April 23, 2006 in Smithers, BC. Classis breaks for lunch.

Classis begins again with the singing of Hymn 29:1. Revs. David Klein and Robert Van Kooten of the OPC address the assembly, referring to upcoming matters at their General Assembly as well as the Lord's blessing experienced in the growth of OP congregations in the Seattle area. Rev. William Vanderwoerd of the URCNA also addressed the assembly. Appropriate words of response are spoken.

The church at Smithers proposes the following addition to

Art. 61 CO: "This same care and caution must be exercised when administering Lord's Supper to shut-ins." Classis decides to deny this overture on the ground that Art. 61 CO is not the appropriate article to address this issue since it deals with *admission* to rather than *administration* of the sacrament.

Upon request of the church at Willoughby-Heights, Classis decides to grant Rev. Kampen an honourable release as of August 1, 2006, as he has accepted the call extended to him from the church at Orangeville, ON. Rev. Van Vliet of the church at Surrey Maranatha is appointed as counsellor. The church at Willoughby-Heights will receive classical pulpit supply for two services each month as of August 2006.

Rev. Kampen is appointed as delegate to the farewell evening for Rev. E. Venema, missionary to Brazil.

Reports: Treasurer – The statement of receipts and disbursements is perused and received with thankfulness. The per km reimbursement is set at \$0.40. The church at Cloverdale submits an audit of the treasurer's books. All is in order. The church at Houston submits a letter concerning the inspection of the classical archives in Smithers. All is in order. The church visitors report on a visit to the church at Willoughby-Heights.

The chairman asks the delegates the questions from Art. 44 and the delegates answer in turn. Advice is given to one church.

Appointments: Next classis – Convening church: Cloverdale; place: Cloverdale; date: June 13, 2006 (or September 26, 2006). Suggested officers: Rev. Van Vliet, chairman, Rev. Lodder, vice-chairman, Rev. W. Bredenhof, clerk.

Examinations – Organizing deputies, Revs. Van Vliet and Visscher; OT, Rev. Van Spronsen; NT, Rev. Lodder; Doctrine and creeds, Rev. Van Vliet; Knowledge of Scripture, Rev. Van Spronsen; Church history, Rev. Visscher; Church polity, Rev. Bredenhof; Ethics, Rev. Van Vliet; Diaconiology, Rev. Visscher. Church visitors – Revs. Visscher (convener), Van Vliet, and Lodder (alternate). Church for taking care of the archives – Smithers. Church to inspect the archives – Houston.

Treasurer – br. R.H. Mulder, #208 6247-121 St., Surrey, BC V3X 3J2. Committee for Financial Aid to Students for the Ministry – brs. R.H. Mulder, M. Van Driel, J. Winkel (convener). Committee for Financial Aid to Needy Churches – brs. H. Leyenhorst, P. Vandergugten (convener), R. Van Oene. Deputy for preaching arrangements in vacant churches – Rev. Lodder. Deputy for coordinating ecclesiastical contacts – Rev. Visscher.

Personal question period is used by a few brothers. In

particular, Rev. Kampen speaks a few words of reminiscing and farewell. Rev. Visscher responds, wishing him and his family the Lord's blessing in the church at Orangeville. The chairman judges that censure ad Art. 34 is not needed. The acts of Classis are read and adopted. The press release is approved. In closing the chairman reads John 3:1-21. We sing Hymn 40:1, 2. The chairman leads in prayer. Classis is closed.

J. Van Vliet
(Vice-chairman at that time)



Letter to the Editor

Letter to the Editor

Re: How are We Doing? The Canadian Reformed Churches Today

Like Ebbel Kampen of Vernon B.C. I also read the article of Dr. F.G. Oosterhoff in the January 20 issue of *Clarion*. This was a reprint of a speech held by Dr. Oosterhoff in Amsterdam in 2004.

Unlike Ebbel Kampen, I had no problem with the contents of this speech. After all, Dr. Oosterhoff is a qualified historian and is dependent upon the correct information from others. She explained this in the footnotes. Some of the data was supplied by Rev. Eric Kampen. Her submission dealt with "Canadian Reformed" church history only. To me, there was nothing missing. Anyone can go to the Statistics Canada website to find whatever there is about other denominations. We are not listed there because of our "low" numbers in membership.

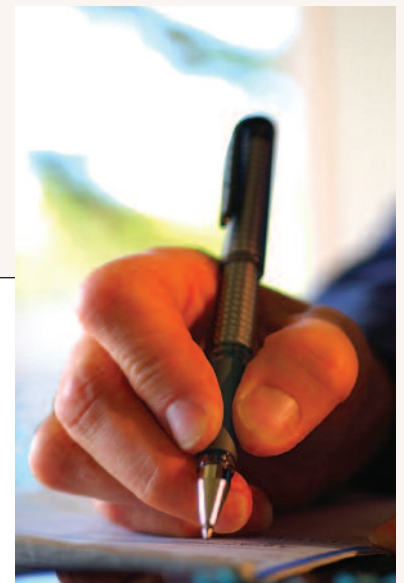
What struck me is that Br. Kampen listed primarily mainline churches. But these have lost members for years and decades. Such is not necessarily the case, however, with Bible-believing churches. As well-known examples I could mention

Reformed churches in New York, led by men like Steve Schlissel and Tim Keller, where there is much growth indeed. I should not be surprised if some truly orthodox Lutheran and Presbyterian churches (and these exist!) are in

a similar situation, although I have not tried to verify this. Br. Kampen did mention the Christian Reformed Church. But isn't the decline in membership there in large part to be explained with the recent secession of United Reformed, Orthodox Christian Reformed, etc.? What I am trying to say is that we must not compare apples with oranges – the Bible-believing CanRC, for example, with liberal churches like the United, but with orthodox ones.

I agree with Br. Kampen that the article as a whole raises legitimate concerns, but don't see that the opening figures give a wrong impression. I do hope that we will give serious attention to the concerns the article raises.

Arie J. Hordyk



Letters to the Editor should be written in a brotherly fashion in order to be considered for publication. Submissions need to be less than one page in length.