



Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

Volume 55, No. 17 • August 18, 2006

*Reflections on
our Contact
with the Free
Reformed
Churches*

*Defending
Christian
Freedom: Our
Civic
Responsibility*

Faithful Songs



All our labour is service to Christ.



W.B. Slomp

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Reflections on our Contact with the Free Reformed Churches

By and large some progress seemed to be made

Introduction

The Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) have been having contact with the Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA) since 1998. This contact was begun as a result of an overture by two churches in the Fraser Valley who had recognized the Abbotsford Free Reformed Church as a true church. These churches were advised by the broader assemblies to involve the respective federations of churches. Consequently Synod Fergus 1998 gave the mandate to the Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity (CPEU) to take a contact with the External Relations Committee (ERC) of the FRCNA.

Progress

Through the ensuing years the churches have been informed through the *Clarion* and Synod reports of our contacts together. Although there were some ups and downs in our relationship, by and large some progress seemed to be made. For example, their Synod 2000 offered us "limited contact," which meant that we could now communicate in an official and brotherly matter. We could also receive each other's delegates at synods, exchange copies of the Acts of Synods, and offer one another spiritual support. Synod Neerlandia 2001 thankfully accepted this offer of limited contact. Since that time our committees have had many talks together dealing with the issues concerning the various differences between our churches. The combined minutes of these meetings show that there was an increasing appreciation of one another's position on the various issues and an awareness that we are much closer than we first thought.

Surprise

However, to our surprise, last year November the ERC sent us a letter stating that on their part there is no longer any motivation to meet together. They gave two reasons for this surprising development. The first reason is "the ongoing discussions and movement of the Canadian Reformed Churches towards union with the United Reformed Churches in North America." The other is that our meetings "are too much from the top down communication with virtually no concrete communications between our churches on a local level."

It appears that the FRCNA wants to be left alone as much as possible

Why is this a surprise? In the first place the CPEU committee members very much wanted to open these talks up to the members at large. We were keenly aware that these talks should not be done only in committee rooms. We knew this was already one of the complaints of the Free Reformed brothers at the time of the Union of 1892 and we knew that that was one of the reasons they did not want to join the Union.

With that history in mind we organized, together with the FRCNA brothers in the Fraser Valley, several public meetings to which both CanRC and FRCNA members were invited. In those meetings we dealt with some of the "distinctives" of the FRCNA and with the different historical developments of our respective federations and we gave updates on the



Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd., Winnipeg, MB

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One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5
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RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO:
One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5

Subscription Rates for 2006	<i>Regular Mail</i>	<i>Air Mail</i>
Canada*	\$46.00*	\$ 75.00*
U.S.A. U.S. Funds  	\$55.00	\$ 70.00
International	\$82.00	\$120.00

*Including 7% GST – No. 890967359RT

Advertisements: \$14.00 per column inch

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

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progress of our talks together. It is true, however, that such meetings were held only in the west, but for that very reason our delegates to various synods of the FRCNA each time pleaded with the brothers to also organize such meetings in the east. As far as I'm aware, no such meetings were held there. But, it wasn't for lack of trying.

As for contact with United Reformed Churches (URCNA), it should be noted that this contact had been initiated before taking up contact with the FRCNA. This was not defined as an obstacle to beginning our talks with the FRCNA. Now suddenly it is. Furthermore, during our many combined committee meetings together, our contact with the URCNA had never been brought up as an obstacle to further talks. Nor have they told us what exactly concerns them regarding the URCNA.

And so, one must question whether or not the reasons given in the letter are the real reasons why our talks have now been put on hold. One might suspect that something else is going on. What could that be? They do not tell us straight out, but we can read between the lines in the light of what has been happening.

East versus west

It has become clear that the Free Reformed brothers in the east have never been as interested in getting to know us as have their counterparts in the west. The talks began out west and continued out west. Very little or nothing took place out east. Yet, the eastern brothers of the ERC committee, who are also the ones who make the final report to their synod, have been quite negative about any progress we have been making together. Consequently the reports to their synods did not reflect what took place in the committee rooms or in the combined congregational meetings, but only perpetuated their pre-conceived ideas about us.

For example, after having dealt thoroughly with their distinctive of "experiential preaching" and after having listened to each other's taped sermons, we came, as our combined report also stated, to a "growing understanding and appreciation of each other" and having "no essential difference in our understandings." Yet, in their report to synod the ERC reported that they "continue to sense a lack of understanding of what an experiential, discriminating ministry should be."

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There is so much that we have in common and so much that we could be doing together and helping each other with

At the FRCNA Synod of 2005 the brothers did apologize to us about that statement, but this occurred only reluctantly and after much prodding. In their written report they also referred to articles written in *Clarion* by Rev. Cl. Stam and stated that "the content of these articles merely confirm our earlier assertion." And so, on the one hand they made an apology and on the other hand they took the apology back again.

We made an offer on various occasions, including on the floor of their synod, to have them critique these articles of Rev. Cl. Stam and even to have their point of view published in *Clarion*. At this point no one has taken up the offer.

Why would that be? It appears that the FRCNA wants to be left alone as much as possible. For there are other things that set them apart from us and other faithful Reformed and Presbyterian churches. They have a different view of the congregation. In their sermons they usually do not address their members as "brothers and sisters" as we do. They believe that we too easily accept the members as believers and therefore as being saved. They also like to maintain the archaic language of the past in their worship services, as evidenced in their continued use of the KJV and in their old translations of the Three Forms of Unity. By becoming too close to us they are afraid that they will lose these precious "distinctives."

Sadness

This is all very sad. In our contact together it has become quite clear that the FRCNA brothers and sisters have a sincere desire to serve the Lord our God. They recognize the infallible Word of God as the only standard of truth. They want to use God's Word as the basis of their faith and practice. Like us, they also subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity, and they basically have the same church order as we do. There is so much that we have in common and so much that we could be doing together and helping each other with.

Conclusion

And so, what do we do? Do we continue to have talks together? The ERC hopes that in the future "our contacts may receive new and fresh impulses." But such talks should be opened up so that not only the west, but also the east is involved. We should have public combined meetings at the local levels as well. Furthermore we should inform the people of our talks together in publications such as *Clarion* and the official magazine of the FRCNA, *The Messenger*. In all this there should be openness, honesty, and integrity. If these things are not done, then there is no use for any further talks together.



R. Schouten



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Working for the Lord



MATTHEW 13:52

“Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favour; but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men. . . .”

Colossians 3:22-23

When Labour Day comes around each September, it's worth pausing to ask: why do I work? What motivates me to get out of bed each day, eat some breakfast, and head off to my daily work?

Here in Colossians 3:22 - 4:1, the Apostle speaks about labour in the context of slavery. In the first century, well over half of the population was enslaved.

Whatever work had to be done, slaves did most of it by far. Even though many slaves had kind and compassionate masters, the reality was that masters had the power of life and death over their slaves.

The Apostle Paul doesn't endorse slavery here in Colossians 3, but neither does he advocate overthrowing it by way of social revolution. Instead, he addresses believing slaves and believing masters and calls them both to show the style of the Kingdom of Christ. The gospel addresses slaves as real persons with inherent dignity and value and it makes masters accountable to their Master in heaven. As the gospel penetrated Roman society ever more deeply, it was inevitable that social structures would change to become more equitable and just.

We can be thankful that we live in a society that rejects slavery of some humans to other humans. But in one sense, we are all slaves of Christ. We've been redeemed in his blood and the result is that we are

not our own but belong to Him as our Lord and Master. This has repercussions for the way we work.

If Christ is our Lord, then all of our labour is service to Christ. For Christians, not just church work, not just ministry of the gospel, not only Christian education, but *all* work is service to Christ. We don't believe that some kinds of work are "higher" or "more spiritual" than others. Instead, all legitimate work has dignity and value because it is done for Christ.

That all work is service to Christ becomes clear when Paul says that slaves should work in obedience to their masters "out of reverence for Christ." In this context, having "reverence for Christ" means being aware that we are in his presence even when our earthly master isn't watching us at the moment. Even if the boss isn't around, Christ is never absent from us and knows how we are working. That all work is service to Christ becomes even clearer when the Apostle goes on to say that slaves should consider themselves to be "working for the Lord, not for men." Verse 24 says it most plainly: "It is the Lord Christ you are serving."

Isn't this something to remember on Labour Day and throughout the year? The gospel calls us to "work for the Lord." We don't work in the first place to make a living. We don't work to advance our careers. We don't work to get wealthy. We don't work to

win approval from other people. We don't work only to have the freedom to do what we really want to do on the weekend. Nor do we work simply to pay off debts or get rid of our mortgages. Instead, we work for the audience of one, the Lord Jesus Christ. We make it our aim to please Him.

How can we please Christ our Lord in our work? The answer to this question would include: working hard to the best of our ability; working with all our heart, that is, really throwing ourselves into our work; striving for excellence in our work and showing contempt for mediocrity; finding work that best suits our talents and personalities; showing patience in the face of difficulties at work including unpleasant employers, fellow workers, and less than desirable pay.

Everyone today is looking for job satisfaction. Usually, job satisfaction is understood in terms of "what makes me feel good." In reality, however, there is no job satisfaction like the kind we feel when we consciously do our work for the Lord. When we do our work for the Lord, then our job is never just a job. Instead, it's a calling, a holy, spiritual task in which we serve Christ. Knowing the true nature of our work changes the way we feel about getting out of bed and taking up our task.

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Defending Christian Freedom: Our Civic Responsibility (Part 2 of 3)

This article was originally a speech delivered at the Second Annual ECP Centre Conference in Burlington, Ontario on November 12, 2005.

Obey God before men

The basic principle

It is obvious that if matters deteriorate to the extent that a choice must be made between obeying either God or the government, then God must be obeyed before man. This principle is clearly vocalized in the rhetorical question that Peter and John raised before the rulers and elders of the Jewish people: "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God" (Acts 4:19).

When necessary, Christians have the duty to remind the government of these things. If the lawful authorities were nevertheless to ask what God would forbid, then God must be obeyed before men. This has happened more often in the history of God's people. Think of the following examples. The believing midwives did not listen to Pharaoh's decree that they kill the baby boys when they were born. They let them live. These women were as wise as a serpent, for when the Pharaoh asked why the

baby boys were not killed, they gave the excuse that the boys were born before they arrived (Exod 1:15-20). Another example: the high government official, Obadiah, did not obey the royal house of King Ahab. When Queen Jezebel was persecuting the prophets of the Lord, he hid one hundred of them

God wants our heart, mind, and soul, our total love and commitment

(1 Kgs 18:3-16). A final example: when everyone in Babylon had been commanded to worship no one but King Darius, Daniel still kept on praying three times a day to the true God and he did not attempt to hide that action from those who hated him (Dan 6:7-11). Like his fellow countrymen, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Dan 3), Daniel was prepared to pay the ultimate price for his obedience. He was thrown to the lions, but the Lord shut their mouths and so rescued Daniel (Dan 6:22).

Now all these examples are taken from situations which are far removed from our present

democratic context. Pharaoh and Darius were absolute monarchs and King Ahab and Queen Jezebel also clearly acted like they were. What they wanted happened, even if it meant corrupting justice and disregarding the rights of the people (cf. 1 Kgs 21). But notice, in all these examples, the believers simply did what they could. They disobeyed man in order to honour God and left the consequences to God.

If necessary, we must be prepared to do the same. When push comes to shove and when a clear choice must be made, then we disobey the human authorities in order to obey God. God always comes first.

Give to Caesar . . . and to God

Christians are often in a bit of a dilemma in how to respond to the demands that the state can impose on them. Our Saviour gave as guideline: "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's" (Matt 22:21; Mark 12:17; Luke 20:25). How should we interpret that? Does this mean that life is divided into two parts: one part for Caesar and one part for Christ? Is freedom of religion honouring the government in public and doing what it says while, in the privacy of your home or church, exercising

your religious activities? Is that what the Lord envisages as freedom of religion? Let's take a closer look at this saying.

The Pharisees wanted to trap Jesus and so discredit Him before the people. So they asked, "Teacher. . . we know you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by men, because you pay no attention to who they are. Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" (Matt 22:16-17)

Now if Christ had answered "yes," He would have alienated the Pharisees, the zealots, and every devout freedom-loving Jew. They all hated paying the poll (head) tax to the Romans. But if Christ had said "no," that would have made Him liable to being charged with treason. And so Christ gave neither answer.

Instead He asked, "Show me the coin used for paying the tax.' They brought Him a denarius, and He asked them, 'Whose portrait is this? And whose inscription?'" (Matt 22:19-20) When Christ said, "Whose portrait is this?" He literally said, "Whose image is this?" It's Caesar's. His image is on the coin. The coin belongs to him and thus to him it should go. "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's!"

Well, if the coin is Caesar's because his image is on it, what belongs to God? Or, in the context of this situation the question is: what bears God's image and so belongs to Him? Well, people bear God's image. After all, as the Jews knew full well, humans were created after the image of God and

they bear the likeness of the Most High (Gen 1:26-27). If a man or woman bears the image of God, then he or she ultimately belongs to God and should therefore render to God what He has coming! And God who created us after his image and likeness does demand our everything! He is not satisfied with a denarius or dollar bill; God wants our heart, mind, and soul, our total love and commitment. God must always come first. He made us and He has first rights to us. No government can ever supplant this right of the Creator.

Secularism has banished God from the public square and government is now virtually taking the place of God

So the point the Lord Jesus is making is this. Honour the government and pay taxes that are due, but in this all, honour God first of all for He made you after his own likeness and image. He owns you and it is to Him that our first loyalty must therefore always go. Indeed, to Him we must offer our very selves! (Rom 12:1-2)¹ The government can never legitimately go that far. Their demands must of necessity be much more limited, for they do not own us. But God does.

God is sovereign over all, but not the government. There is always a tendency for government to keep adding power to its already vast portfolio of authority and

control. Indeed, in our day, secularism has banished God from the public square and government is now virtually taking the place of God. After all, government is even in the business of legislating morality, audaciously passing laws that are diametrically opposed to what God has said in his Word. Tolerance is preached from the pulpits of parliament but it is only tolerance for what they wish to hear and bear.

This tendency of government to take for itself ever more power and authority we must resist. According to Scripture, God has given the government a relatively limited mandate which includes upholding God's norms. Other spheres in society such as the family, the world of business, the sciences, the arts, and last but not least the church, all have their own God-given rights and responsibilities and these should also be acknowledged and honoured.

However, when government banishes God from public life and debate, there is no outside arbiter of morals. Then indeed, morals will need to be imposed through sheer force and power. And so, in effect, government gives itself the place once reserved for God. This is not the legacy that the western world has inherited from Christianity.

True freedom is the freedom to observe the will of God and to live according to his Word. The law of God and obedience to it is true freedom. In Christ this can be done and He sets us free (cf., e.g., Ps 119:44-45; John 8:31-34). Sin enslaves and condemns to bondage.

3. The need to participate in the public square

The biblical rationale

We have seen a couple of basic biblical reasons why we need to participate in the public square. Like the Israelites of old, we too share responsibility for the maintenance of justice and righteousness in our land. Furthermore, if we are to give to God what belongs to Him, then we must give Him our everything in holy service in the fullness of life. After all, God claims to be and is sovereign over all areas of life, including the public square. As those well known words of Abraham Kuyper put it, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'"²

What a powerful truth for us living in a culture of "no God and no master but ourselves. We want to do what we want to do." Over against that individualizing and self-serving principle, Christians confess that Christ is sovereign Lord. He rules everything and He must therefore be honoured. Indeed, all creation and power and rule is held together in Him and makes sense only in Him (Col 1:15-20). And so we need to serve God in our homes, churches, and Christian schools. God claims all of life for Himself.

We also need to serve Him in the public square, in the political arena, in the city halls and town halls, in the courts and elsewhere. There is not a millimetre that the Lord of lords does not claim for Himself. Christians are in the service of this great Lord to whom all authority in heaven and earth has been given (Matt 28:18).

Practical necessity to act

Besides these biblical reasons, there are also some very practical reasons why we have to be involved in the public square and the political process. To begin with, the person who says "I don't really want to get involved" is both mistaken and naive. As citizens of this country we are already involved in the political process! We are already in the government computers. We do pay taxes and our tax dollars are used to fund the agenda of those currently in leadership. Every day we are affected by decisions made in Ottawa or our provincial legislature. Christians are no less prone to complain than other citizens of our land about the direction our country is going. But unless we are actively involved and at least informing our elected representatives of where we stand and why and get involved in the political process, we have no reason to lament the strong drift to the left.

There really is no room or excuse for us as Christians to be apathetic. If we are truly convinced that the Lord our God is the ultimate ruler of this world and also of Canada and that He in his sovereign ways has placed the present government in power, we will do everything possible to understand the issues of the day so that we can interact with parliamentarians and have our input in the current economic, social, and international issues. After all, government should be a minister of God for good.

There is much wisdom in Scripture and in many ways our country continues to be, often unknowingly, a beneficiary of that wisdom even today. One can think of issues such as good legal principles derived from English common law that still function,

limitations of government, protection of individual liberties, and a healthy work ethic. It can be argued that these are largely due to the biblical nurture that once undergirded much of western society. But it is this biblical wisdom that is so badly needed today for it exalts virtues such as honesty in high places, a strong family structure, the bedrock of society, a concern for the poor, and last but not least, the limitations of power inherent in good government. Government should not become all-encompassing and totalitarian, regulating every segment of human life. That is not its task. As those ultimately placed in power by God, the task of government is to represent God's will and justice and righteousness. Instead, as mentioned, the state today is claiming for itself the position of God, deciding what is right and wrong while consciously keeping God out of the discussion.

If we as those who believe in the God of heaven and earth don't get involved to seek betterment for our country, who will? The church as an institution has no business getting involved in politics. The church has her task cut out for her. She has to preach the gospel, the glad tidings of Jesus Christ. But members of the church, as citizens of this land, they should take the implications of the gospel into all of life, including the political. In a sense we, as the Christian part of the population, may have been silent or ineffective far too long.

¹This is an old interpretation. See Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 526, n. 207; David T. Ball, "What Jesus Really Meant by 'Render unto Caesar'," *Bible Review* 19:2 (April 2003) 14-17, 52.

²A. Kuyper, *Souvereiniteit in eigen kring* (Amsterdam: Kruyt, 1880) 35-36.

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Faithful Songs (Part 5)

The word “faithful” functions significantly in the guidelines. And so it should! “Faithful” is one of the names of our Lord Jesus Christ (Rev 11:19). He is called “the faithful witness” (Rev 1:5). The bride of Christ is called to be faithful (Rev 2:10). The ninth commandment commands us to speak faithfully. We must also *sing* faithfully.

The third guideline speaks about this. It reads:

When Psalms or other portions of Scripture are set to music, the words must be faithful to the content and form of the inspired text.

The next guideline will address songs that are not versification of Scripture – they too must, of course, be faithful to the teaching of Scripture. But this guideline deals specifically with songs that are paraphrases of Scripture (Psalms or other portions) set to music.

Setting Scripture passages to music is a great challenge. In our tradition, we do not chant texts of Scripture; rather, we sing songs based on Scripture. What are characteristics of song? A song has an identifiable melody in a specific mode or key. It usually has several stanzas and a pattern for rhyming the words. It has rhythm. Other guidelines will speak about the music. Here we are speaking about the words. As the songwriter sets the words of Scripture to music applying the restrictions of metre, melody, rhythm, and rhyme, he

must all-the-while ensure that he is faithful to the text.

The songwriter’s material is the inspired word of God. The lyrics do not flow forth from his emotions, experiences, or personal thoughts about what is true and good. Just like a preacher must handle faithfully the word of truth (2 Tim 2:15), so must the songwriter.

It is a great responsibility to put a part of Scripture to music. Once a song is in the church’s songbook, it will be sung. The message of the song will be imprinted on the minds of those singing. If a song, in order to satisfy the restrictions of stanza, rhyme, or metre, introduces elements that are foreign to the passage on which it claims to be based, those who sing it will think those elements belong to the Word of God.

In this guideline we say that the words must be faithful to both the *content* and the *form* of Scripture.

To be faithful to the *content* of the text, the songwriter needs to have a good grasp of Scripture. He needs to be a believer who can do some exegesis and who understands the teachings of the Bible. It is nearly impossible to make a song suitable for congregational singing that follows the text of the Bible word for word. The songwriter will need to fill out the text a bit here and there because of the restrictions implicit in song writing. Because this cannot be avoided, the

songwriter needs to have a good hold on the teachings of Scripture.

The guideline also says that the songs need to be faithful to the *form* of the inspired text. The songwriter will need to pay attention to the length of the sentences, the specific words used, and the grammar of the text.

The *Trinity Psalter* has, in a very interesting way, sought to be faithful to the form of the text by placing the actual verse numbers of Scripture in the margin rather than numbers for the stanzas (please see sidebar). The minister would, then, call for verses to be sung rather than stanzas. Something to think about!

In considering both content and form of the text, the songwriter will need to pay attention to the genre. For example, if the song is a lament, the music will need to reflect that. Similarly, if a joyful piece of Scripture is set to music, the music must soar. Imagine “Rejoice, the Lord is King” set to the tune of Psalm 13, “How long, O Lord, wilt Thou Forget Me?” (see No. 18, *Psalter Hymnal*) The songwriter needs to choose an appropriate melody, key, metre, rhythm, and rhyme to suit the specific text.

One of the questions the Joint Songbook Committee is always asking as it selects songs for the future common songbook is: “Is this song faithful to the text of Scripture?”

Psalm 2

- 1 Why do heathen nations rage?
Why do peoples folly mind?
- 2 Kings of earth in plots engage,
Rulers are in league combined;
Then against Jehovah high,
And against Messiah's sway,
- 3 "Let us break their bands," they cry,
"Let us cast their cords away."

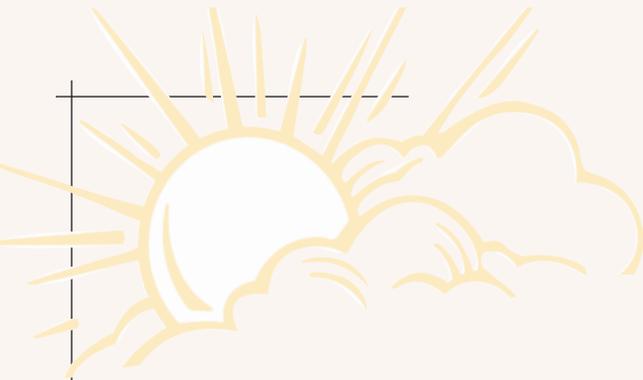
- 4 But the Lord will scorn them all;
He will laugh Who sits on high,
- 5 Then His wrath will on them fall;
Sore displeased He will reply:
- 6 "Yet according to My will
I have set My King to reign,
And on Zion's holy hill
My Anointed I'll maintain."

- 7 His decree I will make known:
Unto Me the LORD did say,
"Thou art My be-lov-ed Son;
I've begotten Thee this day.
- 8 Ask of Me, and Thee I'll make
Heir to earth and nations all;
- 9 Them with iron Thou shalt break,
Dashing them in pieces small."

- 10 Therefore, kings, be wise, give ear;
Hearken, judges of the earth;
- 11 Serve the LORD with godly fear;
Mingle trembling with your mirth.
- 12 Kiss the Son, His wrath to turn,
Lest ye perish in the way,
For His anger soon will burn.
Blessed are all that on Him stay.

Trinity Psalter (Crown and Covenant, 2000)





Ray of Sunshine

By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

"For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God."

2 Corinthians 1:20

We have come to the final article of this series dealing with the Lord's Prayer. We will hereby focus on the word "Amen."

First we will look at what the word amen means. For the meaning we can turn to the Heidelberg Catechism in question and answer 129. "Amen means: it is true and certain. For God has much more certainly heard my prayer than I feel in my heart that I desire this of Him."

For most of us, when we hear the word "amen," we know that we have come to the end of a prayer. In the Hebrew language it means to be "faithful" or "true."

In the Old Testament it was used when speaking about faithfulness in the covenant bond which the Lord had established with his chosen people. In Genesis 15:6 we read, "Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness." It can also be said that Abram said amen to the Lord's promises. Abram believed the Lord's promises and therefore acted upon the Word of the Lord. He left his home and kindred and went to the Promised Land.

Later, in Deuteronomy 27, we read of the people saying "amen" again. This amen was a verbal witness that the people understood what the Lord had said and that also in this regard they trusted his covenantal love. It is to declare that they believed that all the sins which are mentioned in chapter 27 had to be cursed in order to continue in the freedom which the Lord is granting them.

While the Lord Jesus was on earth, He frequently used the word amen. "Amen," meaning that as the Lord is faithful, thus what is said is really true. It is used in this sense, for example, in Matthew 8:10, where the Lord Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith."

In 1 Corinthians 14 the Lord warns us through Paul about a disorderly way of speaking in tongues. When those who listen to such speaking in tongues do not understand what is being said, the church will not be edified or built up. We cannot say "amen" if we do not know what is being said or being prayed about. From

this it is clear that with the word "amen" we express that we have understood the Lord's revealed Word and believe it.

Thus, when we use the word "amen" to close our prayers, we declare to have understood the Lord's promises and trust in his faithfulness. It is like saying "I believe." What a beautiful way to end every prayer made according to the instruction of Christ. We call upon the name of the Father because we trust his faithfulness as proven through the works of Christ. Praise be to Him alone!

Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me adore Him!
All that hath life and breath, come now with
praises before Him!
Let the Amen
Sound from His people again.
Gladly for aye we adore Him.

Hymn 60:5

Birthdays in September:

- 8 **MARSHA MOESKER will be 29**
5820 Dixon Dam Road, Vernon, BC V1B 3J8
- 11 **MARY VANDE BURGT will be 50**
32555 Willingdon Crescent, Abbotsford, BC V2T 1S1
- 14 **JERRY BONTEKOE will be 42**
Anchor Home
361 Thirty Road, RR 2 Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2
- 29 **PAUL DIELEMAN will be 37**
653 Broad Street West, Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8

Congratulations to you all who are celebrating a birthday in September. May our heavenly Father bless you in this new year and may you have an enjoyable day together with your family and friends. Till next month,

Mrs. C. Gelms and Mrs. E. Nordeman
548 Kemp Road East, RR 2, Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2
905-563-0380



June 2006 CYA Retreat

After three months of preparation, the first ever Christian Young Adults (CYA) Retreat was held on June 2 and 3, 2006 at the Campfire! property in Markdale, Ontario.

A small group of young adults from the Flamborough/Burlington/Hamilton College and Careers Bible Study Group set out to plan a weekend geared toward Christian young adults (18 years +) who wanted to study God's Word with their peer group as well as meet new people through fellowship and activities. The focus of the weekend was studying the Word, under the theme of "Christian Young Adults in an Evolving World." This conference was meant to fill the gap between young people's study weekends and the men's and women's league days.

On Friday night Cornelius Boersema and Carina Ploeger opened up the weekend with a talk on biblical people of faith like Joseph, Ruth, and Peter. Cornelius read *Who is Sam Harrington?*, which reveals a very applicable message and is a recommended read for all ages! Carina put us through the "Peter-Faith-O-Meter" exercise, which demonstrated that a strong Christian man also had his doubts and struggles, but he knew where to find help and we can, too. After the talk by Carina and Cornelius, the evening was formally closed with singing and prayer. A fire was built and



refreshments were served. Some engaged in games of euchre, while others enjoyed the fire and fellowship until all stumbled off to bed, looking forward to what tomorrow had in store.

Although there was a large thunderstorm during the night, we were blessed with amazing sunshine the next morning. Breakfast was served in the sun-soaked main hall of the lodge. After breakfast everyone participated in the ultimate-get-to-know-you game so that we could all leave saying that we had met someone new! At about 10 am the second speech was given by Dr. F.G. Oosterhoff, which explored postmodernism. She spoke about this rather recent phenomenon's origins and place in history, what it means in our Christian lives, and how we should respond. Afterwards, we broke up into discussion groups and talked about how postmodernism has affected our lives and how we can respond to it, whether at school or

work, in politics, and in our interaction with others.

After lunch, which was served amid good fellowship and laughter, we discovered how beautiful the Campfire! property really is (and how many uninvited mosquitoes came to the retreat!). By participating in a colour orienteering activity, teams had to search for question sheets and answer the colour clue on their sheet. After all the teams had finished, it was time for the H2O Fill Challenge, which is a great combination of capture the flag, save the princess, and the great fire game. This game brought out the competitive nature between the genders – how could we resist!?

The third speech of the retreat was presented by Rev. T. Emmanuel, president of the ECP Centre. Rev. Emmanuel spoke about the political side of today's society, using the three main points of cultural vilification, political marginalization, and the suppression of the Charter of Rights. His message was that the persecution of Christians is very real today in Canada, but it is hitting us in more subtle forms. He emphasized that we should not accept it and should not be afraid to stand up against it. Once again, this speech generated a lot of good discussion.

Supper brought the weekend to a close and was highlighted with a slide show of photographs taken



during the retreat (check them out at cyaretreat.no-ip.org). During the closing, many "thanks" were said – the food was excellent, the activities very enjoyable, the speeches uplifting and insightful, and the fellowship among believers was amazing.

The CYA Retreat was over almost too quickly. It proved to be a complete success – the efforts of the organizing committee were blessed. Many attendees stated that they were thrilled that they had come and that they hoped another CYA Retreat would be planned soon.

But it cannot be forgotten that the success of the retreat was not the work of man. It is only thanks to our heavenly Father that this retreat was as successful as it was. Without Him all the planning would have come to naught.

As for the possibility of another CYA Retreat? Stay tuned. . . it is being planned and will be held, the Lord willing, in late autumn.

"Give thanks to the LORD, for He is good; his love endures forever." Psalm 107:1





Behold What Manner of Love!

(Part 1 of 2)

At the CRTA convention last fall, Rev. Peter Feenstra from Owen Sound presented the following devotional, based on 1 John 3:1-3. It serves as a good reminder at the beginning of another school season for all those involved in education to consider.

Every school has a basis and foundation and some sort of statement of purpose. These standards for education influence the activity of a Board and of an Education Committee and what is put into a student or parent handbook. That is especially true within the setting of our Christian schools. The children come to learn and you as teachers stand at the front of the classroom to teach them to respond in thankfulness to what the Lord has given in his mercy.

The underpinnings of so much of what we do within the school setting can be summed up with the words that are the theme for this convention, "Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed (lavished) on us that we should be called children of God." These are beautiful words. Every time the door to a classroom is opened and the children file in and sit down in their desks to do their school work we have evidence of God's covenant faithfulness and abiding love. "Behold, what manner of

love!" The love of God in calling us children is the driving force determining the content of the education, the attitude of the children on the playground, the communication between parents and teachers, and the support the school receives from others who do not have children in the school system. Reformed and covenant education directs children to God the Father and teaches them to walk in obedience to Him in all areas of life.

Reformed and covenant education directs children to God the Father and teaches them to walk in obedience to Him in all areas of life

Within the field of education there are plenty of scenarios that may dismay, discourage, or disappoint us. Students are not always that easy to handle. Parents can be unreasonable in their expectations. Some of our colleagues can at times irritate and annoy us. Yet if we think of teaching in the context of the Father's love, that might give us the boost we need to keep us from

losing heart or throwing in the towel! Something good is going on – also within our schools! "Behold what manner of love. . . !" God the Father is gathering together his children; Jesus is preparing an eternal home for your students and for you as teachers.

All of us are in school – the school of life. As children of God, we long for the final bell – when the trumpet will sound and we will go home. Christian teachers are themselves students. Together with the parents and the students in your classroom, you are children who are under the tutelage of the Holy Spirit.

The privilege of being children

"Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children." In 1 John 3 the Apostle searches for words in an attempt to describe God's love. He is overawed by the manifestation of the Father's love and he wants that reaction to filter through to all of us. To be called children of the living God is more wonderful than you can imagine and deeper than you can fathom. In the Greek language, the phrase translated "what manner" refers to something foreign, something out of this world. What manner of love: the love of God is not ordinary. It is foreign to the human race. It

belongs to a different dimension. This love is not arbitrary or whimsical (like human love tends to be). It does not discriminate on the basis of what we are like – whether we are desirable, attractive, or loveable. It is solely rooted in grace – undeserved favour.

See what manner of love has come into our earthly existence! The Almighty, the holy Father, approaches an unclean people, a rebellious and contrary people, and He says, "I claim you! You are my son and I take you to be my daughter. I establish a relationship – a covenant of love with you."

John's first epistle was written against the false teachings of an early form of Gnosticism. Those of you who teach church history know that Gnosticism was a major movement within the early Christian church. These people taught that only those with superior knowledge and a special bond with God could call themselves children of God. They suggested that you should not be presumptuous or assuming and consider yourself to be a child of God until you reached a certain level of spirituality. Imagine the tension that would have created within the congregation – some members would always be made to feel inferior because they did not make the grade. John, however, will have none of it, and without hesitation refutes these false teachers. For the church is the household of God, the home where the children of God dwell. As children of the Lord, you are given brothers and sisters throughout the world! School children are part of the family of God. As a believer I do not stand on my own, and I may not stand on my own, because the

Father has placed me in his family. Together with all the other members of the family I am called and obliged by the Lord to behold his love.

It certainly changes our perspective if we pause for a moment each day and say these words: "Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us (me as a teacher, and they as students) that we should be called children of God – literally, that we should be *brought forth* by God."

To be called children of the living God is more wonderful than you can imagine and deeper than you can fathom

For we are speaking about something that is nothing short of a miracle. What greater love can you find than this: the holy majestic God takes us into his family and calls us his sons and daughters! The language of God's love is a language unknown in this earthly realm. The eternal love of God is so profound and so wonderful that it goes beyond anything in this world; it is beyond human experience. The Lord in infinite love and mercy takes outcasts, rebels, and enemies and brings them into his family and gives them the family name, status, privileges, blessings, and the family inheritance!

When the Father determines to enter a relationship with us we receive the same privileges that Jesus Christ receives being the eternal Son of the Father. What awesome and extraordinary love! It

is amazing and breathtaking because in order for us to be children and to be heirs to everlasting life, Jesus had to go to the cross. The natural Son of God had to shed his blood for this. The Lord was under no obligation to save us from sin. He did not owe it to us. It is a great thing to have our sins forgiven through the shedding of Christ's blood, but it is even greater to be received and accepted into God's family. The Lord was under even less obligation to grant us the privilege of being his children. He could have left us in our sins or simply called us slaves, but He calls us children. "Behold, what manner of love! Behold. . . and bless the Lord oh my soul!"

The love of God in calling us children is the strength of the church and of our schools! Every day you and I are called to be what we are. It is a great privilege to be part of the covenant and to have a father/child relationship with the most high God. There are also implications for how we – teachers as well as students – act in response.

The all-encompassing implications

The more we learn of the revelation of Christ, the more we see the all-encompassing implications of being children of God. The following verses of 1 John 3 take us to those implications, "Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall see Him as He is."

The certainty that we are children gives meaning to life for the present. Life has value and meaning! The time we spend

educating covenant children is not without purpose. We live today as children with the perspective of what is to come. A young child knows he is a child but he doesn't know what will happen during his life. Similarly we know who we are: we are children of God, but we do not know what exactly the future holds. We are not all-knowing; we have our limitations, but that does not mean we do not know anything. We know that when Jesus Christ appears we will be changed. The children of God will be released from sin completely and we will be made wholly suited for glory. John says that we will be like Christ. Our outward appearance will change in that we will receive a body that is no longer subject to lack of energy, disease, death, and decay. Our inner disposition will change in that we will no longer sin or be bogged down by the effects of sin. Here our life is fleeting like the grasses. Yet, as children of the Lord we can live in the assurance of eternal life. Furthermore, we will

not only be Christ-like, but we will see Him in his glory. We will have full communion with Him and our eyes will not be clouded by the sins that today cloud our vision. That vision makes us long for the day we will be in glory and so the children of the Father join the Spirit and pray, "Come, Lord Jesus! Maranatha."

The love of God in calling us children is the strength of the church and of our schools.

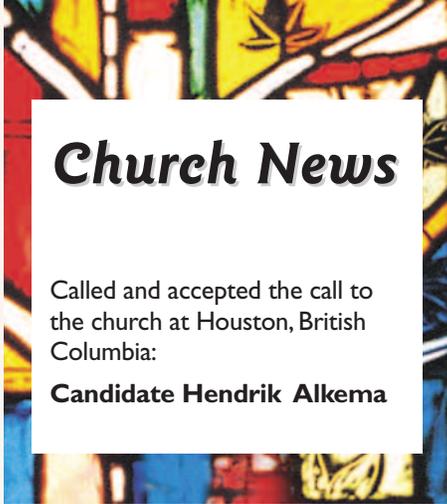
Being children of the Father gives us a grand perspective for the future and shapes the philosophy of Christian education. What we will be is the perfection of what we are – children of God. What that all entails is not known to us but our status as children and the hope this establishes in our hearts has implications for today.

Verse 3, "And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure." To purify is to lead a life worthy of the Lord and according to his commandments. Nothing may jeopardize this! Christian teachers and Christian students are to walk together in purity and holiness. The social activities and the environment of a school are to reflect a desire to serve the Creator. Students are to see in their teachers examples of godliness – an enthusiasm for the Lord and a heart of love and compassion for each student.

(To be continued)

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





Church News

Called and accepted the call to the church at Houston, British Columbia:

Candidate Hendrik Alkema

Press Release

Press Release of Classis Northern Ontario, June 23, 2006, held in Fergus, Ontario

On behalf of the convening church of Fergus North, Rev. W. Geurts called the meeting to order. He requested the delegates to sing Psalm 25:2 and 4, read from 2 Corinthians 3, and led the meeting in prayer.

The delegates from Elora examined the credentials and found them to be in good order.

Classis was declared constituted and the officers took their places – Rev. Geurts as chairman, Rev. C. Vermeulen as vice-chairman, and Rev. P. Feenstra as clerk. The chairman welcomed all.

The agenda for this meeting was adopted. With respect to matters of memorabilia, it was mentioned that Rev. J. Van Woudenberg had declined the call to Willoughby Heights and had recently received calls from the Canadian Reformed Church in Hamilton and the Free Reformed Church of Darling Downs and Rev. P. Aasman had received a call from Ancaster to serve as a missionary with Streetlight Ministries. Rev. Van Woudenberg and Rev. Aasman were wished the Lord's blessing as they considered these calls.

After reviewing the documents presented to it, Classis approbated the call of Rev. D. Agema to the Canadian Reformed Church of Fergus Maranatha, the call of Rev. E. Kampen to the Canadian Reformed Church of Orangeville, and the call of Rev. M. Van Luik to the Canadian Reformed Church of Brampton. Rev. Agema will be installed in Fergus Maranatha on August 6, Rev. Kampen in Orangeville on August 6, and Rev. Van Luik in Brampton on September 10.

The church visitors reported on visits to the churches in Elora, Fergus Maranatha, Fergus North, Grand Valley, Guelph, Orangeville, and Owen Sound. These reports were received with thankfulness; this thankfulness was also expressed to the Lord in prayer.

Question period according to Article 44 of the Church Order: all churches affirmed that the ministry of the office bearers was being continued and the decisions of broader assemblies were being honoured. No churches had any requests for advice.

The church at Guelph had proposed changes to the classical regulations. These were discussed and some changes were made to the classical regulations.

A letter was received from Rev. Ben Westerveld, chairman of the Interchurch Committee of the ERQ,

extending greetings and wishing Classis the Lord's blessings.

Convening church for the next classis is Fergus Maranatha and the date is set for September 22, 2006. Suggested officers: chairman – Rev. Van Woudenberg; vice-chairman – Rev. Feenstra; Clerk – Rev. Geurts. The church at Guelph is instructed to represent Classis at the installation of Rev. Agema, the church at Grand Valley at the installation of Rev. Kampen, and the church at Fergus Maranatha at the installation of Rev. Van Luik.

The church at Fergus Maranatha was instructed to invite observers to the next classis from the URC and the ERQ, as well as to represent our classical region at the next classis Southern Ontario of the URCNA.

Question period was made use of.

The chairman thankfully noted that censure according to Article 34 of the church order was not necessary.

The Acts were adopted and a Press Release was approved.

The chairman requested Classis to sing Hymn 29:1 and 2 and Rev. Vermeulen led in closing prayer. The chairman closed Classis.

*Rev. C. Vermeulen,
for Classis Northern Ontario,
June 23, 2006*

