

Clarion

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*God entrusted the care
of planet earth to the
crown of creation...
mankind*



Inside this issue

- Saving Planet Earth
- God's Life-Giving Love
- Improving the Church's Song





C. Van Dam

Dr. C. Van Dam is professor of Old Testament at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Hamilton, Ontario
cvandam@canrc.org

Saving Planet Earth

The earth and all that is in it belongs to the Lord

The big environmentalist push is on. The warnings get shriller and the media hype is being turned up. We are told that planet Earth is in grave danger and, unless we act quickly, it may already be too late. There is concerted action on several fronts. In December of last year, the United Nations sponsored a ten day conference on climate change in Bali, Indonesia. It attempted to find a consensus for limiting carbon dioxide emissions. This conference was a follow-up of the Kyoto Protocol reached ten years earlier. Among those attending was former American Vice-President, Al Gore, who has continued to be active on the environmental front. His film,

Where is the truth?

An Inconvenient Truth, graphically portrays the dire consequences of inaction. The movie continues to have considerable influence, helped no doubt by the fact that many school children all over the world have seen it. Climate change is so much of a hot topic today that even the Nobel Peace Prize committee got into the act by awarding Al Gore, together with the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the Nobel Prize for 2007. In our own nation, the issue of the environment and climate change has become a top concern for voters according to recent polls. Worry about the climate was ranked even higher than concern for terrorism and the fragile nature of world peace and for young people climate concerns took precedence over getting ahead at work.¹

What are we as Christians to think of all of this?

God's mandate to mankind

God entrusted the care of planet Earth to the crown of creation, mankind. He set Adam and Eve, and thus all humanity, as rulers over the beautiful world God had made. He blessed them and gave them the mandate to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth and subdue it, and to rule over all creation (Gen 1:26-28; Ps 8:5-8). Man however was not to do this task selfishly; he had to take care of what was entrusted to him (Gen 2:15) and to do so in the awareness that he was responsible to God who gave him this task. After all, the earth and all that is in it belongs to the Lord (Ps 24:1). Christians should therefore have a strong sense of stewardship when dealing with environmental issues. Indeed, Christians should be at the forefront of seeking to protect the earth's finite resources from abuse and waste. They should also be at the forefront in the struggle against pollution.

Emotion is driving much of the rhetoric

Does all this mean that we embrace Al Gore as our hero and environmental activist David Suzuki as a "patron saint," as he has been called? Not really. There is more going on here than meets the eye. One remarkable element in the whole discussion of climate change is the inability of scientists and experts to agree on all the critical data and conclusions. There is, for example, not even agreement among experts on whether carbon dioxide emissions are indeed causing global warming. A report from the U.S. Senate Environment



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EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Editor: J. Visscher; Copy Manager: Laura Veenendaal
Coeditors: R. Aasman, E. Kampen, Cl. Stam, C. Van Dam

ADDRESS FOR COPY MANAGER:

Clarion, 57 Oakridge Drive South, St. Albert, AB T8N 7H2
E-Mail: veenendaal@shaw.ca

ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS:

CLARION, Premier Printing Ltd.
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Website: www.premierpublishing.ca

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and Public Works Committee released on December 20, 2007 detailed how over 400 prominent scientists – experts in dozens of fields of study worldwide – say global warming and cooling is a cycle of nature and cannot legitimately be connected to man’s activities.² Similarly, at the time of writing this article, Swedish scientists reported in the prestigious journal *Nature* that the warmer Arctic is not the result of man-made climate change but comes from atmospheric energy transfers from southern latitudes to northern. This is a cyclical phenomenon which has happened before.³ Yet, in spite of scientific studies which show that there is by no means any unanimity about the reasons for climate change, a global hysteria is being fomented by mainline media and United Nations scientific committees as if their conclusions that we have man-made climate change are undisputed.

Where is the truth? Al Gore’s film is a case in point. It is somewhat ironic that about two days before he received the Nobel Peace Prize, October 10, 2007 to be exact, a British court judged his film to be unsuitable for viewing in schools because of the untruths and exaggerations it contained as well as the propagandistic and politically charged nature of the film. Furthermore, it is good to remember that as recently as 1974, the big climate fear, based on a wide assortment of scientific research, was global cooling and mainline media spoke of a possible new ice age.⁴ Now, a mere three decades later, the big fear is global warming. Actually, this is the fourth time in a century that scientific climate change views have changed. “We went from global cooling to warming, to cooling to warming again.”⁵ No wonder it is often difficult to discuss the adduced evidence for all of this in a rational manner.

Why is the current hype on global warming so highly charged? One reason seems to be that the environmentalists who especially push the climate change scenario are deeply religious in their convictions about saving planet Earth. For many the point has been reached that not reason and fact, but emotion is driving much of the rhetoric.

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The religious nature of environmentalism

It is no secret that the current mindset in our society is tilted against Christian values and Christian principles. The evidence is plain to see especially in moral issues such as society's toleration and even defence of homosexual values. The roots of secular environmentalism fit within this general hostility to Christianity. Christendom has been blamed for encouraging the destructive use of creation by promoting ideas such as man's dominion over the natural world and the desacralizing of nature, that is, teaching that nature is not divine. There is no doubt that Christians have erred in the past in not fully realizing the need for a more careful stewardship of the environment, but to blame the teachings of God's Word on a perceived climate crisis goes far beyond the evidence.

In rejecting biblical teaching on the unique place of man over against the rest of creation, environmentalism considers humans as a threat to the environment and has embraced pantheistic ideas of the sacredness of nature which must be safeguarded at all costs. Indeed, it has come to the point where the welfare of animals and plants is sometimes being given a greater priority than that of mankind. This neo-pagan approach is religious in nature and helps explain the fervency of environmentalist and climate change advocates. It is striking that Al Gore, who is a Baptist, nevertheless suggests that it is obvious that a better understanding of the ancient pagan earth goddess worship could offer us new insights into the nature of the human experience and our relationship to the environment.⁶

A Christian response

As Christians we reject any neo-pagan principle that may be energizing current environmentalism hype and alarmism and offering worldview solutions. At the same time, we will do everything possible to protect the environment. If certain human activities are indeed detrimental, we should limit or cease those activities to the best of our ability. Our reasons

for doing so will however be radically different from those of environmentalists. We will do it not because the earth or nature is sacred, but because it is God's creation for which He has given man responsibility to manage and take care of. We will also want to be good stewards of the natural bounty God has placed at our disposal. We will do so in the full realization that the Lord our God is at work in this world. It will also be this world, delivered from its present brokenness and groaning, which will be renewed (Rom 8:19-21).

Planet Earth is a very special place. It is not just a speck in the universe. This is where God has placed the crown and ruler of his creation, mankind. Because of man's rebellion against God, planet Earth is a place that needs to be saved. But ultimately humans cannot rescue it from its troubles. The Earth is therefore also the place to which the Son of God has come to redeem an entire creation lost in sin. This is the world which God has entrusted to our care. And so we must care for it to the very best of our ability, for it is the place to which a new heaven will descend. It will then be an earth renewed, purged by fire, where righteousness will dwell (2 Pet 3:6-13; Rev 21:1-4).

¹ The one poll was done for CTV and the *Globe and Mail* and reported on in the December 10, 2007 edition of CTV news. A second poll was a Decima Research Survey and reported in the *Vancouver Sun* of May 8.

² See http://www.worldnetdaily.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=59319

³ See the report by Lorne Gunther in the *National Post* of January 7, 2008

⁴ For example, "Another Ice Age?" *Time*, June 24, 1974

⁵ Joseph Farah, *Stop the Presses!* (Los Angeles: WND Books, 2007), 246

⁶ Al Gore, *Earth in the Balance* (New York: Plume, 1993), 260



H. Alkema



Rev. H. Alkema is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Houston, British Columbia
hendrik.alkema@canrc.org

God's Life-Giving Love



MATTHEW 13:52

“. . . as you lay there in your blood I said to you, ‘Live!’”

Ezekiel 16:6b

The picture Ezekiel paints by means of allegory in the early part of chapter 16 is a striking one. Birth can indeed be a messy business, but this is quite something! A female child is born and upon birth she is neglected and discarded. Unwashed, unkept, and unloved, she is thrown into the open field, presumably left to die. The reason for this treatment is given at the end of verse five: “On the day you were born, you were despised.”

Who is this child, treated in such an atrocious and inexcusable manner? And who could be so callous as to treat anyone in this fashion? The description is enough to make your blood boil in anger, or your heart cringe with sadness.

Equipped with the authority and power of the Word of the Lord, Ezekiel is sent to confront the people of God. Although verse one speaks specifically about Jerusalem, the story is an account of God's dealings with his people as a whole. They have spurned the Lord with their disobedience and now God is reminding Israel of how *He* has treated *them*.

Israel is the child. The figurative birth of Israel refers to the period of enslavement and oppression in Egypt, when the nation came into being. It was a terrible time, marked by cruel and oppressive masters who made the lives of the people bitter (Exodus 1:11-14).

As the allegory continues (v 6), it is God Himself who saw Israel in her misery, completely unable to help herself, and destined for death. While she wallows in the depths of her suffering, God speaks one word to her: *Live!* It is not a wish, but a command. God calls into existence a new reality for his people simply by the power of his Word. God commands and Israel passes from death to life. This remarkably brief decree demonstrates the power and the quality of God's life-giving love.

Notice the elements of God's love. First of all, in his compassion and grace, God loves the *unloved*. The child in this story had an ungodly ancestry and background, was unwanted, had no future, and yet God showed love and compassion. Where others would reject and find fault, God looks down in mercy. In complete contrast to the love we hear so much about today in our society, the Lord's love is not deserved, or conditional. It cannot be earned.

Secondly, God also loves the *unlovely*. Imagine the picture of that abandoned newborn lying in the field, kicking in its blood. What a wretched sight. Our awesome God is not deterred or put off by this! We tend to love and admire that which is beautiful, but God's love has much more depth and substance.

These words of Ezekiel are reminiscent of Moses' words

spoken to the Israelites on the verge of entering the Promised Land. God did not choose his people because they were more numerous or attractive than others, but explicitly because *He loved them* (Deut 7:7-8). Our society today tells us we have to be all kinds of things before we can expect anyone to take any interest in us. This passage teaches us that we do not have to *be* or *have* anything to earn God's love. He gives it to us simply because he chooses to and that is a wonderful comfort!

Finally, God's life-giving love is a *liberating* love. Israel was rescued from bondage and slavery in Egypt, the representation of slavery to sin. God called them out and rescued them so that they could serve him freely. The sending of God's Son is the ultimate expression of God's life-giving love, for it is in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that freedom from sin for God's children has been assured. He is our life (Col 3:4). We are given new life in Christ so that we can serve the Lord with joy and thankfulness, in response to his unfathomable love.

In our world today, and particularly this time of year, we are saturated with warped and weak messages about what love is. But we may point to the love of our God, and say: this is *real* love.





Rev. W.L. Bredenhof is co-pastor of the Canadian Reformed Church at Langley, British Columbia
wbredenh@telus.net

A Guide to Reformed Worship (Part 6) – The Collection

Historically speaking, the offertory or collection has not had a clear right to be an element in the public worship of God's people. Looking back to the Reformers, Martin Bucer believed that it was one of the four essential elements of the regular Christian liturgy (the others being preaching, prayer, and the Lord's Supper). Calvin, however, believed differently: "There are three things that our Lord has commanded us to observe in our assemblies of worship: the preaching of his Word, public prayers and the administration of the sacraments." While it is conceivable that Calvin included the giving of alms with the weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper (which he advocated), this is nowhere made explicitly clear.

The apparent lack of consensus among the Reformers continued into the following centuries. To this day, many Presbyterian churches (among them our sisters in the Free Church of Scotland) do not have the collection as a part of the service. Rather, they will often have a collection plate at the back where the congregation can give their offerings either before or after the service. Closer to home, Dr. K. Deddens related how the Reformed churches in the Dutch province of Zeeland even in the beginning of

the twentieth century did not have the offertory as a separate element of the worship services.

All of the above would agree that God's Word gives clear direction that the church of God is to take offerings, especially for the needy. In the Old Testament already, we find evidence of this sort of thing. 1 Chronicles 16:29 says, "Bring an offering and come before him." Likewise, Deuteronomy 16:17 reads, "No man should appear before the Lord empty-handed: each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the Lord your God has blessed you." Coming to the New Testament, we find passages like 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, where Paul gives the same orders to the church of Corinth that he did for the churches of Galatia: "On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come." Based on the biblical evidence, all the churches descended from the Reformation have insisted on a collection of some sort in the life of the church.

An element or not?

The question that needs to be determined is whether it is properly an element of the worship

service. If we look at the passages I mentioned above, I believe a solid case can be made for the inclusion of the offertory in our worship. For instance, the Old Testament passages speak about bringing these offerings into God's presence. This was a reference to the special presence of God in the temple, a presence which is reflected today in God's presence in public worship. In 1 Corinthians 16:1-2, Paul speaks about the collections as something active taking place when God's people gather together on the Lord's Day. The collections are not a passive item that takes place at the back of the church, but rather an activity in the assembly. Taken together, a case can be made out of "good and necessary consequence" for the inclusion of the offertory as a separate element of public worship.

As such, the offertory is part of man's response of thanksgiving to God for the gospel of Jesus Christ (which is why it is best located after the sermon). It is unusual among the responsive elements in that it is the only one that does not directly involve words. Here we communicate something with our actions, by putting some money into a black bag. Nevertheless, there is often a song specifically appended to this element to

express in words what we have also expressed with our actions. There can be no objection to this practice and in fact, it may help to focus our minds on the fact that the offertory is indeed an act of worship.

Practical considerations

We can now consider a couple of the practical aspects of the offertory. Usually the offertory is introduced with some basic words such as, "You now have the opportunity to show your thankfulness with your offerings" or words to that effect. From time to time, it may be wise and helpful for the minister to introduce the offering with an appropriate Scripture passage which illustrates that the call to make an offering is indeed something that originates with God and not with man. Whatever words are chosen, as congregation members we ought to be focusing carefully on them so that this element does not become a matter of formalized ritual where we give no thought to what we are doing.

I wonder how many of us give any thought to one of the most unique features of a Reformed worship service: the black collection bag. Speaking broadly, in most churches where collections are taken, a plate of some sort is typically used. Reformed churches of a Dutch background are unique for their use of a black bag. But more than some sort of cultural expression, these black bags express a biblical principle: "But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you" (Matt 6:3-4). While it may seem strange to newcomers, it quickly becomes apparent that the black collections bags are a wise way of implementing a biblical principle.

Another biblical principle that needs our attention when we consider the offertory is that God wants our hearts to be focused on Him. In Matthew 15:8, the Lord Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees and He quotes Isaiah 29:13, "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." Surveying what goes on during the offertory in an average worship service, we might paraphrase that,

The offertory is part of man's response of thanksgiving to God for the gospel of Jesus Christ

"This people honours me with their money, but their heart is far from me." Many seem to view the offertory as a time for conversation and even for joking around. This sort of behaviour does not fit with an understanding of the offering as *an act of worship*. Yes, the organ may be playing, the minister may be silent, but that does not mean that it is a time for conversation. Rather, it is still a time for worship where God's people should be actively focusing their minds and hearts on Him. If you think about it: how are we responding to God in thankfulness when we are conversing with one another about things that usually have nothing to do with the worship of God? I encourage readers to use this time to reflect on God's blessings, both for themselves individually and, especially, for the congregation as a whole.

Finally, a word needs to be said about the difference between the offering taken for the needy and the regular voluntary contributions. Even adult believers who have done profession of faith

sometimes do not understand this important difference. Usually the collections taken during the worship services are for the needy and for other worthy causes where the compassion and charity of Christ can be shown through the deacons. The money that goes in the collection has absolutely nothing to do with the support for the church building, for the pastor's stipend, for the heating bills, for the federational assessments, and so forth. That money comes from the regular voluntary contributions of the church members. In our churches those contributions are made with envelopes – in some places the envelopes can be placed in the regular collections, while in other places there is a special box for the envelopes to be placed. But no matter what the arrangement, those envelopes end up with the Committee of Administration rather than the deacons. These are the contributions that are necessary for the support of the church. More could be said on this matter of regular voluntary contributions, but it will have to wait for some other time.

In my next installment, I hope to conclude our look at the regular worship services with the concluding elements. Following that, I will write about the sacraments and then finally about the practice of having two worship services.

Footnote:

The quote from Calvin comes by way of Hughes Oliphant Old in his dissertation, *The Patristic Roots of Reformed Worship* (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1975), p.184. The reference to Dr. K. Deddens is to his book *Where Everything Points to Him* (Neerlandia: Inheritance, 1993), p.148.





Rev. Th.E. Lodder is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Cloverdale, British Columbia
thlodder@telus.net

Improving the Church's Song

Get involved!

Since Synod 2007 the churches have been invited to get involved in all the stages of the revision process of the Anglo-Genevan Psalter and to provide their input to the Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise* (SCBP). This is a good thing. Those who sing from the *Book of Praise* shouldn't feel as though what they sing in the worship services is the business only of a select group of experts.

Special expertise should certainly be utilized, as it was in the Old Covenant. Think of Bezalel and Asaph (Exodus 31; 1 Chronicles 16). But the Holy Spirit has anointed all his people (1 John 2:20, 27). Just as Bezalel and Asaph couldn't accomplish what they did without the assistance of a great number of people (Exodus 36; 1 Chronicles 25), so the experts and specialists appointed by the churches today need our help when we can offer it.

Personally, I wonder about the synodical decision that church members shouldn't submit their comments directly to the committee, but only via their consistories. That just seems a little bureaucratic to me. A person's request will have more weight, perhaps, if it has been endorsed by his consistory, and a member would be wise to go to consistory first. But what if that particular consistory refuses to pass on

something that a member or a group of members would really like to convey to the committee? There will always be those who will abuse the system, but bureaucracy isn't the solution.

Improved yet familiar

We can be happy that with both of these Psalms, as appears to be the case with all of the proposed revisions thus far, an attempt has been made to remain as close to the older versifications which have become familiar. This will make relearning them less onerous.

Psalm 8

This Psalm sings well as revised, except for the presence of one letter, and the size of another. I'm referring to the word "gods" in stanza 4. In this stanza an interpretive change was made. Upon a closer exegetical study of Psalm 8, the choice that was made in the 1972 edition is certainly preferable in my opinion, namely "God."

I defer, however, to the Hebrew expert at our Theological College, Dr. Van Dam, who confirmed this preference. When I consulted him about this, he had already responded to a similar inquiry by the SCBP. He wrote:

This passage is a difficult one to translate in part because the ancient Greek translation (Septuagint) gives the

interpretative translation "angels" which is reflected in Hebrews 2:7. The fact that the Septuagint rendering is quoted in Hebrews 2:7 gives that translation a certain legitimacy. The King James and the States General (Statenvertaling) translations, for example, follow it. I would definitely not use the translation "gods" as it creates more problems than it solves and in the context is dubious at best.

In my opinion, it would be best to translate literally: "God," referring to the true God. This is the normal translation of the Hebrew, the default setting so to speak. The point seems to be that Psalm 8 alludes to man's being created in the image of God. He is and was not God, but "only" image of God, representative of God on earth. (The same Hebrew term for God is used in Gen 1:27.) The translation "you have made him a little lower than God" should be understood in this light. Indeed, the words that follow: "You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet" reinforce this understanding.

Translations have been torn between a desire to be literal ("God" as in the NASB and RSV) and a desire to avoid the

Church News

Called and accepted the call (for the second time) to the church of Attercliffe, Ontario:

Rev. J. Huijgen

of Burlington-Waterdown, Ontario.

Declined the call to Owen Sound, Ontario:

Rev. W. Slomp

of Edmonton (Immanuel), Alberta.

Declined the call to Winnipeg-Grace, Manitoba:

Rev. C.J. VanderVelde

of Tintern, Ontario.

impression that man is somehow almost God, thus eliminating the Creator-creature distinction. This latter consideration probably motivated the Septuagint's translation "angels" and may also be behind the renderings "heavenly beings" (NIV).

Making the change from "gods" to "God" would be relatively easy, since it wouldn't require a total reworking of the poetry.

Psalm 81

The revision from the 1972 version is an improvement. Many

of the stanzas are the same.

One glaring omission in the 1972 version in stanza 9, however, is righted. The 1972 is versified thus:

Sing to Me your laud.
Out of Egypt's power
I, the LORD your God,
Rescued Israel;
So on you as well
Blessings I will shower.

The NIV reads as follows in verse 10: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt. Open wide your mouth and I will fill it." The improvement is obvious:

I, the LORD, am He
Who from Egypt freed you.

Place your trust in Me;
Open your mouth wide;
With what I provide
I will richly feed you.

Most of the other stanzas have only minor changes, all of them improvements. For example, "I gave you My law" replaces the more archaic "Did I give My law."

Get involved, but don't wait too long!

Since the SCBP has a timeline to work with, consistories should pass on any comments by March 12, 2007, in accordance with the request of the committee. I suspect that the SCBP will receive mostly favourable comments on the new versification of Psalm 81, if any at all. The proposed revision of Psalm 8, however, is sure to generate a lot of responses. But then again, that's how God's anointing works!



News from the Women's Savings Action

Collection

At the College Evening held on September 7, 2007, we were able to hand the Principal of the Theological College a cheque in the amount of \$30,000 from the Women's Savings Action. It is with great thankfulness to the Lord that we can announce that in the book year 2006/2007 an amount of \$33,977.75 was collected for the library. We want to thank all of you who contributed financially, and also those who gave of their time and effort, to reach this wonderful result. The funds provided by the Women's Savings Action are the main source of income for the acquisition of books and magazines.

A look in the library

However, for the professors and students the library is far more than a place to borrow a book or read a magazine. To see that, let us take a short tour of the library. When you come in through the main entrance to the library, there is a computer immediately to your right. That is the self serve station for anyone with a library card to check out the books they want to borrow. Nearby there are two handmade wooden carts for the books that are being returned. These carts were specially made years ago by Mr. C. Walinga, who used to live close to the College. But many books are used in the

library building itself. There are many spots for the students to sit and study or write papers. To the right there is a large table where a number of students can sit and work together or where they can work a bit "gezellig," in the company of others. From there you can see people enter and leave the library and people regularly walk past there on their way to Margaret Van der Velde, the librarian. The only thing missing there is a Tim Hortons. For those who prefer or need their own space and a quiet atmosphere, there are the individual carrels to the left. A number of students can work in their own space, for there is ample room to put the books they need and their laptop. These carrels are hidden away a bit behind rows of book cases, so that there is less distraction from people walking past. And if people want even more quiet, they can go downstairs. There are worktables and even less traffic, for this is where the books that can be taken out are stored; only people looking for books come there.

Both upstairs and downstairs there are several computers. These are mainly used to look up books via the catalogue, but they also work for an Internet search or even a quick email check. The office and the workroom of the librarian are also upstairs. Anyone who needs help finding information or library resources can go to Margaret, who

has helped many people find what they needed. On this level a photocopier can also be found, more convenient than going to a convenience store, and definitely less smudgy!!!

In thankfulness

In short, the library is used almost daily by many professors, students, and also ministers. It is great that we can play an important role in the equipping of many servants of the Lord for their daily work. The Lord gives us this opportunity to do this in freedom and we make use of it in thankfulness.

The Board:

President:

Mrs. Joanne Van Dam
642 Ramsgate Road
Burlington, ON L7N 2Y1
Ph. 905-634-0593
E-mail: jvandam@cogeco.ca

Secretary:

Mrs. Dinie Gootjes
10 Vespari Place,
Hamilton, ON L9C 6Y5
Ph. 905-387-9399
E-mail: gdinie@hotmail.com

Treasurer:

Mrs. Christine Nienhuis
36 Hopewell Crescent
Stoney Creek, ON L8J 1P4
Ph. 905-561-4220
E-mail: hnienhuis@sympatico.ca

Women's Savings Action

Contributions for the year July 1, 2006 to June 30, 2007
(With comparative figures for the previous year)

Congregation	2007	2006	Congregation	2007	2006
Abbotsford	—	—	Hamilton	1779.93	1339.17
Aldergrove	1350.00	—	Houston	265.00	—
Ancaster	1348.85	990.48	Kerwood	290.00	344.00
Attercliffe	807.00	938.00	Langley	2080.00	1900.00
Barrhead	220.00	290.00	Langley/Willoughby Heights	960.00	805.00
Brampton	415.50	313.50	Lincoln	690.00	1012.85
Burlington/Ebenezer	1131.20	302.00	London	—	180.00
Burlington/Fellowship	335.00	402.00	Lynden	652.52	776.05
Burlington/Waterdown	830.00	990.00	Neerlandia	—	300.00
Calgary	—	459.00	Orangeville	91.50	538.25
Carman/East	405.00	494.00	Ottawa	150.00	150.00
Carman/West	442.00	287.50	Owen Sound	1310.00	745.00
Chatham	620.00	625.00	Smithers	795.00	699.90
Chilliwack	573.00	620.00	Smithville	1360.70	1435.23
Cloverdale	1280.00	75.00	Springcreek	—	367.50
Coaldale	615.00	460.00	St. Albert	1510.32	1437.03
Dunnville/Wainfleet	805.50	462.00	Surrey	432.50	1196.00
Edmonton/Immanuel	1462.50	1908.50	Taber	285.00	345.00
Edmonton/Providence	1085.00	1060.00	Toronto	616.90	—
Elora	326.75	449.00	Vernon	534.75	429.00
Fergus/North	99.05	113.00	Winnipeg/Grace	671.00	625.00
Fergus/South (Maranatha)	473.00	289.30	Winnipeg/Redeemer	1073.87	872.50
Flamborough	—	—	Yarrow	—	—
Glanbrook	693.20	781.65	Australia	1217.70	—
Grand Rapids	—	—			
Grand Valley	238.61	217.48	Royalties Selles	—	450.11
Grassie	478.90	306.72			
Guelph	176.00	1355.00	Total Collected	33,977.75	31,136.72

Keith Sikkema

Mr. Keith Sikkema is principal of Dufferin Area Christian School in Orangeville, Ontario
ksikkema@istop.com

Peregrine Survey



The previous peregrine survey focused on the race in which we find ourselves as we seek to serve the Lord and guide our students to do the same. When we are in the starting blocks, we look at the track ahead of us, concentrate on the placement of our feet, control our breathing, and wait for the pistol to fire the starting shot. Where are we, now that the race has gone on for some four or five months? Are we still as focused as we were in August and September? Is our hope still in the Lord and are we soaring on eagles' wings, as Isaiah has it?

Some people asked me recently what "Peregrine Survey" means. They know of peregrine falcons, which grace our skies, stoop down at breakneck speeds to catch a juicy morsel in mid-flight, and are known for their migratory or wandering character. There is something wandering and migratory about the peregrine survey as well, as it scours things educational from school magazines between Ontario and Washington for newsworthiness and returns to home base to write it up. One time, when I signed a submission to a Dutch publication as "peregrine teacher," the editor wasn't sure what to do with it and translated it as "rondreizend docent" or wandering teacher. Interestingly, because of its Latin root, the word peregrine can also be used in the sense of "pilgrim," and I think that Guido de Brès' companion at the

gallows, Peregrine de la Grange, may have taken his name in that sense. In a way, we are pilgrims or peregrines on the way to a renewed earth and hope for the day when Christ returns. Peregrine surveys serve somewhat as markers of what we do for the education of our children as we travel that pilgrim road.

Dufferin Christian School (DCS) in Carman should not be confused with Dufferin Area Christian School (DACs) near Orangeville, and DCS has learned to check whether unexpected bills and parcels should perhaps be sent to DACs. Aside from the distance and grades taught, and their respective ages (DACs is the older sibling), there are many similarities between DCS and DACs and many other schools "in our system," as became evident from the DCS Beacon. In summary, the principal identified DCS as a school where learning takes place, but particularly a Christian place. He continued,

Christian schools want to help teach the way of life Jesus taught – everyday, in all subjects. But a Christian school is not a protective fish-bowl for children. Rather, it's a total plunge into the study of God's marvelous world. Yet, when the currents of different beliefs and philosophies swirl around our young ones, Christian schools try to help give children the

confidence to know where they're going. A Christian school is a community, in which Christian love and concern are woven into the task of learning [that] complements the Christian home and church. A community in which time and talent are regarded as given by God to be used in His service ... A Christian school truly can be a community because it is rooted in the knowledge that Christ is the Lord of Creation and Life. When one sees that the school is truly part of our community then it is evident that we all have a relationship with one another ... and I would like to encourage everybody who is part of this learning community to become involved. . . .

Here is one thing that our schools have in common: a strong reliance on the Lord and a continuous seeking of his blessing. May He continue to grant us that blessing.

Mini-conference

After ICRE-II ended in Sumas, Washington, some Dutch delegates travelled to Ontario to learn more about education in Canada. They acknowledged that good education does not require doing things the Dutch way. It is interesting to look in the mirror and see what others observe about the race we run. On Wednesday, October 3, a mini wrap-up conference was held at the CCRTC in Hamilton. Here, the

Dutch delegates shared their impressions about the race of our schools as pearls or puzzles and identified some questions for further discussion.

As for pearls, they noted that our schools excel in teacher drive and passion, and that they have a strong sense of community. The identity as Reformed schools is obvious: the Dutch guests could see it, hear it, feel it. There was a note of jealousy in this observation, no doubt given in part by their fading reality of the triangle of home, church, and school. The visitors zoomed in on how and why we practice “inclusive education” (incorporating special needs students in our regular classrooms). They saw our schools as “clean, peaceful, structured, and respectful” and were blown away by the space in and around our schools.

The Dutch guests were puzzled by the almost impenetrable high walls of protection we build around our students. They wondered how the schools could be a salt and a light to the outside when they only shine inside. In response, reference was made to the involvement of young people in endeavours like Campfire!, Streetlight, and Faithworks trips. This difference also needs to be seen in light of the role we ascribe to the school: should it prepare students for their cultural mandate, or also serve to reach out to those living in darkness? The Dutch visitors found our education predominantly teacher-directed, with a greater emphasis on teaching content (what?) than on skills (how?). (Someone did comment that their picture would have been very different if they had also come in the afternoon.) They wondered whether our curriculum should not



steer the students more towards independence, with greater emphasis on meeting and developing their unique needs and strengths. Dutch schools have much more interaction between students, with implications for behaviour and discipline standards. It was recognized that factors like our view of the child come into the picture here. Finally, the Dutch visitors noticed that we put much more effort in helping students with learning difficulties than in meeting the needs of gifted children. This matter does receive attention, but logistics and means contribute to the lack of progress.

Questions

The Dutch visitors posed three questions for further discussion and I address each question in turn, together with a summary statement. The first question was: how can we explore (and act on our findings) that each child is unique? Schools in The Netherlands have gone rather far in this direction and one Dutch principal noted that parents may not show up for a school society membership meeting, but will pick up the phone to tell a teacher how to teach their

unique child. In some cases she would respond that parents had better look for another school. The flip-side of this reality is that schools need to advertise their unique approaches to attract students. The Dutch position on the nature of the child was characterized as the view that they will, can, and want to learn and the Canadian position as leaning towards preventing them from failing to learn. One discussion group summarized that the uniqueness of the child calls for a unique approach that must fit within the covenant context of promise and thankful obedience. This must prepare the child to radiate outwards what it has received in the classroom, in the school, and in the world, and has an impact on the methodology the teacher uses.

Another question related to governance: who leads and who should lead the school? Apart from six independent schools, the Dutch model works with eighteen school-clusters, each with a superintendent who sees to it that the regional board's policies get executed locally under the direction of a “location principal.”

Involvement of local boards and committees is minimal and the role of the parents is diminishing (although an effort is underway to address this). Parental schools expect a high degree of involvement of the local community in the direction the school takes – much like we have it in arrangements with volunteers, boards, and committees who work together with the principal and staff. If the role of parents in the school diminishes, the school may begin to set its own direction. If it observes a need for change, will it present this to the parents for consideration, or will it start pushing its own agenda? How much policy development is initiated by the school and how much by parents or by the board or its committees? Meanwhile, one of the Dutch superintendents expressed surprise that I would even bring this matter to the attention of the parent community. The second discussion group summarized that the role of the board is local at the school in Canada and distant in The Netherlands. For both cultures, the identity of Reformed education remains the most important focus, and this identity has some static core elements (such as our confessions), but also evolves dynamically over time.

A final question was posed in the form of a German catch-phrase: should the school be involved in "Führen oder wachsen lassen," that is, directing and steering the children or watching them grow? It appeared that Dutch schools go more for the latter position, while the Canadian schools go for the former. The third discussion group presented that all our children belong, and we must cater to them all as they need it, to the best of our ability.



In Canada

The issues addressed with the Dutch visitors are alive and well in this country.

Consider the matter of governance. The Manitoba government no longer allows a committee of the board to represent the parents as official "parent advisory board" or "advisory council for school leadership." The school board consists entirely of parents, but this council usually also includes a teacher and a high school student as ex-officio members and may include special interest members of the community. DCS in Manitoba is looking into ways to comply with the redesigned expectations.

Consider the matter of vision and how we see the role of our schools. PICS (Edmonton) has a new vision of "LIFE" - Learning In Faith Everyday, through enthusiastic learning, caring people, and a nurturing community. The president reports that it aims to move from being a good school to becoming a great

school – with much prayer, under the umbrella of God's grace. It has also embarked on an exciting program of renewal in line with this new vision statement.

Consider the matter of teaching. The BC Ministry of Education is making it harder for out-of-province educators to come and teach in BC's independent schools. Temporary letters of permission to teach will only be issued if everything will "probably be alright," and may require thirty hour credits in a recognized teacher education program and practicum for aspiring teachers. *The Eagle* (John Calvin School, Yarrow) suggests to "get all your certification ducks in a row, if possible, before applying." Meanwhile, Covenant College in Hamilton continues to explore avenues to become accredited, so its graduates will be certified. Furthermore, across the continent, there is concern about the impending shortage of principals and vice-principals. May the staffing needs of each school be filled with qualified teachers who are also committed to telling the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord (Psalm 78).

We are running a race. Do we know where the race goes, who our coaches are, how we should run, and who is allowed to participate? What do we hear from the sidelines and where would the authorities have us go? In the end, consider the quote from the DCS principal in the beginning of this article.

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

Further Discussion

Dear Editor,

Rev Souman writes in the November 23, 2007 issue of *Clarion* that on Saturday, May 19, 2007, Synod Smithers made an important decision. Rev Souman calls the decision an important one. When I read it the first time I did not consider it an important decision but rather an unfortunate and even an incorrect one. I was very pleased to read Rev J. L. van Popta's concerns in the October 12, 2007 issue of *Clarion*. I also appreciated the comment made by Rev. VanOene in the speech he delivered to a study society meeting in British Columbia. What I really appreciated in both Rev. van Popta's article as well as Rev VanOene's speech, was the very strong, straightforward, and unambiguous language used.

A few questions come to mind as I review the Church Order as well as decisions made by previous synods. The Church Order, in Article 19, states, "The churches shall maintain an institution for the training of the ministry." Article 29 also uses the word "maintained." Four kinds of assemblies shall be maintained. The key word, therefore, is "maintained." How should we understand that word? Does that mean that the churches need to provide the financial resources to operate a school? Or does it also imply responsibility and accountability?

When Article 29 uses the word "maintain" we all know that our churches understood this "maintenance" of four assemblies in such a way that the authority for all decisions rested where it belonged, i.e. with the local consistory. So why would anyone think that when Article 19 uses the word "maintained" it means maintenance without responsibility and accountability? The local consistories ensure that there are

men appointed to attend various assemblies and the local consistory ensures that there is sufficient capital to run a theological school. The authority of the assemblies rests back in the local consistory and the authority for the operation of that school rests back in the consistory.

Synod Chatham appeared to understand this principle quite well when it mandated the unity committee to work with the understanding that there must be a theological school that is clearly supervised and operated by the churches. Actually, both committees seemed to understand this as well. At least, the joint report made to Synod Chatham states that both parties had agreed that it is the task of the churches to educate their ministers and the churches should work towards a school that is accountable to the churches. And in its considerations Synod Smithers states emphatically that the principle remains: "The churches are responsible for the training of the ministers."

The only question that remains is, how can Synod Smithers say that the churches are "responsible" for the training of the ministers, but this training can take place in a school that is owned by a trust, or a corporation; where the professors are hired by and accountable to that trust or corporation; where students are accepted by and accountable to that trust or corporation. I understand Rev J. L. van Popta very well when he writes, "We need to maintain the principle that the church should control the education of its ministers." I understand Rev VanOene when he writes, "Yet the united churches maintained the principle that the churches should have their own institution." There is both a *responsibility* and *accountability* for the education of

its ministers.

But, I cannot understand that in its consideration 3.3 Synod can state that the churches are responsible for the education of its ministers but in almost the same breath it transfers the real responsibility when it determines that this does not imply a school that is accountable to the churches. Synod Smithers and Rev. Souman both used a very old argument when they want to change something that is no longer in vogue. They ask the question, "Where does it say in the Bible that I must do this or that?"

We have been provided with a mandate: the churches are responsible for the education of their ministers. Why do we not simply accept this and move forward? It appears to me that Synod wanted unity at any cost. I also think that the churches all agreed to the words in Article 19 of the Church Order. Over the last few synods, each time, with the exception of the last meeting, the churches *agreed* that they must maintain a school to educate their ministers. But suddenly, for the sake of unity, we change the meaning of this responsibility so that the education of the ministers should be the responsibility of the churches but that this responsibility does not include accountability. This I do not understand.

I read Rev Souman's arguments carefully and I still do not understand. How are we maintaining and strengthening the principle and at the same time giving up the practice that goes with the principle? Responsibility must include accountability. I do not understand how there can be accountability by a theological school to the churches if that school is not of the churches. I am more firmly convinced than before, when it dealt with the matter of the

theological education of the ministers, Synod Smithers made not just an unfortunate decision, but a very wrong decision.

And, if I may be permitted one little promotional line, I would encourage all who are interested in some history of this matter to read once again Rev VanOene's book, *Patrimony Profile*. To the best of my recollection, no one has ever questioned the veracity of this book and I can only say that I wish more of us knew a little of our history. I want to publicly thank you Rev VanOene, for providing the churches with this phenomenal work.

*John Voorhorst
Coaldale, Alberta*

Response to Br. Voorhorst:

The response of Br. Voorhorst to my article shows again how important it is to read carefully and not to put words in someone's mouth which he didn't say (or write). To make it clear to Br. Voorhorst: neither Synod Smithers, nor I, ever denied that the churches are responsible for maintaining an institution for the training of the ministry. Synod Smithers as well as Synod Schererville of the URCNA went even further and not only said that the churches shall maintain an institution, but even agreed in the first of the six principles that it is the task of the churches to train ministers. That it is the task of the churches not only means that the churches shall maintain it, but also that they are completely responsible for it. I think I made this abundantly clear in my article and I can only advise Br. Voorhorst to read both my article and the Acts of Synod Smithers again, and really carefully.

The key word is therefore not "maintained," as Br. Voorhorst suggests, but "the churches" in Article 19 of the Church Order. If I follow Br. Voorhorst's line of thinking, then Article 19 would not just mean what it says, that is, "the churches," but, according to him, it must mean the churches through their general synod. Br. Voorhorst adds something to the Church

Order. If his interpretation would be the only correct one, then the financial support for the students of theology should go through general synod (Article 20), as should mission work (Article 51).

What I made clear in my article was that there are more ways for the churches to fulfill their responsibility to train brothers for the ministry. Br. Voorhorst wants to keep the current practice, where general synod appoints the board of governors and the professors and the board of governors assesses the churches with an amount per communicant member. I explained that this practice only came into being here in Canada in the twentieth century; now I add that it was even before our Dutch sister churches shifted to this way of raising funds for theological training. I showed from history that there have been different ways. Before 1854, the churches of the secession also had their schools. There were several schools all over the country, maintained either directly by churches or through ecclesiastical assemblies. May I advise you, Br. Voorhorst, to study some more church history and go further back than only the history of our Canadian Reformed Churches? The churches of the Secession decided to establish one school for all the churches in the country because it was beneficial and necessary to do so. It was because of the situation in those days, in the churches of the secession, that one minister often had to serve several churches and at the same time had the task to train brothers for the ministry. In that situation it would be better and more efficient to work together.

Br. Voorhorst accuses Synod Smithers of wanting unity at any cost. I can only say: Br. Voorhorst, be careful in what you say and keep the ninth commandment and Lord's Day 43 in mind. You cannot prove what you wrote. The purpose of my article was to defend and promote the honour and reputation of General Synod Smithers and its delegates and I will continue to do so if necessary. It is easy, of course,

to first place words in someone's mouth (or in this case a synod), words which he did not say, and then score points by attacking him on those words. However, it does not build up. Let it be very clear, Br. Voorhorst: Synod Smithers maintained the principle that it is the task of the churches to train ministers, with which even Synod Schererville of the URCNA agreed. At the same time, Synod said that the current practice, which is only a practice, although a good practice, should not be an impediment for ecclesiastical unity. Synod saw the commandment for ecclesiastical unity of true believers as a divine command, as does Article 28 of the Belgic Confession.

I can imagine that the churches will find another way of maintaining an institution for the ministry, in which the churches keep complete responsibility for this institution. Moreover, I can also imagine that in our search we find a way in which the churches are even more directly involved in the work at and for the college than they are in the present practice. That the present practice is not perfect and can be improved was something that came up at the Synod Smithers as well. There was a request from one of the churches if there could be more input from the churches in the appointment of professors (see Article 130, 3.6). Moreover, history has shown that working with assessments, for instance, is not the best way of keeping church members involved. For more than a century, the churches in The Netherlands collected the funds for their theological institution through free will offerings and not through assessments. As I showed in my article, the appointment of governors also happened differently in the situation directly after 1854.

We have some serious issues to deal with in our contacts with the URCNA and I really hope that we will spend our time and energy on that instead of having to straighten out what exactly General Synod Smithers decided.

Regards, A. Souman

