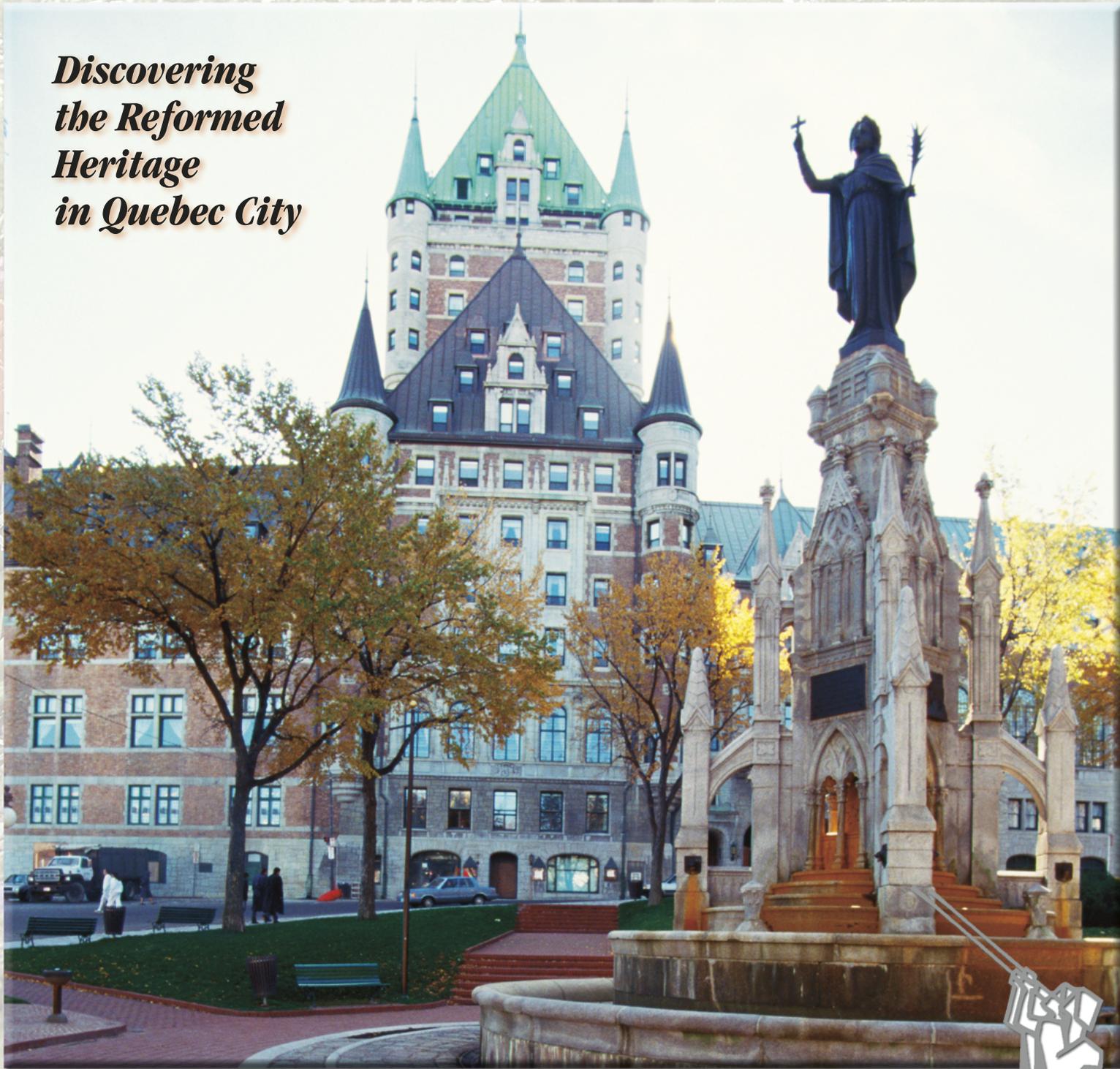


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Discovering the Reformed Heritage in Quebec City



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- Are Christians Sinners or Not?





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A Revised Psalter

Canadian Reformed people have grown to love their psalter

Among the most significant decisions taken by the last synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches (held in Smithers, 2007), are surely those concerning the psalms and hymns which we sing during the worship services.

With respect to the psalter, the synod decided to initiate a review of all 150 psalms which we currently have in the *Book of Praise*. The synod mandated the Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise* to engage Dr. W. Helder to make revisions of the psalms. At the time that this article is written, a hundred revised psalms have already been posted on the website of the committee: www.bookofpraise.ca.

With respect to the hymnal, the synod adopted a collection of twenty-eight new hymns (the so-called *Augment*). These hymns are to be tested by the churches for a period of three years after which the next synod will take a decision about it.

These are momentous decisions indeed! In this article I would like to make some comments about the revision of the psalter.

The psalter

Since 1972 the Canadian Reformed Churches have been able to sing all 150 psalms on the Genevan melodies. After a few early revisions, a version of the 150 psalms was adopted in the 1980s and has been used ever since.

Over the years Canadian Reformed people have grown to love their psalter, and rightly so. One reason is the *melodies*: the Genevan melodies combine musical beauty with a certain kind of dignity which makes them very fitting to be used in congregational worship. Another reason is the *words*: the current

psalter contains many memorable lines which rephrase the original text of the psalms faithfully.

Even if we agree that the psalter is in need of revision, we appreciate the work of brothers such as the late Rev. G. vanDooren and Br. M. de Groot, who were driving forces behind the project, as well as the first generation of brothers that made the rhymings of the psalms on the Genevan melodies (Van der Kamp, Westra, Van Oene, Helder, and others).

At the same time, it has become clear that the psalter is in need of revision. As Synod observed, our current *Book of Praise* uses "out-of-date wording." In its report to Synod the Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise* included some examples of psalm stanzas that use archaic language, e.g. Psalm 17:2:

LORD, Thou hast probed and tried my heart,
And Thou by night dost test and weigh me.
Thou findest when Thou dost assay me
That I in evil take no part.

More examples could be added:

Psalm 8:2 – "Thus breakest Thou the adversary's force and thwartest Thou the evildoer's course."

Psalm 19:6 – "All this Thy servant prays of Thee who scanst his ways."

Psalm 51:4 – "Let nought me from Thy Holy Spirit sever."

Psalm 68:4 – "Rain in abundance Thou, O God, upon Thy host didst shed abroad, Thy heritage reviving."

Psalm 101:4 – "The proud of eye and heart I will not suffer."

Psalm 123:2 – "Our soul is sated with the scorn and chiding of those at ease abiding."



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We agree with the Committee that this kind of language is so archaic that it creates distance and makes the message obscure instead of helping the congregation to understand what it sings. In addition, it should be mentioned that the rhymings are sometimes too verbose, in the sense that words and ideas are added that are not found in the original biblical text. To stay with the given examples, Psalm 8 does not refer to God "thwarting the evildoer's course," and Psalm 19 does not refer to Him "scanning" our ways.

More could be mentioned. There are words in the psalter that may be found in the dictionary but not in contemporary language. We sing about "furious foemen" (Psalm 3:3) who "wantonly" oppress God's children (3:1). There are references to "solemn throngs" (Psalm 68:10) and to the "girth" of God's kingdom (Psalm 47:1). How many of us use such words, or even know what they mean?

All this is not mentioned to discredit the current version of the psalter. We should take into account that our psalter was made during the 1980s. During those years our churches were still using older Bible translations such as the KJV and the RSV. The brothers who made the early versions of the psalter simply used the language that was being used at the time.

In the meantime the NIV has become the Bible translation that is predominantly used in our churches and as a result there has been a significant change in the "religious language" that is used during worship services. A gap has emerged between the language that is used in the *Book of Praise* and the language that is commonly used in sermons and prayers. This gap should be bridged by way of modernizing the language in the *Book of Praise* generally and the psalter more specifically.

Necessary

One draw-back of doing a revision of the psalter is obviously the fact that many people know the current psalm versions. Whether archaic or not, many people – especially our elderly brothers and sisters – simply love them. Is Synod right in expecting them to make this sacrifice?

We are convinced that Synod has done the right thing in initiating a revision of our psalter, for the following reasons. In the first place, a good metrical version of the psalms should be faithful to the

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original text of the psalms, while at the same time using contemporary language that has poetic quality. Since many flaws have been pointed out with respect to our present psalter, we should try to improve that.

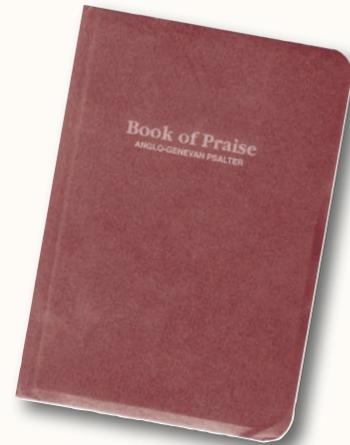
In the second place, it is important that the youth of the church should be able to sing the psalms in language which they can take to heart. Currently, our elementary school kids are still faithfully memorizing stanzas of psalms that they sometimes hardly understand. If we want to remain a psalm-singing people for generations to come, we should be using language in our psalter that is not just biblical but also contemporary.

A third reason to revise and improve the psalter is the fact that this will enhance the chances that other church federations in North America would incorporate Anglo-Genevan psalms in their songbooks. We can only expect others to appreciate the Anglo-Genevan psalter if it compares favourably with other psalters. At the moment, I fear that we may have the good melodies but in many cases not the better wording.

A gap has emerged between the language that is used in the Book of Praise and the language that is commonly used in sermons and prayers

In this connection, it may be helpful to mention that there is genuine interest for the Anglo-Genevan psalms in North America. A recently published psalter/hymnal, entitled *Cantus Christi* (Canon Press, 2002), contains some Anglo-Genevan psalms taken from our *Book of Praise*.

It may be helpful to mention here that not all the psalms are going to be revised in the same way. While there are psalms that will be revised drastically, there are others that will be changed only slightly or not changed at all. An example of the last category is Psalm 100. The "new" version of Psalm 100 is identical with the old one. Other psalms have been changed only slightly and still sound very familiar (e.g. Psalm 96).



This approach is careful and wise. While it allows us to look forward to a significantly improved psalter, there will be enough continuity between the old and the new that everyone can make the transition.

New revision

Meanwhile, Dr. Helder has been working hard at the revision of the psalms. A hundred revisions have been made available at the website of the SCBP, including a revision of the big one, Psalm 119.

I can't say that I have worked through all these new versions, but what I have seen so far makes me very happy. Some of those psalms that were in need of drastic revision have indeed improved. Just compare the current versions of Psalm 3 and 47 with the new versions that are posted on the web and you will notice how the text has improved. The new Helder-versions are closer to the original text, more direct, and less verbose than the old ones, and more contemporary in use of language.

I hope that the churches will make the most of the opportunity to use and to test the new versions. The Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise* (as well as Dr. Helder himself) are open to suggestions for correction and improvement. So let us sing the new versions during our meetings and before or during our worship services. There are various practical ways to organize this.

May the Lord grant our Brother Helder strength to be able to complete the revision of the psalter. It is my hope that the work would be completed soon, that the churches would have enough time to use and to test the new versions, and that the next synod (Burlington 2010) could adopt the revised version.



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Godly Communication



MATTHEW 13:22

“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.”

James 1:19

Communication: what a beautiful gift God has given us! This wonderful gift was given to bring Him glory and to help us live in communion with Him and with one another.

But just how do we glorify God in our communication? What does it take for us to communicate in a good way in everyday life? It takes two people: one to be quick to listen and another to be slow to speak. But are we quick to listen? Are we slow to speak? Just how is our communication in our marriages, in our families, and in the communion of saints? Is it healthy and wholesome? Does it show a good level of Christian maturity? Do we in our communication accept the Word of God that is planted in us?

As long as we sinful people are living in this world we will never experience perfect communication. Yet as believers in Jesus Christ our Lord we must strive by the power of the Spirit to improve our communication with one another. For godly communication shows our thankful love to God.

Using his servant James the Lord God addressed his dispersed people, a people who were riveted with conflict. He addressed them about how to build up communion among one another. As James wrote to his brothers in the faith, “Take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.” These words of God are most helpful and encouraging also for us.

Note well what James mentions first: “Be quick to listen.” In this way James emphasizes listening over speaking. Yet this goes against our nature! For what people are always in great demand? Who usually receives a lot of recognition, admiration, and acclaim? Those who speak well, those who express themselves eloquently and fluently.

How often do we say of another that he or she is an excellent listener? Listening is a difficult art to master. For are we really interested in listening to what the other person is saying? Do we sometimes ignore someone who is speaking, either because we think we already know what he is going to say, or because we are already thinking of how to respond? Or do we listen poorly because we are too busy?

To be quick to listen is to love your neighbour as yourself. It means taking an intense interest in the person who is speaking. His problems, concerns, questions, and suggestions are sufficiently important to be heard by you and me.

More than just hearing, listening involves trying to understand what the person is saying. We may need to ask further questions in order to confirm what we have heard. And only when we have understood what was said can we properly respond in love. Only then can we open our mouth to speak!

For James also writes: “Be slow to speak.” This instruction, too, is

about loving your neighbour as yourself. It means we should not want to speak too early, to interrupt when someone else is speaking. Being slow to speak does not mean we have taken a vow of silence; rather, God desires that we think before we speak. We should ask ourselves: “Is this the right time to speak? How will my speaking be received? What words should I use? What tone of voice should I have?” May God’s Spirit give us wisdom to speak the truth in love!

Among God’s people there is no place for careless words. As our Lord Jesus said, “I tell you that man will have to give account on the day of judgement for every careless word he has spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted and by your words you will be condemned” (Matt 12:36-37).

Such careless words are often accompanied by anger. Indeed, anger is a barrier to being quick to listen and slow to speak. Rash and reckless words of anger are prone to wound. They promote animosity and conflict. As James concludes: “Man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires of us” (1:20).

With these words of God may we be encouraged to listen and to speak in his way, bringing Him the glory and serving for one another’s well-being. In the power of the Holy Spirit may we communicate in a godly way, making for wholesome and mature communion among the saints.



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The Church Is Catholic (Part 2 of 2)

To say that the church is "catholic" means that the church of Christ is a world-wide church, encompassing the whole of history, and sharing in the fullness of God's grace in Christ. Moreover, the catholic character of the church has implications for the way in which the church views the outside. The church is called to be a light to the world, a bearer of the message which speaks of healing for the whole of mankind. To confess that it is essential for the church to be catholic, simultaneously means: taking a look at yourself and your church in the mirror!

The church and our church

Since the last few centuries, the catholicity of the church has become an awkward theme, especially because the Protestant church has broken up into so many denominations. To limit ourselves to The Netherlands: we have a book entitled *De kaart van kerkelijk Nederland* ("The Map of Ecclesiastical Holland"). Every church fellowship is described in a few pages, but the total has become a sizeable tome.

For almost every Christian, in practice the word "church" refers to the fellowship to which he or she belongs. In what way are you a

member? What is your responsibility in the church? What do you expect from the church? How does the church appear to those outside? These are questions which make us think of a certain church community. In what way this church is catholic, is not a question which quickly springs to the Christian mind.

Is "our" church the same as the catholic church?

In the church of the Reformation, this question could be fairly satisfactorily resolved. There was the *Gereformeerde* or *Hervormde* (in English both: Reformed) church and it crossed nobody's mind to hear anything different in that. It was not different. This church could have been called Christian Reformed church with no concern at all. It was the catholic, Reformed church. In Article 29 of the Belgic Confession, it was accepted that the Roman Catholic Church still existed, but with deep conviction and with good grounds, it was labelled as the false church. The true church – recognizable by the true administration of the Word

and the sacraments and by the exercise of church discipline – was that of the Reformation. This meant that the Catholic church was not truly the one which had the word "catholic" in its name.

Moreover, in those days, Anabaptists and that sort of groups were active. They are also referred to on a number of occasions in the confessions. These were just as equally on a trail which could not be that of the church of Christ.

The distinction between the true and false church, however, cannot easily be used in the middle of the discord in the church which came later. In the Reformed Churches (liberated), this was a tendency for years. Sometimes it came down to this: if a church was not immediately ready to unite with the true (liberated) church, this was reason enough to consider this church a false church. It may be clear, that making absolute this way of thinking, as this was found with Rev. Hoorn, was vigorously denounced years ago by the Reformed (liberated) synod. There now seems to be a certain embarrassment when it comes to using the words "true church."

In the meantime, the question remains of course: Is "our church"



... *Abraham Kuyper* formulated his ambitious design of the multiformity of the church.

the same as "the church," or the catholic church? Many have sought an answer to this question, also when they realized that the label "false" could not so easily be stuck onto other churches.

Multiformity?

Various attempts have been made to answer this question. Abraham Kuyper formulated his ambitious design about the multiformity of the church. To him, the diversity of churches was not a sign of the body of Christ being divided, but of the special character of the church. The diversity of the people of God cannot be expressed in one body. The existence of different churches should not accuse us, but should make us praise the greatness of God.

These thoughts have little influence today. We do not regret this. He who knows a little church history, and sees how the splits and divisions have crept into the church, will come across more lamentations than reasons for worship. There can be thankfulness about the faithfulness and obedience that God has left intact, but that a split was necessary for this – as with the Secession of 1834, cannot make a Christian cheerful.

One way in which practically the same direction is taken in our postmodern times, is one in which many people share the idea: "I myself choose a church. Where I feel good, where I feel addressed, where I fit easily, that is where I want to belong!" Individual feeling and personal taste help you find a way in the many churches. That there is so much choice, with many gradations between Reformed this or that and evangelical, is all the better. The question of *the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, the catholic church* which is God's people, Christ's body, and the temple of the Holy Spirit, means little to people at the moment. "Just as long as I feel at home. And if not – then I will look for something else."

Invisible church?

The downside of such an attitude can be found where people happily declare that the actual church is invisible. The visible church is only the human organization with all its shortcomings. There must of course be something like that; how else can there be ministers, missionary work, and all those expressions of church and Christian life which a solitary Christian cannot realize? The real church, however, is there where believers meet right across all church boundaries! The communion of the saints is the surprise which you definitely do not find in the church! Spiritual affinity and unity is sometimes much easier to find outside of the church than within it. . . that this is – fortunately – often true, I acknowledge with thankfulness!

Only, this must not be the happy ending of all church responsibility. "Long live the unity of the heart and leave the toil and moil to the church" cannot be the confession of the Christian.

Our confession also knows the invisible church. It is, however, better to speak of the invisible side of the church. The church as God sees it is not the same as the church which we see! In the church there are hypocrites, sanctimonious people, mixed in amongst the good (BC, Art 29). Moreover, the church is spread out and scattered across the entire world, but still exists in one Spirit (BC, Art 27). But that does not mean indifference as far as the "visible" church is concerned. Every believer should join the church! And he who separates himself from the church opposes God's ordinance (BC, Art 28)!

It is thus right to recognize the invisible aspect of the church. In saying this we acknowledge that we cannot see what is in the heart. Only God can do that. But the catholic church is very visible! Just as the New Testament continually speaks of very concrete, visible churches, even including their concrete and visible sins. The apostles do not distance themselves from this church! On the contrary, they wrestle for its purity; they rebuke, and comfort and they call for obedience, love, and faithfulness.

This is in any case, also for us, the way in which we should deal with the visible catholic church. The shortcomings we discover in it ask for self-reflection, certainly when we remember that the Lord



Prof. Dr. Ph. J. Hoedemaker

sees things more clearly than we do. And he sees us also as part of the picture that does not always lead only to joy. To run away and hide in the invisible is, in any case, not the way of the Spirit of Christ!

A separate covenant?

In pointing out unusual ways of approaching the catholicity of the church – sometimes thus, also the avoidance of it – a distinct vision must be mentioned.

In the nineteenth century Dr. Ph. J. Hoedemaker was intensely busy with the church. Initially, he was a Kuyper supporter, later the relationship cooled off.

Hoedemaker became the guide of the *Hervormde* grouping which distinguished itself by assuming a close connection between the church and the Dutch people. He was convinced of God's special involvement with The Netherlands. By virtue of divine election, The Netherlands is a Protestant, Reformed nation! The church, in which baptism as sign of the covenant of God is administered from generation to generation, is a natural part of the national character. Hoedemaker did not deny a distinction between church and people, but to him God's

involvement with the church throughout the centuries is, in fact, an involvement with the Dutch people.

God has a covenant with the Dutch people, such was his conviction. The church is therefore explicitly a national church. "All the church for all the people" is the slogan. At this moment I especially want to point out that a romantic thought such as God's private covenant with The Netherlands can not be maintained alongside the catholicity of the church. On the contrary, God has no separate covenant with whatever land, be it Scotland or South Africa where people have harboured similar thoughts¹. The church is catholic and shall therefore want to look across the boundaries!

From the Lord

It is evident: the closer the word "catholic" comes to our "own" church life, the more the tension increases in what you have to say about it. But it is useful to look deeper into this.

A flight into the invisible church is not the way of the Spirit

The word "church" is derived from the Greek word *kurios*, Lord. Without the Lord there is no church. The church is his; it is the church of our Head, Christ. This also sounds forth constantly when we consider the meaning of "catholic." Catholic had to do with the spreading of the one church through history and throughout the world, but it also had everything to do with the

content of the gospel. It is not the place and the time which are the norm, but the Lord, who gave his blood for the church and who gives his Spirit and his Word to live in the church.

This constantly creates tension with the way in which we experience being the church and how we express that. We honour those who have left their mark on the way the church thinks and who have been decisive for the – separate, seceded, or not – organization of the church. We hold on to historical facts and years which partly determine what our identity is: 1517, 1834, 1892. Church history is not insignificant! We honour the obedience of faith and the courage of our fathers in those moments which were important.

There is tension in this. It is not difficult to recognize the surrender to the Lord in the Secession of 1834. There it was all about one thing: staying faithful to God and his Holy Word. In the same breath we can add that in that same history, much which is human came along as well. It was not all equally holy. Nevertheless, God preserved them. For me now, it is not so much about the history as about the way in which we deal with it. The catholic norm of the church shall urge us to be involved in that which is the Lord's and not in that which is ours. With this I also do not mean to say that we should pass judgement on all the ins and outs of the past. This is much more about us being deeply convinced that the Lord judges all the ins and outs of how we live as church here and now.

It is history especially which teaches us what the reality of the church is today. There are no saints in the Roman Catholic sense of the

word, no figures from history or today who can be our guide and our norm. The best that we can learn from the “true” fathers is that their concern was for the Lord. In this sense, Paul’s words may show the way, when he says to Timothy that he must continue in what he had learned and been entrusted with, because he knew from whom he had learned it (2 Timothy 3:14). It is clear from what follows that the essential emphasis falls upon faith in Christ Jesus!

Spiritual character of the church

Because “catholic” brings to mind the association with Rome, it always has the connotation of a bulwark. It suggests that the catholic church, by means of human strength and influence, is capable of controlling a worldwide bulwark. Protestants have understood that it should not be this way. That which is built up in this fashion is more like Babylon than like Jerusalem.

However, fascination with the great structures and the impressive shape of the church is not strange to us either. The aura of a huge church building, the efficiency of a large church organization, the ability of prominent figures who are also noticed outside of their own circle, sends out the message: look at us, we hold a position in the world. The temptation to think politically in a permanent way threatens the church. The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is, however, a spiritual community. Political strategy is completely out of order within it. I do not hesitate to include the work of a general synod in this. Who will deny that forms of ambition for power have also functioned within

our “own” churches? There were – and are? – at least groups who wanted to ensure that one of their members was placed in an influential position. In this way the church is taken out of the spiritual community. It is only found within our “own” circles. Church meetings are then a sort of necessary evil, but not gatherings in which spiritual life and the fellowship of the saints can be found. Naturally, I am exaggerating in drawing this picture, but just as long as it is clear how great the distance between Jerusalem and Babylon, between the church and the world is. The church is about the Lord Jesus. That is the most characteristic thing about being catholic.

The Lord judges all the ins and outs of how we live as church here and now

It is truly great if church meetings strike a pure note. Then the fellowship of saints is experienced there. Then the “calling upon the name of the Lord” is not a formal issue which according to the church order should take place before the deliberations, but the expression that all participants together are willing to serve and to obey Him. I think that this is the reason why deputies should receive no instructions from their church councils, classis, or particular synods with regard to the way they should vote. Being a church is being of the Lord. Then you may

ask and desire together to understand his will.

Can you then not differ in opinion with each other? It would be folly not to recognize this. We already find this in the church of the New Testament. But what a beautiful example is given in the church meeting of Acts 15! They listen to each other. Their hearts come together and the result is “it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” (Acts 15:28).

It can sometimes be necessary to make a distinction between main issues and side issues. Then it is of course important that we agree about the assessment! If, on the grounds of certain external forms or habits, a spiritual judgement is given, things can go wrong. It is especially the catholic character of the church which requires spiritual clarity in the way we deal with one another.

For this reason it is spiritually unacceptable when ministers or church members within the church are actually written off. We can sometimes claim, for example, that the Protestant Church of The Netherlands has become a worldly church, where truth and lies are received with equal authority, where the power of numbers weighs heavier than the spiritual authority of God’s Word; however, if things remain in our church as they always have been, then we are of the same un-spiritual sort. The catholic church is not like this.

Inside and outside of “the church”

The catholic church watches over the holiness of her worship services. This is evident in the admission to the sacraments. Here, the tension I mentioned earlier is

built up, for we can do nothing other than to link admission to the sacraments in the church of Christ to the witness and decisions of Reformed church councils. There, in the church councils, the door to Christ's table is opened and closed.

At the same time we know that the church of Christ is wider than "our" church. We do not solve the problem of the different churches with an interdenominational policy, as if there could be various catholic churches! This contradicts the word catholic, because it is contrary to the one body of Christ.

But the reality, which we accept so easily, exists. On all sorts of occasions within the church we behave as though the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Churches* (Editorial note: JWM is speaking here about his own churches in The Netherlands) form the body of Christ on earth. At other moments we earnestly discuss our contacts with "other" churches and we pronounce judgements as though we ourselves are the Head. I do not say this as though I can produce a handbook of how we could do this better. It is too difficult for that! I do say it so that we are aware of the almost unbearable tension. Surely we cannot deal with the Lord's business as though we are the boss? Because of the catholic character of the one body of Christ, the unity of his body ought to be taken more seriously. It should bring us on our knees before God in humble prayer. The word "interdenominational" is impossible to work with. The same with an indifferent way of dealing with the questions of unity. An attitude such as "as far as I'm concerned, no thanks" with regard to the search for the one catholic

church, is one of the most unspiritual statements that I have ever heard about the church.

Love the church

It may be clear that I do not plead for indifference with regard to our "own" church life. A negative attitude will not teach us what the way of the Lord is. Let us be thankful for all the spiritual blessings which we have received in our church life. Our heritage is a heritage from the Lord. I do not hesitate to say that for one minute. For this reason, our love for the church is fitting!

But let our love constantly be subject to the discipline of the Spirit of Christ. It should not be about the love for what we have built up but about the love which He has given us in his mercy. That distinction is necessary. That which is ours, can never be

catholic. That which is his, surely is. It shall point the way, a spiritual way that takes us further than the powerlessness we keep coming across. Loving what is the Lord's – that will last.

¹ A story could be told about how Hoedemaker's ideas initially influenced the *Confessionele Vereniging* (Confessional Association) in the *Nederlandse Hervormde Church*, and later, only since a few decades, also the *Gereformeerde Bond*. When the Protestant Church in The Netherlands was going to be formed, a number of *Hervormde* authors published a report: W.J. op 't Hof a.o., *Belijdenis en verbond* (Confession and Covenant), Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2003.

This article was published in Lux Mundi, 24/2 (June 2005), 43-46.



"On all sorts of occasions within the church we behave as though the Christelijke Gereformeerde Churches form the body of Christ on earth". Photo of the CGK Synod held last year.

(photo P.G.B. de Vries)



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Are Christians Sinners or Not? (Part 1 of 3)

At the back of our *Book of Praise*, we have a collection of fifteen prayers. These prayers have a long history in the Reformed churches, most of them going back to the sixteenth century, and from there back even further in some form or another to the early church. These prayers decidedly do not reflect the sensibilities of our age. Some people find the language of some of these prayers to be overly harsh. For instance, the third prayer, "A Public Confession of Sins and Prayer Before the Sermon" begins with these words: "Heavenly Father, eternal and merciful God, we acknowledge and confess before your divine majesty that we are poor wretched sinners." Poor wretched sinners? Is that really what we are?

The Heidelberg Catechism uses the same kind of language in Q/A 126 when it explains the fifth petition of the Lord's Prayer regarding the forgiveness of our sins: "Do not impute to us, wretched sinners, any of our transgressions, nor the evil which still clings to us..." Are we really "wretched sinners" or is this just a bit over the top? Doesn't this contradict what we confess in Q/A 43? We say that we believe that our old nature is crucified and put to death. That means it's done with. It's dead. So if our old sinful nature is dead, how can we still say that we are wretched sinners?

A big lie?

These are not abstract theological questions. These are real questions that people ask and struggle with. Some have thought long on these questions. On the one hand, there are those who reject the language of our prayers and Q/A 126. They believe that sinners are the wicked, those who are under God's curse. That's not us. Yes, we sin, but we are not sinners. We have been redeemed by Christ; we are a new creation. They agree with many popular Christian writers today who call this idea of Christians being sinners a big mistake. In his popular book, *Wild at Heart*, John Eldredge is even bolder and calls it a big lie.

But on the other hand, we have those who have sensitive hearts and consciences. They're all too aware of their unworthiness before a holy God. They know that they sin, they have sinned, they keep on sinning, and they are sinners. This awareness makes them doubt and question and wonder. They lack in assurance and they feel burdened when they hear those words "poor wretched sinners" in our creeds or in our prayers. For all these people and for the rest of us too, it's important that we get these matters straight. What is at stake here is not merely an abstract point of theology. We're considering our

comfort in life and death and about how we live here and now before God.

We're not the first ones to consider these important questions. You'll find these things discussed repeatedly by Christians over the last two thousand years. However, with the coming of the Reformation, there was finally a wide consensus on the answers to these questions – at least among those who took the Bible seriously. Beginning with Martin Luther, the Reformation churches held that man is at the same time justified *and* a sinner. There was a Latin expression they used for that: *simul iustus et peccator* (at the same time just and a sinner). Luther and the other Reformers simply went back to the Bible. They came to this consensus by carefully reading the Scriptures, especially the letter to the Romans.

Pietism and John Wesley

With the passage of time, however, this consensus was eventually called into question again. During the seventeenth century a movement arose in Europe known as Pietism. In sixteenth century confessional Protestantism, a lot of emphasis was placed on the doctrine of justification – what God does for the believer and outside of the believer. However, beginning in the seventeenth century, certain voices

were heard that placed more emphasis on sanctification – what goes on in the believer’s life and the believer’s obedience to God.

Philip Jakob Spener (1635-1705) was one of those voices. Spener was a Lutheran pastor in Germany. While formally adhering to the Reformation doctrine of *simul iustus et peccator*, he undermined it with an idealistic view of sanctification. Spener maintained that true Christians could not commit sin. They could *have* sin (as a sort of accident or weakness), but they could not wilfully *commit* sin. According to Spener, true Christians may have sin, but they are not sinners. This idea became widely accepted in European Pietistic circles.

Pietism was one of the influences on the development of Methodism in England. John Wesley (1703-1791) came to believe that Christians may reach a stage in their spiritual development where they do not sin. The key was that Wesley defined sin as wilfully and intentionally disobeying God. Wesley himself did not believe that he had reached this level of perfection, but was rather plagued by self-doubt.

It must be noted that Wesley did not deny that believers have a struggle within them between the flesh and the Spirit. He maintained that there was such a struggle and he insisted that the denial of that struggle was a novel and dangerous doctrine. However, all this did not guard him against questioning the doctrine of *simul iustus et peccator*. Writing about justification, he says, “It does by no means imply that God judges concerning us contrary to the real nature of things; that he esteems us better than we really are, or believes us righteous when we are unrighteous.” Through this sort of

ambiguity, the ground was being prepared for the wide spread denial that Christians are at the same time justified and sinners.

Charles G. Finney

The doctrine of justification held by John Wesley was problematic. He denied the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. He denied what Martin Luther called “the great exchange”: that Christ has taken all our sin upon Himself and that God has placed all the righteousness of Jesus Christ upon us. According to Wesley, this notion of justification is a legal fiction.

That idea made its way to America and found roots during the Second Great Awakening. Charles G. Finney (1792-1875) was one of the central figures and his explicitly Pelagian theology has been a perpetual source of mischief in American Christianity. Under the influence of Methodism, Finney followed in Wesley’s footsteps and denied justification by the imputation of Christ’s righteousness – he called this absurd and nonsensical. According to Finney, such a doctrine would give no incentive for personal holiness.

Finney held that if they will it, Christians can perfectly obey God in this life and thereby achieve justification. He went so far as to say that obedience to God is a condition of justification and that no one can be justified so long as he has any sin remaining in him. With respect to *simul iustus et peccator*, Finney declared that this doctrine “has slain more souls, I fear, than all the universalism that ever cursed the world.”

If we are to look for a main source for the modern denial of the Reformation teaching that believers are both justified and sinners, it

would seem that Charles Finney is our man. The important thing to realize is that this denial was and is part of an integrated system of theology. The denial of this doctrine has a theological development and it has serious implications. It grew out of problems with the Reformation doctrine of justification, specifically with the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. Is the righteousness that function in our justification our own righteousness or that of another? Pelagian that he was, Finney said the former; the Reformed confessions insist on the latter.

Now it may be possible to affirm the Reformation doctrine of justification (as found, for example, in Lord’s Day 23) and to yet deny the doctrine of *simul iustus et peccator*. But to do so is inconsistent, unrealistic, and naïve. The Reformation doctrine of justification is that an alien righteousness (one that is not our own) is imputed to us. The notion of imputation involves the transfer of all of Christ’s merits to our account. This transfer entirely removes the *curse* of sin; however, the power of sin remains in some degree. Where the power of sin remains, people sin and are sinners. In Reformed theology, justification does not imply the full measure of sanctification or perfection, rather it *leads* to a battle for progressive sanctification.

We’ll explore this battle in the next installment as we turn to the Scriptures.

Footnote:

The quote from John Wesley is from the *John Wesley Reader*, compiled by Al Bryant (Waco: Word, 1983), p 141. The quote from Charles Finney is from his *Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1976), p 57.

Psalms 19, 51, 126, 148

as revised by W. Helder

PSALM 19 (Geneva, 1542/1543)

1. The spacious heav'ns declare
God's glory everywhere;
The skies proclaim His might.
The knowledge they display
Day echoes forth to day
And night makes known to night.
They use no speech or word,
Yet everywhere is heard
The voice of all creation.
The truth that it expounds
Throughout the world resounds
And reaches every nation.
2. God in the firmament
Pitched for the sun a tent,
The canopy of night.
The sun is like a groom
Who from his bridal room
Leaps forth with great delight.
Like one who runs a race
With strong and eager pace,
Across the vault of heaven
It soon its path completes,
And from its piercing heat
Not anything is hidden.
3. God's law is sound and whole;
It will revive the soul,
For it new strength supplies.
His testimony sure,
Trustworthy evermore,
Will make the simple wise.
His precepts plainly show
How right they are, and so
The heart they cheer and brighten.
The LORD's commandments pure
Shine forth with radiance clear
And so the eyes enlighten.
4. The fear of God is clean
And, free from sin and stain,
Forever will endure.
His judgments all express
Unfailing righteousness;
The LORD's decrees are sure.
They far exceed in worth
The finest gold on earth:
His precious testimony!
It sweeter is by far
Than all that's sweet and pure
In combs that drip with honey.
5. Your servant, who has heard
The warnings of Your word,
To them pays heed, O LORD.
Those walking in Your way,
Who Your commands obey,
Will win a great reward.
But, LORD, who can perceive
What errors one may have
Unwittingly committed?
O cleanse me! Let me be
Of secret failings free,
Of hidden faults acquitted.
6. O LORD, from wilful ways
Preserve me all my days:
The rule of sin prevent.
Then I shall blameless be,
From grave offences free,
And wholly innocent.
O hear me as I pray:
Let what my tongue may say
And what my heart may ponder
Be pleasing in Your sight,
O LORD so great in might,
My rock and my defender.

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PSALM 51 (Strasbourg, 1539 / Geneva, 1551)

1. O gracious God, be merciful to me,
And in Your love, Your infinite compassion,
Blot out my sins, remove all my transgressions.
O God, have mercy. Listen to my plea!
From every taint of evil wash me clean,
And from my guilt and misery relieve me.
For I am deeply conscious of my sin,
And all day long my misdeeds haunt and grieve me.
2. God, You have I offended, You alone.
In mercy hear my sorrowful confession.
How evil in Your sight is my transgression!
You rightfully condemn what I have done;
Just is, O God, the sentence I received.
I have from birth been guilty, ever sinning;
In my iniquity was I conceived,
Tainted with sin right from my life's beginning.
3. You teach me all the wisdom I must know,
For You want truth to dwell and rule within me.
Purge me with hyssop. Wash and fully clean me
Till I am whiter than the whitest snow.
Let me hear shouts of happiness and joy,
And let the bones You crushed leap up in dances.
From my transgressions turn Your face away.
Blot out my guilt, erase all my offences.
4. Create in me a pure, clean heart, I pray,
And put a steadfast spirit deep within me;
Give me new life to strengthen and sustain me.
God, from Your presence cast me not away.
Show me Your mercy. Do not take from me
Your Holy Spirit. Let me, O my Saviour,
Again the joy of Your salvation see,
And make me willing to obey You ever.
5. Then to transgressors I will teach Your ways,
And sinners will return to seek Your favour.
O God, from guilt of bloodshed me deliver;
Then shall my tongue Your saving justice praise.
I will aloud Your righteousness proclaim;
You are, O God, the God of my salvation.
LORD, open then my lips to praise Your name
And let me sing my songs of jubilation.
6. LORD, You do not in sacrifice delight,
Or else I would with off'rings try to please You.
How could I ever with my gifts appease You?

Burnt off'rings find no favour in Your sight.
One gift alone is pleasing in God's eyes:
The contrite heart of one who has repented.
A broken spirit You will not despise
When humbly as a sacrifice presented.

7. In Your good pleasure, bless Jerusalem;
Cause her to thrive, and shield her with Your power.
Build Zion's walls, O God. Uphold her towers,
Safeguard her citadels and strengthen them.
In sacrifices You will then delight,
In bullocks rightly offered on Your altar;
Burnt off'rings will be pleasing in Your sight.
Your love and mercy will not fail or falter.

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PSALM 126 (Geneva, 1551)

1. When Zion was at last restored,
Brought back from exile by the LORD,
It seemed to us as if we dreamed.
How glad were those He had redeemed!
Our mouths were filled with loud rejoicing;
We laughed and cheered, our rapture voicing.
Then other nations, too, confessed,
"The LORD His own has greatly blessed."
2. In His enduring faithfulness
The LORD did wondrous things for us.
With shouts of gladness and delight
We gloried in His deeds of might.
Again, LORD, grant us restoration,
As in the Negev's desolation
The rain-filled streams turn arid sand
Into a green and pleasant land.
3. Let those who sow their seed in tears,
Beset by anxious cares and fears,
At harvest time no longer weep,
Rejoicing in the crops they reap.
The sower going forth in sorrow
To carry seed to field and furrow
Will with his sheaves come home again,
Exulting in the golden grain.

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PSALM 148 (Geneva, 1562)

1. O praise the LORD! His name exalt!
Praise Him from highest heaven's vault.
You angels, from your lofty post
Praise Him with all the heavenly host.
You sun and moon, you constellations,
Shine forth your light in adoration;
Join with the clouds as they ascend
In praise and worship without end.
2. Let them extol the LORD, for He
Created them by His decree,
And by a law that will endure
He fixed their bounds for evermore.
Let earth as well show Him devotion:
Praise Him, you monsters in the oceans,
You frost and snow, you fire and hail;
Praise Him, you storms that do His will.
3. Praise Him, you hills and mountains all,
You fruit trees and you cedars tall;
Wild beasts and cattle, creeping things,
Praise Him with every bird that sings.
You kings and rulers of the nations,
Praise Him with all their populations.
Young men and maidens, join in song;
Old men and children, sing along!
4. Let all creation praise His name,
Extol His all-surpassing fame.
His glory covers earth and sky.
He raised His people's horn on high;
His saints He blessed with praise and splendour,
Showed Israel His mercy tender.
Close to His heart He keeps His own.
O praise the LORD! Praise Him alone!

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Build write express reflect love sing pray relate inspire encourage contribute write express reflect love sing pray relate inspire

roadside assistance

the magazine for Reformed young people

How can a young man keep his way pure?
By living according to your word. Ps 119:9

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Remembering God

Rebecca VanDijk

We do as we
Are taught to do
Say our prayers,
Read our Bibles,
Sit dutifully in our pews.

Then Sunday done
We hurry on
Busy in our work,
Busy in our play,
Too busy to remember Him.

Till He gently
Bids us, "Stop,
Be still my son,
Hear me my daughter,
For I am the Lord your God."

In his great Stillness
We remember then
That this life is nothing
And will soon pass away
As we draw ever nearer
To Him and his Great Day.





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Fellowship with l'Église Réformée du Québec

The relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship that the Canadian Reformed churches now enjoy with l'Église Réformée du Québec is unique insofar as it exists solely within the boundaries of Canada. Though there are differences in language and culture, the unifying bond of the one faith joins the five congregations in *la belle province* to those of our federation in English-speaking Canada.

Since the historic decision of Synod Smithers to enter into this special relationship, the gratitude for God's blessing in the recognition of a federation of true churches on our own soil has been accompanied by the growing realization of the duty to exercise fellowship in a very real, practical way. To that end the Committee for Contact with Churches in North America has continued to meet with its counterparts in the ERQ, and has attended a recent synode.

One opportunity for such a meeting was presented at the annual gathering of NAPARC (the Council of North American Presbyterian and Reformed Churches), held last fall. More recently, in late-March 2008, members of the inter-church relations committees met in Montreal. One important point of discussion was the implementation

of the rules for ecclesiastical fellowship, which include such matters as the handling of attestations and opening the pulpit. On this last point, consistories may wish to note that the following ERQ ministers are able to preach in English and may be available to fill the pulpit: the

Reverends P. Bedard, M. Veilleux, B. Westerveld, J. Zoellner, and J. Zuidema.

Another point of discussion has been the report on the supervision of the Lord's Supper within the ERQ. This report, which has been in the making since 2000, concerns the



Members of the ERQ Committee for Inter-church Relations,
(R-L) Rev. Bernard Westerveld and Br. Pierre Legault, with Rev. Eric Kampen
of the CCCNA.

Church News

Accepted the call to the church of Lincoln, Ontario:

Rev. R. Wynia

of the United Reformed Churches in North America at Wyoming, Ontario.

Called by the church at Smithville, Ontario:

Rev. J.A. Bouwers

of the Immanuel Orthodox Reformed Church (URCNA) of Jordan, Ontario.

Accepted the call to the church at Abbotsford, British Columbia:

Rev. R.C. (Karlo) Janssen

of the Gereformeerde Kerk in Nederland (Vrij.) at Hoek, The Netherlands.

Examined by Classis Niagara on June 18th, 2008 and declared eligible for call:

Candidate Rolf den Hollander

Called by the church of Winnipeg (Grace) Manitoba:

Candidate Rolf den Hollander

Called by the church of Owen Sound, Ontario:

Candidate Rolf den Hollander

Called by the church of Hamilton (Providence), Ontario:

Candidate Rolf den Hollander

Called by the Free Reformed Church of Albany (West) Australia:

Candidate Rolf den Hollander

principles and practice of admission to the table of the Lord. The ERQ committee that had been formed to present this report recently requested our input, particularly for information regarding the grounds for the practice of supervision within the Canadian Reformed churches. Readers will appreciate that this matter is not a simple one. As the June synode when the report will be treated approaches, they may wish to remember it in their prayers for these "sister-churches."

Our counterparts in the ERQ have invited feedback in other matters also. We were thankful for the opportunity to assist the churches as they composed forms for baptism and the public profession of faith. One form that remains to be adopted by the ERQ is that of the ordination of ministers of the Word. This, too, is a matter that requires prayer and understanding.

The Committee's mandate to "encourage the churches to seek out ways and means to develop contacts with individual ERQ churches" (Synod Acts, Art. 4.4) was conveyed by the delegates to the recent synode, and to the Committee for Inter-church Relations. While eager to foster closer relations, your Committee respects the wishes, needs, and opportunities within the ERQ. It would be ill-advised to cause even a perception of overwhelming the small federation, or of imposing upon it. Nevertheless, the relations that currently exist on the level of individual congregations are much appreciated and welcomed. Discussions revealed that it is not feasible for other ERQ

Examined by Classis Ontario West on June 18th, 2008 and declared eligible for call:

Candidate Stuart Harsevoort

Examined by Classis Ontario West on June 18th, 2008 and declared eligible for call:

Candidate Cornelis Kleyn

Called by the church of Elora, Ontario:

Candidate Cornelis Kleyn

Called by the church of Kerwood, Ontario:

Candidate Cornelis Kleyn

congregations to embark on collaboration of the sort currently practised by St. Georges and Owen Sound. However, our Committee is prepared to facilitate contacts if so desired by the churches in Quebec.

2008 is a special year, not only for the province of Quebec, but also for l'Église Réformée du Québec. The province celebrates the 400th anniversary of its founding by Samuel de Champlain. In connection with this commemoration, special events that focus on the French-Protestant presence in New France are being promoted by the ERQ congregation in Quebec City. It is hoped that attention drawn to the history of the Huguenots will provide an opportunity to promote a revival of the Reformed faith in the province. The year 2008 also marks the twentieth anniversary of l'Église Réformée du Québec. Plans are underway to organize a "celebration" in late-October. Let us join the Reformed churches there in thanking the Lord for his church-gathering work in Quebec.

*For the CCCNA-East
R. Faber*

Rev. B. Westerveld is pastor of the Église Réformée de Québec (ERQ), serving the congregation Église Réformée St-Marc de Québec (St. Mark's Reformed Church of Quebec City)
b_westerveld@hotmail.com

Discovering the Reformed Heritage in Quebec City

The year 2008 of our Lord celebrates the 400th anniversary of the founding of Quebec City. Numerous festivities and conferences are planned. In his gracious providence, the Lord has opened a door to discovering and celebrating the Reformed heritage of this historic, French city.

While the popular impression remains that New France was a monolithic Roman Catholic colony, the reality is otherwise. Many Huguenots, French-speaking reformers, actively participated in the building of the colony. Historians debate whether Samuel Champlain, the founder of Quebec City in 1608, was Protestant or Catholic. However, his financial sponsor and the visionary for the colonial city, Pierre Dugua de Mons, was a devout Huguenot.

The Église Réformée St-Marc de Québec, a member congregation of the ERQ, is seeking to shed light on this Reformed heritage through a museum exhibit and a series of conferences.

Huguenot museum exhibit

Amongst the numerous events marking the 400th anniversary is the exhibit *Forgotten Presence: The Huguenots in New France* in the Musée de l'Amérique Française, a respected museum housed in the Roman Catholic seminary of the old city. How is it possible that the leadership of the seminary would permit, even welcome, a Protestant exhibit?



Croix Huguenote

The Lord providently set in place two key elements. The first concerns an evangelical believer, Dr. Marie-Claude Rocher. Adjunct director of the Laval University Institute for Cultural Heritage, Dr. Rocher's qualifications as a respected researcher gave credibility to this project, which she spearheaded. On the other hand, a wave of tolerance and openness in the Roman Catholic community opened the door to, in their view, an interfaith project. In fact, two Catholic seminaries permitted university researchers to dig through their archives seeking references to the presence of Huguenots in the colony.

While the majority of the museum is dedicated to the first bishop of New France, François Laval, a large room sheds light on the clandestine faith of the Huguenots. Tracing their roots to the Reformation in France, the exhibit explains the biblical basis of their faith, the simplicity of their worship, the persecution they experienced, and their desire to find peace in the New World. An interactive computer program permits Quebecois visitors to answer the question, "Were your ancestors Huguenot?" The final segment traces the core beliefs of the Reformation period to their presence in numerous evangelical communities across the province, including the Église Réformée du Québec.

While several artefacts have been brought over from France, the museum has also exhibited for the first time Bibles and Huguenot psalters confiscated by Roman Catholic priests from Huguenots living in the colony. In one Bible are scrawled the words "à l'index" (placed under the index). The possession of the Holy Scriptures was considered dangerous and therefore forbidden. The Word of truth was removed from their homes in order to remove it from their lives!

The Église Réformée St-Marc de Québec is an official collaborator of the exhibit, providing financial support of \$20,000. Our congregation is appealing to sister

Reformed and Presbyterian churches throughout North America to help us raise the necessary support. In exchange, the museum invited our choral group to sing psalms as VIP guests visited the exhibit, readily acknowledges our collaboration in its publicity and website, and prominently displays flyers about our congregation. Our prayer is that this exhibit will contribute significantly to making the Reformed faith credible in the eyes of Quebecers. May the Lord see fit to open wide the door to the preaching the gospel!

The exhibit *Forgotten Presence: The Huguenots in New France* will remain on display until March 2009. (For more information about the exhibit, visit the museum



Statue of Pierre Dugua de Mons, who was the financial backer of Samuel Champlain's explorations. De Mons was a devout Huguenot. He stayed in France in order to protect his monopoly for the colony.

website: <http://www.mcq.org/en/mat/expositions.php>). Information will be distributed to the public schools inviting teachers to organize a fieldtrip to the exhibit for their students. We're praying that many teachers will take up this opportunity and that the students will be receptive to exploring and learning about the Reformed faith built upon the Word of God.

Educational conferences

In conjunction with the Huguenot exhibit, the congregation of the Église Réformée St-Marc de Québec has developed a series of conferences exploring the history, faith, and worship practices of the Reformed faith. Beyond our own membership, we desire to inform and educate evangelical believers about the biblical, Reformed faith of their spiritual ancestors. Significant time and money is being spent to contact and invite congregations from Quebec City and the surrounding regions, as well as organize the conferences.

Thus far our events have included a public concert by the Redeemer University College Concert Choir and a weekend conference surveying 2000 years of church history given by Dr. Jason Zuidema, professor of Farel Seminary and pastor of the Église Réformée St-Paul near Montreal. Recently we held a series of three conferences exploring 400 years of French Protestant history in the province of Quebec. Participation was strong (60-90 at each conference), drawing people from a wide variety of church backgrounds, including a few Roman Catholics.





The Westerveld family

The story of the Reformed faith in the province of Quebec has not always been glorious. Historians often highlight three moments of significant presence and growth: the early colonial period until 1627; the late 1800s, thanks to Swiss missionaries and Presbyterian missions; and the evangelical revival of the 1970s and early 1980s. The study of our history reveals how fragile the Protestant faith has been amongst the French-speaking people. Rarely has a living faith been transmitted to the third or fourth generations. These conferences have become a solemn reminder to teach the Word of God to our children and our children's children (Psalm 78; 2 Timothy 1.5).

Future conferences will focus on the singing of psalms (October 8-9, 2008) and a study of the Reformed confession *La Rochelle* (February 20-21, 2009), which became the basis of the Belgic Confession. Lord willing, we shall also celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the ERQ (November 1, 2008). We'll celebrate his faithfulness, reflect upon our struggles to maintain the faith, and cast a vision for outreach, instruction, and growth.

An open door

We did not plan the 400th anniversary of Quebec City.

Neither did Samuel Champlain. The Lord did. In his mercy, He also saw fit to provide us with an open door for making known the gospel and in particular the Reformed faith. When the door is open, we need to walk through. The Huguenot exhibit and the conference series are providential opportunities which we are taking hold of in order to glorify his name in this city and throughout the province. Now our prayer is that the Lord God will open hearts to hear and receive the Word of truth and life.

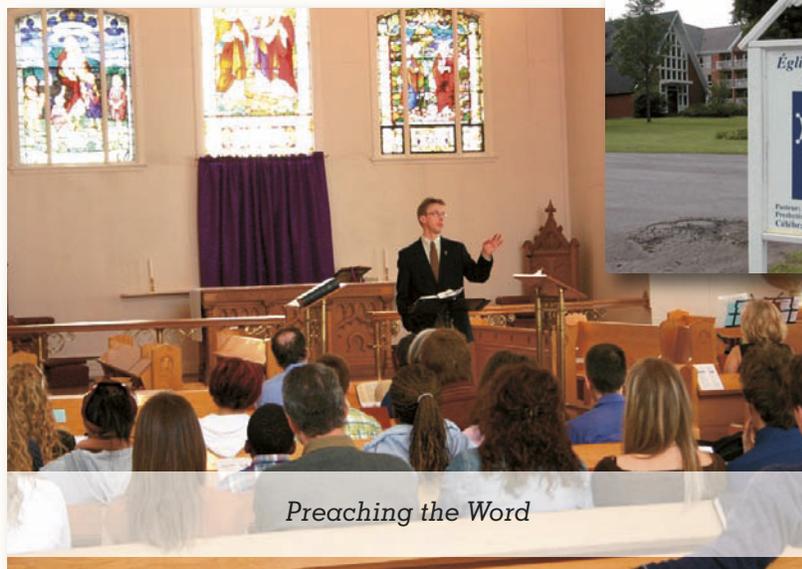
Please pray with us. Ask the Lord to bless our efforts. May He draw many visitors to the exhibit, particularly students. As we prepare future conferences, may the Spirit prepare believers in Quebec to grow and be built up in the biblical doctrines of grace.

If you desire to receive more details about the Quebec 400 project, to receive our monthly newsletters, or to contribute financially, please contact us:
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Please make your cheques out to
Église Réformée St-Marc,
 memo note Québec 400.

For those of you who may wish to visit Quebec City during the festivities, you can find all the details at www.MonQuebec2008.com for planning your vacation. If you stay the weekend, the brothers and sisters at St-Marc would rejoice to welcome you during our Sunday worship service (details on our website www.erq.qc.ca/stmarc/english.html).

St-Marc church sign



Preaching the Word



Press Release of the meeting of the URCNA Songbook Committee, held Wednesday and Thursday, April 23 and 24, 2008

Our meeting was opened by our chairman, Rev. Knott, reading and making remarks on Psalm 150 and leading us in prayer. We were advised that Mr. Henry Nuiver, an original member of our committee, had passed away in February of this year. We note with appreciation the work that Mr. Nuiver did on behalf of the churches, as a member of our committee, and express our sympathy to his wife, Trudy, and their family.

After approving the agenda and the minutes of our last meeting, we decided that we would anticipate meeting face to face for two days, three times per year, as URCNA committee, reserving one day per year for meeting as a joint songbook committee with the Standing Committee for the Publication of the *Book of Praise*. This decision was made in light of the decisions made by Synod Schererville with respect to our mandate, namely, Acts of Synod Schererville Article 63, point 6, and, Article 78, point 10.

We agreed to review a list of hymns, drawn mainly from the 1987 *Psalter Hymnal* of the CRC, and *Cantus Christi*, for possible inclusion in the collection of hymns that we will propose to our churches.

We discussed a paper prepared by Rev. Lankheet on the "vivid historical present," in order to help us address the legitimacy of speaking in the present tense about events that have taken place in the past, particularly as we find that in many hymns about the birth, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The paper will be distributed to the members of the Standing Committee for the

Publication of the *Book of Praise* for discussion at a future meeting of the joint committee.

We discussed the advisability of adding further members to the committee. We are inclined to seek out volunteers who will serve as resource people to help us with specific aspects of our work, e.g. the production of the songbook itself.

We discussed a proposal from Rev. VanderMeulen for the structure of the hymn section of the songbook. We also received from Rev. VanderMeulen some suggestions as to how we could educate the churches of the URCNA about our work. From Mrs. Daphne Jasperse we received updated indices of the hymns we have placed on the "gross list" of hymns for possible inclusion in the songbook. We reviewed a number of recently published hymns, mainly produced by Keith Getty and Stuart Townend, as well as selections from several songbooks, proposed for our consideration by Rev. Lankheet.

We received and discussed a letter received from Dr. John Smith, a minister of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, in answer to a question we had asked him, and several other scholars, regarding the use of the first person singular pronoun, "I", in the psalms. Since the psalms provide us with scriptural examples of songs acceptable to God, we believe that understanding how the first person singular is used in the psalms will help us to apply Guideline 7 of the "Guidelines for Selecting Songs" (see Report of the Songbook Committee to Synod 2004), which instructs us to avoid "individualism" in the music of the church. We found Dr. Smith's remarks very helpful.

We scheduled an on-line meeting to discuss the hymns from *Cantus Christi* for May 20, 2008 and our next face-to-face meeting for

July 9 and 10, 2008, in Jenison, Michigan. Thanks were expressed by the chairman for the good spirit in which the meeting was conducted and Mrs. Jasperse led us in closing prayer.

*For the committee,
Rev. Dick Wynia, secretary*

Press Release of the Meeting of the Joint Songbook Committee, held Thursday, April 24, 2008

Our meeting was opened by Rev. Rand Lankheet reading Psalm 115, making some remarks, and leading us in prayer. We were made aware of the fact that Dr. Niek Gootjes has asked to be temporarily relieved of his duties on the committee, in view of health concerns.

We spent quite some time discussing the actions taken by our respective synods with respect to our work as individual and joint committees. We were thankful to note that the Joint Committee's recommendations were adopted, unanimously, at Synod Smithers. At Synod Schererville, all but one of our recommendations were adopted. Synod decided to "postpone indefinitely" consideration of our recommendation that Synod state its commitment that the songbook would be the official songbook of the united federation.

The decision of Synod Schererville to adopt Overture 17, which asked for clarification of the URCNA Songbook Committee's mandate, will have an impact on our work together as a joint committee. In view of the URCNA committee's goal of presenting a collection of hymns to their churches by June 2009, we decided that the URCNA committee would review the hymns on the gross list, plus some additional hymns. They

will forward their remarks and conclusions to the Standing Committee for the Publication of the *Book of Praise* for their consideration. We will compare notes at our next joint meeting.

We decided it would be helpful to speak together about "the concept of a common, official songbook," including some discussion of the use of official songbooks in the history of the Reformed churches and the purposes served by adopting such a songbook. We hope to take this up also on the agenda of our next joint meeting.

Following some discussion, and some revision, we approved

the provisional Table of Contents for the hymn section. We decided that in principle, paraphrases of psalms are permissible, but that they ought to be placed in the hymn section. We discussed the advice we had received from Dr. John Smith regarding the use of "I" in the psalms and how we might appropriately apply Guideline 7, which warns against allowing individualism in the church's songs. We are awaiting further expert advice on this subject.

We decided to ask some scholars to help us to possibly prepare new translations of several Latin hymns. In view of the

advice we have received from Dr. C. VanDam and Rev. M. VanderHart and in light of the usage in most of the Bible translations currently in use among our churches, we decided in principle that we will not use "Jehovah" as a translation of the covenant Name, "YHWH."

We agreed to meet, D.V., November 5-7, 2008, in Wyoming.

Thanks were expressed by the chairman, Rev. Knott, for what we could accomplish together and the joy we find in our cooperation; we were led in closing prayer by Rev. VanderMeulen.

For the committee,
Rev. Dick Wynia, secretary



Clarion Advertisements

Advertisements:

Announcements of Weddings, Anniversaries (with Open House) should be submitted six weeks in advance.

BIRTHS

Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

With thankfulness to our Heavenly Father who has entrusted another child to our care, we joyfully announce the birth of

VICTORIA JEWEL

May 30, 2008

Joseph and Anna Snyder

Proud brothers: *Jakob and Nicholas*
334 Corvette Street, Welland, ON L3B 4S6

WEDDINGS

For you make me glad by your deeds, O LORD, I will sing for joy at the works of your hands.

With thankfulness to our Heavenly Father, Leo and Geraldine Post announce the marriage of our daughter

STEPHANIE ROCHELLE

to

JONATHAN MICHAEL

son of Jim and Judy Visser.

The ceremony will take place, D.V., on August 2, 2008 at the Spring Creek Canadian Reformed Church, Tintern, Ontario
Future Address: Box 274, Smithville, ON L0R 2A0

And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord, and may please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God. Colossians 1:10

With thankfulness to our Heavenly Father we, Tony and Ruth Linde, joyfully announce the upcoming marriage of our daughter

MICHELLE ANDREA LINDE

to

CHRISTOPHER STEPHEN WIERSMA

son of Jeff and Laura Wiersma.

The ceremony will take place, D.V., on July 12, 2008 at 1:30 p.m. in the Canadian Reformed Church of Attercliffe, Ontario.

Reverend D.W. Vandeburg officiating.

Future address: 75 Bolzano Drive, Hamilton, ON L8W 3W2

Email address: cm_wiersma@hotmail.com



"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Jeremiah 29:11

With thankfulness to our Heavenly Father for His guidance, direction, and love, we

RACHEL TANYA BROEKEMA

and

MARK DAVID TORENVLIET

were united as one in marriage on Saturday, June 28th, 2008. Rev. J. DeGelder officiated, in the Rehoboth Canadian Reformed Church, Waterdown, Ontario.

230 Bendamere Avenue, Hamilton, ON L9C 1P4