

Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE • Volume 59, No. 2 • January 15, 2010



*No one knows
the precise
number of
Christians in
China*

Inside this issue

- China
- A Servant Prays
- A Bit of Church History

China

If the church in China is large, it is also extremely diverse in doctrine and practice

An explosion

Today Christianity is coming to China as never before and it is causing a spiritual explosion. Millions of people are involved in official government recognized churches. Millions more are part of unofficial family churches or house churches. Meanwhile, many more are weighing the claims of Christianity and showing increasing interest.

As a result the numbers keep on going up and up. Today no one knows the precise number of Christians in China although a figure well in excess of 100 million is often mentioned. Already there is ample evidence to suggest that the largest body of Christians in the world today may well be in China.

Setting

Before commenting on this religious development a few things should be said about the country where all of this is happening. For a Westerner coming to China is almost like coming to another planet. The moment that one steps off the airplane the smells, the sights, and the sounds are different. All kinds of new impressions hit you in waves.

Energy

The first impression that one has is of a country filled with energy and excitement. In the large cities the sidewalks and squares are teeming with people. The train stations are hubs of activity and swelling with waves of humanity going off in all directions. The streets are filled with cars, trucks, taxis, bikes, and all manner of motorized contraptions. The strangest things can be seen pattering along often loaded down with goods.

At the same time the rules of the road seem to be highly flexible. A divided highway with four lanes on each side going in two different directions can in time of rush hour become a highway with seven lanes going one way and only one lane going the other. The traffic

simply spills over to the other side and lays claim to as many lanes as it needs. Traffic lines are often visible but just as often ignored. There is little sense of "your side" and "my side" of the road. Playing road chicken tends to be a national sport.

All the while the nation is building. In some ways it is like a huge game of catch-up. What this means is that China is in a hurry to modernize and construction is going on everywhere. Towns and cities, streets and countryside – everything is changing. Often this change leads to fascinating sights as ancient buildings often stand side by side with stunning skyscrapers. At the same time there is no doubt that much of what is old, decrepit and behind the times is losing out and being replaced.

Scale

What is also astounding in China is the scale of the change that is taking place. Fly into the new and modern airports at Hong Kong, Shanghai (Pudong), or Beijing and you are immediately confronted with massive edifices. These are ultramodern, state of the art buildings filled with marble floors and wall, leather chairs, and all manner of modern conveniences.

Outside the highway system is being expanded everywhere and well-engineered roads are making life easier for drivers and their ever increasing number of vehicles.

And then there are the high speed (over 350 k per hour) magnetic trains being built. Recently in Vancouver they completed an extension to the Skytrain system of some ten or twelve kilometres. But then you go to Beijing and you are confronted with an extension that goes on for hundreds of kilometres. And the same is true north of Dalian, south of Shanghai and elsewhere.

Added to this one can also think of all the new bridges being constructed. They too are long, complex, and expensive.



Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd., Winnipeg, MB

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Editor: J. Visscher; Copy Manager: Laura Veenendaal
Coeditors: R. Aasman, E. Kampen, K. 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.
One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5
Phone: (204) 663-9000 Fax: (204) 663-9202

Subscriptions: clarionadmin@premierpublishing.ca

Advertisements: clarionads@premierpublishing.ca

Website: www.premierpublishing.ca

RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO:

One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5

Subscription Rates for 2010

	Regular Mail	Air Mail
Canada*	\$49.00	\$ 85.00
U.S.A. U.S. Funds  	\$65.00	\$ 90.00
International	\$95.00	\$145.00

*Including 5% GST – No. 890967359RT

Advertisements: \$17.00 per column inch

Full Colour Display Advertisements: \$21.00 per column inch

We reserve the right to refuse ads.

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

Cancellation Agreement

Unless a written subscription cancellation is received we assume you wish to continue to subscribe. You will be invoiced prior to the subscription renewal date.

Agreement No. 40063293; PAP Registration No. 9907; ISSN 0383-0438

Copyright © Premier Printing Ltd.

All rights reserved. No part may be reproduced in any manner without permission in writing from the publisher, except brief quotations used in connection with a review in a magazine or newspaper.

Useful Link: www.canrc.org

In This Issue

Editorial – China — <i>Barnabas</i>	26
Treasures, New and Old – A Servant Prays — <i>D. DeBoer</i>	29
A Bit of Church History — <i>C. Bouwman</i>	30
Further Discussion – Testing the Revised Psalm Lyrics — <i>P.H. Holtlülwer</i>	34
Owen Sound Welcomes the Moeskers — <i>T. and B. Breukelman</i>	38
Ray of Sunshine — <i>P. Gelms</i> and <i>C. Gelms</i>	40
URNCA Synod 2010 Notice	41
Letter to the Editor	42
Press Release – Board and Committee of Administration of I.L.P.B.....	43

As well there are the ports. I have seen the ports of cities like Seattle, Vancouver, Rotterdam, and elsewhere, but they all shrink in comparison to what is going on in Hong Kong and at other port cities in China.

Finally, there are all the factories that line the highways everywhere for great distances. What they are all making is anyone's guess, but there is no doubt that they are making something.

Truly, this is a nation on the move. Recently Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper saw some of it first hand and he was impressed. He too came to the realization that today China is the factory of the world. No other nation can compare to its numbers of people, its industrial capacity, and its burgeoning infrastructure.

People

The current statistics also indicate that China is a nation of well over a billion people. It is the most populous nation on the face of the earth. In the future some are predicting that India will overtake it in numbers, but that has not happened yet.

Also the common perception in the West is that these billion plus people form one united ethnic grouping. Nevertheless, such an assumption is in error. For in reality China is a nation composed of hundreds of different ethnic groups, each with their own dialect, customs, personality types, and even physical features.

Often it is difficult for people from these different groups to understand each other. Thankfully, there is Mandarin as the official language. It serves as a uniting force and facilitates communication between all of these differing groups of people.

Church life in China

Leaving behind these general impressions, we come to the matter of the Christian church in China. We have already noted that it is large. Besides that there are a number of other characteristics to note.

Widespread

The first is that it appears to be widespread. Whether one travels to the far north, close to the Russian and Korean borders, or whether one goes to the far south near Vietnam, or whether one stays close to the eastern seaboard or goes inland, there appear to be local house churches, either recognized or not, everywhere. Of course it is also true that there are Islam followers particularly in the northwest and Buddhists throughout the land.

Then there is Confucianism as well. In the West this is often characterized as a religion, although a number of people, who are better informed about it than I am, tell me that it is more of a philosophy and a way of life than an official religion.

Diverse

If the church in China is large, it is also extremely diverse in doctrine and practice. There is the Roman Catholic Church, whose struggles are often reported in the Western press when it comes to conflict between Rome and Beijing about who has the right to appoint bishops. There is the Three Self Church, which is officially recognized by the government but which is viewed by many in China as being both liberal in its theology and governmentally controlled in its policies. There are all sorts of groups that claim adherence to any number of Anabaptist or Protestant churches: Alliance, Anglican, Baptist, Presbyterian, and Reformed. Added to this mix are the Pentecostal churches, some of which are traditional and others of which are extreme and confrontational. Finally, there are the cults present such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons. In short, then, the church scene in China is just as confusing, if not more so, as it is in North America.

Added to this confusing scene is the fact that many of these churches and sects have gone underground for fear of persecution. The result is that it is very difficult for the government or anyone else to arrive at an accurate conclusion about the size and influence of many of these groups and churches.

As for those churches who call themselves Reformed, they too need to be approached with caution. Some have taken over the name but do not really know what it means. Currently there are reports coming out of China about the rapid growth of Reformed house or family churches, but one should not be too quick to embrace these reports. If you assume that the word "Reformed" means the same in both China and in the West you will be in for more than just a few surprises.

Persecuted

Officially China claims that it allows for freedom of religion. This claim is disputed, however, by many both outside and inside China.

In my travels throughout China I have discovered that the situation varies greatly. In some cities non-registered churches are severely persecuted. If you are a pastor in such places, you may be jailed and forced to do hard labour for seven years. If an unregistered

church group is discovered meeting in your apartment, you may forfeit it and be homeless. If your boss learns that you are Christian, you may lose your job. As well in some cities every hotel is hooked up to the local police station and foreigners are watched closely.

But then too there are other places where pastors and policemen have a good relationship. Indeed, in some cities the authorities will alert local church leaders if there are law breakers living in their neighbourhoods and ask them to try their utmost to convert them and turn them into law abiding citizens. In these places believers look at you with confusion when you ask about persecution.

Another noteworthy thing is that believers in China do not seem to be too worried or afraid of persecution. Many of them even view it as a good thing. One church leader who has been jailed often told me that he tells the authorities that every time they pick him up and jail him, his local church grows. In spite of this warning, they continue to jail him and his church keeps on increasing in number. Such are the wondrous ways of the Lord.

Diligent

If believers in China come across as fearless, they also come across as diligent. Every person who has taught in China and with whom I have spoken marvels at the same thing, and that is the dedication and commitment of their Chinese students. These believers are hungry. They want to learn more and more. They will sit on hard floors for hours listening, writing, and taking in what is taught. They will bombard their teachers with questions and more questions about everything either directly or indirectly connected with the Bible. Their hunger is insatiable.

In short, these people are every teacher's dream. With their zeal and devotion they energize every teacher who comes to them with the Truth. They want to learn and they are asking constantly for more and more teaching help. Indeed, the Macedonian call to "come over and help us" has become today the Chinese call.

Pray that more and more ways may be found for us to rise to the Chinese challenge and to help them advance in the gospel. Pray as well for the Chinese authorities that they may come to realize that they have nothing to fear from every church that upholds what is said in Article 36 of the Belgic Confession. For such a church prays for those in authority, holds them in honour, and obeys the laws of the land. May God continue to bless his church in China.





Rev. David DeBoer is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Dunnville/Wainfleet, Ontario dmdeboer@sympatico.ca



MATTHEW 13:52

A Servant Prays

"Bring joy to your servant, for to you, O LORD, I lift up my soul."

Psalm 86:4

Prayer is an important part of your life as a Christian. Through prayer you can thank and praise God and you can also lay your needs, concerns, and trials before Him. Prayer keeps you close to the Lord and is a means by which you can receive strength, comfort, hope, and assurance.

Prayer is an activity that we must continually practice and renew ourselves in. Our sinful nature pulls away from prayer. But without prayer we cannot persevere for long in our service of God and in our faith.

Psalm 86 is labelled a "prayer" of David. In fact, all the psalms are prayers of one form or another. But this psalm is particularly a prayer because in it David seeks out the Lord's help. It's a prayer not only in the sense of talking to God, but more specifically in the sense of being an earnest entreaty. As we study this psalm, we can learn about prayer and can be encouraged to seek help from God by following the example of the psalmist.

No special occasion is mentioned as the reason for Psalm 86. The song is written in the first person throughout, which gives insight into the heart of the author. This also encourages us to be personal, humble, and direct in our private prayers.

In verse 4 David prays, "Bring joy to your servant, for to you, O Lord, I lift up my soul." This verse

comes in a list of similar petitions that form the beginning of the psalm (v. 1-7). A special feature of verse 4 is that David approaches God from the point of view of a servant. This is a theme that is worked into the whole psalm. Seven times the author appeals to "my Lord," and "Lord" here means "Master." Three times he also calls himself "your servant." In verse 16 he even calls himself "the son of your maidservant," which implies a person who is born into service and slavery.

When you pray, it is important to realize that you are in the position of a servant and that you are dependent upon your Master. While the servant lives for the purpose and plan of the Master, the Master in return gives the servant the right to expect help, protection, and support from his Lord. In prayer you acknowledge your dependence upon God; He is the source of every good thing that you need for body and soul. You also acknowledge your Master's wisdom and his plan; He knows better than you do what you need and so you are willing to submit to his greatness and authority.

In verse 4 David's position of dependence is further shown by the phrase, "To you I lift up my soul." To lift up your soul to God means that you reach out to Him, that you lay yourself open before Him with all your frailties, and that you appeal to Him for the needs of your

soul. Many saints in the Scriptures would indicate their reaching out to God by physically lifting their hands to heaven. "To lift up your soul" to God means that you reach out to Him for help. You know that He sees and hears you and will answer you.

In this psalm David lifted up his soul to the Lord to ask for joy. In whatever trial David was experiencing at that time, his soul was weighed down. Perhaps he was feeling oppressed by the "arrogant" and "ruthless" men that we read about in verse 14. Perhaps his own sins made him feel guilty and unworthy before God, leading him to confess his trust in God's forgiving grace (v. 5). In either case, David turned to the Lord for joy, which is what all Christians must do. There is no other source for true joy than God himself.

Your Master in heaven has promised to give you peace (Phil 4:7) and joy (Ps 4:7). Keep in mind however, the words of the Catechism in Lord's Day 45. "God will give His grace and the Holy Spirit only to those who constantly and with heartfelt longing ask Him for these gifts and thank Him for them." You are commanded by God to lift up your soul to Him so that He might pour his gifts upon you. Through Christ the way is open. Your Master, your Father, will not turn you away when you lift your soul to Him.





Rev. Clarence Bouwman is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Yarrow, British Columbia
cbouwman@shaw.ca

A Bit of Church History

The Secession of 1834 – Choice Against Rationalism

I had opportunity in catechism class the other day to discuss the Secession of 1834 with the catechism students. I know that teachers have covered some of this material with the students in the school classroom, but it was still disconcerting to discover how little the young people knew of what Jesus Christ had done in this period of his church's history. Those who don't know their history are doomed to repeat their father's mistakes, some wag once said, and history shows he's right. The events surrounding the Secession of 1834 involved many of our ancestors and so we do well to have a reasonably accurate understanding of what that Secession was all about. So herewith a brief consideration of Christ's mighty deeds in this portion of church history.

Background

The church in The Netherlands at the beginning of the nineteenth century was officially bound to the Word of God as confessed in the three Forms of Unity, just as we are today. Even so, the church at that time permitted and condoned preaching that denied the depraved nature of man and that contradicted the doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith in Jesus Christ. Man, proclaimed the average preacher, was not totally corrupt, but knew by nature what was good and evil. Sin was not disobedience against God, but was rather a moral defect. Christ had not come into the world to save sinners through his substitutionary suffering and death, but came instead to be the example people were to follow; by leading a virtuous life as Christ did, one was on an open road to heaven. That's the sort of sound our fathers heard as they sat in the pew Sunday by Sunday. And many of them were quite content with that. . . .

This sound was not new. It had, in essence, been propagated some two centuries earlier by Jacob Arminius. The Dutch churches had emphatically rejected the teachings of this man in the Canons

adopted by the Synod of Dort in 1618-19 and had bound themselves officially and firmly to the scriptural teaching of man's total depravity and God's gift of salvation through grace alone in Jesus Christ. But in the days preceding the Secession, the Canons of Dort lay buried under layers of dust.

In fact, in 1807 a selection of 192 "evangelical hymns" was introduced into the churches, to be sung alongside the existing 150 psalms. Characteristic of these hymns was the emphasis on the religious man, with his spiritual feelings and experiences. These hymns sang not primarily of Christ's redemptive work, or man's sinfulness and hence need for redemption, but instead encouraged the religious man to follow the example of Christ and so to lead the virtuous life – and so achieve salvation. The churches on the whole calmly accepted these hymns.

A further indication that things were not well became evident in 1816. The Church Order formulated by the Synod of Dort had been built on the premise that Jesus Christ was Head of the Church. Now a new Church Order was imposed on the churches, one in which the secular authorities received ultimate control of church affairs. In agreement with the desire of the king, the synod now became an instrument of the state. No longer was the Word of God the final court of appeal in the church; the secular government instead received that role.

Also in 1816 a new Form of Subscription was imposed upon the church. The previous Form of Subscription, dating from the time of the Synod of Dort, required that every office bearer declare his firm belief that *all* the articles and doctrines of the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort *agreed in everything* with the Word of God. The new Form of Subscription now had office bearers declare that they would believe and would teach the doctrines mentioned in the three Forms of Unity *in so far as* these teachings agreed with the Word of God.

In other words, the contents of the confessions did not necessarily summarise accurately what God had revealed in Scripture; rather, each office bearer could disagree with a particular Lord's Day and freely teach its opposite on grounds that you had promised in the Subscription Form to teach according to the Forms of Unity only *in so far as* their teachings agreed with Scripture. So a wedge was driven between Scripture and the confessions and the personal insights of the office bearer became the judge between the two. The confessions, then, no longer had any binding authority and the pulpits were legally open to any wind of doctrine. So the Canons of Dort, with its teaching about the depravity of man and the atoning work of Jesus Christ, could be officially denied as not agreeing with the Bible. Changing the Form of Subscription officially loosened the ship of God's church from her anchor in God's Word and set her adrift in the uncertain seas of human rationalism.

Rev. deCock

Hendrik deCock (1801-1942) received a training for the ministry in agreement with the spirit of the times, and that's to say that he learned to preach liberalism and modernism according to the itching ears of the majority in the pews. As a young preacher, then, he zealously proclaimed the gospel of man's goodness, of his ability to win salvation from God through following the worthy example of Jesus Christ. Such was the man who became minister of the Word of God in the church of Ulrum in 1829, his third congregation. The congregation received him with a measure of dissatisfaction because of his known liberal slant.

A wedge was driven between Scripture and the confessions

But under the guidance of the Head of the Church, Rev. deCock developed a warm relationship with his flock. Upon the advice of elder Beukema, the young minister began to study Reformed literature which he had never read before. This included – gasp! – an abridged edition of Calvin's *Institutes* as well as the Canons of Dort – neither of which he had read during his time in the seminary. His prayerful reading of this material, together with further talks with the simple of faith in his congregation, was used by the Lord to work an upright faith in this preacher. The word of the simple farmhand Kuipenga made a deep impression

on him: "If I am to add even one sigh to make my salvation possible, I would be forever lost." The content of his sermons changed; he no longer preached the goodness of man, but preached instead the gospel of free grace in Jesus Christ for lost sinners. From far and wide the hungry came to Ulrum to be fed by the bread of life now sounding from this pulpit. Though labourers worked long days, it was not uncommon for many to walk fifteen kilometres on Sunday morning to hear Rev deCock and walk another fifteen kilometres home in the afternoon. They came in droves so that for many there was no room in the church itself; they stood outside to listen, to learn, to still their gnawing hunger . . . behold the church gathering work of Jesus Christ.

"Looking to the command; blind to the future"

Rev. deCock was not a pretentious man. He did not systematically attack the wrongs in the church by writing or sending appeals. He simply preached, in a positive manner, the full doctrine of salvation each Sunday anew and he prayed publicly that God would graciously raise up a person capable of spearheading the attack against liberalism in the church.

Behold the church gathering work of Jesus Christ

Meanwhile, Rev. deCock did what he could to teach the people. Those ancient publications which had been so instrumental in opening his own eyes to the riches of the gospel – the Canons of Dort and the abridged edition of Calvin's *Institutes* – he republished and made available to his countrymen.

While the simple of faith greeted this effort with gladness, the broader circle of deCock's colleagues responded with apprehension. For the theology of these old Reformed heirlooms did not at all agree with the free spirit of the day. To state that man was lost, was deserving of eternal punishment, and was totally at the mercy of a just God, did not fit with the enlightened views of the nineteenth century. At a result, other ministers published counter brochures in favour of the modern consensus and the church membership was encouraged to reject Rev. deCock's primitive narrow-mindedness.

Particularly two of these publications were sharp in their attacks on the Canons of Dort. These two brochures, authored respectively by Revs. Brouwer

(*Necessary Warnings and Salutary Advice to my Congregation*) and Reddingius (*Letters concerning the Current Divisions and Movements in the Reformed Church*), offered attacks at times sharp and sarcastic on the Reformed doctrine and its defenders. They claimed that the doctrine as contained in the Canons of Dort was "unbiblical, passive and unfruitful." And the pastor of Ulrum was made out to be a schismatic, a deceiver of the flock and in league with the Jesuites.

It was when deCock learned that all his colleagues in his classical area agreed with Brouwer and Reddingius that he felt compelled to begin writing. He published a brochure, "*Defence of the True Reformed Doctrine and the True Reformed People*." The subtitle made a reference to Brouwer and Reddingius: "*The Sheepfold of Christ Attacked by Two Wolves and Defended by H. deCock*." In this brochure he did as was his custom on the pulpit; he defended from Scripture the doctrine of salvation through faith alone in Jesus Christ for the lost sinner. Large numbers of people were delighted with this publication.

Peace and quiet was of greater importance than humble acceptance of the holy Word of the living God

But the church officials were not amused. In response to this brochure, the power brokers of the church summoned Rev. deCock to appear before a classical board (December, 1833). Because he refused to retract what he had written about the scriptural faith, these power brokers from elsewhere in the land suspended him from his office in the church of Ulrum for a period of two years. The official ground for this suspension was: he "overthrows the good order in the church." Peace and quiet was of greater importance than humble acceptance of the holy Word of the living God.

Rev. deCock's suspension did not lead to his silence. In April 1834, Rev. deCock wrote a preface to a pamphlet written by a certain Jacobus Klok, entitled "*The Evangelical Hymns Tested and Found Wanting*." In his preface, deCock charged that these hymns of 1807 deprived the Reformed people of the true faith, for they applauded the goodness of man. Clearly, the issue was not the use of hymns as such; the issue was

rather the attacks which these hymns made on the Scripture and therefore on the confessions drawn from Scripture.

In May 1834 the provincial church board deposed deCock as minister of the church in Ulrum, on the ground that he had again broken the good order in the church. Once again, it was not doctrinal honesty, nor respect and love for God and his revelation, that prompted this decision. The church leaders desired but one thing and that was peace and quiet. To achieve that goal, Rev. deCock had to go.

It's not so hard for us, sinful people as we are, to repeat the mistakes of the fathers

Although the deposition was temporarily retracted, appeals by deCock to the higher church courts, even to the king, were vain. It became abundantly clear that the ecclesiastical leaders were not willing to bow before the Word of God as confessed in the three Forms of Unity. So there remained no alternative for deCock but to separate himself from the Reformed Church in The Netherlands.

Secession

Further appeal to higher courts had proven futile. Upon the urgings of his consistory and congregation, deCock agreed, in October 1834, to break his bonds with the church that refused to bow before the Word of God. Over the weeks and months it had become apparent that hatred had developed within the Reformed Church, a hatred directed against those who defended Scripture and confession, a hatred that was ultimately directed against the God of the Scripture. So, on Tuesday, October 14, 1834, the congregation of Ulrum met together to sign an "Act of Separation or Return." By signing this act, the faithful of Ulrum gave testimony to their desire to uphold the Reformed confessions. Not only did they embrace wholeheartedly the Canons of Dort with its articles on the corruption of man and his need for God's grace, they clung also to the Belgic Confession with its marks of the true and false church. This "Act of Separation or Return" notes the fact that the state church had lost the marks of the true church; in fact, it displayed the marks of the false church as listed in Article 29. As a result of

this observation, the subscribers to this act concluded that they had a duty to “separate themselves from those who are not of the church” (see Art. 28, BC) and “declare at the same time their willingness to practice communion with all true Reformed members and unite with every assembly based upon God’s infallible Word.” Again, that’s in strict harmony with the Word of God as echoed in Article 28, Belgic Confession.

It was this love for God and respect for his holy Word that characterized those who seceded from the apostate state church. That was evident also by their decision, as recorded in the “Act of Separation or Return”, to “abide in all things by God’s holy Word and by our time-honoured Forms of Unity, based in all things upon that Word, namely, the Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of the Synod of Dort.” Theirs was a desire to manage all things according to the pure Word of God, to acknowledge Jesus Christ as the only Head of the Church. So they acted in faith, following the command of Christ, knowing that the future would not be easy, but aware that those who follow the Shepherd wherever He may lead will not be disappointed.

Struggle and triumph

For those who separated themselves from the state church, life was indeed not easy. Internally, the Seceders were a motley group, with different emphases and few leaders. Six young ministers served in the Secession churches, the oldest a mere thirty-three years (Rev. deCock himself), the youngest twenty-three. All six had received their theological training

from liberal professors, all had to orientate themselves properly in the works of bygone Reformed writers. Yet on these six preachers the Lord laid the mantles of leadership. Together they struggled to comprehend the riches of Scripture as the church had known and proclaimed it 200 years ago at the time of the Synod of Dort. Together they struggled to feed the sheep in the growing number of seceded congregations (by 1836, the six ministers served some 128 congregations!). Together they struggled against the hostility of the government and of the state church and encouraged the faithful in the face of persecution and oppression.

It was a time of struggle for the rejuvenated churches. But by the grace of God, they persevered. Through these young men the Lord worked a miracle, to gather a church in nineteenth century Holland that could be an enormous blessing in the land as a whole and the world beyond. God could use them because they desired to be faithful, because they bowed reverently before the Word of God and therefore held the confessions in high esteem.

Today

We live many years later, in a different part of God’s big world. It’s not so hard for us, sinful people as we are, to repeat the mistakes of the fathers. It’s also not so hard to discover from God’s Word what the mistakes were and determine not to repeat them. It’s my prayer that the remembrance of God’s mighty and gracious works in history will prompt us to stay informed and so to be alert against current attacks on the sheepfold of Jesus Christ.



Peter H. Holtvlüwer



Rev. Holtvlüwer is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church in Carman East, Manitoba
pholtvlüwer@mts.net

Testing the Revised Psalm Lyrics

Some time ago, Rev. W.W.J. VanOene wrote some strong remarks against singing the revised psalm lyrics within the worship services (see his Letter to the Editor, June 19, 2009). Because of the potential for misunderstanding in the churches, I would like to share some research into this practice and interact with Rev. VanOene's concerns.

Rev. VanOene's main criticism is that such a practice violates the Church Order, specifically Article 55, "The metrical Psalms adopted by general synod as well as the Hymns approved by general synod shall be sung in the worship services." Since the current psalm lyric revisions have not been adopted by a general synod, Rev. VanOene believes this practice to be in contravention of the Church Order.

A secondary argument that Rev. VanOene brings forward is that the practice in the "early years" of our federation (i.e. where the churches *did* test proposed psalms and hymns by singing them within the worship services) was not a violation of the Church Order since in those days, as he says, "there was no such Provision in our Church Order." In addressing these concerns I would like to begin with this latter point.

The Church Order prior to 1983

When the Canadian Reformed Churches came into existence in 1950, of necessity much of church life and practice from The Netherlands was taken over. This includes the Church Order that was in use by our sister churches (the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands – Liberated). From 1950 till 1968 the Dutch version of that Church Order was in force. In 1968 a draft English translation was adopted and in force until the entire "Dutch" Church Order could be revised and adapted specifically for the Canadian situation. This revised Church Order was finally prepared for and adopted by General Synod Cloverdale 1983.

What this means is that from 1950 to 1983 the Dutch Church Order was in effect, at first in the Dutch language but later in the English translation. The relevant article that deals with singing in the worship services is Article 69 as printed in the Acts of General Synod Orangeville, 1968, Supplement 12: *"In the Churches the 150 Psalms shall be sung, and the Hymns, maintained and adopted for ecclesiastical use by the Synod of Middleburg in 1933."* Contrary to what has been claimed, there always was a provision in the Church Order regarding the

singing of psalms and hymns within the worship services. Article 69 clearly limits those songs to those *"maintained and adopted for ecclesiastical use"* by a general synod, even specifically Synod Middleburg 1933!

Reading through the Acts of Synods 1954, 1958, and 1962 it is clear that Article 69, CO was considered and treated by the churches as in force. Article 69 even figured prominently in an appeal by one of the churches which considered the decision of Synod 1954 (Art. 56) to be contrary to it. Synod 1954 had authorized the singing of thirty-four psalms taken from the Christian Reformed Psalter (1934 edition). The appeal's concern was that *all* 150 Psalms were to be sung (according to Art. 69, CO) and hence the argument that Synod 1954 had limited the scope of Article 69 by making only thirty-four psalms available.

The response of Synod 1958 is worth quoting in full as it shows how Synod worked with Article 69, CO:

The Synod rejects the appeal by the church at Chatham to consider that, on the ground of Article 69, Church Order, the decision of Synod Homewood-Carman 1954 (Article 56) no longer applies, since that Synod by her decision in Article 56 did not reduce the number of

Psalms to be sung, but left it in the freedom of the churches to also allow 34 of these Psalms to be sung in the English language. (*Acts of Synod Homewood, 1954, Article 173.* Emphasis added.)¹

This demonstrates that General Synod recognized the ongoing authority of Article 69, CO and yet did not deal with it in a legalistic manner. If Synod had done so, then only the *Dutch* versions of the psalms approved by Synod Middelburg 1933 could be permitted. But, very much in line with the intention of Article 69, Synod considered the addition of thirty-four of those same psalms now in the English language to be quite appropriate.

It therefore cannot be maintained that our present Article 55 is essentially different and more restrictive than the old Article 69, for both clearly limit the churches' singing to synodically-adopted songs. Even so, from the earliest days, the churches in common (through the general synods) have shown an eye for the spirit of the Church Order in dealing with the songs of the church.

Testing within the churches

What seems to be missing in the objections is an appreciation for the nuance of *testing* songs in worship. What appears to get lumped together is the long-standing practice of testing in worship the various songs proposed by a synodically-appointed committee together with the *regular employment* of songs in worship as adopted by a general synod, as if these two are one and the same. Testing,

however, is a *temporary measure* used by the churches in common as part of the process to determine the final edition of songs that will permanently be permitted to be sung in the churches. Testing is not every church doing as it sees fit. Rather, it is part of a collective effort to arrive at a final selection of approved songs.

First Book of Praise (1961)

In the Canadian Reformed Churches the practice and process of testing both psalms and hymns within the churches (meaning also within the worship services) before they were adopted by a general synod has been long understood and accepted. This can be demonstrated by a quotation from the very first *Book of Praise* produced in 1961, one year prior to General Synod Hamilton, 1962:

In harmony with the conclusions of this report the Synod 1958 appointed new deputies with instructions as follows: "To compose a Psalter in the English language including, if possible, other hymns of Scripture, in accordance with directives contained in the report of 1956; and to make use of material available in the Psalter of the Christian Reformed Church and other Psalters inasmuch as the versification is faithful and tunes answer the Church-musical norms." The results of the work of the deputies should then serve as a "proefbundel," a *proof to be tested by the churches during the year preceding the next synod* (p.3, emphasis added).

This directive for testing within the churches can be verified by referring to the Acts of Synod 1958, Article 172.

This decision very clearly intends the publication of various psalms and hymns to be sung in worship by the churches before a general synod evaluates them for approval or disapproval. In fact, the churches collectively are given partial responsibility to evaluate these songs and provide assistance to the subsequent general synod by submitting their evaluation to that body. This was the purpose in sending out the songs to the churches in advance. That these songs were actually sung within the worship services can be verified by older members and is not denied by Rev. VanOene either.

Supplement 1967

This practice carried on with subsequent editions of the psalms and hymns as well. Synod Edmonton 1965 decided to authorize the Deputies for an English Calvinistic Psalter to ". . . if it appears impossible to submit to the churches a complete Psalter in the near future, to publish a 'supplement,' to fill the gap between the present "Book of Praise" and a complete Psalter" (*Acts, Art. 35.h.*). The result of this was the so-called Supplement of 1967, consisting of thirty-four psalms and nineteen hymns, all as yet unseen by a general synod. The supplement was published one year prior to Synod Orangeville 1968 and given to the churches at that time for their evaluation and input either to the Deputies or to the next general synod. The Deputies introduced the Supplement of 1967

explaining some particulars and then concluding, *"This must be seen as an experiment and we would appreciate any suggestions"* (from the *Preface*). Clearly, both General Synod and the Committee sought interaction from the churches as they tested these songs in worship.

Hymn Section 1979

Once more in 1979 the Committee for the Publication of the *Book of Praise* undertook the same approach in the evaluation of more hymns. In the introduction to the green-covered "Hymn Section 1979" we read once again of both the provisional nature of these songs and the request for input and feedback from the churches:

In order to make the above report as "complete and definite" as possible, the Committee decided to make available to the churches a "provisional" report covering only the Hymn Section, so that by using it the Churches might be able to contribute towards the required definite report, to be issued early in 1980. What is presented here is the provisional report of the Hymn Section. The churches are requested to inform the Committee of any changes or corrections deemed necessary either in the music or in the words.

As in earlier cases, these hymns had not been approved by any general synod. However, in keeping with past practice and past synodical decision, the Committee issued these hymns to the churches in advance of general synod strictly for the purpose of testing and evaluation. Most of

us can remember using the green 1979 hymn book within the worship services.

The current situation

Since 1980, the churches have had a "settled" *Book of Praise*, at least with respect to the songs. After a lengthy period of constructing an English Calvinistic Psalter, the churches began to enjoy the fruits. No changes have been made to either psalms or hymns since that time until now.

The recent process of considering new hymns got off the ground at General Synod Chatham 2004 (at the request of various churches through the minor assemblies), while revising the psalm lyrics was mandated by General Synod Smithers 2007. With respect to the hymns, both the Committee and the Synod spoke openly of publishing "a revised hymn section for testing by the churches" (*Acts of Chatham*, Art. 115, 6.1.1.1, p.120. Emphasis added.) in keeping with past practice.

Testing the revised psalms

Since the present dispute is about the revised psalm lyrics, it is helpful to focus on what the Committee wrote in its report to Synod 2007 about the use of these lyrics:

When considering the process involved in a revision project, the Committee proposes to seek as much input and constructive feedback from the churches at all stages of the project. Given the "work-in-progress" nature of the work, ways ought to be explored that enable churches to interact with the material as

soon as it is released for testing by the Committee. It may be left in the freedom of the churches to make use of the revised Psalms in different ways. *For example, either by having the congregation sing them before or during the worship services.* (*Report to General Synod Smithers*, Section 15.2.12, p.199. Emphasis added.)

Here again the Committee openly speaks of having the churches test the new psalm lyrics and gives the concrete suggestion that this may be done within the worship services. Their idea was clearly to facilitate the churches' use of the new lyrics and encourage their feedback as much as possible.

General Synod Smithers evidently agreed with this approach. No church appealed the suggestion of the committee or provided negative comment. Synod itself took note of these suggestions in the Committee's report² and never reprimanded the Committee for daring to suggest that the churches test these new lyrics in worship prior to them being approved by a general synod. Instead, Synod showed itself in agreement with the line of the Committee and echoed the wording of the Committee in its decision:

To involve the churches in all stages of this process and to solicit input from the churches, the committee will do well to publish revised or updated psalm versions as they become available, on a website linked to the official website of the Canadian Reformed Churches (www.canrc.org).

In light of all of the above, any church in the federation which

decides to test the new lyrics *within* the worship services is not only in line with the most recent decision of General Synod Smithers but is also in harmony with the practice of the churches since the start of the federation.

Against the Church Order?

Even with history on the side of the current practice, it is good to ask whether this testing is in violation of the Church Order itself as has been charged. After all, people, churches, and assemblies can be wrong, even consistently wrong over decades. It is important that we protect the integrity of our agreed-upon Church Order lest we undermine our insistence that it be upheld on other points by members, churches, and assemblies alike.

However, this practice of testing is not a violation of Article 55, CO. The article lays down the good principle that only songs agreed upon by the churches in common should be sung within the churches. This is intended to prevent the easy introduction of error, heresy, or deformation into the congregation's singing by the unguarded decision of a local church. It is relatively easy for one church (or consistory) to introduce new songs for worship, but for a federation of churches to do so requires much debate, sober second thought and a majority agreement of the broadest assembly. Hence, Article 55 is an important safe-guard of our doctrinal orthodoxy.

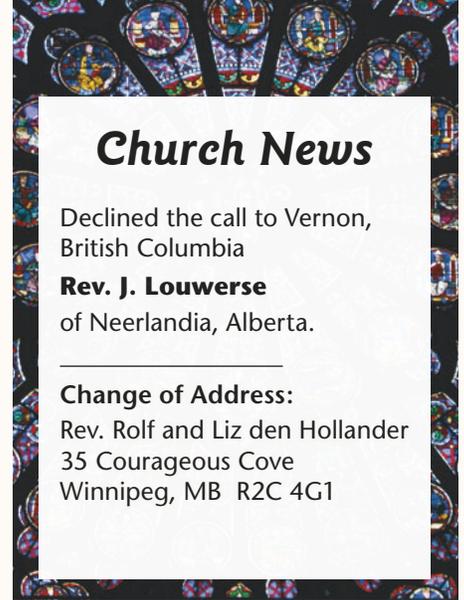
The practice of "testing" various psalms and hymns proposed by a committee appointed by General Synod and working with certain fixed criteria for selecting songs only supports this principle. The

songs proposed are not put forward by a local church or by certain people with a personal agenda but by a Committee established by the churches in common. The committee is mandated to review songs submitted by the churches and to analyze them in light of synodically-approved criteria. This whole exercise is aimed at arriving at a fixed body of psalms and hymns that in the end will have been rigorously analyzed by all the churches so that only the best and most-fit end up in the final collection.

Semper Reformanda

Testing the hymns in the worship services of the local church encourages the watchful eye of all the churches to be upon the work of a synodical committee and to give input. Far from inviting *deformation*, this practice stimulates and promotes *re-formation*, ensuring our songs accord fully with Scripture. In addition, these songs are to be tested for a *limited period* of time. Churches then give input to either the Committee or Synod or both. Eventually a general synod will make a decision and after that point the churches will sing only those songs that have been adopted by the synod (as has been the case from 1980 till this recent round of psalm-lyric revision).

I am convinced that it is for these reasons that no church or ecclesiastical assembly ever saw a contradiction between the Church Order and the practice of testing new songs within the worship services. This practice is limited in time and scope and serves a very specific purpose: to



Church News

Declined the call to Vernon,
British Columbia

Rev. J. Louwerse
of Neerlandia, Alberta.

Change of Address:

Rev. Rolf and Liz den Hollander
35 Courageous Cove
Winnipeg, MB R2C 4G1

discover whether these songs are truly worthy to be used by God's covenant people to sing to their covenant God in holy assembly. Once the period of testing is over, only the adopted songs are used and the rest are discarded. That this has been done is a matter of record and anyone perusing the previous editions of and supplements to the *Book of Praise* can find a number of songs which are no longer in use.

With all due respect to Rev. VanOene, I do believe both his criticism and his concern for deformation on this issue are misplaced. This practice is tried and true. It does not violate the Church Order but is an orderly, trust-worthy fulfillment of the principle contained in Article 55, CO.

¹ The original Acts of Synod 1958,(as well as 1954, 1962 and 1965 are in Dutch, though the first and the latter two have English summaries. This translation was greatly aided by sr. Marry van Dijk (with many thanks!) though any errors remain my responsibility.

² See *Acts of Synod Smithers, 2007*, Art. 148, Observation 2.1, p.170.

From time to time Clarion will publish longer responses to articles received. The decision as to which responses to publish will rest with the Editor.



Owen Sound Welcomes the Moeskers

With apologies to Gosciny and Uderzo: The year is 2009 D.V. and far away in a little town in Ontario, Canada. . .

The sun rose to warm the landscape on a beautiful Sunday morning. On August 23, Owen Sound's minister-elect Rev. Moesker, counsellor Rev. Agema, and congregation assembled for the installation service. Rev. Agema preached the installation sermon: "Christ we proclaim." He explained what this meant for the preaching, the congregation, and the preacher. The minister, imitating Christ's example of servant leadership, ensures the congregation is well-fed by the preaching of the Word. He presents the gospel, explains it, and brings it close to the hearts of the congregation. He has been commissioned by God to present the Word in all its fullness. This Word must reach the lives and hearts of the people - and it will effectively work in peoples' lives. As congregation, we have a responsibility to recognize the minister's God-given authority in fulfilling that task. In obedience, we must respond. Then as congregation and minister, we stand in awe of God's care, united in our praise for his care.

After the sermon, Rev. Agema read the form for installation of ministers and Rev. Moesker gave his hearty ascent to the questions. The form of subscription was read and then signed by Rev. Moesker.

Congratulations were received from the classical region, former pastor, and surrounding congregations. One of the delegates noted the fact that Rev. Moesker has returned to the province of his youth and is only now one hour from his hometown of Fergus - there are still many relationships from days gone by.

Soon afterwards. . .

Rev. Moesker preached his inaugural sermon during the afternoon service. Using the text of Mark 4:26-29, he expounded on how God's kingdom is like a farmer sowing seed. Jesus Christ taught that God's



glorious Kingdom comes in a totally different way than people expect; not by means of an impressive show of strength, but by the Word, which is the power to salvation to everyone who believes. The farmer in the parable is not responsible for the germination and growth of the seed. Neither can the minister make the seed of the Word grow. It has the power in itself to grow. It is the blood of Jesus Christ that gives the Word of God its power. A farmer, who has sown seed in his field, has to be patient. It takes months for the seed to grow and for the crop to finally ripen. That's how it is with the kingdom of God as well. Jesus sends his disciples into the world with an eye to the harvest. Christ longs for that harvest, when all believers will be gathered into God's Kingdom to be with Him and to rejoice with Him forever.

A few days later. . .

In keeping with an Owen Sound "dress-up" tradition, a Roman theme was selected for the welcome evening. This theme determined the decor, menu, and outfits. Many took advantage of yet another opportunity to dress up for the event. Men, women, and children alike were bedecked in togas, tunics, and stolas. Ave, *Romani!* The informal half of the evening began with a delicious dinner. The menu included wild boar (aka roasted pig), caesar salad, and an assortment of side

dishes. The hearty meal was topped off with dessert - a decadent affair! By 8 p.m., after we had eaten our fill (and slightly resembling pigs ourselves), the congregation headed to the church auditorium for the more formal half of the evening.

The evening was opened by Rudi Wildeboer, who formally welcomed the Moesker family to Owen Sound. After the opening, Matt Hutten took over as Master of Ceremony. He started off by announcing the winning costumes: Becky Pieterman (adults) and Joseph Kapteyn (children). Next the children's choir, directed by Cindy Kruisselbrink, treated us to a rousing performance. They sang a rendition of Psalm 136 as well as a welcome song to the Moeskers (M-m-m-m-m-M! uh,uh,uh,uh,uh-O...!). It was then up to Becky Pieterman to test the wits of the Moeskers: how well could they distinguish and link physical resemblances between siblings, parents, and children? They did a respectable job! After this entertaining matching game, Klaas Werkman shared a poem about the experiences of the congregation during the two years of vacancy and ultimately the decision for Rev. Moesker to accept the call: "Hail the conquerors!"

The youth group/young people choir, directed by Melissa Kruisselbrink, then took over the stage and



beautifully performed the song "Let it be Said of Us" based on 2 Timothy 4:7. Following this was a slideshow put on by Henrietta Reinink on behalf of the young peoples in Owen Sound. The objective was to introduce Julia and James Moesker to the Owen Sound young peoples. Another slide show quickly followed on the heels of the first, organized by Sarah and Kelly Devries. The purpose was to introduce us to the Moesker family members, including respective spouses and children that had not moved to Owen Sound. The children of the Moeskers are spread near and far: most are distributed throughout Canada and one lives as far as Papua New Guinea. Marlissa Nyenhuis then tested Rev. Moesker's knowledge of family last names - but with a twist. Each family name in the congregation was a fusion of Latin, Spanish, and Dutch. As he was presented with the foreign name, Rev. Moesker had to determine the correct last name in English. Again, a good performance! The adult choir, also directed by Melissa Kruisselbrink, ended the evening by performing two songs, "We Will Serve the Lord All My Days" and "Here We Stand, Lord." The evening ended with the congregation singing "Great is Thy Faithfulness." We are very thankful that the Moeskers have come to Owen Sound. We pray that the Lord will bless Rev. Moesker with much wisdom and strength as he fulfils his task as shepherd and leader in Owen Sound.

A wonderful time was had by all! *Lam, vicis lavo toga!*

Never before has Clarion received a welcome speech in the style of Asterix and Obelix. May Rev. Moeskix serve the natives well.



Ray of Sunshine

Patricia Gelms and Corinne Gelms

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Connie for the contribution she provided this month. Also, a sincere congratulations on all the birthday's being celebrated this month. May our heavenly Father bless you all in this new year with good health and much happiness. Have an enjoyable day!!



Connie Van Amerongen

I have lived at Anchor Home in Beamsville, since the end of August in 2002. Prior to living here in Beamsville, I lived in Orangeville with my friend, Gail Wemekamp – for eight years!! I loved it there!! (I still am amazed at how she managed to put up with me!!) We had many wonderful – yes, sometimes even

wacky times together – too many adventures to mention here in great detail – lots of laughter, but also tears as well, but I can honestly tell you that I have no regrets about living there. But, before Orangeville: I lived with my parents in Grimsby. I have three older brothers, a younger brother as well as a younger sister – with lots of nephews and nieces, too! When I was growing up, I attended a school for special-needs children in St. Catharines, for seventeen years!! Yes! I loved it there and I have many happy memories of that time in my life. When I was still living at home with my Mom and Dad, I was able to – in the summer of 1990 – fly to Neerlandia, Alberta, where I stayed for two weeks with Rev. and Mrs. Wieske, Sr. They had moved from the Beamsville area to Alberta and they had invited me to visit them once they'd been there for about a year. Well, that is exactly what I did – and what fun we had!!

While I lived "Up North" in Orangeville, I was privileged to be able to go on many trips – try many new things – and, not necessarily doing them with Gail, or just with Gail, but also with other friends, and even with other family members – never on my own. I travelled to Holland in 1998, Florida in 2001, and Pennsylvania in 2007. So, you see, my life is very rarely dull!

Though I am confined to a wheelchair because of Cerebral Palsy, I still try to keep busy. Here are just a few things that help me to be just that. I have, at the moment, a part-time job delivering Sears Catalogues – once a month or so. Regarding going on my catalogue route – if anything, doing my route is helping me to

keep my electric wheelchair on the sidewalk!! :-)) I also love to read! I have many different types of books in my own room. I also proof-read, on a volunteer basis, library books for the John Calvin School Library in Smithville. With each book I submit a report. I enjoy reading and especially enjoy writing poetry, articles, and the like. I dream some day of being officially published. I also love listening to music. Although I have limited movement, I enjoy writing using my computer. I write like I talk – a lot!! I have my ups and downs, sure, but God has truly blessed me with a loving family, caring friends, a church community, and most of the time, a positive attitude! I also really enjoy attending the Wednesday Morning Bible Study at our church. I make a lot of my own cards and have a fairly large doll collection as well!! Lastly, I love sending and receiving e-mail messages from friends and family!! My e-mail address is: connievl@hotmail.com. Please also visit my blog at: <http://cvanam.multiply.com> – "and thanks so much for DANCIN' with me!!"

I am in friendship yours,
Connie: -)

Care so much for all of my friends and family;

Only hope some day to be more patient too.

Not to always put myself first, before everyone else,

No, but instead to put others first, before myself.

I have a lot to be thankful for, God is so good to me;

Eager to tell of the wonderful things He is doing in my life!



Birthdays in February

- 12th **Connie VanAmerongen will be 45**
361 Thirty Road, Beamsville, ON LOR 1B2
connievl@hotmail.com
- 18th **Cora Schoonhoven will be 59**
93 Oxford Street, Richmond Hill, ON L4C 4L6
- 24th **Fred Ludwig will be 58**
653 Broad Street West, Dunnville, ON N1A 1T8

A NOTE TO ALL PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

If there are any address or other changes that we need to be aware of please let us know as soon as possible. You can contact us by the following means:

Mail:

Corinne Gelms
8301 Range 1 Road
Smithville, ON LOR 2A0
Phone: 905-957-0380

Email: jcorgelms@porchlight.ca



C

URCNA Synod 2010 Notice

Cornerstone United Reformed Church is pleased to present the work that its Synod 2010 Organizing Committee has accomplished to date. Synod 2010 London Ontario will be hosted the week of July 26, running from Monday (registration) through Saturday (check-out). With delegates from over 100 URCNA congregations, fraternal delegates, and guests, we are expecting to accommodate approximately 300 people. To facilitate this event, the Synod 2010 Organizing Committee is working with the University of Western Ontario (a campus boasting over 20,000 students during the academic year) to provide facilities, room, and board. For the meetings, UWO will be providing a lecture hall with seating for 500 (for the plenary sessions) as well as a number of smaller meetings rooms for committee work. Room and board will be provided through one of UWO's student housing complexes.

With facilities taken care of, the organizing committee is turning its attention to registration. URCNA congregations should have already received the information and registration package for Synod 2010 via email. A copy of this package can be found at www.urnca.org after logging into the website. Fraternal delegates can obtain a copy of this package by emailing synod2010@cornerstoneurc.org. Delegates from the USA are reminded that a passport will be required for entry into Canada. We are looking forward to the Synod 2010 meetings and ask for your prayers that this synod may be well run, characterized by a sense of brotherly love and unity, and glorifying to God.

Submitted by the Synod 2010 Organizing Committee on behalf of the Consistory of Cornerstone United Reformed Church, London, Ontario, Canada.

C

Letter to the Editor

As a Christian scientist, I was a little disgruntled to read in Rev. Stam's rebuttal to A. Sikkema that "modern science is an enterprise opposed to faith." Rev. Stam may have meant this for certain fields, but it was certainly not written that way. I would agree if he was referring to something like evolutionary biology, but it was a statement writ large. I'm compelled to vigorously disagree.

Science is not an enterprise opposed to faith; rather, it is a worthy pursuit stemming directly from our creation mandate. Historical or modern, science has and continues to be a wondrous and fulfilling occupation where meaningful things can be accomplished in glory to God. There is no built-in agenda to oppose God or people of faith. Science is what it is, because God has established a creation with order and principles of cause-and-effect. Science is a tool that works. The sheer success of an organized approach to understanding and harnessing creation is undeniable. I think sometimes as Christians we are a little fearful of what "science may discover next," presuming that our faith may take a further hit. Some of our thought leaders in the Reformed tradition then go on the offensive in an attempt to stem the tide. Perhaps most worrisome is the tendency to turn the providence of God over his creation into a mystical concept that has no room for a scientific perspective. A humble Christian scientist can actually "add" an amazing richness to the grand actions of God in creation. I mean this: by studying how God applies Himself in creation, we can appreciate his creation on a whole new level. A humble scientist knows he isn't anything other than an observer and a user of the created order. And there are vast capabilities built in, still waiting to be tapped to God's glory!

Now, there are bad apples in any field: carpentry, business, politics, stamp collecting. Science is no different and I do agree that it concentrates more than its fair share of unbelievers. There are at least two reasons for this: there is considerable prestige that modern society places at the feet of scientists. It attracts and fosters great egos because there is an elitist quality to it, unfortunately. The second is because Christians have not taken to the field. Probably because of the "fight or flight" mentality that many Christians have when it comes to science. Evolution has dominated our view of science, but it is such a small, insignificant part of science on an operational level. One can happily spend an entire career in science and never feel compelled to engage its principles. Let's not be scared of it. Let's also not

throw the baby out with the bathwater. There are elements of evolutionary theory that are very sound and workable, which have nothing to do with the questions of origin.

Our Reformed thinkers would do well to exercise a little more care in tarring all scientific endeavor with the same brush. If they don't mean this, they shouldn't write like they do. We have a new generation of budding Christian scientists being held back from a meaningful use of their talents.



Dave Schriemer

Response

Thank you for your letter. It's always nice when readers feel compelled to react.

The two statements that are in question are:

- 1) Science is an enterprise opposed to faith
- 2) There are elements of evolutionary theory that are very sound and very workable.

Ad 1. I see that the first statement is formulated rather broadly. It was not my wording, but that of Sikkema, who used it in a broader sense. My article was about Charles Darwin. Perhaps your quarrel is not with me, but with Sikkema. I specifically mentioned a few fields where science opposes faith: education and media, for example. I still believe that science generally opposes faith. I do not mock scientists; I only wish they would stick to their fields and not make sweeping statements that affect my faith or cast doubt on the Scriptures. If the scientific endeavor of scientists is to pursue the "creation mandate," let them first acknowledge the Creator as He has revealed Himself e.g. in Genesis 1 and 2.

Ad 2. I wrote, twice by now, that I do believe there is a certain evolution as in "development." Scientists should identify and track these developments and discover how God's wisdom in creation can be applied for the betterment of all. God has laid great gifts in creation which we may research and use. Unfortunately, many scientists try to figure out origins. My articles were directed to those who may fall into evolutionist waters and under an elitist, academic spell.

As for the new generation of “budding Christian scientists,” I enthusiastically greet them with the words of Proverbs 1:7, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. . . .”

By the way, can a Christian really “spend an entire career in science and never feel compelled to engage its principles”? Budding Christian scientists need more positive guidance than that.

Klaas

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



Press Release

Press Release of the Combined Meeting of the Board and Committee of Administration, Inter-League Publication Board, held November 4, 2009 in Burlington, ON



The chairman of the Board, Dan VanDelden, opened the meeting with Scripture reading and prayer and welcomed everyone. The agenda was established.

In attendance for the Board, representing the League of Men’s Societies in Ontario, Dick Nyenhuis and Dan VanDelden, and representing the League of Women’s Societies in Ontario, Mary DeBoer, Betsy Kingma, and Dianne Westrik. In attendance for the Committee of Administration (CoA): Paul DeBoer as chairman, Cathy Jonker as administrator, Annette Nobel as secretary, Debbie Swaving for sales, Theresa Westrik for marketing, and Nellie Hoeksema as treasurer.

The minutes of the last meeting held in May were adopted and matters from the minutes dealt with.

Books being worked on were reviewed. There will

be two new books of outlines and one new workbook published in the next six months. A catalogue of all the books sold by the ILPB was developed and printed. Ads have been taken out in *Clarion*, *Reformed Perspective*, and *Christian Renewal* to promote the newest book, *Encourage One Another*, and increase awareness of the ILPB. A book sale on select books is currently running until the end of January.

Nellie Hoeksema was welcomed as the new treasurer. The finances were reviewed and they are in good shape, with sufficient funds to develop and print the upcoming new books. Sales have remained steady.

The Board updated the CoA on the progress of books they are looking at for possible publication. There are several workbooks being worked on by our own ministers.

Various administrative matters were discussed and finalized. The long-term plans for the ILPB as developed by the Board were presented and reviewed. A sub-committee was struck to research website development and look at various alternatives for make the website (www.ilpb.ca) more professional and user-friendly.

General question period was held and the press release approved. Paul DeBoer closed the meeting with prayer.

