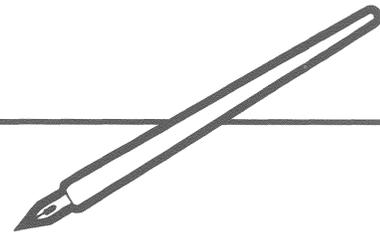


**Clarion**  
THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

Volume 43, No. 4

February 25, 1994



## About Good Works in Our Society

### A letter to the editor

The reader may remember that I wrote in the first issue of this year about the two bills 45 and 55 of the New Democratic government in Ontario. These bills prohibit any discrimination against any person, including sexual discrimination. The same government has recently made statements in the same line regarding institutions of learning. In Ontario's colleges and universities the people are expected not to say anything that is discriminatory. Some fear that soon in Ontario it will be considered an offence against the law if a person speaks out or even says that the God of heaven and earth has forbidden a sexual relation between persons of the same gender. One can ask where is this government leading the Province of Ontario?

In a Press Review in a following issue, Dr. C. Van Dam asked our attention for actions of the same Ontario government against those who are active against the murdering of unborn babies. In a peaceful way, these people walk in front of abortion clinics and try to prevent women on their way into such clinics to have their babies killed. Now the government is suing a number of them. It even spied upon. One asks how this is possible in a free country with a "democratic" government.

In reaction to my editorial I received the following letter to the editor. In this case, we include also the address where support can be sent to. The government uses tax payers' money to sue its "righteous" citizens, while these "righteous" people have to pay the cost of their defence and so on. Here is the letter.

### To the editor of Clarion.

I am responding to the editorial by J. Geertsema.

First, I congratulate you on publishing this relevant article. I would like to make some additional remarks, especially "For the Churches the future could become difficult too." I cannot help wondering where Rev. Geertsema has been.

The future is here and has been for a while.

No, none of our members has been standing on the sidewalk proclaiming that homosexuality is a deviation and against God's commandments.

But some of us have stood on that sidewalk and have proclaimed to the world that abortion kills God's created human beings and have endeavoured to offer the victims help and support. That has now been labelled "demeaning."

For that offence, 18 pro-life counsellors and picketers are being persecuted and are facing an exhausting trial and a \$500,000 lawsuit.

Among them a Pastor whose only crime was to speak consistently against abortion from his pulpit.

I am the coordinator of the picketers and sidewalk counsellors at the Toronto's abortion "clinics."

Our mandate is to offer women help and protest abortion. Our written rules are strictly enforced; we do not shout, do not touch, do not block, do not use derogatory language, do not trespass, do not judge and at all times show compassion and love.

Personally I have been charged with a series of offenses which are preposterous. In a cruel 15 hour cross examination, I was asked 3505 questions.

At the just concluded hearing the Attorney General of Ontario urged Judge Adams to put a temporary ban on all pro-life work at 23 locations till the trial. Included are hospitals, doctors' offices, homes and abortion clinics. At that hearing, the main argument became the rights of women, with no consideration for the baby or the women who need help. Please pray for Judge Adams.

Since January 1992, more than 200 women accepted our help, many whose gratefulness show by the dozens of pictures and thank-you notes we receive daily.

My recurring question here is; Why is such a most important case not being dealt with in our publications?

Have we left it to the Roman Catholics?

Are we so disheartened, that we do not know what to do anymore?

Or are we believing the media, when they slander our names, knowing full well, we have no resources to combat them?

I thank those who reacted to my appeal for financial aid and notes of encouragement. (The vast majority came from out West). Any donations sent to: "Aid to Women Support Fund" are tax deductible and can be sent to: 300 Gerrard St. E., Toronto, ON M5A 2G7.

Can you devote an editorial on that situation please?

In Christ's service,  
(Mrs.) Joanne Dieleman

### Doing good works in society

The letter speaks for itself and I do not think it necessary to react to it. However, this letter caused me to think about what God's Word teaches us concerning works of charity in the church and by church members in society. We are told by our Lord through His apostle Paul that we have to apply ourselves to good works. Trying to prevent expecting mothers from having an abortion, and in this way holding them back from committing murder is such good work. This is the more so when it is done out of love for God and the neighbour, and when the healing and saving love of Christ is shown.

Some time ago I heard about a private organization within our sister churches in The Netherlands which has as its goal to help sick people, in particular Aids patients, who are expected to live for only about eight weeks and who

have no place to go and no one to take care of them. This organization has a doctor and nurses and many volunteers. They do not receive financial support from the government. All their financial needs are covered by private donations. This is one of the many organizations which help people in need. I take this Dutch organization as an example.

The members of this organization want to help Aids patients who have no helper out of Christian love. They also make clear that their help is only given in a Christian manner. At a certain moment a patient, nearing death, wanted to die through euthanasia. The response was: we do not do this here. If this is what you really want you have to go elsewhere. We are Christians and we want to act according to what God teaches us in His Word. The patient wanted them to find another place for him. This was not easy. It took a day or two to find a different place for him. However, when they told him that they had found a new place, he did not want to go anymore. He did not want euthanasia anymore. He had changed his mind in the Christian surrounding. So he stayed and received Christian care to the end.

The apostle Paul writes many a time in His epistles that God has given the members of His church many gifts. The one this, the other that. I quote Romans 12:4-8.

For as in one body we have many members, and all the members do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who contributes, in liberty; he who gives aid, with zeal; he who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

It is evident that the apostle speaks here about serving one another as members of the body of Christ, the congregation. However, this does not imply that this serving has to be restricted to the church. The body of Christ is also called to serve those outside with their good works. It is part of letting the light of Christ shine in the world in order that people may see our good works and glorify God, as Christ said in Matt: 5:13-16.

In former days Christians established Christian hospitals to take care of the sick. These hospitals were called in Dutch "diakonessenhuis." Translated this means: hospitals of deaconesses. There were also Christian homes for the blind and for other handicapped and sick people. They were set up as homes of care for whoever needed it.

One can say: such undertakings cost enormous amounts of money. We cannot do such things. There is not much money available and church, mission, schools and the institutions of charity that we are involved in, as Anchor Home for the mentally handicapped, cost already so much. I know this too.

Nevertheless, let us not forget our calling to show loving care to those in need, both to the household of faith, and to all (Gal. 6:10). Gifts of insight and knowledge are needed in the church. The Lord gives them. And we are called to make use of them, so that the church continues in the way of the Lord and does not become a kind of religious social institution. The same counts for gifts of service, of giving aid in different forms, of doing acts of mercy. To these gifts too there must be a place in the body of Christ for each other and for those in need outside the body. **C**



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IN THIS ISSUE

Editorial – About Good Works in Our Society — J. Geertsema .....	82
Remarks on church and tolerance — Prof. J. Kamphuis.....	84
Our Children and Entertainment — G.Ph. van Popta .....	89
Press Review — C. Van Dam.....	92
Ordination of John L. van Popta — P. Buist .....	93
Our Little Magazine — Aunt Betty .....	95

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# Remarks on church and tolerance

By Prof. J. Kamphuis

*Below one finds printed the first part (slightly edited) of one of the papers that served at the recent meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Churches. With Prof. Kamphuis' consent, I take the liberty to publish this paper in *Una Sancta* because of its relevance to the ongoing discussions in our midst about "unity of faith" and inter-church relations.*

*Of the five sections of the paper, the first two (printed in this issue) deal with humanistic tolerance. These two rather philosophical sections set the ground work for the more "hands-on" material of the later three sections. Though not exactly easy reading, please press on! These two sections provide a penetrating analysis of what our (Australian) society thinks about the church and her gospel (see also Press Review). Before his retirement, Prof. Kamphuis taught church history and church polity, and later dogmatics, at the Theological University of our Dutch sister churches in Kampen.*

C. Bouwman

## 1. Introduction

**The subject that we are now dealing with at this conference has been announced as "Tolerance." From the nature of this meeting as delegates and observers of churches it is more or less a matter of course that we confine ourselves to tolerance as an ecclesiastical issue.**

### 1.1.

Tolerance ("verdraagzaamheid" in Dutch, "forbearance" in English) functions as a key word, as a central idea in present-day (Western) society and culture, and has gradually acquired the meaning of: the willingness to respect the complete freedom of any conviction and of the attitude to life that originates from it and is connected to it, no matter how deviating this practical attitude

to life may be from traditional convictions and moral maxims as they may still be found among the majority of the people.

### 1.2.

Thus the idea of tolerance became much broader compared to the term that was most current until recently. In spite of all the difference, the central point of tolerance always meant tolerating all deviant conviction and behaviour. This tolerance was always limited and bound to certain conditions, e.g. when one wanted publicly to propagate one's deviant convictions or behaviour. This tolerance had its starting point in determinative authority that for whatever reason, allowed one to tolerate what in itself could not receive positive approval. Compare the survey article that gives insight written by W.F. Adeney in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics XII*, 1921, 360 e.v. (Unfortunately, the article is not fully accurate in some historical details). We quote the extensive description of "tolerance" given by Adeney on page 360:

The word 'toleration' in its legal, ecclesiastical, and doctrinal application has a peculiar limited significance. It connotes a refraining from prohibition and persecution. Nevertheless, it suggests a latent disapproval and it usually refers to a condition in which the freedom which it permits is both limited and conditional. Toleration is not equivalent to religious liberty, and it falls far short of religious equality. It assumes the existence of an authority which might have been coercive, but which for reasons of its own is not pushed to extremes. It implies a voluntary inaction, a polite leniency. The motives that induces a policy of toleration are various, such as mere weakness and inability to enforce prohibitory measures, lazy indifference, the desire to secure conciliation by concessions, the

wisdom to perceive that 'force is not remedy,' the intellectual breadth and humility that shrink from a claim to infallibility, the charity that endures the objectionable, respect for the right of private judgment.

At the end of his article Adeney points out (and he did so at the beginning of our century!) the great change that takes place in our time:

*The champions of liberty now represent the use of the term as representing a gracious concession on the part of the privileged, and claim to go far beyond it in their demand for the abolition of all theological and ecclesiastical privileges and the establishment of absolute religious equality.*

You might say that the *present* use of this term has been bent towards this equality!

### 1.3.

The *present-day* idea of tolerance, and the use of words that agree with it, means a definite breakthrough of the basic convictions of the sixteenth-century humanism that saw the measure of all things *in man*.

Together with the Reformation of the sixteenth century, this humanism opposed the claims of authority of the hierarchic Roman Catholic church. Humanism, however, was in favour of human autonomy and that's why it opposed the reformation which looked to obedience to the word of God for the deliverance of life.

It is important to bear in mind that the Reformation also took its stand against humanism. Humanism was often connected with numerous Christian convictions at that time. Think of the so-called Christian of Biblical humanism that had a spokesman in Desiderius Erasmus, elder contemporary of Luther (1469-1536). Erasmus opposed Luther at the point of man's "free will." In spite of all his criticism on all kinds of evils in the Roman church, on

at this point Luther sided with Rome. From the dispute between Luther and Erasmus it becomes clear that they also went different ways at the point of *certainty* as to the doctrine that God had revealed in His Word. Erasmus thought that little can be said *with certainty* at the points that were in discussion between Luther and Rome. Luther on the contrary vigorously maintained the clearness of God's revelation ('the Holy Spirit is not a skeptic'!). He insisted that on the basis of God's revelation the believer and the church can confess *with certainty*.

Erasmus' Biblical humanism had great influence on people's minds, especially in the Netherlands. To a great extent his views make up the background of the Remonstrants in the Reformed churches, who both in a dogmatic respect pleaded in favour of "man's free will" and in ecclesiastical practice wanted to see a broad tolerance observed. In the time that follows, humanism remained a real threat for the church, although, together with the help of foreign Reformed churches, Remonstrantism was condemned at the Dordrecht Synod 1618-1619 (where many foreign delegates were present as members of the meeting and were entitled to vote). In the course of the eighteenth century humanism more and more rejected the "biblical" character which was still present with Erasmus. In the so-called Enlightenment (*Aufklärung* in German) this humanism more and more set its stamp on society. Already John Locke in England (1632-1704) and later Voltaire in France (1694-1778) vigorously pleaded in favour of tolerance, which got a broader and broader sense. Voltaire, in his turn, had a great influence on King Frederick the Great of Prussia (1740-1786), who by his unscrupulous policies, made his country into a great power.

The *Christelijke Encyclopedie* writes about King Frederick: "He belongs to the enlightened dictators, who, with maintenance of royal absolutism in government and administration applied the ideas of the *Aufklärung*." As a rationalist he was indifferent towards Christianity. Denying the Protestant tradition of the house of Hohenzollern and of Prussia, his policies aimed at the principle secularization of the state. One of his first measures of government was the *tolerance* edict of 1740, the elaboration of his famous statement: "Hier muss jeder nach seiner Fassung selig werden" (everybody has to be saved here in his own way). Tolerance and absolutism go together here! Here

is one of the historical backgrounds of the totalitarian national-socialism of our age. Compare Ben Knapen, *Het duitse onbehagen, Een land op zoek naar identiteit* (*The German discomfort, A country in search of identity*), 1983, 105. A plain indication that the term "toleration" has real significance only in a context!

#### 1.4.

During the nineteenth century, humanism developed into an aggressive atheism with the German philosopher Fr. Nietzsche (1844-1900). In our time his influence is very strong in France and in the whole western world and in the Netherlands in particular. Many who have broken with the Christian faith have been marked by his nihilism and atheism (Compare my *Nietzsche in Nederland*, 1987). Apart from direct influence by one certain philosopher the influence of humanism is becoming stronger and broader in all cultural and public life. The acceptance of the autonomy of man (connected with a strong individualism) makes present-day society very atheistic. Especially in ethical questions autonomy strongly throws its weight around. (The right of self-determination in case of termination of life, the legalization of induced abortion, the acceptance of homosexual practice are graphic examples.) In all these things an appeal is always made to tolerance as the comprehensive fundamental human attitude, which has to be protected, propagated and established by the state. The equality of all people is sought in the greatest possible freedom to organize life according to one's own will and insight and to give public evidence of it.

#### 1.5.

For the church which wants to live in obedience to the Word of the living God and which also wants to preach this Word, *in principle* there is no place left for her in this society, although freedom of religion will still be reserved for the "churches" by the state.

But when the church preaches the salvation and the will of God outside her walls, she is considered to be an illegal nuisance. According to the feeling of many people who form "public opinion" (in particular, by means of modern mass media), the church is considered to be the centre of *intolerance*. This applies to both the Roman Catholic church when her spokesmen wish to adhere to the official Roman Catholic ideas regarding the great ethical questions of our time as well as to

orthodox Protestant and Reformed churches. Whereas freedom of religion applies to the strictly ecclesiastical field, the modern concept of tolerance more and more clearly demonstrates that it is at odds with this freedom of religion. If no restraining factors come into action, present-day, absolute tolerance will increasingly show itself to be intolerant towards confessing Christians and towards the church that only wants to live according to the Word of God in everything. Then tolerance will change into intolerance! This shows a remarkable similarity with the experience of the church at the beginning of our era in the Roman empire. At that time great tolerance towards many religions prevailed. But when young Christianity openly confessed the name of the only God, the Father of Jesus Christ, and when the church opposed customs which were condemned by the Gospel and refused to join in the cult of the emperor, there was no tolerance left for that church.

#### 2.1.

Present-day tolerance easily infects the climate in the church. In many respects the history of the church in past centuries has been dominated by the struggle against penetrating humanism. People often try, especially in theology, to achieve a synthesis with philosophical ideas which dominate the minds. Then the confession of the church is resisted. Especially the confession of the church of the reformation becomes the target of criticism. The accusation of intolerance often goes hand in hand with the accusation of fossilized confessionalism. It was said that the confession was an obstacle to a sound development of theology and of ecclesiastical life and to make it impossible for a church to become really up to date. In the sixteenth and at the beginning of the seventeenth century Christian humanism often accused the Reformed of being intolerant and confessionalistic. This complaint was raised by the Remonstrants in their struggle against the Reformed confession, although they emphatically claimed the name "Reformed" and a place in the church for themselves.

In the eighteenth century this was also the case, when the Enlightenment penetrated the church. This led to separations in the nineteenth century (Scotland, the Netherlands). The modernism in the nineteenth century founds its strongest resistance in the churches of the Separation, but the accusation of

being confessionally intolerant was continuously hurled at these churches.

In our century we see the spirit of modernism becoming victorious in the (Synodical) Reformed churches in the Netherlands. An unlimited tolerance has conquered these churches. Professor K. Runia of the Theological University of these churches recently wrote (*Centraal Weekblad*, 9 July 1993); "If the members of these churches are asked to choose between discipline and tolerance the great majority will undoubtedly choose tolerance even if they personally do not agree with the concepts defended." Here the "concepts" refer to the theologians Dr. H. Wiersinga in his *Geloven bij daglicht (Faith by daylight)*, in which he radically breaks with the entire "Reformed inheritance" and especially to Prof. Dr. H.M. Kuitert with his notorious book *Het algemeen betwijfeld christelijk geloof (The catholic doubted christian Faith)*, translated into English by the characteristic title *I doubt*. Kuitert breaks with the traditional doctrine of inspiration of the Scriptures, vigorously exclaiming: "away with it" and he breaks with the whole substance of Christian and Reformed belief. But "tolerance" remains the key word even in the case of these denials! A line can be drawn from the doubt of Erasmus about whether one can speak of the certainty of Christian belief (Luther) to this skepticism, with which christian belief had developed into no more than a "design of search" for God.

## 2.2.

How the humanist idea of tolerance gives a completely different course to ecclesiastical life appears very clearly from the fact that names and ideas which have always been used are put aside as aged and having too intolerant a sound. Thus there is more and more objection against the contents and also the name of "mission" as the preaching by and from the church of Christ to the heavens (and to the followers of Islam as well). For a long time now the preaching of the Gospel among the Jews has had to make room for "the discussion with Israel" in which openness and tolerance are the key words. And the rest of "mission" changes into a dialogue with the world religions. There is no room left for preaching the invitation to salvation, revealed in Christ, with the authority of the gospel. Such preaching would discredit the toler-

ance, which belongs to today: ideologically pluralistic society.

## 3.

It appears to be self-evident, since we reject the humanist idea of tolerance that we need to opt for intolerance! And we need not avoid these words, "intolerance" and "inforbearance," although we do have to choose our words with carefulness and wisdom, because they may have a different shade of meaning especially for English speaking people.

### 3.1.

In the first place, we need not avoid the word: intolerance. It cannot be helped that the contrasts are sharp, since the light shines in the darkness. Here we give the floor to the Scriptures themselves.

#### 3.1.1.

The LORD calls Himself the one God (Deut 6:4; also compare Zech. 9:14). He is supposed to be confessed and lauded as the only – Living *opposed* to all dead idols (compare Ps. 115). Idolatry warrants intolerance! A radical choice is also required without a compromise. "If the Lord is God, follow Him, but if the Baal is God, follow him" (1 Kings 18:21). The New Testament is equally antithetical and without a compromise, and if you like, intolerant. The triune God is preached as the only, true, living One: "For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth – as indeed there are many gods and many lords – yet for us there is but one

God, the Father from Whom all things came and for Whom we live, and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through Whom all things came and from Whom we live" (1 Corinthians 8:5,6). This is also relevant for a Godfearing life: "No-one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other; you cannot serve both God and Money" (Matthew 6:24).

#### 3.1.2.

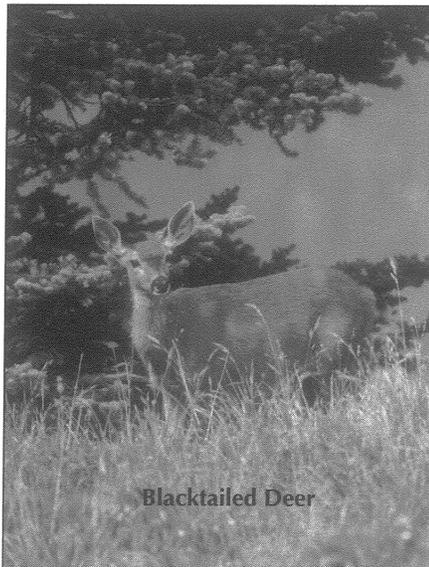
As there is in the confession of the living God no tolerance to the denial of His name, so it is also in the confession of Jesus Christ, His Son Who has come in the flesh: "God appeared in the flesh." John draws intolerant lines: "Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ! Such a man is the anti-christ – he denies the Father and the Son," (1John 2:22). And John has learned this from the Master Himself: "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I also will disown him before my Father, in heaven," (Matthew 10:32,33).

That is why the disciple also summarizes the gospel of his Lord and his God in the powerful message as to Jesus of Nazareth: "He is the true God and eternal life," (1 John 5:20). And again there is the sharpest antithesis possible with all idolatry: "Dear children, keep yourselves from idols" (verse 21).

#### 3.1.3.

That is why the congregation of the living God and especially the office-bearer in the congregation are called to follow the pattern of the sound words as opposed to all errors (2 Tim. 1:13, 4:3; Tit. 1:9, 13; 2:1) and that in view of "the times of stress" that will come in "the last days," (2 Tim. 3:1 compare 1 John 2:18 and following). Thus the apostle Paul warns the elders of Ephesus of "savage wolves," who will not spare the flock (Acts 20:29), and he says to the congregation of Rome: "watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned" (Rom. 16:17). Therefore doctrine and life are under the discipline of God's holiness (Deut. 19:19, 1 Cor. 5:7). That's why the congregation is praised if she (in spite of a lot of shortcomings that are found with her) "cannot tolerate wicked men," (Rev. 2:2). "Not tolerate" – with as many words intolerance is mentioned here, condemned by Christ Himself!

## OUR COVER



Blacktailed Deer

He even speaks about hating the works of the heretics (Nicolaitans). He hates those works Himself and the congregation is in agreement with Him her Lord, Rev. 2:6. And how radically do Peter and Jude contrast the doctrine of truth (and the life flowing from it) with "the destructive heresies" of "false teachers," who have their forerunners in the false prophets of the Old Covenant (2 Peter 2:1ff, Jude 3ff). There is the penetrating admonition "to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints," (Jude 3). No doubt is permitted here, as if there might be place for doubt in the church. Even if so-called reformed theologians publish books with the challenging title *Het algemeen betwijfeld christelijk geloof (The catholic doubted Christian faith)*, the Christian church continues to say that this received faith is "without doubt" and undoubted among us regardless of how much it may be challenged and doubted in our time. And in doing so the church has not become narrow minded and limited and ignorant as to the realities of all those challenges, but through faith she speaks the firm language of "we know," making it sound as the refrain (1 John 5:18, 19, 20) with which John concludes his first letter.

### 3.2.

However obvious it seems to be to opt for "intolerance" as a term that might represent the struggle of Christ's church very well, as opposed to a humanist concept of tolerance, yet great caution is required here! I mention some reasons for it, which mutually correlate.

#### 3.2.1.

We must always take care not to live from *reaction*, having the other, the opponent, label us. If we are blamed for being intolerant we need not avoid that term out of fear, but we must not have ourselves labelled either. For our opponents labels us inspired as they are by their own background and convictions which we fundamentally reject, do we not? That is why it is a good thing to realize that in contrast with the humanist concept of tolerance it is not a matter of *tolerance* opposed to *intolerance*, but of *true* tolerance opposed to *false* tolerance, of *Reformed, scriptural* tolerance opposed to *humanist* tolerance.

#### 3.2.2.

Add to this that we have to be as understanding as possible both inside

and outside the church. There is indeed an intolerance that originates from narrow-mindedness and ecclesiastical insularity. In the Netherlands we know how truly Reformed people were suspended from the exercise of their offices by a synod which wanted to oblige everybody to subscribe to a private (and always controversial view) of the covenant of grace, namely Dr. A. Kuyper's. The Liberation of 1944 and following years became necessary because of that! Only in this way could we keep *the room* that is really characteristic of Reformed Churches!

We find essentially the same problem with "The Reformed Congregations in the Netherlands and in North America" with their Doctrinal decision of 1931 and also with the Protestant Reformed Churches in the USA with their Declaration of Principles of 1951. (Compare W.W.J. VanOene, *Inheritance Preserved: The Canadian Reformed Churches in Historical Perspective*, 1975, pp. 64-67.) It is notable that in these cases we are confronted with a theological opinion, namely, the identification – basically – of the eternal election with the covenant of grace. This *seems* to be a logical solution of a theological difficulty. The *logical* system probably has a great attraction in theology and the church. Nevertheless, there are decisive arguments from the Holy Scripture against this solution, especially against the thesis that the promise of the Gospel is unconditional only for the elect. This runs up against important Biblical and pastoral objections. But in all these cases the logical system is imposed on the church as if it is a *Scriptural* truth. And then the really catholic room of the church disappears.

#### 3.2.3

Narrow-mindedness does not suit the church of God, does it? The Lord Himself is not like that: "as a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him. For He knows how we are formed, He remembers that we are dust" (Ps. 103:13,14). Neither is the Saviour narrow-minded: He had compassion with the hosts in Israel, who were like sheep without a shepherd. Then He patiently took His time to teach them many things (Mark 6:34). And the apostles did not lead us in such a way either: According to his own testimony Paul had a wide heart for the difficult congregation of Corinth (2 Cor. 6:11) and that is why the congregation – and the "strong within the con-

gregation" – are also urged by him to be tolerant and to bear each other's failings in the community of saints (Rom. 15:1, Gal. 6:2), and so fulfill the law of Christ. That is something different from making quick work of each other!

#### 3.2.4.

Now we must ask ourselves: what may be the cause of the fact that the God Who takes such an intolerant position toward idols and all idolatry (and also teaches His people to be so intolerant) is at the same time full of patience and steadfast love and teaches us regarding our attitude in the community of saints: "bear with one another in love: (Eph. 4:2 compare Col. 3:15)? There is only one answer here. *Our God is the God of history*. In the history of salvation He goes a way with His people. How full is the Bible of it! God's way is perfect (Ps. 18:30) in saving holiness for His people (Ps. 77:14). In the New Testament the Saviour calls Himself "the way and the truth and the life," (John 14:6). Therefore the congregation is called the meeting of men and women, who "belong to the way," (Acts 9:2). God came to a world which had sinned: "Adam, where are you?" He had given His promises and has gone *the way* of the fulfillment of those promises. He *is* still going that way! At the beginning of His dealing with us He did not proclaim a philosophical world view, a religious system, but He revealed *Himself* as the Living One, the God who works salvation. If He had been the God of a system, then He would have been as intolerant as everybody who builds a philosophical and world view system and then asks submission to it. But He makes *Himself* known in the way of grace and justice. On that way He shows a lot to patience and lenience in enduring the conduct of a troublesome and obstinate people (Acts 13:18), although He undoubtedly maintains Himself also in the way of His judgements of them who take counsel against Him and His anointed (Psalm 2). He is the truth in the fullness of His virtues and of His actions. He is so in His Son, the Beloved. And on the way of salvation He has made His name known to Moses: "the LORD the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished; He punishes the children and their children for the sins of the fathers to the third and

fourth generation." (Ex. 34:6.7). That name reverberates throughout the history of the Covenant (compare Num. 14:18, 2 Chron. 30:9, Nehem. 9:17, 31, Jonah 4:2, Joel 2:13, Nahum 1:3). In the course of the times Israel praises this name on his way with this God (Ps. 86:15, 103:8, 145:8).

Early and late in the history of the Old Covenant the Lord sent prophets and taught the people in His ways. This is not patience because of weakness or indifference! For there is a limit! History knows His just judgments and it knows the exile of His people, for 70 years. And from heaven the glorified Christ threatens congregations which leave His service and His way with the revenge of the Covenant. He made known to the congregation of Sardis and Laodicea, setting an example to us that we may not despise "the richness of the kindness of God's tolerance and patience" (compare Rom. 2:4). On the way that He goes with His people of the Covenant in the Old and in the New Testament He makes Himself more and more known. History of salvation is at the same history of *revelation*. The name of the LORD has opened gloriously for us in the name of the true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, into which the congregation is baptized, Thus *the doctrine* of the truth has been made known to us, not as an abstract and timeless system, but as "the revealed mystery of godliness," (1 Tim. 3:16). That is why there is an inseparable coherence between doctrine and life and in the congregation, a deep unity. That is why in view of the reconciliation by Christ in the fullness of times in the preceding centuries God was slow to anger both with his people and with the heathens, who were then not called yet.

For the sake of the hardness of human hearts, He admitted practices of marriage in the Old Covenant different from how marriage had been from the beginning and therefore our Saviour does not teach His disciples in this way (Matthew 19:3ff). He passed the sins by "in his forbearance," because the bloodshed of Calvary and the revelation of His righteousness still had to come (Rom 3:25). That is why in his preaching at the Areopagus, in Athens, Paul says that God overlooked "the times of ignorance," but "today" He commands all people to repent and receive forgiveness of sins (Acts 17:30). Since God is the God of history in the lives of His people and of His children, He weighs sins in equity and one is blamed heavier because of ignorance than the other. We are judged

according to the light we receive. We are not examined in theology by Him at a certain moment, or alternatively in philosophy with a positive or a negative result, but He asks us to know *Him* and to live Godfearing lives according to the old rule which He impressed on Abraham in the Covenant and on the way of the Covenant: "walk before me and be blameless" (Gen. 17:1).

4.

From the above it may become clear to us now what *Christian* and *Reformed* tolerance means. It is essential for the church! But it is also essentially distinguished from humanist tolerance! It is opposed to it! The *humanist* thought of tolerance aims at a free margin for man, for his ideas and behaviour. Consequently, the doctrine of the Scriptures confessed by the church is in fact always a heavy yoke. But the starting-point of Reformed tolerance is the fact that Christian doctrine is not a yoke of compulsion, limiting human freedom, but it is *the condition* for human freedom!

True tolerance does not aim at making human margins as wide as possible, but it aims at *the good progress* of the Word of God and of Christian doctrine, both in the life of the church as a community and in the life of the individual believers. And here is the blessed work of the Holy Spirit. Christian tolerance is only possible through confidence in the progress of this work!

In a fair study about *The doctrinal discipline in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands between 1570 and 1620*, published at the beginning of this century (by H. Schokking, as a theological dissertation at the University of Amsterdam) it is made clear that the Reformed church is that time also took a firm stand against the humanist idea of tolerance, which the Remonstrants wanted to see practiced, but that at the same time Reformed tolerance was not forgotten! At the same time tolerance among the Reformed meant "the possibility that in good faith and by lack of insight, objections were felt against dogmas, which were as a matter of fact generally recognized in the church; they did describe these cases well (H. Schokking, 253).

That is why practicing tolerance was never *timeless* or an *abstract* problem. It was important whether one was dealing with just a member of the congregation or with a pastor. What could be tolerated with one, could not be permitted with the other. Which is rather obvious: with the pastor the question

of *the good progress of truth* is at stake! The pastor has to lead the flock in the "right ways of the Lord" and is not permitted to pervert them (compare Acts 13:10 and Hos. 14:10). It also depends on the circumstances, if and in how far tolerance can be practiced: it is not permitted to cause confusion in the congregation, neither may evil be spoken of the way of God (Acts 19:9). There has to be an openness for the Word of God in the life of him with whom one tolerates much: he must be willing to be taught and not be eager to propagate his private problem as a doctrine in the congregation. Then the limit has been reached for this tolerance; it lies in the Word of God and in sound doctrine.

Neither is the tolerance left to one's own discretion. It is the church that has to decide here in obedience to the Word of God, since it is "the pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:14). The office-bearers and the ecclesiastical meetings have a responsibility of their own here. That is why the Reformed churches in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century were *both* intolerant *and* tolerant in a Scriptural sense when, with the help of the foreign churches, they definitely resisted the errors of Remonstrantism and did not want to accept any compromise. But at the same time they were prepared to exercise patience with simple people who had been thrown into confusion and who were willing to be instructed. This intolerance and tolerance is set aglow with respect for the Word of God and love for the church of God. So far the Reformed churches have desired to continue this way, even today when they have been obliged to resist errors which occur in the congregation and for which room for propaganda was asked and made both in book and magazine. I think now of the schisms of 1926 (Dr. J.G. Geelkerken) and of 1967 and the following years (the Netherlands Reformed Churches).

For that matter we witness with sadness in our hearts, how the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Synodical) as a confessing community sank into *autonomous* tolerance and how this, also in world scale, on the level of the REC, destroyed the fraternity of believers and continues to destroy it! So if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! (1 Cor. 10:12 can also be applied here).

5.

Practicing true tolerance and con- tending to one's utmost for the belief that was once delivered to the saints,

(Jud. 3) are not *opposed* to each other, but the first is the consequence of the second and inseparably coheres with it. Within the context of the ICRC we as Christian churches can help and support and encourage each other in a rich sense, urging each other always to look for the good progress of the Word of grace. Contact with each other as churches from all over the world is of great importance in this! Although we are moving a little bit from our subject (tolerance in a strict sense), yet there is a clear link. When we see that the Lord God goes a way with His people in the world, the way of His Word and Spirit, then we may also see that in all unity there is and there may be distinction as well. There is unity, for there is one God and one Lord Jesus Christ. There is one belief and there is one baptism (compare Eph. 4:4). We can speak about the *one way* of the Word in the world. We meet each other on that way.

At the same time we may see that God leads His church in every country on the way of her own. Rome knows a world-church with one centre on earth and one and the same confession of faith. We, Reformed people, have our centre in heaven, where Christ is at the right hand of His Father. Though scattered all over the world, we are united in the same Spirit of faith.

Reformed churches have in the past not been diligent to possess one common confession which would have to replace the existing confessions. *The Harmonia Confessionum Evangelicarum* of 1581 also was not a new common confession, but rather sought only to demonstrate the harmony of the existing confessions. That the Lord goes different ways with His people has always been respected in the fact of *pluralism* of confessions with the *unity* of belief. Error has always been resisted unanimously. Again I think of the help, received by the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands at the Dordrecht Synod 1618-1619 from the sister churches abroad. But the community was not broken because one confession was formulated different from the other. We are not always confronted with the same problems. Then we often choose our formulations according to the problems we are confronted with and also within the possibilities of the language we have at our disposal. That is why within a young community of churches as the ICRC, the question of critical importance for each of the participating churches is: *how do we meet each other?* How to we associate? In an atmosphere of mistrust since we do not have the same confessions and we have a different historical background

and we sometimes speak a somewhat different language than we are used to in our environment? Or do we meet each other in gladness, because, in spite of all the variety amongst us we do see God goes the *one way of His pleasure and grace?* Then we can also learn the determination *and* the patience of belief from each other, and encourage and urge each other to Scriptural tolerance in not bearing error. For decisiveness in belief and decisiveness towards error go hand in hand with tolerance *within* the one community on belief – a patience that we want to exercise mutually in a spirit of gentleness. Now that we see in our time so much belief being destroyed, and secularization making quick progress, the ICRC can be a priceless means, a good instrument, a striking symbol of the community of saints, which does not tolerate error, but within which there is a communal life from Christ's peace – that peace which surpasses all understanding and which can keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. If one word of the Saviour can direct our community of churches, it is what Christ said to His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount:

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.” **C**

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# Our Children and Entertainment

By G.Ph. van Popta

## 1. Introduction

Children love to play with toys. They love to play games. To be a child is to play. What is acceptable for our children? Which games, what sort of play, which kinds of entertainment and leisure activity are good for children of Christian families? Most parents struggle with these questions.

There are so many different toys and games available. A stroll through Toys 'R'Us will make that clear. If your children watch television, they know all about the newest toys and games. And they want them.

Then there is the whole question about television. Should we allow televisions into our homes? If we decide to

allow them in, how much may the children watch? *What* may they watch? The television leads to countless arguments between parents and children. Anyone who parks the television out beside the trash is not doing a foolish thing.

We have computers in our homes. How much time should the children spend behind the computer playing various games? Which games are okay and which are not? Are there any helpful criteria that can aid us in making a judgement?

What about community sports? Do we want to get our children involved with community baseball and soccer, etc., knowing that it may cause some problems with undesirable friendships. There will be pressure to play on Sun-

day - “. . . just the tournament games, mind you.” Do the advantages of getting the children involved in community sports outweigh the disadvantages?

These are difficult questions for parents. We struggle with them. It is not all cut and dried.

## 2. Biblical data

The Bible does not give explicit nor detailed commands regarding what kind of entertainment is acceptable and what is not; however, as we will see later, it does give a standard for making decisions.

The Bible does speak a few times about children playing. Zech. 8:5 tells of a time when boys and girls will be playing in the streets. The prophet is

proclaiming a time of peace and restoration after the exile. The Lord will return to Jerusalem. Old men and women will be sitting in the streets, relaxing and enjoying a time of leisure, and the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing.

That old people will be able to relax and that girls and boys will be able to play is a sign of God's favour upon Jerusalem. This shows that there is something good about girls and boys playing and having fun.

There is no reference in the Old Testament to toys for children; however, archaeologists digging in various places in Palestine have found many whistles, rattles, balls, marbles, dolls and carved animals. They have found toys similar to those our children play with. Today the toys are just a little more sophisticated. Archaeologists have also discovered reliefs of boys playing tug of war and of girls dancing and playing games.

In the New Testament we find an indirect reference to the games children played in the streets and market place. In Matt. 11:16,17 the Lord Jesus referred to the children of His day playing games of make believe and let's pretend. Just as children today often copy their parents as they play their games, so they did in the days of the Lord Jesus. In this text the children are playing first wedding and then funeral.

The Biblical data gives no explicit commands regarding games and play. Zech. 8:5 shows that the LORD God understands that children like to play – indeed, there is something good about it. It is a sign of peace with God (cf. Is. 11:8). The way the Lord Jesus spoke about children playing shows that it is a normal, natural thing for children to do.

### 3. Criteria:

Should we bemoan that the Bible does not give explicit commandments about which games are acceptable for children? No, we should not. We must realize that the Bible is not an automatic answer dispenser. We cannot push a button and expect a couple of texts to pop out which will easily and quickly answer all of our questions; and yet, the Bible is always a lamp for our feet and a light for our path. With the Bible in hand we can discover a certain line, formulate conclusions, and make decisions (J. Douma, *Christian Morals and Ethics*, Premier: 1983, p. 33).

I submit for your consideration the following thoughts on the identity of our children and the rule of Phil. 4:8.

#### a. Identity of our children

Who are our children? Understanding who and what our children are will help us to make decisions in concrete instances regarding certain forms of entertainment, toys and games. The following is not exhaustive.

##### i. Our children are sinners.

By nature, they are children of wrath. They are born with sinful natures. We may not underestimate the urge, the impulse of their sinful natures. We should not be surprised if they show a natural desire for that which is base, which is sinful, against the will of God. Because of original sin and our total depravity, children will be attracted to forms of entertainment which are not wholesome, upbuilding, or pleasing to God.

And yet. . . .

##### ii. Our children are God's children.

Children of the people of God belong, first of all, to God. Ezek. 16:20,21 shows this in a striking way. In this text the LORD God chastises Israel for having sacrificed their sons and daughters to the fire of heathen gods. In v. 20 God called the children "your sons and daughters." In v. 21 God called them "my children."

Our sons and daughters are God's children. If we deliver up our sons and daughters to the gods of our age, God will not be pleased.

##### iii. Our children are baptized children.

As we confess in QA 74 of the catechism, the children belong to God's covenant and congregation. They have the promises of salvation and regeneration; therefore, they must be baptized. By baptism, they are grafted into the church and distinguished from the children of unbelievers. God has His covenant with believers and their children. God works in the lines of families. As we learn from Acts 16, Eph. 5,6, and Col. 3, Christ redeems families.

That our children belong to the community of the redeemed should make a difference in what they do for entertainment. It's got to relate. There has got to be a consistency. That our children are baptized and thus set apart by God and for God means they must live as distinct children. We must guide them in this.

Think of the questions to which you said "I do" at the baptismal font.

##### iv. Our children are holy.

1 Cor. 7:14 says that the child of a believer is holy. We repeat this in the Canons of Dort. I,17 where we confess ". . .that the children of believers are holy, not by nature but in virtue of the covenant of grace, in which they are included with their parents."

We must maintain this antithetical holiness in our families vis-a-vis the world in the matter of games and entertainment.

##### v. Our children are prophets, priests and kings.

We must each them to confess the name of Christ, to present themselves as living sacrifices to God, and to fight the battle royal against sin. They have an honourable status. Their lives, including what they do for entertainment, must reflect that. We, as parents, have the duty to guide and instruct them. We must teach them how to be good and faithful prophets, priests and kings.

##### vi. Our children are images of Christ.

They are called to reflect Christ, to be Christlike. We must teach them to have the mind of Christ. The calling to be images of Christ will affect the choices our children make for entertainment.

Remembering who our children are and being aware of their lofty status before God will go a long way in helping us determine which forms of entertainment are appropriate and which are not.

#### b. The rule of Phil. 4:8

Phil. 4:8 says:

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

This biblical standard is a very helpful rule for making ethical choices. When considering whether something is acceptable you just have to ask some questions.

Is it *true*? This is a very general qualification. A mason checks to see if a wall is "true" with a plumb line. The question is whether it can stand out in the open. Is the form of entertainment you are considering something that can stand the test of God's plumb line?

Is it *honourable*? Is it fitting? Does it fit the occasion and the person? This

criterion includes the idea of dignity, propriety. Is what you are considering worthy of respect?

Is it *just*? Is it righteous and proper? Is it in accord with what God requires?

Is it *pure*? Is it without blemish, without defect? This is very close to "holy." Is it worthy of reverence?

Is it *lovely*? Is it raunchy, disgusting, or is it lovely? There is a difference.

Is it *gracious*? Is it worthy of approval? Can you truly speak well about it? Does it deserve approval? Is it something that should be praised and commended?

Does it have *excellence*? Does it have outstanding goodness? Is it a cut above?

Is it *worthy of praise*? Is it something that should make people stop and say: "That is very good?"

The apostle Paul told us to "think about these things." We are to reckon with these things. We are to bring these things into consideration. And not only are we to *think* about things which are true, pure, honourable, etc. But, as verse 9 says, we are also to *do* these things.

#### 4. A few specifics

Without wanting to fall into legalism and not intending to give the impression that I have the right or ability to dictate what is good or bad, allow me to get a little specific.

On the negative side, we should steer the children away from all gratuitous violence. For example, we should not allow computer games whose sole purpose is to destroy something or to kill people into our homes. We should have nothing to do with the "shoot 'em up, knock 'em down, smash 'em and kill 'em" type games.

We should be aware that many toys and especially cartoons are teaching the children to think that magic is normal. They are drilling home the message that the supernatural lies in the creature. Creatures become gods. The distinction between Creator and creation is blurred.

There is a lot to talk of "the Force" or some power. Often the toy or the cartoon character will have a shiny jewel on or in its chest which has magical powers. Think of care bears and trolls.

"The Force" was made famous by the movie *Star Wars*. "May the Force be with you" was pronounced as a benediction. "The Force" is an impersonal, all-pervading divine power. George Lucas, the producer, has embraced east-

ern mysticism and pantheism. Movies such as *Star Wars* promotes these religious philosophies. It advances the idea that God is all and all is God. Eastern mysticism runs through such movies as *Star Wars*, *Return of the Jedi*, *ET*, *Close Encounters*, etc.

By letting the children watch these movies and cartoons, and play with toys which have everything to do with magic, the supernatural, the Force, etc., we run the risk of the children getting so used to the ideas of pantheism that they end up susceptible to the New Age philosophies when they are older.

There is another disturbing development in toys. It seems that ugly is becoming beautiful. For example, the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles live in the sewers. On top of that, they have everything to do with nothing but violence. There are many toys which are just plain ugly – figurines of creatures which are half man and half animal with bulging muscles intended to enable the creature to smash and destroy. Phil. 4:8 would have something to say about this.

We do well to steer the children away from these things – from gratuitous violence, from that which is purposefully ugly, and from a fascination with magic and the supernatural.

On the positive side, we should do things as families. My best childhood memories are not of toys my parents bought me but of times that my family did things together. It's good to have fun together, to play games together. The teenaged children may roll their eyeballs at "doing the family thing," but it's what memories are made of.



DECLINED to Edmonton (Immanuel), AB

**Rev. D.G.J. Agema**  
of Attercliffe, ON

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CALLED to Neerlandia, AB

**Rev. R. Aasman**  
of Edmonton (Providence), AB

Encourage the children to get involved in sports. God created our bodies to move. Our bodies are wonderfully designed for physical activity. Sports is a powerful antidote to boredom. It keeps children and young people out of trouble and often away from drugs and alcohol. Community sports such as soccer and baseball are good as long as we impress upon our children that they are not to seek their friendships in that context. They are to seek their friendships in the church community. We must also make sure that involvement in community sports does not compromise the call to gather with God's church on the Lord's day.

Music is often an expensive option, but if the possibility exists, give the children piano lessons or have them play an instrument in the school band. Music is a wonderful way in which a child can praise God. It can also give the child a sense of accomplishment.

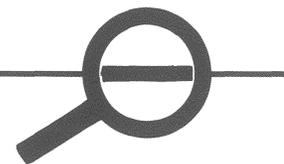
#### 5. Conclusion

Perhaps we should not talk so much about *entertainment*. Entertainment is largely passive. You entertain someone. You entertain a visitor. The original meaning of "to entertain" is to receive someone as a guest and provide for him. It has come to mean "amusing someone." The implication is that one person is doing the entertaining and the other is being entertained.

We should encourage the children to be active in their leisure time. Perhaps we should talk more in terms of "recreation." Our free time, our leisure time does not exist as a goal in itself. Free time is meant to give us new vigour for our work. Leisure time is there to replenish us, to invigorate and refresh us. It is meant to "recreate" us. We should see our fun time as a temporary relief *from* the work *for* the work.

We should teach our children, especially, as they grow older, that leisure time should be used first for lively activities. There is a time for the passive but we should emphasize the active. The times when the children just sit back and let someone else do the work should be very few. Children should be active and involved.

The bottom line is that we must teach the children that the all-embracing goal of life is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. This must also come out in the things we do for entertainment. Whether we eat or drink, work or play, let us do all to the glory of God.



## Improving our experience of worship

In the February 1994 issue of the *Monthly Record*, a publication of the Free Church of Scotland, there was a fine article by Rev. J.M. MacPherson entitled "Proper Preparation," with the additional title "Improving our Experience of Worship." Most of it is reproduced here for our edification.

Very little of our time is spent each week in public worship. Two Sunday services make up 1.5 per cent of the whole, which suggests that work, family or leisure are all more important areas of Christian experience and activity. That they are vitally important is undeniable, but you can't determine spiritual experience mathematically.

The Sabbath is only one day in seven, but it sets the tone for every other day. . . . A couple of hours on a Sunday may not seem much, but they bring us face to face with God and are central to all we are as Christians.

How do we get more out of worship? How do we put more into worship? We must begin before we ever get to the place of worship, taking our cue from the phrase in *The Directory of Public Worship* of the Westminster Assembly: "having prepared their hearts thereunto."

### The attitude

We worship God because he has commanded us to do so. He has said that we should "not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing" (Hebrews 10:25). Paul describes how "the whole church comes together" (1 Corinthians 14:23), while the Lord Jesus Christ promises us that "where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:20).

Every time we go to church, we should remind ourselves that God has called us to worship him. Whenever we find ourselves in danger of falling into a mere Sunday routine, we should deliberately remind ourselves that public worship is God's command and that he himself will be there. You may have found some church services lifeless and boring, but that doesn't matter as far as going the next time is concerned. Tell yourself: "I rejoiced with those who said to me: 'Let us go to the house of the Lord' (Psalm 122:1). Or again: 'How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord Almighty! My soul yearns, even faints for the courts of the Lord' (Psalm 84:1). If you expect nothing, you are likely to get it."

It's also good to remind yourself constantly how privileged you are. Think of many people too ill or disabled to attend public worship. Yet you can! What about millions of fellow-Christians forbidden to gather for worship, or who do so in fear of their liberty or even their lives? And you're free to go twice every Sunday! What a privilege not to be missed!

### Prayer before worship

Psalm 81:10 expresses a fundamental principle of the Christian life: "Open wide your mouth and I will fill it." Or in New Testament language: "You do not have because you do not ask God (James 4:2). We can't expect regular blessing from our public worship if we don't pray regularly for it. That means taking time for much prayer, especially on Saturday evenings and Sunday mornings.

Pray for yourself. Pray that no sin in you will prevent God's blessing reaching you. Pray that you will have a receptive heart to all

God wants to say to you. Pray that you will contribute to the spiritual quality of the church service by your own awareness of God and your desire to listen to him and obey him.

Pray for your fellow-worshippers. Pray for these in special need, that God will graciously meet with them and help them. Pray for those who will be unavoidably absent, that God will create a true spiritual bond between them and you. Pray for those whose unconfessed sin proves a hindrance to God's full blessing on the congregation, that they will be convicted of sin and brought to repentance. Pray for unbelievers, that they will be brought to a saving knowledge of Christ.

. . . Pray earnestly for the minister. He's just a man, as subject to discouragement as you are. You may be blessed in having a minister of great knowledge, wisdom and eloquence. But it's far more likely that his preaching is not as good as you would wish. But remember he's only an instrument in God's hands, unlikely to be an effective instrument unless he is faithfully upheld in prayer by those to whom he preaches. Pray like the early church: "Enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness" (Acts 4:29). Listen to Paul: "Pray for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me" (Philippians 4:19).

### The environment

True worship springs from the heart and does not depend on buildings and other outward circumstances. But we are physical beings too, and public worship has to take place somewhere. So we need to do everything we can to ensure that

our congregation's building is as conducive as possible to public worship. That means we should gladly contribute to its being reasonably warm and comfortable. We should encourage, where necessary, the installation of public address systems. We should make sure there is good access for wheelchair worshippers. We should be supportive of every initiative that aims at

making our buildings more appropriate for worship – perhaps converting a huge building into a more compact place of worship, or making a dismal building more attractive, or creating facilities that will help foster fellowship among a worshipping people.

We should play our part in making visitors feel welcome to our services. Bible and Psalm books should

be easily available, and we should be ready during the service to guide visitors unfamiliar with their use. People unnecessarily ill at ease will not benefit from the service as they should and may distract other worshippers.

A prepared building, a prepared people . . . a prepared preacher – and the promise of the Holy Spirit's presence and power! 

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## Ordination of John L. van Popta

Ottawa, November 14, 1993

By P. Buist

Sunday, November 14, 1993 was a day the Lord had made and we rejoiced and were glad in Him. Some of us remembered June 21, 1992 when we exchanged emotional farewells with Rev. George van Popta and his family as they prepared to head out west to their new congregation in Taber, Alberta. Little did either party know that 17 months down a somewhat winding road, we would meet again on a much happier occasion: the ordination service of Candidate John L. van Popta which was conducted by brother George. According to Br. J. DeHaas who has researched the history of our churches, including her Dutch roots, this was the first time that



Rev. G. van Popta congratulates the church at Ottawa



Rev. J. Mulder (Oom Hans) reminisces

a minister has filled a vacancy left by his brother. Adding to the historical significance of this event was the presence of the mother of these two brothers – Mrs. J.T. van Popta who has a special place in our church history as the wife of the Canadian Reformed Churches' first minister.

Rev. George van Popta chose his text from Hebrews 13:20-21 for the ordination ceremony: *Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shep-*



Mrs. J.T. van Popta with her two sons, George and John

and glorious things. He calls us to simple obedience. In this way the Lord fulfills His ultimate goal for us – to bring forth praise unto Himself through us, His flock.

After the sermon, it was time for the ordination ceremony and elders H. Jager and P. Buist along with Rev. J. Mulder, a long time friend of the family, participated in the laying on of hands.

In the afternoon, Rev. John van Popta preached his inaugural sermon based on the triumphant text found in 1 Peter 1:3,4 and 5: *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By His great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”* In the midst of their sufferings, Peter directs his readers’ attention to the good news of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The resurrection is:

1. The reason for our praise,
2. The source of our hope,
3. The guarantee of our inheritance.

After the service, Br. H. Jager as outgoing chairman of consistory gave the floor to Rev. George van Popta, Rev. J. Mulder and Sr. Sarah Vandergugten who spoke on behalf of the van Popta family with whom the congregation of Ottawa has forged a special link.

A welcome evening for Rev. J. van Popta and his family was held on the

*herd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in you that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.* The theme of the sermon was: “God equips His people with everything good” and was elaborated under the following headings:

1. The God who equips you,
2. The good things with which He equips you,
3. His purpose in equipping you.

God has brought about peace between us and Himself through the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus, the Great Shepherd of the sheep. This God equips us with good things so that we may do His will. He has given a good thing to the flock in Ottawa – a shepherd to labour under the Great Shepherd. Under-shepherds, entirely incapable of themselves, must depend upon God. God will equip them with what they need to do His will. Through the little shepherds the Great Shepherd

equips His sheep. He equips us for a purpose – that we may do His will. The Lord does not often call us to do grand



Sarah Vandergugten thanks the Ottawa congregation

following Saturday evening. A potluck supper was enjoyed after which Br. Henk Holtvluwer presented a brief history of the Canadian Reformed Church at Ottawa. The financial assistance of Classis Ont. North throughout the past decade was acknowledged with gratitude since without this help we would not have been able to benefit from the services of our own minister.

The young people then provided our new ministerial family with a whimsical survival kit in order to deal with such challenges as bilingualism, bureaucracy and blustery weather.

An amusing talent show ensued featuring vigorous piano performances, eloquent poetry and hilarious skits. The van Popta family was presented with a table cloth on which the names of the congregation were embroidered.

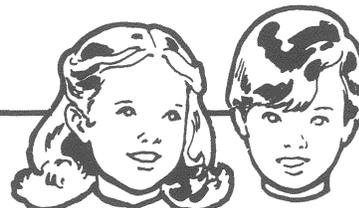
Rev. J. van Popta closed the evening with words of thanks and expectation after which we sang "Now thank we all our God" and our new pastor closed in prayer.

The church at Ottawa invites you to visit our beautiful Capital region, hear our new minister and fellowship with us.

C

## OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



### Dear Busy Beavers,

Thank you for all the pictures you sent in for the Picture Contest!

There were so many different ones. Some in pencil, some in pencil crayon. Others in magic marker. Some even decorated with sparkles!

You drew animals, people, trucks, Christmas scenes, and storybook pictures.

I can tell you all worked hard on them.

As you can imagine, it was hard to choose the winners!

Well, I did finally decide, after looking and looking.

Here are the Junior winners:

1st Prize: Busy Beaver *Tim Sikkema* for **Kangaroo**.

2nd Prize: Busy Beaver *Anthony Nijenhuis* for **Birds in Summer**.

And the Senior winners:

1st Prize: Busy Beaver *Florence Nijenhuis* for **Good Shepherd**.

2nd Prize: Busy Beaver *Tamara Dejong* for **Christmas Candles**.

Honourable Mention:

Busy Beaver *Richard Oosterhoff* for **Boy Sledding**.

Again, thank you, all Busy Beavers who sent in a picture for the contest. I enjoyed them all, and hope to see you work in other contests!

### WORD SCRAMBLE

by Busy Beaver *Tracy Breukelman*

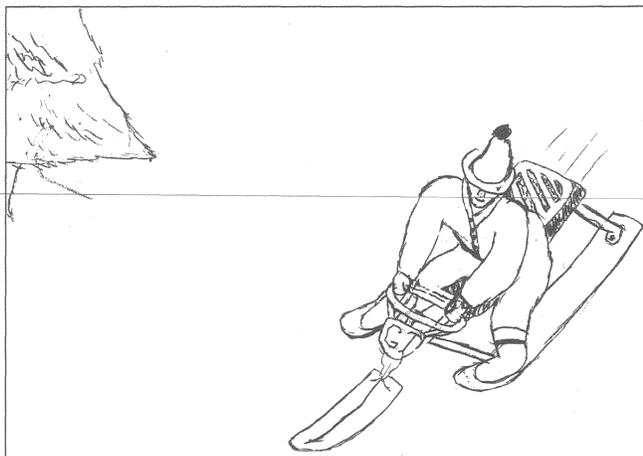
1. NSICOU \_\_\_\_\_
2. TRESIS \_\_\_\_\_
3. RTHOBER \_\_\_\_\_
4. MROETH \_\_\_\_\_
5. REFHTA \_\_\_\_\_
6. TSEIVRLEA \_\_\_\_\_

(Hint: They all have to do with the family!)

### WINTER FUN

Picture and Puzzle

by Busy Beaver *Richard Oosterhoff*



### WORDSEARCH

A	L	S	Z	B	Q	N	L	D	Y	N	G	C	Q	G
O	Q	K	Y	R	N	A	H	E	A	D	B	A	N	D
S	N	E	T	T	I	M	K	G	J	B	H	K	B	T
P	K	A	X	E	M	W	G	I	E	J	O	P	L	C
S	J	S	W	G	H	O	C	K	E	Y	G	L	X	M
A	Q	B	F	F	B	N	S	A	E	C	Z	F	D	Z
P	H	I	W	O	N	S	D	N	B	D	P	I	E	Y
B	O	S	T	O	L	D	A	E	H	E	U	C	N	U
N	M	L	K	D	S	Q	C	R	L	I	C	E	X	V
I	B	A	T	I	Z	F	R	A	C	S	K	A	T	E
C	U	D	G	K	E	X	Z	O	O	J	A	P	W	F
F	C	G	Z	S	F	S	L	M	Y	Q	N	Y	K	E

### Find:

toboggan  
sled  
snow  
scarf  
snowman  
mittens  
headband  
hockey  
won  
ice  
puck  
arena  
skidoo  
skate  
skies

**"FIND THE SENTENCE"**

from Busy Beaver *Melissa DeBoersap*

Code: U T D H S E I R O L N  
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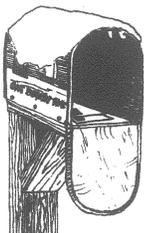


**RIDDLES**

from Busy Beaver  
*Henrietta Breukelman*

1. Which animal do we have to oil?
2. What's more dangerous than being with a fool?

**Answer:** 1. Mice, they squeak  
 2. Fooling a bee



**FROM THE MAILBOX**

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Jocelyn Schoon!* When you're a member, you can do the puzzles, send in answers, or pictures, or be part of a contest. Send me your birthday, too, *Jocelyn!* Bye!

Hi *Anya Malda.* Thanks for your letter. I hope you do well in your school work. Bye!

Welcome to the Club, *Alicia Koolsbergen!* Thank-you for your neatly printed letter, and the pictures, too! I can tell you like drawing pictures. Bye, *Alicia!*

Hello, *Felicia Oosterhoff!* Thanks for the pictures and letter you sent, I hope your family is over the flu now. Are you still having fun in the snow? Bye, *Felicia!*

Hi *Richard Oosterhoff!* I can tell you are having fun this winter! What kinds of things do you make with your scroll saw? Thanks for the puzzles, *Richard.* Bye!

Love, *Aunt Betty*

P.S. Busy Beavers, don't forget to put your name on the letters you send in!!

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