

## THE DISPOSITION OF THE ORGANIST

In the magazine *The American Organist* there appeared, in one of the earlier issues, an article that dealt with the matter of relations between ministers and organists. The author relates how a prospective applicant for the position of organist asked for a copy of the pipe-organ's specifications so that he would at least know something about the "disposition" of the organ. The members of the church council invited the prospective applicant to come to the church in person to view and play the instrument, and also to meet with them so that they could get some indication of the "disposition" of the organist. The author continued his article with the observation that the frequency with which the matter of relations between ministers and organists is brought into discussion indicates that relations are not always cordial and that an evaluation of a prospective organist's temperament, character, or personality, is not a superfluous endeavour. The author suggests that, costly as it may be, it is easier to change the "disposition" of the organ than that of the organist. "If we consider how hard it is to change ourselves, we will understand what little chance we have of changing others."

Why is it that organists are singled-out for the distinction of being less than amiable? Is it not necessary and fitting for *all of us* to engage in a little reflection and introspection when it concerns the matter of our "disposition", and our ability to get along with others? The author agrees, but adds that the need for self examination is particularly evident with those who are drawn into the competitive environment of the fine arts. "When the fine art happens to be music, and the artist the sole performer, the problem with the competitive element is that it tends to produce not only the best in music, but also the worst in man. There are still many organists who exhibit great virtuosity, but show little evidence of virtue. There remain many musicians who have ample ability, but reveal a lamentable lack of humility."

This regrettable reality also became the subject of a number of articles in our own periodicals when Rev. G VanDooren articulated some of his observation on the "peculiar race whom we name after the instrument they play"

"Of course, there are all kinds of organists. You have the humble ones, humble not only because they are aware of their limitations, but also because they are deeply impressed with the serving character of their organ-playing. All they really want to do is to undergird the congregational singing, and, by their choice of music and way of playing, to support the message from the pulpit.

Others seem to consider it their task to treat the congregation to weekly organ recitals before and after the service, and even before, after, and in between the singing of the congregation. It may even happen that one only hears the organ, while our God wants to hear His people.

Yes, organists are a peculiar race. You will hardly ever hear an organist praise one of his or her colleagues. If there is more than one organist in a congregation, quite some strife goes on behind the scenes. An organist will not too easily vacate his place for another organist.

Well, organists are just human, as we all are; but with them it sometimes seems to be more obvious. People, and even consistories, are often afraid to make some critical remarks about the function of the organist in the liturgy of public worship. The keys of the organ may be thrown at you; an ultimatum, even a threat of breaking away from the church, may escape the musical lips." (a)

The true "disposition" of the organist will readily reveal itself in the discussions about what an organist should be paid for his services. In this respect we can detect also among the organists in our federation of churches the influence of the professional organists' associations such as the American Guild of Organists and the Royal Canadian College of Organists. We notice in these associations a gradual shift of emphasis away from "A Declaration of Religious Principles," which spoke about "service for the greater glory of God" to "Education and Professional Concerns" which articulates the organists' professional concerns and affirms their pertinent demand for more pay.

The organists official journal, *The American Organist* is "dedicated to furthering their (namely, the organists. RD) ideals, objectives, and cultural and educational aspirations." The "service for the greater glory of God" has all but disappeared. This shift of emphasis has resulted in the demand for the recognition of the organists' professional status, and brings with it the requirement that he be consulted by the minister (clergy) on all matters related to his area of jurisdiction, and, of course, that he be paid a salary commensurate with the "professional" services rendered. Professional development (education) becomes the fulcrum for procuring professional fees and a consultative function in decisions involving the liturgy for the worship services.

That our own organists are not entirely free from the influence of the "education and professional concerns" mentality, is evident from the statements and remarks which are occasionally made:

- 1)"It should come as no surprise that there are so few good organists in our churches. We are only getting what we pay for."
- 2)"It is a discredit to our churches that in the realm of church music amateurism has received permanent sanction."
- 3)"Organists should have at least some input into the choice of Psalms and Hymns to be sung in the worship services."
- 4)"The organ is available to the organist (note the singular, RD) for practice, lessons, and practice of pupils, and is consequently his responsibility."

The last of these four statements is from "the sober words endorsed by Reformed Organists Societies (in the Netherlands) and authorities on church music." The statement, freely translated and applied by "the organist" has in many churches resulted in an exclusive use of the instrument. The organist lays claim to exercising his responsibility for the instrument, and for that matter, all his responsibilities in a manner he sees fit since he is the "professional." It is he who has the necessary education and training, and it is he who has the qualifications to make the necessary decisions on matters pertaining to his area of expertise. With the organists' demand for recognition of his professional status comes the further demand for remuneration commensurate with his profession.

Perhaps we can recognize in these developments the persuasive influence of the A.A.C.S. philosophy of autonomy and "sphere-sovereignty." Perchance we can also identify the ignoble fruits of professional jealousy and cynicism, and a forsaking of Scriptural standards of faith and conduct. Possibly the most urgent educational need is the need for a refresher course in sound doctrine, and a review of Paul's list of "the fruits of the Spirit." Then, and only then, can there be a shift of emphasis away from ruling the roost to serving the congregation, - from the pride of selfish ambition, (James 3) to service with humility. (Eph 5) Then further education (professional development) will no longer become the fulcrum for procuring professional fees, but a means to equipping for better service.

It is obvious from the sentiments expressed by the writers we quoted that generally speaking, organists are not noted for their genial "disposition" or their lack of self-esteem. It is equally obvious that the Scriptural exhortation to esteem others better than ourselves (Phil 2:3,4) will remain, also for organists, an arduous challenge. Yet we may thankfully note, as Rev. VanDooren has done, that there are many organist who "are deeply impressed with the serving character of their organ playing." Therefore they endeavour to manifest a disposition that allows for good harmony in the performance of their task as organist, and in their relationship with each other and their minister. Such a disposition will make the task of the organist truly enjoyable and rewarding for everyone involved in this "service to the greater glory of God."

The author of the article, *About Organists and Pulpiters*, concurs with this sentiment when he concludes that "a two-sided, brotherly striving after good harmony, understanding, and co-operation between preacher and organist will only benefit the liturgy, and thus its purpose: The glory of God and the edification of His people." (b)

In the Methodist church in Oberlin, Ohio there is a sign permanently affixed to the bench of the 2 manual, 24 rank "Brombaugh" pipe organ. It reads: "This church and the organbuilder want you to feel free to use this organ. Please play it with the proper regard for the fine instrument it is. Members of the congregation shall have first priority. The switch is on the lower right hand of the case. 'Praise God in His sanctuary; Praise Him in His mighty firmament! Let everything that breathes praise the Lord' (Psalm 150:1,6)" (c)

This extract from *The American Organist* tells us very little about the disposition of this pipe organ. The sign affixed on the organ bench speaks volumes about the disposition of the organist. Would that more organists, organ committees, and consistories showed such a disposition!

Ron Dykstra

(a)(b) Rev. G. VanDooren, *About Organists and Pulpiters*.

(c) *The American Organist*, March/83, Vol.17 No.3.

## CHURCH NEWS

Regional Synod - East has given concurring advise to the congregation of Rockway, Ontario to dismiss Rev.T.Hoogsteen from his position of minister in that congregation on the grounds of Article 11 of the Church Order.

[ Article 11 reads: "If a minister of the Word is judged unfit and incapable of serving the congregation fruitfully and to its edification without there being any reason for Church discipline, the consistory with the deacons shall not dismiss him from his service within the congregation without the approbation of classis and the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod, and not without proper arrangements regarding the support of the minister and his family for a reasonable period of time.

If no call is forthcoming in three years, he shall be declared released from his ministerial status by the classis in which he served last

## News from around the world

The Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (known as the Free Reformed Churches in North America) have severed the fifty year relationship it has had with the Christian Reformed Church of North America. Ecumenical deputy Paul den Butter stated that "discussions and expressions of deep concern made no difference!" Rev.M.C.Tanis, president of the synod where this decision was taken (42 in favour, 10 against), explained that "all of us are feeling some pain now. But brothers, be sure of this: we could not decide otherwise."

Christian Renewal of Nov.13, 1995 reported that Paul den Butter indicated his disappointment about the lack of concern and education their members displayed by the CRC. He noted that "This year one issue of the The Banner - the official publication of the CRC - contained the full text of the controversial speech made by the GKN - synodical president, Rev.Richard Vissinga. But not a word at our visit!" Only after it became known in America that the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken wanted to break relations with the CRC was there any consternation among CRC members. Until that time they showed little concern.

Criticism was levelled at the CRC regarding their view of the authority of the Bible, women ministers, and their relations with the GKN (Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland - synodical). In an emotional speech Rev.Jacob Kuntz, the CRC delegate to the CGKN synod tried to show that recent deviations from orthodox teachings by the CRC were not all that serious.

He tried to soften the contact the CRC has with the GKN by showing that he, too, had difficulty with the GKN stand on homosexual and that members of the GKN could not automatically attend the Lord's Supper or occupy the pulpit in North America. In defense of women ministers Rev.Kuntz pointed to the practice of women voting in congregational meetings (exercised by, among others, some of the Liberated Reformed Churches in the Netherlands), which, he claimed, is the first step en route to women ministers. He also pleaded for consideration for the many thousands of dedicated, faithful church members still in the CRC.

Dr.David Engelhard, General Secretary of the Christian Reformed denomination did not agree with the need for this decision and expressed the opinion that it had been taken in undue hast. He related some of the history of the relations between the two federations and indicated the present relationship was only in existence since 1980. He expects that when the formal letter comes from the 75,200 member, 187 church Christelijke Gereformeerde federation, a response will be sent.

He did admit in a quote to Christian Renewal, that "Certainly by our relationship and continuing relationship with a variety of churches we have a slightly different view about what our relationship with churches should be."

PdB

### ICRC to be held in Seoul, Korea in 1997

Rev.M.van Beveren, Secretary of the ICRC, says the purpose of the ICRC is five-fold:

1. To express and promote the unity of the faith;
2. To encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among member churches;
3. To encourage cooperation in the fulfillment of the missionary mandate and other mandates;
4. To study the common problems and other issues that confront member churches;
5. To present a Reformed testimony to the world.

Asked whether the ICRC is achieving its goals, Rev. van Beveren, retired minister of the Church in Edmonton, said it's still too early to tell. "We're still at the beginning stage."

Speeches being prepared for the Seoul conference include

1. Biblical Principles for the Relation between Church and State. By Dr. R.C. Beckett of Northern Ireland;
2. The Principles of Reformed Worship by Mr. Mark T. Bube of the U.S.;
3. The New Paradigm in Theology by Drs. E.A. de Boer of the Netherlands;
4. Challenges of the Charismatic Movement to the Reformed Tradition by Dr. Richard Gaffin, Jr. of the U.S
5. Women in Office, especially about deaconesses by Dr. Soon Gil Hur of Korea; and
6. The Ministry of the Word amongst Asian Religious People (Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Zoroastrians) by Rev. David John of India. [Excerpts from Christian Renewal - Nov. 13/95] PdB

## **FIRST PROVISIONAL AGENDA FOR SYNOD 1996 - THE NETHERLANDS**

REFORMANDA, a Dutch weekly within the Liberated Churches, reported in its issue of Nov. 1, 1995 that the first agenda for Synod 1996 has been sent. This synod is scheduled to be held in Berkel en Rodenrijs. The date of the synod was not given, but all incoming pieces must arrive by March 20, 1996.

Two requests for revision of decisions made at the previous synod in Ommen have already been placed on the agenda. They deal with women voting and the declaration of the blessing over the congregation by an elder. A third item, that of special services for the handicapped, will also be raised again at the upcoming synod.

Rev. P. van Gorp, editor of Reformanda, commented on the importance of these matters for the church members at large. He explained that not only consistories and classis' should note the timetable for sending overtures, etc to synod, but also individual members should take note. For they also have the privilege and calling to address synod. At least, when they wish to address synod about matters that are already on the agenda of the synod. If one were to address synod about a new matter, then one should follow the church orderly way of addressing the consistory - classis - regional synod.

But, van Gorp continues, if a church member wishes to address a synod about unity discussions, divorce matters, or the liturgy, to name a few actual examples, then he/she may write directly to synod. Surely this rule also applies to matters on the agenda of the previous synod (of Ommen).

It would be wise, of course, to copy one's own consistory and classis about such an overture and also to encourage them to take up the same argumentation in their address to synod. But it remains the right of every church member to think along and work along with the matters in discussion. Also, in this manner, the work of synods will have the attention, the prayers, and the cooperation of the membership.

At the same time Rev. van Gorp notes that a synod may not be swayed by the weight of the mail on a certain issue. The arguments themselves must lead to the decision. Yet, it is good for a synod to know what lives in the churches.

It is good to remind ourselves of the matters raised in our sister churches in the Netherlands. We have all received the Acts of General Synod 1995 recently. A sound reading of them, including the appendices is not a luxury for an interested church member. Synod Abbotsford received many overtures and appeals at the very last minute, or even after the last minute. This made the task of the delegates that much heavier. They had to spend another full day reading the late material. In this manner not full justice is done to the material nor does it give Christian consideration for the delegates.

When we have questions, concerns, or even out-right disagreement, let us deal with it in an orderly manner. May we never become so complacent that we don't bother, but on the other hand let us deal with these issues in decency and in good order.

PdB

## **The Unity of the Church**

by Rev.P. van Gulp

Several issues ago we quoted what Rev.L.Wierenga wrote in Bij De Tijd about the relationship between churches. Under the title Don't Keep Talking, But Kiss and Make Up - or, Stop the Discussions he proposed that it is really not necessary to strive for church unity with the Christelijke Gereformeerden (Free Reformed) Churches, the Netherlands Reformed, and the Reformed Bond, because we are in fact one already.

At this time we wish to pass on what Rev.B.Luiten wrote about this in Reformatie.

What is the Church?

Rev.Luiten used this question to get at what he sees as Wierenga's error. He said, "In his article Wierenga never gets beyond a group of people who establish a religious bond while at the same time maintaining a number of differences... With that I will not say that Wierenga does not heartily agree with Lord's Day 21 of the H.C. But I do wish to indicate that the essence of the church, that Christ gathers a congregation unto Himself, does not function in his argument."

Luiten also commented about the manner in which Wierenga wrote about the discussion of the differences that do exist. He treats them as if they are only theological debates. Luiten said, "What about the fact that decisions have been made *for Christ's sake*? Decisions made with much pain because it cut through numerous relationships. But people felt that they could not do no otherwise, since the Word of God was at the heart of the matter."

### **TO BECOME CHRISTELIJKE GEREFORMEERD - WITHDRAWING FROM THE COMMUNITY OF THE CHURCH.**

Rev.Luiten speaks a clear language about church members who go to the Christelijke Gereformeerde (CGKN) churches. They withdraw themselves from the community of the Church: "...it remains a withdrawal, and thus a serious matter that must be warned against. Does that make us too hard? Or do we in that way fail to recognize the truth of the CGKN?"

It is very painful to hear that you have withdrawn yourself from the community of the Church when you join the CGKN.

"That pain goes very deep. But it has not been caused because we have become too hard. No, for it is precisely that pain that we constantly feel because the CGKN, till now, has refused to join the Liberated to form one house of God." Indeed - we have been feeling this pain for a long time, actually since the Liberation. And it continues to hurt. Doesn't it become time to stop the discussions, as it becomes increasingly clear that the CGKN refuses to become one with us? Surely Rev.Luiten is correct when he recognizes a withdrawal when one joins the CGKN. But doesn't such a move receive encouragement (especially among the youth) when constant suggestions are made that we have already come such a long way together? Or when new initiatives are described in Nederlands Dagblad (a reformed daily newspaper)? Or when thoughtless discussions take place between consistories indicating that locally they are already one?

### **NO SIGN OF A CLOSER RELATIONSHIP WITH THE NETHERLANDS REFORMED**

We hear the same clear language from Rev.Luiten with regard to the Netherlands Reformed churches: "Our heart goes out to them! But as long as they choose for a church community where unity and purity of doctrine are not realized and

can not be realized, then a closer relationship can not be considered, no matter what type of federation might be proposed. Far reaching differences about what God says can not be solved with looser organizations.”

Rev.Luiten points to the subscription form in the Netherlands Reformed churches. As long as that remains in effect (and it has just recently been re-established) it is impossible that purity will return to the doctrine. Doesn't that mean that, with much pain in our heart, we must conclude the discussions (that Synod Ommen unfortunately agreed too)? Again, because we might otherwise confuse the church members (especially the youth) by indicating that we are already one? Or because new initiatives are described in Nederlands Dagblad? Or because thoughtless discussions take place between consistories indicating that locally they are already one? It is high time that the churches listen to this clear warning. It is high time that eyes are open for the great danger that infiltrates the Church via the working together in various organizations and via Nederlands Dagblad. After all, the issue is true unity and not a forced and therefore a contrived unity.

We are curious if Nederlands Dagblad will tackle this clear declaration in De Reformatie. For the existence of ND as an “interchuch” paper is called into question around this issue.

(Translated from Reformanda Oct.25 by PdB)