

Thus saith the Lord

The necessity for opening God's Word to understand Sept.11, 2001

There has been no lack of commentary on the events in the cities of New York and Washington on September 11, 2001. Religiosity has also played a prominent role in the aftermath of the horrific events of that day. In these circumstances it becomes necessary for Bible believing Christians to reflect on these events in the light of God's revelation to His chosen people.

Christian observers of these events will recognize the progress of history and the hand of God. Terrorism, calamity, death and destruction are not a surprise to the Bible believer. The only amazement amidst the anticipated divine judgment is the guarantee of mercy, grace and salvation.

In an effort to come to grips with the shocking events of that day and the numerous lasting effects it is surely fitting to turn to the Word of God. Each day we open that wonderful gift to listen to the voice of our Father - but how do we read it? Do the passages come to us where we live? Or do we read the Bible as if it is about others - in the past or in the future? Every event in our lives must draw us expectantly and thankfully to the Word of God. The extraordinary happenings of recent times may serve as a powerful reminder to read the Bible as living words for all places and peoples including our times and ourselves.

In their grief, fear and desire for retribution The United States of America also appears to have turned to God. Churches are full to overflowing, television cameras show political and church leaders asking God to bless America and people everywhere and from a variety of faiths have joined the American Congress in imploring God with the words of that famous hymn.

The God of the Bible is the God of History

It is striking that the name of God is used by so many for such diametrically opposite causes. Terrorists claim justification from God for their gruesome deeds. At the same time the targets of the terrorism congregate en masse to implore God for comfort and retribution. Who really is the God that so many worship in such different ways?

Throughout history and around the globe there is a consensus that a God exists. Most of humanity recognizes and deals with a Supreme Being. The difficulty comes when man wants to define or identify Him. Reformed Christians, however, know and believe that God has revealed Himself in a special way, in His holy Word, the Bible. Already when this faith is expressed many part company. Among those who accept the Bible there is still further disagreement about its status and meaning and about the things revealed in it.

In truth, the Bible is the special revelation of God to His chosen people about His work of salvation for them. The Bible tells of God's desire to create heaven and earth and a people that would worship and adore Him. All of us know the history of how sin soon spoiled that creation. Once sin became a reality, judgment was the definitive consequence. The very creation was set in judgment against sinful man (Genesis 3). Already Cain perpetrated the first act of terrorism when he killed his brother Abel. Then, too, it was about God. Cain recognized Abel's worship as being acceptable to God. Today the evil one and his false worship continue to spread terrorism, evil and destruction.

Even though the world was thrown into despair by sin of the very first people that lived, a saving grace has also been granted. The Bible speaks of salvation on each one of its pages. Psalm 110 also speaks about it. There we notice that the unfolding of history is the establishment of a kingdom for the Saviour. God, Almighty, is busy in time to prepare a special, righteous people for the Saviour; and He will make the enemy, the evil ones, a footstool for Him.

Throughout history there is an antithesis between the saving work of Jesus Christ and the evil of sin and its consequences. God's special people are renewed, born again, living a new life that is opposed to evil. They are in league with God, working toward the submission of evil. Therefore they join in the Psalms that call for destruction of the evil ones - the imprecatory Psalms.

In the history of Gods special people of the Old Testament we can read of many ruthless and terrible people being used by God to punish and judge His chosen nation. In turn God also punished the people He used in judgment against His special people for the evil they had done. The God of the Bible is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. He continues to use people to execute His plans. As He uses them to gather and preserve His special people, He also uses them to execute judgment at His time and in the manner of His choosing. Therefore we may surely conclude that these recent events of destruction against the modern western world are truly judgments of God. At the same time we may as assuredly maintain that the terrorism and destruction which has been enacted by criminal minds is a great evil and will certainly be punished by almighty God.

Understanding Judgment and Calamity

In many places of the Bible we can read about judgments God will send to the nations of the world as He guides and directs history. Please take a moment right now to read Revelations 18. It is a good example of a portion of the Bible that speaks about judgment. It speaks to the New Testament church and one can easily see a marked resemblance to the recent incidences we are all still thinking about.

Having read Rev.18 we might be tempted to apply it directly to the terrible attacks on the twin world trade towers. Before we do that, however, we must be careful to remember that many of our forefathers have considered tragedy and horror in their times to be certain signs of the impending end of time. John Calvin and Martin Luther considered the popes of their time to be the anti-Christ. Others were certain that the end of the world would come once Adolf Hitler had garnered power and exercised genocide upon Jews and others on his way to world domination. Anti-christs have also been seen in the persons of Saddam Hussein or Mohammar Kaddafi.

Some Christians were sure that communism, socialism, nazi-ism or unionism was the stamp on the foreheads of people without which one would not be able to buy and sell in society. How often have there not been storms, tornadoes, famines and plagues that have brought people up short with regard to the end of history?

At the same time who would be so brash as to refute the reality that AIDS is God's judgment on homosexuality. The Bible is very specific about that. Using that analogy we can see that there are also non-homosexuals inflicted with AIDS. In this regard we must remember the words of Jesus in Luke 13: 4 where we read, "Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who dwelt in Jerusalem?" "Aids" is a judgment of God against homosexuality. God frequently includes apparent innocents in His judgments. The Bible is full of such examples and we could add more from incidents since the close of the Canon. The bombing of Sept.11 also killed many that are no guiltier than other North Americans.

We need to be careful to try to match prophecies of Scripture with particular incidents of judgment. But at the same time we must be vigilant in pointing out God's judgment on a wicked and perverse generation. Some religious leaders did speak out in recent days about the evils that persist in North American society - abortion and promiscuity being prominent among them. We can not say that the world trade towers were destroyed because there have been too many abortions in North America. But we can say that the terrible and horrific deeds perpetrated by criminal terrorists are at the same time a judgment from God against a wicked and perverse generation. We must also say that the wickedness of North American society includes abortion, idolatry, promiscuity, false and self-willed worship, greed, theft, murder, coveting, etc. etc.

Christian Reaction

In response to the horrendous and surprising attack on symbols of world economic and military power the United States of America has declared war on terrorism, terrorists and all that harbour and support them. They have identified the ideology they want to eradicate and some persons who embody such philosophy. But they have failed to see the deeper meaning behind the gruesome and fearful reality that broke a peaceful Tuesday morning.

In the devastation and horror of the implosion of the twin towers of economic power, the gash in the seat of military power and the symbol of failed human effort to thwart terror, judgment has come upon a people who considered

themselves free and powerful. The shock waves of the surprise attack and the realization that it could really happen almost outweigh the sorrow and pain of the death and destruction it caused.

A rush to turn to God in the tumult and fear that followed the attack by anti-American zealots included words of warning and explanation by some religious leaders. During the services that could be seen around the world via television God allowed the truth of His Word to be heard in the midst of much false religion.

In the Old Testament we often find a true prophet of God standing alone among a great cloud of false teachers, so also in this situation the truth of God was drowned out by the many false prophets of our day. It appears that God wants it that way. It is His way of calling those whom He has chosen for salvation. Through the work of the Holy Spirit those whom He has chosen will hear His voice - even though it is surrounded by so much man made religion. With the eyes of faith we can see our heavenly Father bring out judgment on the world and at the same time seek out those to whom He will show mercy.

The true Christian can also see something else in these traumatic days. The true Christian can be comforted in the knowledge that our Saviour is on His way. The Bible clearly teaches that in the last days the beast (the world) and the whore (the false church) will challenge the bride of Christ - the Church. In the aftermath of Sept. 11, 2001 a great deal of effort is being made to allow each religion its own legitimacy. The American and allied response is not against Muslims or Islam but against terrorism, so the line goes. We must leave all religions free to worship in their own manner. After all, we are all worshipping the same God in our own way. This approach is so much in line with the North American attitude toward religion. No one is permitted to claim fundamental truth. Each religion, each church group, each person is permitted to accept as true whatever form of religion or belief he desires. Only now all must unite in the fight against terrorism. Is this not the congregating of the whore - the false church. And who can fail to recognize the strong effort by the US and the UN to make as large a political coalition as possible against terrorism. Countries that would never have thought about cooperation with the United States are suddenly in league with them against a common enemy. Does the Christian Bible reader not recognize the beast of Revelations in such talk and activity?

As we said before, we must be careful about applying Scripture texts to current events, but at the same time we may and must recognize the hand of our God, our Father when He fulfills His promises, His Word. We may be comforted that our God is an active and faithful God. He is coming! He is coming to judge the living and the dead. He is coming. He is coming to fulfill His Word - to gather His own unto Himself. He has said it and He will do it.

PdB

LONG-ESTABLISHED REFORMED PRACTICES

Explaining What We Confess and Practice

In the editorial "Getting Rid of Idiosyncrasies" (1) we examined the sentiments of those who think that "perhaps we even need to be critical of some "long-established practices" One of the long-established practices in question was the Reformed practice of "closed" communion, a practice that was called "a Canadian Reformed idiosyncrasy" by some people outside the Canadian/American Reformed Churches (Can/AmRC). Regrettably, there were also some people "inside" the Can/AmRC who, although they did not use the word "idiosyncrasy", expressed similar sentiments. It is therefore important that we continue our discussion about our "long-established Reformed practices." We must, on the basis of scripture and confession, clearly explain what we as Reformed people confess and practice; we must once more spell out precisely "why we do what we do." In the process of these discussions we can, hopefully, come to a better understanding and greater appreciation of our Reformed heritage.

DEALING WITH DIFFERENT VIEWS

As an introduction to our discussion we begin with focusing on what we read in the "Reader's Forum" column of the 1996 year-end issue of Clarion. (2) The contributor to this "Reader's Forum" titled his contribution "Visitors at the Lord's Table", and in this context expressed some reservations about our long-established Reformed practice of

“closed” communion. He writes that “in the light of recent discussions in contact with other Reformed and Presbyterian churches”... “perhaps we even need to be critical of some long-established practices.” It was in reference to this particular contribution that we made the observation that “what was once staunchly defended by our ministers in 1993-1994 (namely, closed communion, RD) began to be openly and publicly questioned in 1996, also by our own ministers.” (3)

At the bottom of the writer’s contribution to the Reader’s Forum we read: “The views expressed in Reader’s Forum are not necessarily those of the editorial committee or the publisher.” The willingness of Clarion’s editorial committee to publish contributions that apparently warrant this type of qualifying statement is both commendable and at the same time somewhat puzzling. It is commendable because Reformed Polemics owes its existence to the fact that in the past Clarion has often refused to publish articles that do not share the sentiments held by the members of the editorial committee. The fact that this potentially controversial contribution to Reader’s Forum was indeed published seems to indicate that views which “are not necessarily those of the editorial committee” are open for discussion.

Nevertheless, the publication by Clarion of this contribution to Reader’s Forum is at the same time somewhat puzzling because a paper written in response to what was published in Clarion, for which the same qualifying statement could have been used, was refused for publication by the same editorial committee. It is puzzling because apart from expressing a different view than that expressed in the published contribution to Clarion’s Reader’s Forum, there was no logical or valid reason to refuse this paper for publication. This paper, in response to what was published in Clarion, clearly articulated the Reformed position on our long-established Reformed practice of “closed” communion. Therefore the editors of Reformed Polemics, without reservation, published this paper in the June 21/97 issue. (4) Since this issue appeared prior to the federation-wide distribution that began in March of 1998, (5) we now publish it again.

In the footnotes of the previous editorial (6) we noted that when we mentioned sister-church relationships it would be advisable to “overlook, for the time being, the troublesome predicament produced by Gen. Synod Neerlandia 2001 regarding ‘sister-church’ relationships.” The same advice is necessary for the paper we now publish again. It was written Feb. 5/97, well before the conundrum effectuated by our last Gen. Synod. The paper mentions the fact that “one of the issues which has prevented this contact (with the OPC, RD) from becoming full ecclesiastical fellowship is this very matter of fencing the Lord’s Table (see Acts of G.S. 1995, p. 75). Synod Neerlandia, however, decided to enter into ecclesiastical fellowship *before* resolving this and other remaining issues. Therefore, in our perusal of this paper we also need to overlook, for the time being, the “troublesome predicament” perpetuated and actualized by this debatable decision of Gen. Synod Neerlandia.

MISSING NAMES

The observant reader - particularly one who takes an occasional glance at the footnotes of previous editorials - will have noticed that often the source of the excerpts or quotes used in our discussions is indicated by mentioning the title of the article and also in which issue of a magazine or periodical this particular article can be found. The *names* of the writers or authors have, at times, been deleted. This is not a slight oversight, nor an attempt to hide the names of these authors or writers, but simply an effort to first and foremost focus on *what* has been written rather than on *who* wrote it. When we engage in polemics we must be careful to stick to the issues and not get sidetracked into name calling or making personalistic comments. This is particularly important when it becomes necessary to take a closer look at the writings, presentations, declarations, assertions, comments or remarks made by our leaders; by our professors, ministers, or “overseers who labour among you and are over you in the Lord...”(7). Therefore, whenever and wherever it is possible and prudent, the names of the authors or writers will be deleted. Hopefully the absence of names will help us in our endeavor to focus on the *real* issues and so lessen the possibility of our polemics becoming personalistic.

ARTICLE 61 AND VISITORS TO THE LORD’S TABLE

In the “Reader’s Forum” (*Clarion*, year-end Issue, 1996), the writer addressed the question of our use of Art. 61 of the Church Order, especially as it relates to visitors. (Art. 61 states: “The Consistory shall admit to the Lord’s supper only those who have made public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life. Members of sister-churches shall be admitted on the ground of a good attestation concerning their doctrine and conduct.”) What the writer to “Reader’s

Forum” writes in this article raises three main questions about Art. 61: the authority, the scope, and the implications of this article.

THE AUTHORITY OF ARTICLE 61

The writer says Art. 61 is “one way and a good way” to exercise oversight, but “not necessarily the only mode of exercising supervision over the Table.” He warns us against what he views as the danger of institutionalizing our way of deciding admission. Later he speaks of consistories that require written travel attestations as “strict.” It is clear from what he writes that the writer has, as he himself says, “nothing against Art. 61 of the Church Order.” Yet, the questions he raises, and the manner in which he speaks about Art. 61, convey a wrong impression.

The fact of the matter is that Art. 61 does institutionalize the way we decide admission to the Lord’s Supper. Indeed, it is the only mode of exercising supervision over the Table allowed in our federation, by reason of agreement together in the Church Order. Furthermore, consistories that require written attestations are not being “strict,” they are being faithful to their agreement. This does not mean one cannot question the basis for Art. 61, but we are not helped in this matter by effectively undermining the authority of Art. 61 as it presently exists and functions in our federation.

Someone might object to what is argued above on the grounds that nothing is said in Article 61 about the attestation taking a written form, and thus opening the door for other forms. In answer, attention must be directed to Art. 62 (Attestations) which makes it clear that when attestations are in question, we are speaking of written forms which are signed by two members of a consistory. The connection between the two articles is also made clear by the fact that in both cases the same matters are being attested: i.e., doctrine and conduct (Art. 62), profession of the Reformed faith and godly conduct (Art. 61).

It may be noted, in passing, that the essence of an attestation is not the writing, per se, but the testimony being given (cf. II Cor. 13:1, “Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witness.” NIV) And such testimony could be given verbally rather than in writing. However, it is imperative to guard what is essential to the attestation, i.e., the official witness of the overseeing elders to the doctrine and conduct of the person. Thus, the writer’s reference to phone calls or faxes to the office-bearers of the home congregation is appropriate. But the writer’s assertion that the visitors can give their own testimony, confirmed by local members, misses the mark. As we shall see later, this bypasses the Christ-given role of the elders. But for now, it is sufficient to note that such personal testimony, while possibly acceptable regarding doctrine/profession is not acceptable regarding conduct.

We see then, that Art. 61 possesses a functional authority within our federation by virtue of our consent together to submit to this Church Order. Functional authority, however, doesn’t automatically presuppose Scriptural authority. The writer points out that when others criticize our rule we shall have to support this with scriptural grounds. Space does not permit an extended discussion of this aspect of the subject, but a study of questions and answers 82-85 of the Heidelberg Catechism, with their accompanying proof texts, should provide the interested reader with the necessary foundation

In summary, we may conclude that the elders are the Christ-ordained officers given the responsibility for admitting and excluding from the sacrament. Furthermore, the two criteria cited in Art. 61, profession and life, are clearly ones to be evaluated by the elders, not left to personal recognizance

The role of elders with visitors can perhaps be seen more clearly when we consider their role with their own members. Every time the Lord’s Supper is administered, the communicant members come by the permission of the elders administering the Supper in Christ’s Name. And this permission is not arbitrary, but it is based on these two criteria: the communicant member has professed the Reformed faith, and the member is living a godly life. (Of course we have in view the public life of the individual which is overseeable by the elders; personal/private sins must in the nature of the case be addressed in the self-examination). If the individual were living in sin, it would be the duty of the elders to exclude such a person according to Christ’s command and our confession (LD 30).

Once we understand the principles involved with the elders admitting their own members to the Supper, we can more easily see what their role must be with visitors. Indeed, it can be no different: the principle of the elders’ authority in admitting and excluding must be maintained, and the principle of those elders making these judgments based on the

two criteria (profession and life) must be maintained. Hence, the reason for an attestation, for an attestation is simply the way in which we honor these Scriptural principles in admitting visitors. And since the elders of the church being visited do not have oversight in the case of the visitor's life, they must have testimony from those whom Christ has appointed to exercise such oversight: the elders of the visitor. For practical reasons, it is also advisable to receive similar testimony from the visitor's elders regarding their profession as well. For although it may be theoretically possible to interview a visitor to determine if they profess the Reformed faith, it is usually not practical if it is going to be done in a manner consistent with the usual format used in interviewing people for profession of faith. It may be true that members, even officers, of the church being visited have some knowledge of the visitor. However, it is not their duty to oversee the visitor, and so their knowledge will, in the nature of the case, never be complete in a way that is commensurate with the duty given by Christ to the elders responsible for the visitor. Furthermore, given the confidential nature of much church discipline (e.g., so-called "silent censure"), friends and acquaintances of the visitor able to testify will not have the complete picture.

The procedure outlined above for admitting visitors to the Lord's Supper is confirmed by what is said in Art. 62, C.O. It too properly reflects the role of the elders in testifying about doctrine and conduct. Also, the fact that attestations are required when people move to another one of our congregations is not unrelated to this matter of admittance to the sacrament.

Thus, we see that official testimony from the office-bearers responsible for overseeing the visitor's profession and life is needed before a visitor can be admitted to the Lord's Table. This is not just "one way and a good way," but a Scriptural way. We may even say, "the Scriptural way." For no other method has been conceived which still insures that the Biblical principles of oversight are preserved. There are other methods, of course, but they all, in one way or another, compromise the principles at stake.

THE SCOPE OF ARTICLE 61

The second question raised by the writer to "Reader's Forum" has to do with the scope of Art. 61. There is no doubt that this Article regulates how we handle visitors from within our own federation, but does this Article regulate how we treat visitors from outside our federation? He believes that such questions are beyond the scope of the Church Order, and therefore, it remains a matter for the local consistory to decide. He does admit, however, that Art. 61 may be confusing to some and perhaps should be clarified.

It is true that Art. 61 speaks explicitly about members of sister-churches, meaning of course, other churches in our federation, and nothing explicit is said about those beyond our circle of churches. However, it would be specious to suggest that Art. 61 has no relevance to these other visitors. It is patently clear that if the criteria for admittance to the Lord's Supper for our own members must be profession of the Reformed faith and a godly life, then nothing less can be required from visitors from outside our churches. Otherwise we would be guilty not only of a double standard, but we would undermine the order established by the Lord Himself for guarding His Table.

Furthermore, if the reasoning behind the need for an attestation for visitors from within the federation, as outlined above, is valid, then how can anything less be required for a visitor from outside? To not require the same is, as we saw above, to flaunt Christ's regulation of His supper. The only question left open then is which churches are those from which we may accept attestations?

The writer has in view the increasing possibility of visitors from churches with whom we have ecclesiastical fellowship or other forms of contact. I suspect that he is especially concerned with the latter, since the rules for ecclesiastical fellowship as adopted by our General Synods are clear. Rule 4 states, "The churches shall accept one another's attestations or certificates of good standing, which also means admitting members of the respective churches to the sacraments upon presentation of that attestation or certificate." (Acts of G.S. 1995, p. 165)

The next closest relationship maintained by our churches is the one of temporary ecclesiastical contact with the OPC. Whatever one thinks about this contact, it is clear from repeated Synodical statements that it precludes inter-communion. In fact, one of the issues which has prevented this contact from becoming full ecclesiastical fellowship is this very matter of fencing the Lord's Table (see Acts of G.S. 1995, p. 75).

Beyond the two categories just outlined, we as churches have no other official forms of contact, other than those being pursued by the Deputies for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity, by the Deputies for Contact with the ERQ, and by local churches. In all of these cases, the level of contact is even less developed than it is with the OPC, so one could hardly argue that those contacts warrant anything beyond what is practiced with the OPC.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF ARTICLE 61

It is clear in reading the writer's article that he is motivated to have us re-think Article 61 and its use because of his concern for our discussion with others who share the Reformed faith. He believes that our present practice, if applied strictly, places unnecessary obstacles in our discussions with these churches. What, after all, is the root of this ongoing problem of fencing the Lord's Table?

If it has not become clear in the course of this article so far, let it be said now that what lies behind the differences on this issue is one's doctrine of the church. The question is not a matter of relative strictness in guarding the sacrament. But as we have seen it is a matter of understanding and applying the correct Biblical principles. In my judgment, one of the major reasons we as a federation have so much difficulty in our contacts with others is because we do indeed hold a different view of the church. Invisible and pluriform church views are rampant among Presbyterian and Reformed people especially on our continent. When such views are held, our principles for fencing the Table, as expressed in Art. 61, in connection with the Heidelberg Catechism, LD 30, 31, are seen as intolerable. Or as the writer to "Reader's Forum" warns us regarding our practice, "we may find ourselves in situations which seem contrary to the intent of the Lord's commandment." And there are many Presbyterian and Reformed people who believe that our practice places us in exactly that kind of situation. It must not be ignored that the main issue involved in the Laurel congregation seceding from the OPC was this very question of the proper fencing of the Lord's Table. It was also a major question in the situations in both Blue Bell and Denver.

The answer to this problem does not lie in altering our practice as we find it in Art. 61, for it is indeed based on a Scriptural view not only of the role of the elders, but also of the church. If we believed in the pluriformity of the church or in an invisible church, then there would be no need for regulations like Art. 61. But since we believe in the uniformity of the church, such regulation is necessary. This means that the direction of our discussions with others must not devolve into talk about more-or-less strictness in admitting visitors to the sacrament, but rather must center on the real differences in ecclesiology which divide us.

Does our view of the church, and subsequent view of fencing the Lord's Supper render us sectarian as some allege? This would only be true if we had no interest in seeking unity in the true faith with others. At the same time, we must not allow our desire for unity to be compromised by diluting or discarding what we confess regarding the church. We may find ourselves in the somewhat unpleasant position in which Prof. Schilder found himself on these matters. He was willing to live in the same church with those who held views of pluriformity. The problem was that they were not willing to live with him! The situation today does not seem much different. The reason is not hard to find. Where the rubber meets the road, admittance of visitors to the Table, those who hold to pluriformity find our views unbearably restrictive along the lines of the writer's warning: we are seen as acting contrary to the intent of the Lord's commandment.

Can this impasse be removed? In the end, of course, it is not up to us to change others. However, we must be patient, prayerful and diligent in explaining what we confess and practice. Only in this way may we pursue our ecumenical task with integrity and trust that under the Lord's blessing unity in the truth may be achieved with others.

- (1) (3) (6) Getting Rid of Idiosyncrasies - Ironing -out the Differences, Reformed Polemics, Sept 29/01
- (2) "Reader's Forum" - Visitors at the Lord's Table, Clarion, year-end Issue, 1996.
- (4) Article 61 and Visitors to the Lord's Table, Reformed Polemics, June 21/97.
- (5) Federation-wide distribution of Reformed Polemics began with Volume 4, Number 13, March 14/98.
- (7) Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons, Book of Praise.

Ron Dykstra

Editorial Opinions Regarding the Acts of General Synod - Neerlandia 2001

During the early part of October most communicant members received or were offered a copy of the Acts of General Synod Neerlandia. It is surprising that it took so long for this book to arrive. On the other hand it may be a good thing that there has been a time of reflection and rest before interested readers delve into it.

It is our hope and desire that this book does not only receive a dutiful place on a bookshelf, but that it is also read and maybe even studied. Over the course of time there have been a couple of interesting developments with regard to the reading of Acts of Synods. One is an apparent waning of interest in the reading of these books and the other is the matter of how to deal with possible disagreements with decisions and/or considerations recorded in it.

Why the Acts?

Let us first tackle the apparent lack of interest. For many years it has been a custom that each communicant member or family in all of the congregations was assigned a copy of the Acts of Synods. In recent times some consistories have opted for placing a full compliment of books at the disposal of the congregation and whoever wanted one could help themselves. When using this latter method it was soon discovered that many books remained in the shipping box.

One can wonder what brings on this lack of interest in acquiring the Acts, but short of doing an accurate survey it is difficult to be definitive. It might be best for each of us to reflect on this phenomenon as it relates to ourselves. At the same time we might also consider if this is one of the symptoms of “less doctrine - more love”, or that the issues discussed at Synods are deemed less important than they have been considered in the past. Or could it be that there is increased apathy among church members?

As we said before it is impossible to be definitive, but the matter does raise some interesting questions. Certainly it would be prudent for everyone to consider acquiring the Acts if only to ensure access to them when they might be considered relevant or important at a future time. Often what one considers irrelevant or unimportant at one stage in life takes on a very different meaning at an other stage in life.

The Acts are, after all, a detailed account of what the churches have agreed on together. Someone who takes his or her membership of the Church seriously must also be interested in what the Church is doing. Although not everyone may be able and/or interested in reading all the accounts of every issue, it seems likely that some issue(s) dealt with at Synod will be of interest to the living Church member. For example, Synod 2001 in Neerlandia dealt with many issues of Church unity, but it also dealt with the use of wine at the Lord’s Supper celebration. A decision was made regarding the discussion about women voting. A new professor was appointed for the Theological College. The matter of a uniform subscription form was also dealt with, and the matter of disagreement with decisions of major assemblies by individual members was given some direction.

May we urge everyone to, at least, avail him or herself of the opportunity to acquire a copy of the Acts of Synod? Have a look through them. The presentation is particularly good this time. The Table of Contents is very clear and helpful to find items one might be interested in. The Index in the back is also very helpful. And, even if you don’t think you are going to read anything in it at present, make sure you have a copy. The time may come when you do have an interest in finding out why something was decided or what exactly was considered in coming to a decision. Then you will at least have access to the information.

What to Do with Disagreements

We already mentioned that this past Synod made some comments about the manner in which individual members should deal with possible disagreements with decisions of Synods. We would like to comment about that subject now that the Acts are available.

Not only are the Acts available to any communicant member who wants a copy, they are also sent to all the consistories who will study them to see if the decisions are in accordance with the Word of God or not. If they find something that

is not in accordance with the Word of God they will launch a grievance to the next Synod. They will explain in what way a certain decision (or maybe even a consideration) is contrary to the Bible. And they will ask the next Synod to rectify this matter. But what must an individual member do when, reading the Acts, he/she comes across such an error. Synod Neerlandia (and other Synods have hinted in the same direction) has directed that an individual member which such a difficulty should draw it to the attention of his/her consistory. The consistory, if it agrees with the observation of the individual member, will follow the procedure noted above.

It is possible that the consistory does not agree with the member - that the matter being raised is in disagreement with the Bible. In such a case the member may bring the matter of the consistory's refusal to address the error to the next Synod, to the attention of the next Classis. That Classis will judge if the member's grievance against his/her consistory is valid.

As we all know, a further appeal can be made to a Regional Synod, and, if the matter is still not cleared up, it can end up on the table of a General Synod. In this way, however, the matter will have to be of great importance and will also have been dealt with extensively in the local churches before it comes on the table of a major assembly. Only those matters that can not be dealt with at the local level(s) should come on the table of the major assemblies.

Synod 2001 has rejected a number of appeals from individual members because they had not been dealt with at the local level. Hopefully, the issue of dealing with disagreements with synodical decisions has been clarified. There are two main issues at play in this matter:

A member who disagrees with a decision of a major assembly also disagrees with his/her consistory if the consistory does not appeal that decision. Such local disagreement needs to be addressed first. Of course, if the consistory is also of the opinion that the decision is wrong they will already be appealing and the member has no need to do so.

Members who send appeals directly to Synod become un-appointed delegates to Synod. In the past there have been repeated appeals from members about the same issues. Such members become delegates at Synod with much more frequency than any of the delegated members of Synod.

Hopefully the method described above for dealing with wrong decisions will address both situations.

Reformed Polemic's Editorial Position on Unity with Presbyterians

The Acts of Synod have been available on the Internet in near complete form. Since almost all the deliberations and decisions of Synod were made in public session, it is not a surprise that many interested people heard about the decisions before they were published in the official Acts.

As a result several members, especially readers of Reformed Polemics, were surprised that the decision with regard to Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC was a unanimous one. The editorial position of Reformed Polemics has always been that unity with other federations ought not to take place until significant outstanding differences have been dealt with. Br. Ron Dykstra and the undersigned have always established the editorial position of this magazine as co-editors. In light of this position some have expressed surprise at the unanimity of the decision to offer Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC, as the undersigned was one of the delegates at Synod.

To answer some of the questions about this matter it may be wise to reaffirm our editorial position as noted above. This position has not changed. We continue to maintain that Church unity should be based on true unity and not compromise. We continue to maintain the necessity of dealing with significant differences before Church unity is established.

Of course, the editors of Reformed Polemics were not delegated to Synod. The undersigned was delegated as an elder of a local church. As such the contributions of a delegate to a Synod, either in discussion or in voting are the responsibilities of that individual. By way of explanation to those who see a dichotomy in this matter we offer the following considerations. Please have a look in the Acts to see what really happened. It is not necessary for a delegate to explain his actions at a Synod. At the same time it may be helpful for those with questions to be reassured, as much as possible, that our editorial position has not changed and how the activities at Synod led to a unanimous decision. Please have a look at the following:

Minority Report (Art.31, page 24) authored and submitted by the undersigned.

Considerations and Decisions regarding discussions of differences between the Westminster Standards and the Three Forms of Unity.

Amendment - page 29 of the Acts Art. 34: 4.6.3 & 5.1.5

Amendment - page 36 of the Acts Art. 36: 4.5 & 5.2.3

Art. 45: 4.9; 4.13 & 5.6

Address of Rev. G. I. Williamson

The existing Ecclesiastical Fellowship with FCS and PCK

A few words of elaboration will be in order. Being a member of Synod brings with it a different responsibility than being a commentator. A person looking at a situation with a bird's-eye-view can oversee and comment on a complete circumstance. So, one can say that it is wrong for the Canadian Reformed Churches (subscribing to The Three Forms of Unity) to have established Ecclesiastical Fellowship (EF) with Presbyterian Churches (subscribing to The Westminster Standards) without *first* dealing with the significant differences that exist between them. On the other hand, as a member of Synod, one must deal with the reality that such relationships have already been established and that the discussions of the relationship with the OPC has a long history and has already developed to a certain stage.

It is in this light that each member of Synod Neerlandia had to function. At the outset of discussions at Synod regarding EF with the OPC a minority report was presented to bring the position of not establishing EF into discussion. It soon became apparent that such a decision would not be made by this Synod. A large majority of delegates seemed to favour an offer of EF without more. In light of these developments some further discussion it became possible to modify the majority report by adding some significant considerations to the decision regarding the OPC as well as decisions with regard to other Presbyterian federations with which the CanRC already have EF.

In addition we are grateful with the statement that neither the CanRC nor the OPC condones pluriformity of the Church. Although there are some that are of the opinion that this is merely a theoretical statements, it is a statement which the major assembly of each federation has now adopted. It remains the responsibility of church leaders as well as church members to strive toward the maintenance of such decisions. The decision to establish EF is as equally valid as the decision to accept the statement that both the CanRC and the OPC reject the legitimacy of the pluriformity of the Church.

The speech of Rev. G. I. Williamson also indicates that the entire federation of the OPC must be apprised of the complete decision of Synod Neerlandia before accepting the offer of EF. In a statement published by Reformed Polemics last season, Rev. Williamson explains that all the delegates of General Assembly 2001 have been apprised of the complete decision of Synod Neerlandia 2001, including the Considerations.

We hope that our readers and those who have become suspect of our position regarding church unity may be assured that our editorial position has not changed. We continue to be of the conviction that Church unity should not be established until all significant differences have been discussed and alleviated.

May our heavenly Father bless our work and give us the strength to deal with the issues that confront us. We pray for those who must serve on contact committees to perform work on behalf of the federations in unity discussions. We pray that our Father will give the humbleness of heart necessary to bow to His word and not to hang on to man - centered ideas, no matter how pious they may seem to be.

PdB

Submit Yourself - but . . .

By Peter Veenendaal, National Co-ordinator RCPRC

When we speak about the task and place of governments in our lives, we often refer to well-known portions of Scripture such as Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2. Everyone familiar with these passages knows that in them we are commanded to submit ourselves to governing authorities and pay our taxes. But what happens when a government uses our tax money to promote ungodly living or uses its power to become more and more authoritarian so that citizens lose control over their own families in the process? Are we still required to submit and pay? Do we sit idly by and take the attitude, "It must be God's will. After all, nothing is beyond His control?"

The Bible gives the first known account of a warning that rulers may sometimes overstep their bounds. The author of the book of I Samuel relates an account of the time the Israelites approached the prophet Samuel with a request to give them a king such as the other nations around them had. Samuel warned the people,

"This is what the king who will reign over you will do: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants. Your menservants and maidservants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use. He will take a tenth of your flocks and you yourselves will become his slaves. When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen. "

(I Samuel 8: 11-18 NIV)

This brings to light several concerns, which are still with us today, about governing rulers. Levying of excessive taxes ("he will take for his own use..."), practicing patronage ("... give them to his attendants..."), and taking away power and the right to make individual choices ("... become his slaves..."), are three that stand out clearly in this passage. Let us look at some examples of recent events that show that the warnings of Samuel are still valid today.

One of the responsibilities of a Canadian citizen is to pay the taxes that are levied against him. Various levels of government demand taxes on goods and services to cover the expenses they incur in delivering other goods and services to their constituents. Municipal governments demand property taxes to pay for local road improvements and to support public schools. Provincial governments receive tax moneys to fund health care and education facilities and services. The national government requires funds to pay for federally funded programs such as Medicare and the defense of our country. Such overt taxes, along with many "hidden" taxes total such a large amount that, according to The Manitoba Taxpayer (August 2001), the average Canadian pays every cent of his earnings up to July 2 to one or another level of government in the form of a tax. Only after this date, does he begin to work for himself. This same date for 1985 was May 5. If that rate of tax increases continues, it won't be long before a Canadian's total annual income will completely be used for his annual tax bill.

Many imposed taxes used to pay for specialized services could be reduced for those who do not need them by imposing user fees instead. That would place the cost burden where it belongs - on those who demand those services in the first place. Recently, The National Action Committee on the Status of Women held their annual lobby in Ottawa thanks to the \$80,000 - \$100,000 funding for this rally, provided by the federal government. Besides promoting their regular feminist agenda, which is supported by only a small minority of Canadian women, this conference also heard from their past president how poorly Western women are treated. Perhaps she forgot that in her native Pakistan just standing up in public with her head uncovered would have earned her a jail term. Let her speak freely what's on her mind but not at the cost of tens of thousands of our tax dollars. If the people who organize this lobby think this viewpoint of Canadian society merits a hearing by the Canadian public, let them cover the cost themselves or let them ask supporters for the funds they require. Why should all Canadians, whether they agree with the stated purposes of this organization or not, be forced to support the work of an organization whose propaganda even the prime minister calls into question?

Another example of how Canadian taxes are raised needlessly became apparent when it was reported that municipal, provincial, and federal governments each had given \$ 100,000 to support a bid by Montreal to host the 2006 "Gay Games", suggesting that the city of Montreal will benefit economically. (The Report, August 20, 2001) Besides being requested by only a small minority of Canadians, the Games are sure to cost the city money as other high profile sports events in that city have done in the past. Think of the Montreal 1967 Olympics for which Quebecers are still paying. It

is, as lawyer Gwen Landolt, vice-president of REAL Women says “insensitive to taxpayers to give all this money to a group of homosexuals so they can flaunt their lifestyle.”

How can governments who so blatantly collect and spend money on behalf of a small minority by taking so much from the whole population still have the respect and submission of their constituents? Surely they do not expect to be considered a legitimate government of the people when they distribute the Country’s resources so unequitably!

In the second place, Samuel warned his followers that the king they asked for would practice patronage. In other words, he would give to his friends (attendants) and relatives what rightfully belonged to his subjects. Instead of recruiting government employees based on merit and ability, and instead of providing social assistance when and where it is needed most, we often find political leaders putting their friends and relatives in positions for which they are ill suited. They also frequently give grants to those who supported them in the last election. This is not a new phenomenon for we know it was practiced already by King George I in England in order to attract the support of people in order to pass certain legislation. The examples used to illustrate an earlier point (National Action committee on the Status of Women and Gay Games) could be used here as well. Apparently, our Canadian government believes it needs the support of feminists and homosexuals in order to stay in power. It seems that they cannot risk attracting criticism from two very vocal lobby groups in Ottawa.

Thirdly, governments should stop taking away the power and right of Canadians to make choices in areas that rightly belong to them. Canadians should not have to become “slaves” for whom their master makes all decisions. A major injustice comes to light when we visit the topic of education. According to the BNA Act, funding for education comes from provincial governments. That leaves Canada in the awkward situation in which 10 different governments make 10 separate education policies - one for each province. This includes policies for funding of education. Look a little deeper and you see that some provinces give very generous financial support to approved independent schools out of public coffers while other provinces refuse to allow parents an equitable choice concerning where to have their children educated by withholding government funds to aid these schools. Be reminded here that although those who support independent schools through tuition fees also support the public schools, which they do not use, through property taxes. Does it not seem fair to you that those who use the public schools will pay for them and those who use the independent school will pay for them? Or is the government so intent on promoting the public schools only, as opposed to independent schools? Do they only want to produce students that can learn to be “obedient consumers who feel but do not think” so that they can then become obedient slaves who have learned well the lessons of “conformity, group behaviour, and the necessity of following fashions?” (World, Sept. 8, 2001)

Let one more example show how government agencies meddle in matters which traditionally and culturally belong to parents in families. In September of 2001 Children Aids Society (CAS) workers dragged seven kicking and screaming children from their family home in Aylmer, Ontario because their parents refused to promise that they would not use corporal punishment on them. If children are not being abused, what right does a government agency such as CAS have in interfering with parents who are administering reasonable disciplinary measures to their children? Again, it looks to me like the government is trying to make slaves of parents who are doing their best to bring up their children as loyal Canadian citizens.

Now, look at all the issues together. Is it right that governments levy excessive taxes, much of which is used to promote ideas held by only a small minority of Canadians? Is it right for government agencies to force ideas on parents concerning discipline that are supported by a majority of Canadians? Should public money not be equally available to all Canadians when it comes to funding their children’s education?

Although the issues are different, they point to the same underlying problem in our Canadian governing system today. Our government does not see itself as being ordained by God but as having earned the right to govern in whatever way it seems fit. It is also no longer accountable to the people who have voted for them in the first place, and unless an end is put to these dangerous trends, it will be increasingly difficult for unhappy Canadians to “submit [themselves] to the governing authorities.”

What then is our task here? First of all, we must remember to pray for our governments that they may rule wisely and make decisions that do not take away from our freedom to live quiet and peaceful lives as followers of Christ. We must be prepared to advise our elected representatives concerning decisions they have to make. How do we do this? Be up to

date on Canadian issues; know what Scripture says about these things; get together with others and discuss these matters. Join or form a study group that can help prepare individuals for action. What kind of action? You can write letters, write articles for newspapers, talk to your children about these things; plan and host meetings with government members as guest speakers; subscribe to newspapers and magazines which have the same goals as you. I'm sure you can add many other ideas to this list. But one thing you may not do. That is to be indifferent to all these things that are going on around us. Submit yourself and pay your taxes, but do not allow your submission to be an excuse for inaction when and where God's Word helps us recognize sinful inequities and direction which will surely lead to the downfall of our country.

Letters to the Editors

Dear Editors,

It was with great interest that I read the articles "CanRef 101", written by J. J. Kuntz, as they unfolded among the pages of "Christian Renewal". It is an accurate overview about the "Church" history of the Reformed faith.

I commend the editor for the space allowed in this paper so that this history could be shared with a much broader community. Hopefully these articles will make clear why the CanRC have so treasured and guarded the "Truth" preserved by these "Church" fathers.

On the other hand it has also greatly distressed me, to read the statements made in this paper of May 28 /01 P. 7. I cannot and do not rejoice with the facts, stated here by Doug Barnes and Rev. G. I. Williamson of the OPC, regarding the decisions to unity, taken at Synod Neerlandia 2001 of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches. Doug Barnes states, "This year may well be remembered by those in the Canadian and American Reformed Churches as the year the ecclesiastical gates were thrown wide". Rev. Williamson said, "It was quite astonishing really" (when delegates of the CanRC unanimously agreed to enter ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC). He further goes on and states, "They (CanRC) have removed barriers as far as we are concerned."

Now it is true, that watchmen placed on the walls of "Jerusalem" can abandon their post. They can open wide the gates to that, which formerly was and still is a danger to its inhabitants. But no man can remove Scriptural barriers put in place to protect us. Neither can they evaporate. So what happened to these Scriptural barriers to unity between the CanRC and OPC, that Rev. G. I. Williamson alluded to? I can only conclude that they were never taken seriously and therefore finally ended up being ignored by both parties.

Since Scriptural barriers can be ignored, but never removed by man, they therefore must still stand.

Now that the leaders have scaled the barriers and gone over them it is somewhat distressing for those of us who refuse to follow them. We have promised and therefore will continue to submit ourselves to Scriptural confinement. For, "from strength to strength God's people go", as those have done, who have come to light once again in the articles entitled "CanRef 101".

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CHURCH NEWS

News From Churches in Ecclesiastical Fellowship

Introduction of the sermon delivered July 8, 2001 in the Free Reformed Church at Kelmscott.

Yesterday two weeks ago many of us gathered with the Armadale congregation to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Free Reformed Church of Armadale. That event is memorable not only for the congregation of Armadale itself, but also for us in Kelmscott, inasmuch as Armadale's early history is also our history. I had intended to pay particular attention to the event in the preaching here last Sunday, but the circumstances in which the Lord led the congregation last week required a different sermon.

The commemoration evening as well as the commemoration booklet informed us of some of the struggles that the fathers endured when they set out half a century ago to establish the church of Jesus Christ in our community. We were reminded that the fathers were sinful men and women, persons who needed the saving blood of Jesus Christ so very, very much. We also learned that the Lord God held on to these brothers and sisters, despite all their shortcomings, so that they sought to live for Him and His glory.

At a commemoration we do well to look back to see where we've come from, to see particularly the Lord's care over the years, and thank Him for His mercy. That made the commemoration evening so fitting. What I want to do today, though, is look forward. We stand on the threshold of the second half-century of the Lord's church gathering work in our community. This second half-century has many challenges for us, older and younger alike. Today already we see need to expand the school facilities, there are churches to institute, expansion needed for Fairhaven, much tender care required for Eucalypt, opportunities for increased mission work, requests for help from overseas sister churches, and so very, very much more. We look into the second half-century. We see the work that needs to be done, and we say, yes, we'll serve the Lord in the years ahead, we'll put the shoulder to the wheel confident that the God who has helped us thus far will also help us in time to come. *We want to keep serving the God who has blessed us so abundantly.*

Rev. C. Bouwman