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Bible and science: some basic factors

By C. Van Dam

The present topic has resulted in many books and articles. It is not my intention to go into all the aspects that undoubtedly deserve attention, but to set out the broad lines of how we should relate the two and understand the relationship that does the most justice to the Scriptures as well as the natural sciences.¹

Interpreting Scripture

There are four basic truths or principles that should be kept in mind.

In the first place, the Word of God is clear or perspicuous. This means that believers who read the Bible are not dependent on specialists, be they in science or theology, in order to understand the basic message that comes to them there. When the child of God reads and studies Scripture, humbly submitting himself to the Word and asking for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, then the Word *is* a light on his path, a lamp before his feet (Psalm 119:105). Believers are able to judge and are called upon to judge any interpretations of Scripture that are suspect (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:15; 1 John 2:20). This clarity of Scripture does not imply that there are no difficulties in interpretation or perplexing passages. It therefore also does not deny the need for the scholarly study of Scripture.²

In the second place, God's Word is self-sufficient and self-authenticating. It does not need our reasonings and proofs to show that it is trustworthy and true. As we confess in Article 5 of our Belgic Confession: "We believe without any doubt all things contained in them [i.e. the holy Scriptures], not so much because the Church receives and approves them as such, but especially because the Holy Spirit witnesses in our hearts that they are from God, and also because they contain the evidence thereof in themselves; for, even the blind are able to perceive that the things foretold in them are being fulfilled."

Thirdly, God's Word explains itself and is its own interpreter. Behind the many books of Scripture is the one Author, namely God. This means that there is a basic unity underlying all of Scripture. One part of the Bible can therefore be used to explain another part. If there are difficulties in understanding parts of Genesis, then relevant information found elsewhere in the Old Testament or New Testament can and should be used.

Finally, God's Word has the last say. If there is a real contradiction between what men say and what God says in His Word, God's Word must be maintained and the word of man must be put aside.

Is the Bible a scientific textbook?

It is often said that the Bible is not a scientific textbook. This is true. It would be misusing Scripture to utilize it as if it were, for instance, a modern handbook on biology or physics. The Bible does not speak in a scientific way but uses the language of everyday experience. This means, for instance, that when phenomena in space are spoken of, geocentric language is used, that is, the language of the everyday orientation of those living on this world. For example, to say that Joshua's words, "Sun, stand still!" (Joshua 10:12) prove that the sun rotated around the earth is proving too much. This is everyday language which should not be pressed. We today who imagine that the sun is stationary still speak of sunrise and sunset. We do not say, when there is a beautiful sunset, "what a beautiful turning of the earth!" We speak geocentrically, in the language of our daily experience. Similarly we cannot prove that the world is round on the basis of Isaiah 40:22, which reads: "It is He who sits above the circle of the earth . . ." The circle probably refers to the horizon. Scripture speaks according to our geocentric orientation.

However, to deny that the Scripture is a scientific textbook does not mean that it does not give facts that need to be considered by scientists. It certainly does! He who does not consider the contents of Scripture ignores facts. Also scientists need to consider Biblical data, for they are true and need to be considered in scientific endeavours; facts such as creation, the fall into sin, and the world-wide flood. Wherever the Bible touches upon topics of scientific interest it is reliable. The fact that "all Scripture is inspired by God" (2 Timothy 3:16) means that it can be trusted for whatever it teaches. The Bible can never function as simply a source of data. No. It stands in a class all by itself. It is normative, also for scientific endeavour.

"laws of nature"

The Scriptures must provide the largest framework for scientific endeavour. Although science works with certain "laws of nature," these laws must never be absolutized. Only God is sovereign. He created these "laws" and He can therefore "break" them if He so desires. For example, in geology, a basic principle is that natural processes continue at a constant rate. They have always gone at a certain rate and will continue to do so also into the future. However, since God created and rules over this world, we can never absolutize and make autonomous the particular processes that are at

work and the rate at which they operate. For these processes as such do not have the final say. In Deuteronomy 29 we read for instance that God reminds His people that He had led them through the wilderness for forty years. Now according to the natural laws of nature and processes we are familiar with, that would have meant that Israel would have gone through many clothes and sandals. The regular "wear and tear" of daily life would have seen to that. However, God said: "your clothes have not worn out upon you and your sandals have not worn off your feet" (v.5). God, who alone is sovereign, overrode those "laws of nature." He can do this whenever He pleases.

For this reason, to take geology as an example, one can never simply assume that the present is the key to the past by studying the rates of erosion and rock formation. One needs to remember as well that in the beginning God created everything with the *unavoidable* appearance of age. One needs to remember the catastrophe of the world-wide flood which could also result in certain data appearing to be older than would have been the case under a more uniform rate of erosion, sedimentation, etc. One needs to work with these Biblical data. Now sometimes it is said that God would have been acting in a deceptive manner by making things look older than they actually are. But God is not being deceptive by, for instance, creating man and the trees (bearing fruit!) with the appearance of age, for God has told us in His Word that He has done so!

Scripture and science

The importance of taking full account of what the Word of God says when doing scientific work is underlined when one realizes that science can say nothing sure about origins. By definition science can only be sure about data and processes that can be reproduced and tested. Science can therefore say nothing about the act of creation as a scientifically verifiable fact. That is beyond the competence of science.

Scripture never conflicts with facts. God does not contradict Himself in His Book of Creation and His Book of Special Revelation. We need to remember that if we are to understand rightly we are to read the Book of Creation through the glasses of the Scripture. The one means, the Book of Creation, is not understandable without the other, the Book of Special Revelation. That is because our minds have been darkened by sin and we cannot truly understand creation without the Bible.

Although there actually cannot be a conflict between the books of nature and revelation, conflict does arise when scientific theorizing is influenced by a denial of the Word of God. The theory of evolution, along with all the presuppositions that inform it, is a good example of this. Conflict between the books of creation and special revelation can also arise if Scripture is wrongly understood. If one insists that Scripture does not allow you to believe that the earth revolves around the sun instead of vice-versa, then one goes further than Scripture (cf. the seventeenth-century struggles around Galileo). However, although mistakes in understanding Scripture have occurred and are possible, we should not now relativize all interpretation of Scripture, but we should be careful that we do not go further than Scripture does. Christian endeavours in science, carried out on the basis of Biblical presuppositions and within a scriptural world view, can never come into conflict with Scripture. Secularized science can. "But then we have in essence a conflict, not between science and faith, but between unbelief and faith."³

One's understanding of Scripture may never be subjected to the condition that it must fit the current scientific theory. Faith must never be put over against rationalism as if it is some sort of contest. Scripture has the first and the last say! We accept it in faith and do not need "proofs" from science or



any other discipline that it is true. After all, science is only man trying to understand God's creation. It therefore has a modest place and its theories are only that and nothing more.⁴

This last point can be underscored by listening to the words of some well-known scientists.⁵ The scientist-philosopher Karl Popper noted: "We keep in science getting a more and more sophisticated view of our ignorance." In a similar vein, F.A. Hayek is quoted as saying: "It is high time that we take our ignorance more seriously. We have indeed in many fields learned enough to know that we cannot know all that we would have to know for a full explanation of the phenomena." And finally R.A. Albery, Dean of the School of Science at M.I.T., said: "The more we know about the universe, in a way the more we do not know about it . . . Every time a scientist makes a discovery, he realizes that there are ten more things he doesn't know."

¹ For what follows I am especially indebted to J.A. van Delden, "Bijbel en wetenschap" in his *Schepping en wetenschap* (1977), 48-59. See also A. Keizer, *Wetenschap in bijbels licht*, 23-26.

² See further on this topic, e.g., H. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, I (1967; this ed. first pub. 1906), 445-451.

³ Van Delden, *op.cit.*, 57.

⁴ On the above, see J. Byl, "Science and Christian Knowledge," *Reformed Perspective*, 2:6 (1983), 4-9.

⁵ The following quotes have been noted by L. de Koster in *Christian Renewal*, 5:14 (1987), 19.

True ecumenicity¹

By K. Deddens

Ecumene

The word *ecumene* is used about fifteen times in the New Testament and means "the whole world." Some examples are ". . . *all the world* should be enrolled" (Luke 2:1); the devil showed Jesus Christ "all the kingdoms of the *world*" (Luke 4:5); according to the Acts of the Apostles, Artemis was worshiped by "all Asia and the *world*" (Acts 19:27); in Revelation 12:9 Satan is called "the deceiver of the *whole world*." Striking are the examples of the connection between mission and ecumene, as Matthew 24:14, ". . . this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout *the whole world*," and Romans 10:18, "Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the end of the *world*." Again and again for "world" or "the whole world" the word *ecumene* is used. The root of this word is *oikos*, which means *house*. So *ecumene* actually means "the inhabited world, the world where people are living."

Thinking ecumenically should not be left to the world or to apostate communities, for it is a matter which no less concerns the true church. The church has a mandate which concerns the whole world, the whole inhabited world, for the whole world is the church's mission field. In fact, we speak this ecumenical language each and every Sunday in our public worship services. The late Prof. Dr. K. Schilder pointed to this fact in a speech addressed in 1951 to the League of Young Women's Societies in the Netherlands:

All of you speak "ecumenical language," every Sunday. Then you confess, with the church of all places: I believe a holy, catholic, christian church. And "catholic" has the same meaning as "ecumenical." The "ecumene" means "the entire inhabited world"; therefore "ecumenical" means: "pertaining to the entire cultural world" or "concerning the entire human race." In your Book of Praise you can find an ecumenical heirloom, the Nicene Creed, which dates back to the so-called first Ecumenical Council

of 325. There the Arians were condemned as well as the Cathari (or Novatians); who could, so it says, not join the ecumenical church if they did not agree with the dogmas – that's what it says – of the universal and catholic church. Stipulations were also made concerning the so-called baptism of heretics.¹

We, too, speak an ecumenical language. But that means also that we have to keep in mind "the entire inhabited world" as far as the church is concerned, and to strive for unity with those who have the same faith as we have.

Striving for unity

Is striving for unity good? It definitely is. Christ Himself prayed in His moving high-priestly prayer, "I do not pray for these only, but also for those who believe in Me through their word, that they may all be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me" (John 17:20, 21). Paul, in his epistle to the Ephesians, which sometimes is called "the epistle of the church," exhorts his readers to be "eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:3-6).

Unity of faith

Whoever seeks the unity of the church and strives for unity among God's people, desires a good thing.

However, what character does this unity bear and what is meant by it?

When Christ spoke about unity in His high-priestly prayer He did not only mean an outward unity, but He founded that unity in the unity which exists between the Father and the Son: the closest and firmest communion that there is.

When Paul wrote to the Ephesians that they should be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace,

he also pointed to the one Lord and the one faith that bound them together. When the Heidelberg Catechism speaks about the one holy catholic church, we read that the Son of God gathers for Himself a church in the unity of the true faith, and that bond is expressed in the creeds, which are also called the "ecumenical symbols," and in the Reformed confessions.

Reality and caricature

So the point is to clearly and plainly separate reality from caricature. Like the true ecumene in essence has nothing to do with today's ecumenical movement, the true unity is equally far remote from the false striving for unity that is pursued today.

The present-day ecumenical movement wants to force a unity which is not founded in the unity of faith, but which shows, with a minimum of foundation, a maximum of joining hands. But sooner or later such a building must fall. He who pays hardly any attention to the foundation, but who wants to let a colossal skyscraper arise, should not be astonished when it appears after a short time that such a building cannot possibly last.

Then one does not get the reality, but a caricature. And a caricature is an exaggeration or magnification of some most characteristic forms, traits or qualities. But these characteristics of ecumenism are exactly its weaknesses. Whoever reads the last book of the Bible sees Satan, in the figure of anti-Christ, busy in creating the anti-church, through which the great mass is fascinated, says Revelation chapter 13. Does not Paul say that Christ will slay the man of sin with the breath of His mouth? (2 Thessalonians 2:8).

In this light we should therefore look at present-day ecumenism. We should judge this striving and this movement by the Scriptures. That also means: we should not become introverted and strange. But we should propagate authentically the true ecumene and the true unity, and in this distinguish clearly between reality and caricature.

Antithesis

It is very important, therefore, to maintain the scriptural idea of *antithesis* when we are thinking about the ecumene. I quote again the speech of Dr. K. Schilder:

No wonder that the Bible is full of the ecumenical proclamation of the Great Ecumenical Drama. Ecumenical is not a new term but a very old one. The Jews already had transcribed the Greek word "oikoumene" in their rabbinical scriptures untranslated, in Hebrew letters. Luke starts the Christmas message with the ecumene: Caesar Augustus wants the ecumene registered for the Roman Empire, the Beast of Daniel, and of Revelation; but from a stable in Bethlehem, at that very moment the Great Son of David starts to "register" the ecumene for himself, and for the God-of-David.

Ecumene is then the inhabited world, viewed as the operative area of world politics. The Beast grasps at the latter: but the Spirit has been ahead of him for centuries, when He had David anointed as king of the birth-place of theocracy, i.e., as king of Israel's ecumenically directed community, keeping the ecumenical seas of the world pure. Jesse's living-room, where David was anointed, and the stable of Bethlehem, from where the Son of David starts His world regiment, are the stages of God's Ecumenical Movement, a movement as old as the world ruled by God's Covenant. Emperor Nero, who in the Revelation of John is an image of the ecumenical anti-Christ, is called Ecumenical Daemon in Greek emperor's titles, just as Emperor Claudius is called Ecumenical Benefactor, or Saviour.

"Ecumenical" here has become a matter of world politics and world culture. Therefore Scripture commands ecumenical preaching (Matt. 24:14). Over against the Satanical temptation of ecumenical world power, Christ places the "it is written"; He wants to become the Ecumenical Saviour-Judge only through obedience (Luke 4:5). Christ predicts an ecumenical temptation in the last days (Rev. 3:10), and catastrophe (Luke 21:26); and thus the prophet Agabus predicts an ecumenical famine (Acts 11:28). In that, he is an ally of John on Patmos who, at the opening of the third seal, sees the black horse of famine dash across the world (Rev. 8:5, 6). All this is the beginning of the ecumenical judgement (Acts 17:31).

In short: the Bible continually, from Genesis to Revelation, speaks

about the one great ecumenical Drama. On the one side is the ecumenical preaching (Rom. 10:18, Ps. 19:4); on the other side is the ecumenical error, the ecumenical temptation under leadership of the anti-Christ, God's great adversary, with his "catholic," i.e., universal, propaganda service, with his ecumenical contra-speech against the Speech of God and against all his sayings

That is why the church will find her first task forever in the proclaiming of that centuries-old antithesis. She does not tolerate a break-through with false slogans of unity between those parties who have believed the biblical antithesis, or at least have acknowledged it, but she wants a break-through, with the sharp weapon of that biblical antithesis, among all groups and all movements, also the ecumenical church movement without creeds, also the ecumenical youth movement, which have denied and ridiculed the biblical idea of antithesis, and cursed it as the greatest folly and fragmenting force.²

God's Word is the norm

It is very clear that God's Word is the norm for our ecumenical thinking and acting. We agree completely with what was written by the Dutch Committee for Churches Abroad:

Speaking of ecumenical calling we are dealing with a calling which,

as coming from God, is obeyed only in the way of paying close attention to the divine rules prescribed for its execution. It is this norm which shapes its course and defines the limits which must be observed in the pursuit of its goal. Any other way of dealing with this calling is self-willed and fraught with danger to the church of Christ.

So we are left with the question: what is this norm?

A significant indication with regard to the nature of true ecumenicity is to be found in the truth that ecumenicity deals with and aims at unity in Christ. It is this unity which is both its starting point and its goal. Ecumenical endeavour is not what it claims to be if it does not engage in making visible the relationship which exists in Christ between such as believe in Him. According to Scripture the unity in Christ is primarily a given unity. It is the gift of the exalted Saviour to the people which the Lord has made Himself to a peculiar treasure.

This unity is a spiritual unity, given with and in the calling with which they, who have been given to Christ by the Father, are called. However, they who have been brought together in Him must also obediently come together in Him. They should endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, for there is one body and one Spirit. The fact that the



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unity in Christ is a given one does not exclude that there is a command to strive for it. The gift is at the same time an order.

Furthermore, the very fact, that the unity of the believers is a given unity, is an indication of the norm which must be observed in dealing with the ecumenical calling. Christ is the life, but He is also the way and the truth. In being the life He is the source and power of the bond which links all believers to Him and at the same time interlinks them one to another. In Him, being the way, the true believers find the way to their unity in Him. In addition to all this the unity in Christ is a unity in Him as the truth. So it is quite evident from Scripture that the unity in Christ is made manifest in a unanimous and faithful confession of the truth.³

Not all unity is scriptural

The conclusion is evident that not all unity of churches is scriptural. I quote again the brochure *For the Sake of True Ecumenicity*:

He, who in the name of unity wishes to maintain the teacher of error in the congregation, violates the unity in Christ. Likewise he, who exerts himself to reach unity with teachers of false doctrine, is making efforts for a unity which is not agreeable to the Lord, though he may do so claiming devotedness to ecumenical vocation. An unfaithful teacher proclaims another gospel, which is no gospel, and the apostle Paul writes concerning such a man: "let him be accursed" (Gal. 1:6-9; 5:10).

Essentially we find here the same as what is said with regard to the high priest Eli and the curse he brought upon his own house and upon Israel, when with words only he tried to correct his ungodly sons, Hophni and Phinehas, but did not take measures to purify the service of the tabernacle from what defiled it. Did not the Lord say then: "Wherefore honourest thou thy sons above Me?" And also: "Those that honour Me I will honour, and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed"! (1 Sam. 2:29, 30).

All Christians, however, who exert themselves to attain the binding of all to the truth of Christ, strive for the true unity in Him. They indeed build upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, of which Christ Himself is the chief cornerstone. In the light of all this scriptural evidence the rule for complying with the ecumenical calling is the biblical mandate of unanimous and honest acceptance of the Lord's holy and infallible Word (Eph. 2:20).⁴

Confessional standards

We have to say also that the confessions of the church are very important in connection with true ecumenicity. Prof. K. Schilder pointed already to the "ecumenical creeds." In the brochure of the Dutch Committee we read about the confessional standards:

In the continuing struggle to keep their congregations in the unity of Christ the Reformed churches of various countries have obtained their confessional standards. They have received these standards as a gift from the hand of God, for it was He, who enlightened them through the working of the Holy Spirit to recapitulate in thankfulness and obedience what they first had found in Scripture. Subsequently these standards served them as an agreement of fellowship in the Lord and Saviour.

These Reformed churches continued to accept and defend their standards as being fully in conformity with the truth revealed unto us by God in His Word.

This attitude toward their confessional writings will strongly influence the manner in which Reformed churches meet the ecumenical calling. They are not permitted to forget their allegiance to their standards when contacts are made with churches abroad. If, more or less, they would forget, then not only no justice is done to what in their own congregations is maintained as divine truth, but

also, sooner or later within these churches the loyalty to their standards will be endangered.

Any confessional standard, which is no longer always and everywhere dealt with in all seriousness, is by that very fact undermined and drained of its vitality and power of being a binding consensus.

It is for this reason that ecumenical fellowship is possible only when cooperating churches can honestly declare with regard to each other's confessional standards, that they are in conformity with the Word of God. In no other way can form be given to the obedience to the first rule of true ecumenicity, that it shall serve unity in truth.

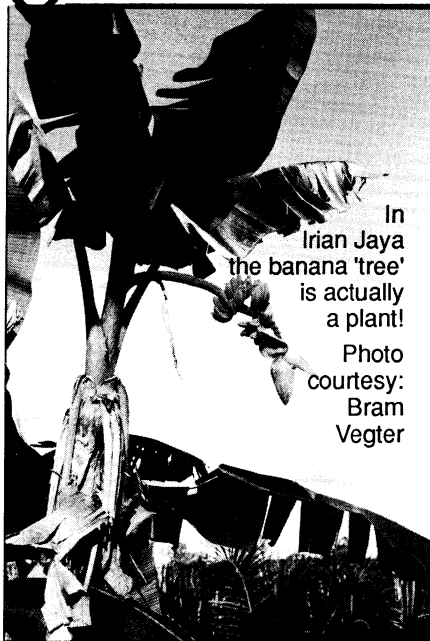
There is, however, more to be said here. The churches, cooperating in ecumenical fellowship, must also have the mutual confidence that they all sincerely maintain their standards and live up to them. In all these churches there must be an unre-served and reliable subscription to the standards. They have to make sure that in all these churches there is faithful doctrinal discipline, in order that the unity of faith be maintained against error and also that the flock of Christ be protected.

From all these considerations it follows that if any of the cooperating churches might become deficient with regard to doctrine or doctrinal discipline the other churches shall give attention to their first obligation: to induce this church to return immediately to the first love and the first works. No partiality shall be shown in doing so. It is not important whether or not the church concerned has a large membership or a glorious and impressive past. The only thing that matters is that the unfaithful church stands in the need of correction and reformation.

If such a destitute church then does not return to sound doctrine and the use of doctrinal discipline, the other churches shall see to it that is done what they are bound to do. They shall not yield but remove that church from their fellowship. Sound doctrine is always incompatible with a lying tongue. Where falsehood in doctrine is tolerated the Lord of all truth is dishonoured and the congregation is destroyed. What communion has light with darkness? (2 Cor. 6:14).⁵

— To be continued

OUR COVER



In Irian Jaya the banana 'tree' is actually a plant!

Photo courtesy: Bram Vegter

¹ K. Schilder, *Your Ecumenical Task*, Launceston, Tasmania, 1975, p. 2.

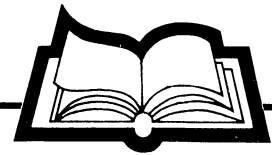
² *Ibid.*, p. 5ff.

³ *For the Sake of True Ecumenicity*, The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, 1982, p. 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5ff.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 6ff.





By J. De Jong

"And if a son of peace is there, your peace shall rest upon him; but if not, it shall return to you."

Luke 10:6

Sons of Peace

People at times question the formality of homevisits. Discussions can be fine, but handshakes and appellatives such as "brother" and "sister" are for some unnecessary and overdone. Yet these traditions are reflected in Scripture, and also appear in the words of Jesus to His disciples. The Lord Jesus does not defend an air of formality *per se*, but stresses the *official* character of the work of those He commissions.

So it was with the seventy apostles He sent out some months before the hour of His trial and crucifixion. These apostles may have reflected a temporary rather than a permanent office. At any rate, we never read of them again in the New Testament. Numbers 11:16ff. relates that Moses also received seventy elders to help him in ruling the congregation of Israel. They, too, occupied what was apparently a temporary office, Numbers 11:25. Yet, whether temporary or permanent, these were office-bearers, who went from house to house in Israel on official visits.

These apostles had a special task. All Israel stands before the great hour of decision. The cross stands ahead in the immediate future. The last warning must go out! Most probably those on whom the apostles called had heard something about the Lord Jesus and were familiar with His work and call. Now the apostles again awaken the people to the imminent arrival of the kingdom of God, so that when the Lord Jesus is crucified and put to death, they will know that He was innocently condemned for the salvation of sinners.

Christ empowers His apostles with signs and wonders, and also tells them that the way ahead of them has been prepared. Who are the sons of peace, and how was an apostle to recognize such a son? This expression is firmly rooted in the Old Testament Scriptures, and was also a term used among those who expected the imminent breakthrough of the Messianic reign. The Messiah was to be a Prince of peace, Isaiah 9:6. He would bring many sons to glory, and those sons were called "sons of peace." The Lord had promised that with the work of the suffering Servant, great peace would come to Israel's sons, Isaiah 54:13. Thus, we may think of those whose hearts were open to the heavenly doctrine, and who willingly received the instruction of Christ and His apostles.

With the proclaimed Word, Christ sends His Holy Spirit ahead and alongside, in order to prepare the hearts of men to receive it. So He did years later with Lydia, Acts 16:14; so He still does today! An open heart of faith that receives the Word also receives Christ's official blessing: the peace of the heavenly King who is seated on David's throne. That blessing comes through

the instrumentality of the faithful apostles, but is only received in the way of true faith.

And if the Word is not accepted in true faith? Then the blessing of peace returns to the apostles. It does not stay in the home of these sons, for they have become illegitimate children, and not true sons. They have become sons of Belial rather than sons of peace. Then the peace that Christ seeks to administer is returned to the apostles.

Yet this peace which returns does not return empty, as if Christ's attempts were futile. For the Word of the One who commissions, the call of the commander of the peoples, will not return empty to Him, Isaiah 55:11. The Word always accomplishes its purpose. Where the peace of Christ is rejected, hearts are hardened, and the unfaithful and unbelieving fall into even greater condemnation. For the judgment will be greater for the wayward sons of Israel than for those who did not know the way of truth on that day when His glory is revealed.

But how can we read our own situation into Christ's command to these apostles? We may do so because with all differences in the hour of administration, the essential reality of what takes place is the same. And just as the seventy had a special function to call Israel to repentance before the great judgment of the cross, so Christ's office-bearers today have the duty to see to it that the (spiritual) sons of Israel are true and faithful sons before the final day comes. For the judgment is imminent, and He sends out His labourers to every home among His people with the call: "Flee the wrath to come!"

And what does He ask? Not a forced formality, or a strange air of stiff silence. He asks for hearts that are open and minds that know the voice of the good Shepherd when He calls. And as the office-bearers must be faithful to the One who commissioned them, so the church must be faithful to the One who speaks to them through the office-bearers. Be faithful sons of peace!

This requires hearts open to the Word of life as proclaimed week by week. It also requires an open heart to the admonitions of the office-bearers, however difficult they may be to accept. As long as the truths of Scripture and the good of the church is maintained, we must listen to their injunctions and submit ourselves with due obedience to their authority.

Then the peace of Christ is also administered through them! The blessings of the King are officially communicated – also through the regular visitations in the home. Let those who desire the peace of Zion have open hearts to His Word!

■

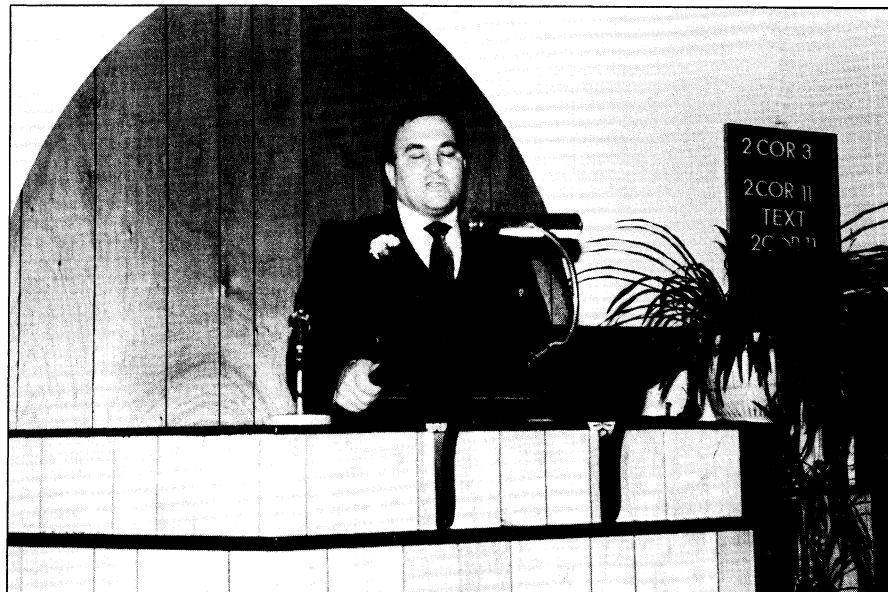
Ordination of Rev. W.B. Slomp

By M. Onderwater

Sunday morning December 11, 1988 is a day that will long be remembered by many in Houston, BC. On this day the Lord once again provided His congregation with a minister. Rev. M. Marren was pleased to conduct this worship service and chose as text 2 Corinthians 4:1 to 4 where Paul speaks "Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart." Rev. Marren started the sermon with these words, "Beloved congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ, it is with great joy and anticipation that we gather here together this morning. Today we are hoping to witness the ordination of br. W.B. Slomp, an event that is coming about only because of the Lord's great mercy and faithfulness." The theme of the sermon is: "The ministry of the Glorious Gospel of Christ is from God."

1. This ministry is received through mercy.
2. This ministry requires the open statement of truth.
3. This ministry reveals the glory of Christ."

Paul, setting an example for all who follow in the ministry, completely sets aside the possibility that he has the ability, talent or righteousness in his own person. In writing to Timothy he said, "I thank Him who has given me strength for this, Christ Jesus our Lord." We must be humble, for God's mercy is extended only to humble and contrite hearts. It is better to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ with pure and simple words, than have you listen to lofty words and much wisdom but not hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ. To preach Christ is to proclaim Him as the sum of all divine and human excellence. As Rev. Marren sums it all up he speaks these words of advice and command, "Willem Barend Slomp, from this day forward openly proclaim the truth, rejecting all disgraceful, underhanded and cunning ways, and know for certainty that if you indeed, to the best of your ability, reveal to all consciences the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, you will someday be received by Him with the Word, 'Well done, good and faithful minister of the glorious gospel of



Christ.' " Rev. Marren then proceeded to read the form of ordination, to which br. Slomp answered "I do with all my heart." He then knelt for the laying on of hands by Rev. Marren, Rev. Berends and three elders after which the congregation sang Psalm 134:3. After the conclusion of the worship service all were invited downstairs for coffee and we were given the opportunity to extend our congratulations.

In the afternoon service we could listen to the inaugural sermon delivered by Rev. W.B. Slomp. He chose as his text 2 Corinthians 4:5 and 6. The theme for this sermon was, "God's light shines in the heart of the believers through the preaching of the gospel of Christ:

1. The character of the preaching.
2. The goal of the preaching.

" At the time there were false apostles in Corinth, Jews who said that what Paul preached was unworthy to be listened to. So Paul wrote them a letter to the church and later heard from Titus that this letter had caused a turn for the better. It was this news that caused Paul to write the letter which includes the text. In this letter Paul points out that the difference between him and the other

preachers is that they preach themselves while Paul preaches Christ. The fact of Christ's suffering and death must be trumpeted forth from the rooftops. Salvation has come through Jesus Christ. It is a message that needs to be proclaimed time and again. Beloved congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ, I stand here before you today. Through the congregation here at Houston, the Lord has called me to be a herald of good tidings and to call people back to repentance. The Lord uses simple men to do this. He has called me to proclaim the establishment of His Kingdom. The proclamation from this pulpit must be done in faithfulness to the great King. It is a very serious task, but it is also a beautiful calling because it is also a message of great comfort.

After the service we went home, pleased and thankful to the Lord for once again providing us with a minister. It is our prayer to God that this thankfulness may last through the years. May God grant Rev. Slomp all that he stands in need of to fulfill his task in the congregation.

The next evening, December 12, 1988 was a welcome evening for Rev. and Mrs. Slomp and children. The



The Rev. W.B. Slomp and family

evening was presided over by br. Ralph Fennema and was started in the Christian manner. On behalf of the congregation he welcomed Reverend and Mrs. Slomp and children, and expressed his pleasure at the fact that also Mr. and Mrs. Slomp senior are present here. The choir then entertained us. Next, the children of the "Sunshine Hour" ages four to six recited a few texts and sang some songs. Sr. Jan Meints was spokesperson for "Ladies Aid." The president of the Y.P.S. "According to Thy Word," Stephen Onderwater spoke a word of welcome. Br. Henry Fennema spoke on behalf of the Men and Women society, and invited Rev. and sr. Slomp to join. Sunshine Hour was again represented, this time the seven- to nine-year-olds. Their leader sr. Jenny Dykstra said a word of welcome and explained what Sunshine Hour is and does. On behalf of the Parent Committee sr. Rita Nyman welcomed the family Slomp and gave details of their function in the congregation. In the middle of this welcome evening time was taken out to honour sr. Ann VandenHoek for her devoted service in the congregation, having donated her time and skill by playing the organ for over 25 years in the worship services.

After a short intermission we sang from Psalm 105:1. Br. Carl Dykstra then addressed the Slomp family on behalf of the School Society and stated its goal and welcomed them. The choir once more raised their voices and sang "Lead Me, Lord." Next, the members of the congregation were introduced by Clarinda Meints and Grace Fennema. This was done in a humorous way with funny remarks and comments about each family. Br. Vreugdenhill from Ontario

read a letter from the church at Ancaster, congratulating Rev. W.B. Slomp and his wife and children. Rev. Aasman in this letter expressed his appreciation at the determination of Rev. Slomp in light of all the setbacks and hardships in his studies and in the way he also accepted this from the hand of God. Br. Martin Onderwater relayed a congratulatory phone

call from Rev. Tiggelaar and read a letter of congratulations from our previous minister Rev. E. Kampen and his wife. Next, Rev. B.J. Berends spoke as delegate for classis Pacific and as minister of the church at Smithers and welcomed Rev. Slomp as a colleague. He then pointed out that it is not his word but the Word of God that he must preach, and not only the parts he favours or likes best, but the whole Scripture. Since it was the evening for catechism classes, Rev. Berends introduced the students of the early class by having them individually say a Lord's Day. The second and the confession classes were also introduced. After this Rev. M.K. Marren said that he was thankful to the Lord that He placed Rev. W.B. Slomp in Houston and that he hopes to make use of his counselling expertise. Last, the Reverend W.B. Slomp thanked everyone for the wonderful evening. He was very thankful for the response of the congregation. He thanked Rev. B.J. Berends for the work done in Houston as minister and as counsellor. Rev. M.K. Marren was thanked for his help also. God was thanked above all for having brought him and his wife and their children to Houston without mishap or accident. We then sang Hymn 60:1, 3 after which Rev. Slomp led in prayer thanking the Lord for the many wonderful blessings He rendered.

C

Second church in Tasmania

By J. VanderRos

On 4 December 1988 a second Free Reformed Church could be founded in Tasmania.

The afternoon service in Launceston on that day saw the culmination of three years of preparatory work under the guidance of the Launceston consistory. Rev. K. Jonker administered the Word from Ephesians 4:8, and then ordained five office-bearers of the new West Tamar Free Reformed Church.

In an atmosphere of thankfulness and joy, the two congregations together listened to a number of congratulations from the sister churches. The church of Launceston

and some of the study clubs added theirs.

Then the congregations went outside for a festive gathering in perfect summer conditions. The ladies of the West Tamar Church had arranged for drinks and cake.

The new congregation – the 7th in the confederation of the Australian churches – lives just to the Northwest of the city of Launceston. It consists of approximately 150 former members of the Launceston church.

The postal address of the West Tamar Free Reformed Church is: P.O. Box 1858, Launceston 7250, Tasmania, Australia.

25th Annual League Day: Fraser Valley Women's Societies

On June 29, 1988, the 25th Annual League Day of the Fraser Valley Women's Societies could be held in the Langley Canadian Reformed Church. Well over 200 ladies started the day with a sociable cup of coffee and a chat. Cards were signed for the missionary and mission aid sisters in Brazil.

The morning session was led by Mrs. Fannie Scholtens, and she called all to join in the singing of Psalm 25:1 and 2, after which she read Romans 8:18-39 and led in prayer. Thereafter she spoke a few words about the extra gratitude with which the Langley ladies could host this 25th Annual League Day. Attention was drawn to the special commemorative program which had been made, containing many historical League Day "tidbits." Special applause was given to three sisters present who had attended all twenty-five League Days. No small feat, considering the size of their families. Guests were welcomed from other parts of Canada, as well as several from the Netherlands. Greetings from the Ontario League were read. The opening part of this session was concluded with the singing of Psalm 25:5 and 6.

The morning speaker was welcomed: Rev. D. VanderBoom, emeritus minister of the church of Langley. He presented his topic: Perseverance of the Saints and our Christian Mandate. He introduced his topic by describing the fifth head of doctrine of the Canon as beautiful and pastoral, and would expand the practical side in our Christian mandate.

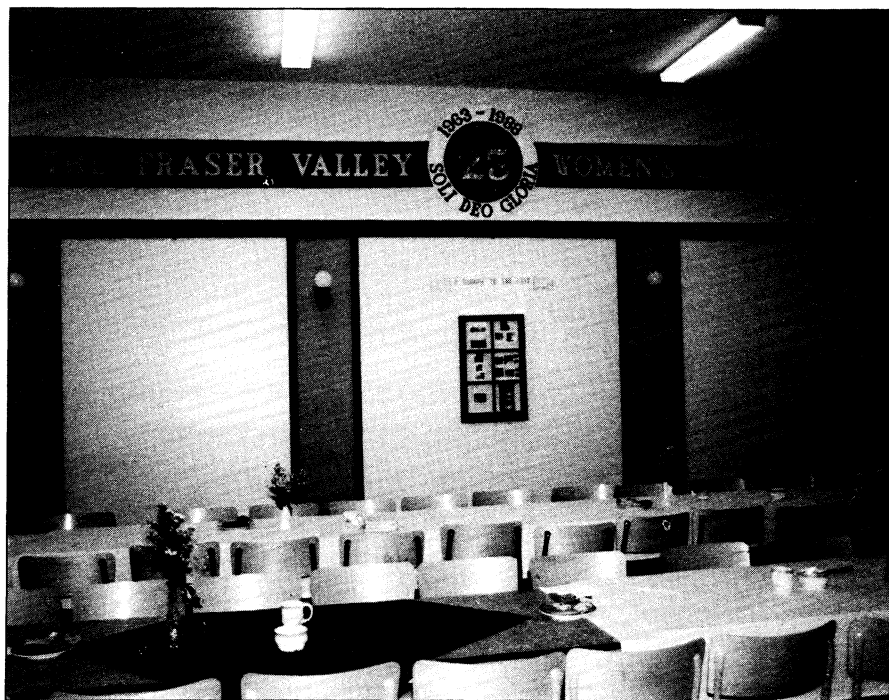
Some time was spent by the speaker on contrasting the Arminian viewpoint with the stand taken in the Canons of Dort. The Arminian assurance of election is "self-confidence," (or conversely, self-doubt) while the Reformed assurance of election is "God-confidence." We confirm God's sovereignty as Head, as well as our responsibility.

Rev. VanderBoom contrasted the difference between persevering and preserving. Persevering is continuing despite opposition. The saints need to per-

severe. God is not affected by opposition; He does not need to persevere. God preserves. Therefore, the saints persevere in God's preservation. And that gives us much more reason for thankfulness, and "God-confidence."

and its saints will ultimately also be victorious, through the preservation of God.

Rev. VanderBoom was thanked for his very enlightening and uplifting topic. After the reading of a poem by Mrs. G. Visscher – "Thy Kingdom Come," written



The banner of the League Day

After the singing of Psalm 138, discussion followed. Some time was spent on the various aspects of our surety of our election. Rev. VanderBoom stressed that we may and must have this surety. We should be able to say, "I'm on the way to the Lord because I'm on the way of the Lord." All this through the sovereign grace of God.

A question was raised about the ongoing struggle between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. But, as we sing in Hymn 40, we know that the church will be in a struggle but we may also be confident that the church

by Anne VanderWall-Beukema – and the singing of the League song, the morning session was concluded.

Lunch was great! There's no other way to summarize this. A couple of dish-washing ladies suggested to each other that we should "brown-bag it" next year to save on dishes, but that would have been resoundingly vetoed by the diners.

The afternoon session was led by the Chilliwack society, chaired by Mrs. R. Hoeksema. Mrs. G. Wendt was welcomed to the podium to speak a few reminiscent words as chairlady of the

first ever League Day held in Abbotsford in 1963.

Thereafter, Mrs. Hoeksema had us sing Psalm 27:1, 2, 6, and read Ephesians 1. Mrs. H. Heetebrij then presented her topic entitled "The Most Important in Christ's Kingdom," based on 1 Corinthians 3. Unfortunately (as usually happens), time constraints limited dis-

cussion severely. Psalm 93:1, 3, 4 were sung to close discussion.

The ladies of Lynden, U.S.A., then took over the afternoon with several lighter presentations, one being "1990 League Day in the U.S. of A." They also challenged some mothers and daughters to see how well they knew each other in a Mother/Daughter game.

General discussion was taken advantage of.

Our League Day was closed with the singing of Hymn 49:1 and 2 and with prayer followed by the singing of *O Canada*. We could take leave of each other with the knowledge and assurance that we may persevere under the preservation of God. C

Perception or deception?

By R. Koat

One bright September morning, aglow with a hint of autumn colours and touched with a chill of cooler days to come, I was driving to work. This activity, not being too unusual for ordinary mortals who have to work for a living, is mentioned only because of its relevance to the events that followed. I felt happy that morning because I generally liked my work and always enjoyed the view of the mountain range on the left, the closer mountains a dark slate-blue, those behind them a shade of grey-blue, and those on the horizon a smokey light grey. Straight ahead rose the massive white cone of Mt. Baker, its peak trailing a narrow pennant of cloud, or possibly steam, backlit by the climbing sun.

Driving on a back road in the country offers its own advantages: less traffic than on the crowded highway, and you get a chance to see things – like that strutting pheasant cock dragging its long pointed tail through the sparkling grass, his head with the red patch bobbing, and the round button eye blinking. Under a lonely fir tree, in the middle of the meadow, a horse with a blanket stands dreaming, motionless.

Then, braking for the four-way stop, I saw something else. There, right beneath the rearview mirror glistened an irregularly W-shaped scratch on the windshield. The scratch had all the features of mutilated glass: the minuscule splintery line of a fractured surface, the refraction of the slanting sunlight in the microscopic, glassy particles. No doubt about it: a senseless mark of vandalism if I'd ever seen one! Too bad, really, but what could the motive be if there was one?

It would not be the first time

some moral moron had gotten his kicks by vandalizing my car. Was it ten years ago already? Both headlights had been punched out, the side mirror had been yanked off, and a series of crosses had been gouged in the yellow paint of the hood. The bill had come to \$475, a bargain because someone in the bodyshop had given me a break. And now this!

What had I done to arouse somebody's fury? Why would this stupid prank give somebody a perverse satisfaction? Making a scratch like that would take only half a second. Any dime-store glass-cutter in a determined hand could scratch a telltale mark on a glass surface. Just take a look at some mirrors in public washrooms and you'll get my drift.

And so, there I sat in air-conditioned comfort, fretting and (you guessed right) feeling sorry for myself. Moments later,

quieting down somewhat, I lapsed into a state of mild resignation: so what? Sooner or later any car would get scuffed or nicked, one's own fault or not. On the parking lot I got out of the car, still a bit uneasy, locked the doors and reached over to touch that vile scratch between the windshield wipers. When I probed it, part of the "W" vanished. Encouraged, I had soon rubbed out the entire letter. Apparently, a filament of a cobweb had floated onto the windshield and had zigzagged itself into a spooky insubstantial "W." So much for that. Resignation made way for relief tarnished with embarrassment. Yes, I had carefully observed the scratch and ticked off a mental checklist of possibilities. In spite of that, I had made a faulty interpretation, and a silly one.

On the way home I couldn't help musing on the morning's event. This is what emerged: how often don't we jump to conclusions before we have carefully analyzed what we perceive? Before we get all in a huff about our brother's opinion, for instance, shouldn't we make sure that we fully understand the issues and arguments? Only then, not before, can we arrive at a valid conclusion. If we don't, we risk being impulsive, silly, and harmful.

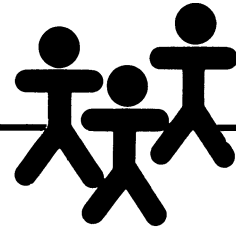
It doesn't take much to scratch someone's reputation by our misjudgment or prejudice. It is a lot harder to "defend and promote the honour and reputation of my neighbour."* That covers also the honour and reputation of my brother, does it not?

* Lord's Day 43

1 Peter 3: 8 & 9

"Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love of the brethren, a tender heart and a humble mind.

Do not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling; but on the contrary bless, for to this you have been called, that you may obtain a blessing."



Where will all the teachers come from . . . ?

Our children need Reformed education, and our schools need Reformed teachers. And that need is considerable. In particular our expanding high schools are faced with an acute staff shortage, with no quick-fix solution around the corner. The principal of Guido de Brès High School (Hamilton, ON) comments on the expansion plans for the school (my emphasis).

. . . Even if all the staff stay (for the 1989-1990 school year), we still need extra help in French, Math, Science and Business Studies. In addition the Board wants to create smaller class sizes in Grades 9 and 10 in order to increase the potential personal attention for these students and help slow learners. An additional two or three staff members would not be excessive. Where will these teachers come from? (. . .) *Our future building plans and our ability to provide adequate instruction for our students may be jeopardized by the lack of properly trained and qualified teachers.*

If this is so for Guido, it will also be so for other schools. Thus these comments leave little doubt about the seriousness of the problem which threatens our schools. What will happen to current and future programmes if no teachers can be found for our children? Indeed, where will all the teachers come from? Colleague E. VanderBoom (principal, Credo Christian High School, Langley, BC) considered the same problem in an article published in a recent issue of the C.R.T.A. Magazine. He concludes that

. . . boards are going to need to review their hiring policies (radical as they may sound!). A short range, perhaps part-time and interim staffing solution may need to be used to save the school programs. The membership may need to consider alternatives.

EITHER: cut the program (and grades) and find that students may leave and go elsewhere. (You will

have no control over the education program they follow in secular institutions.)

OR: provide emergency hiring policy changes so that programs may not need to be cut. (You will have more control over all of the educational programs and if they leave the school.)

Considering these alternatives I was reminded of last year's situation in one of our high schools where it was decided to indeed follow the route of cutting programs and grades. From a recent issue of the magazine of the Immanuel Christian High School, Fergus, ON, I clip the following comments from the principal:

Although this school year is only three months old, we are already preparing for the next school year. The Board will try to attract two full-time teachers for the coming year. Hopefully we will receive two colleagues who are willing to help us build up the school again after it crumbled down last year. Extra emphasis should be put on the Reformed character of the schools. That is namely the basis for the existence of our schools; not the academic level, how important that may be, the primary aspect is the Reformed aspect. If the Reformed perspective permeates all teaching in our school, the academic character is guaranteed! Then home, school and church are on one line: "Seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be yours as well" (Matthew 6:33).

The current teacher shortage, the "annual headache — 1989 version," clearly highlights the difficulty of maintaining the unique character, as well as the quality of the education within our schools. Others will also be busy with their analysis of the problem, and will also search for solutions. In the coming months some of our schools will (perhaps again) face the situation that there

will be no suitable applicants for the vacancies for the coming year, and board members will be forced to choose from among the following unsatisfactory alternatives:

- Employ untrained people. Such a course of action might prevent the dismissal of a grade, or even the closing of a school, but could have adverse effects on the school, its atmosphere, discipline, effectiveness. It remains true that Reformed education is of necessity sound education. This soundness is to be found not only in the academic training, but also in the quality of the interaction between students and teachers. Is it fair to the students, to the person concerned, to the school, to the community, to place such demands on the shoulders of someone who is not trained for this task?
- Cut back (in some situations: cut back further), or do not consider expanding the school's programs. Offer only those courses and grades for which trained staff is available. Students with special needs might have to be satisfied with less; students who need additional courses might have to enroll elsewhere. Such a course of action leaves the school association with a school that can only offer a limited program. This, in turn, might result in "educational shoppers," who look elsewhere for a better product and service.
- Maintain a full range of programs, and where necessary expand. If no staff can be found from within our church community, employ others on a part-time and temporary basis. This will maintain the school as a comprehensive instructional unit, but what about the unique, Reformed, covenantal character of the education offered by the school? What about the unity of educational vision among the staff; what about the unity-in-faith

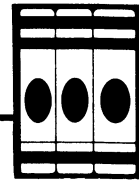
between home and school? In particular in view of the estimated long term shortage of teachers, the fear that temporary solutions become permanent is not unwarranted.

Is the consideration of these alternatives a local matter only? The conclusion should be obvious: rather forcefully is our attention drawn to the fact that any solution proposed by one school is of importance to, and might even have consequences for other schools as well. Therefore if we are to find any solutions at all, they must consider the long range needs of our school system as a whole. If boards are only willing to consider their own local and immediate needs for the coming school year the problem of continued vacancies will remain, finding the Canadian Reformed school community lamenting in the same minor key as in previous years. I therefore offer the following considerations:

- Staffing concerns should not appear on the agenda of school boards and in the pages of school magazines during December to March only. School associations and their boards must accept the fact that they must become directly involved in recruiting teachers for our schools.
 - Boards must commit themselves collectively to a concerted effort to encourage more people to enter the teaching profession. A number of suggestions have been made already, and we are anxiously awaiting the recommendations of the committee of the League of Canadian Reformed School Societies which is "to examine the necessary incentives to encourage and maintain the number of career teachers within our schools." A report is expected at the League's January 1989 meeting.
 - Although each situation is unique, and although every school board needs to resolve its own problems, the decisions of the one board do not leave another unconcerned. Searching for solutions and evaluating alternatives is NOT a mere local concern; we are indeed part of the communion of saints with all the attending privileges and the obligations. Again the spectre looms that one school is going to rob the other.
 - To bring about such a collective effort it is necessary that boards communicate with each other. Is this the right time and place to suggest a national conference of school boards to study these matters? Who shall initiate such an effort?
- Please do not stop praying for the education of our children, for their schools, for their boards, for their teachers. **C**

BOOK REVIEW

By T.M.P. VanderVen



J.A. Knepper, Sr., *Het Heilzame Gesprek, een helpende hand bij het voeren van een gesprek* (Pastoraal Perspectief), Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, Goes, the Netherlands, 1988.

Available from Inheritance Publications, Box 154, Neerlandia, AB, T0G 1R0, \$7.00.

The Dutch publishing house Oosterbaan & Le Cointre – publishers of (among other things) the weekly *De Reformatie* – has published a new series of booklets under the general title *Pastoraal Perspectief* (Pastoral Perspective). "These booklets offer help, and show how help may be offered." Knepper's booklet *Het Heilzame Gesprek* (the wholesome, genuinely helpful conversation) is an excellent example of the valuable material offered in this series. The author describes its aim as follows, "This booklet wants to help beginning and experienced office-bearers, male and female members of the congregation, older and young, each member of the church who wants, by means of exercise and practice, to develop his/her skills of speaking openly and cheerfully about the salvation which we have in Christ" (p. 84). It focuses on the informal, often incidental talks we may have with some-

one who seeks help, or who needs a listening, empathic ear. Why is it necessary to pay special attention to this aspect of congregational life? Knepper quotes Hebrews 10:23, 24: "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works."

Within eighty-four pages a great deal of helpful, practical advice is given: about verbal and nonverbal communication, communication difficulties, and the attitude of the partners in the conversation (Chapters 1-5); basic principles of faith, love and hope, laments and accusations, assumptions and value judgments (Chapters 6-8), how to lead and structure such a conversation, examples of what not to do and what not to say, the follow-up, and the need for developing these communication skills by practice and study (Chapters 9-13). Three times the author includes an "Intermezzo" in which he discusses well-known conversations found in Scripture: Jesus and Nicodemus, Jesus and the Samaritan woman, Job and his friends.

This is a valuable booklet, dealing with a matter about which little has been written in our circles. (Most recently a

paragraph in *Diakonia*, Volume 2:1, September 1988, page 5/6: The Art of Conversation.) It helps us respond to the admonition of the apostle Peter, "As each has received a gift, employ it for one another . . ." (1 Peter 4:10). I translate and summarize a few sections to show something of its tone and thrust.

In the first chapter Knepper outlines his topic: wholesome conversations which provide genuine help because salvation in Christ is their focus. At times we may speak very openly and directly about our Saviour and the treasures we have in Him. Sometimes such talks seem to be about everyday things only. Yet always there is in the background that sure knowledge and firm confidence that in all that happens to us we may know that the almighty God is our God and Father for Christ's sake. Knepper thinks of conversations between congregational members about anything and everything that may concern them: talks with sick people, with the elderly who often have health problems, with those who are lonely, depressed, unemployed; conversations with those who have marriage problems, problems in educating their children, sexual difficulties; conversations with those who are allowed to

celebrate a marriage, the birth of a child, a diploma; talks with the elderly who are yet able to witness of God's great deeds. "But it is always a conversation which does not merely touch the outside of our life, not only our intellect, but also our emotions, our motivation, our soul, our body, all our strength, our heart as the center of our life" (p. 8).

In chapter 5, Knepper speaks about how we should take part in such conversations. He points out the importance of our ability to listen. Most of us have discovered how difficult that is, to listen well to someone else. Often our attention for the words of the other can be gauged by our behaviour: whether we are willing to take time for such a conversation, whether we feel at ease, or whether we are nervous. When we are too busy with ourselves it will be even more difficult to pay attention to what the other has to say. Therefore, sit down comfortably, be relaxed, and look at the other. Eye contact allows the partners, as it were, to reach out, to touch each other (p. 28, 29).

How do we begin such a conversation, and how do we keep it going? Knepper points out that questions asked out of mere curiosity, suggestive questions ("Don't you agree that . . ."), or questions based on all sorts of assumptions do not belong in a wholesome conversation. Generally, he advises, one must ask open-ended questions. Narrow questions result in yes or no answers, e.g., "When did you get married?" "There are no problems with the children, are there?" Such questions help control the conversation, but this approach assumes that the questioner is

capable of asking the right and relevant questions, and this assumption often proves to be so wrong! An open-ended question between, for example, a social worker and a client could be, "You mentioned that there are marriage problems. Perhaps to begin with you might want to tell me about your marriage in general." "Yes, sure, . . . but that's rather difficult. I do not really know where to start; perhaps with the beginning. We married in 1968 . . ." (p. 30).

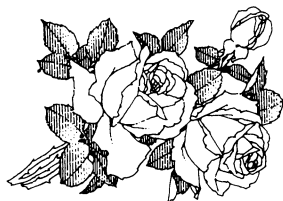
Asking open-ended questions is relatively easy. However, it is rather difficult to decide how to react to and what to do with the answers. We must realize that we have no idea what answers might be given. Are we able to cope, when we hear of things that make us shudder, with ideas that are totally contrary to what we hold for true? Is there true communication? (cf. Chapter 2: Communicating.) Knepper points out that a real conversation places heavy demands on both partners, and in a sense is and remains risky (p. 30), but a risk which we may and can take with God's help.

In chapter 6 he addresses basic questions about our basic belief. He writes, ". . . everyone who wants to speak of salvation must have experienced that salvation himself. Through the preaching of the gospel the Holy Spirit works true faith, love which wants to serve, and persevering hope in our hearts. That which God has worked in our hearts will become visible in our behaviour, in our actions, so that the image of Christ becomes visible in the Christian because he/she is being renewed according to the image of the

Saviour" (p. 43). This is a process of constant struggle against our sins and shortcomings, also in our speaking with one another. But we may also experience joy and gratitude when our speaking is, indeed, in accordance with the will of God. "If we look at ourselves we cannot understand how God wants to use such people as instruments in His hands to speak of Him and to spread His Word. (. . .) God builds the house, and no stone shall be missed in it. (. . .) This may indeed comfort us when we failed to generate a good conversation despite our preparation and effort" (p. 46).

Knepper urges us to study and train ourselves in the art of wholesome, Christian conversation ("Good communication demands an endless amount of practice!" p. 12) – *Het Heilzame Gesprek* was written precisely to help with such training! "We may be encouraged when we struggle with the thought that we are not able to speak in such a way. We will discover, by trial and training, with many mistakes and often with much failure, that we, indeed, are able to conduct such wholesome talks. It is possible for us to make much progress, and to discover after only a short period of time that it becomes easier. . ." (p. 83).

Highly recommended! For those among us who still master the Dutch language *Het Heilzame Gesprek* is a most useful and important tool in our training to be a hand and a foot to each other. Take and read, reflect on its advice, refer to it regularly. For those who seek a translation project: consider this booklet; it will be of great service to many.



This is the LORD's doing, it is marvelous in our eyes.

Psalms 118:23

Our heavenly Father has richly blessed us and entrusted into our care, another covenant child,

MATTHEW JAMES

Born December 28, 1988

A brother for *Joshua* and *Helena*
William and Phyllis Tamminga
(nee Baartse)

RR 2
Wyoming, ON N0N 1T0

From our covenant God we received
DANIEL GERRIT

Born January 4, 1989

Bram and Allie Verhoeff
(nee Kremer)

Deborah, Jan, Hannah

11 Grundy Place
Carman, MB R0G 0J0

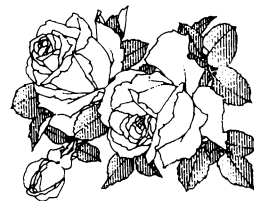
With thankfulness to the LORD who has made all things well, we announce the birth of a son:

DEREK NICHOLAS

Born December 16, 1988

Tony and Jacqueline Jelsma
(nee Nyenhuis)

6 Orchard Way,
Horst Green, Oxted
Surrey, England RH8 9DJ



For Thou didst form my inward parts, Thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb.

Psalms 139:13

We give praise to the Lord who made all things well with a gift from His hand, in announcing the birth of our first child, a son:

BRUCE ALAN

Born December 21, 1988

Andrew and Betty Ann Leyenhorst
(nee Vander Meulen)

4130-88th Street
Delta, BC V4K 3N3