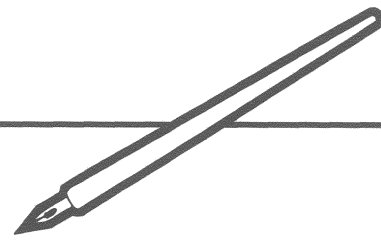




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A Word of Wisdom In the Struggle of Faith

The Struggle

One of the wise words in Proverbs (14:16) is, "A wise man is cautious and turns away from evil, but a fool throws off restraint and is careless." A more literal translation is, "A wise man fears and turns away from evil, but a fool lets himself go and (yet) trusts."

This word was given to Israel by its wise king in the struggle of faith. It is the struggle between being wise or being foolish. We know this contrast also from Christ's word at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 7:24-27. The wise man builds his house on the rock of being a hearer and a doer of the words of Christ. When the storms and floods come the house does not collapse. The fool builds his house on the sand of being a hearer only and not a doer of Christ's words. When the storms and floods come his life perishes.

This contrast is in fact the old antithesis set by God in paradise after the fall in sin. It is the antithesis between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, between faith and unbelief, between church and world, between a truly God-fearing life and a worldly life.

In this spiritual war Satan and his host of evil spirits oppose to destroy the work of Christ. Satan tries to make the church of Christ powerless and lacking all attraction through a worldly life style of its members, or of some of them. Satan's efforts are the more effective when he can manage to combine such a worldly life style of church members with a lack of discipline by a consistory.

Of course, Satan fights his war with deceitful cunning. He works step by step. From an occasional sinful thought and desire he tries to bring us to a thinking that increasingly gives in to sin. In this way he seeks to lead us to a deed of sin. And from one deed of sin, he pushes us into a life in sin. Thus he makes us his slaves, unless there comes repentance and a turning from sin to God in a struggle of faith.

For fighting the good fight of faith, God gave us this wise word of Proverbs, too. With it He calls us to be wise and not a fool, for a wise man fears and turns away from evil, while a fool does the opposite.

The picture of a wise man

A wise person fears. It does not say what he fears. In this way all the emphasis is placed on a wise person's attitude in life. His life is characterized by this fear. From the rest of Scripture, also the context of the book of Proverbs, it is clear that this fear is first of all the fear of the LORD. This fear of the LORD is described, for instance, in Prov. 3:1-12. It is good to read this whole passage. We are taught here not to let loyalty and faithfulness forsake us, but to trust the LORD with our whole heart and not to rely on our own insight. It says further, "Fear the LORD and turn away from evil. It will

be healing for your flesh." For the LORD disciplines His children in His love and calls them not to despise such discipline.

This fear includes a being afraid of sin and of the awful, destructive power sin can obtain in our life. The wise person fears the evil of sin. He is afraid of it, for he knows that his sin would provoke God to anger, and that he would cause God to turn against him in wrath. He does not want this, because he realizes in his faith, living by God's Word, that he cannot truly live when God is his enemy. He does not want God to be his enemy, for he loves the LORD as his Father in heaven through Christ. A child does not want to grieve and provoke his loving father. This is why the wise man fears and turns away from sin.

The picture of a fool

With the fool it is different. He does not have that child-like fear but lets himself go, namely in his own sinful, evil ways, at the same time trusting that all will be well, and that no harm will come to him. He is not afraid of sin and its power in his life. He does not have a deep respect and awe for the holy God who will not accept sin against Him. On the contrary, the fool lets himself go in his sin, first in thinking it, then in doing it.

First of all, a fool sins in his mind. He allows his mind to be busy with sinful activities that are not pleasing to God but a transgressing of His will as this is revealed in His commandments. I shall work this out with illustrations from the Ten Words of the Covenant.

In the *Sixth Commandment* the Lord not only forbids murder but also all hatred and desire of revenge. When one has hurt us, our sinful nature easily causes us to remain angry with such a person. We easily allow ourselves, in our mind, to develop a deep grudge for him or her which becomes a strong desire for revenge. In this condition we easily allow our mind to think of ways in which we could harm this person. We do not correct this attitude through the gospel of Christ and His command to forgive and forbear, and to love our neighbour, even our enemy. The Lord teaches us that this letting ourselves go in our mind with our fostered dislike and grudge typifies a fool. A wise person who lives in faith by what God's Word teaches through the Spirit of Christ will fight against and overcome this sin of hatred in his mind. But a fool will let himself go in such hatred so that it grows on him and takes hold of him. In the end, this hatred will more and more show in his words and in his actions. The fool lets himself go and yet trusts that all is fine. He does not realize that his hatred is not only aiming at the ruin of the person whom hates, but also is destroying himself

as believing child of God. Personal hatred comes from the evil one, not from Christ. Yet he lets himself go.

The second illustration comes from the *Seventh Commandment*. As children of God, we know that we are (called to be) temples of the Holy Spirit in body and mind. We know that God forbids adultery and all unchastity. However, one can act as a fool here too. One can allow his thoughts to play with the fulfillment of sexual desires with a person one is not married with. A fool does not say to himself, in such a case: Stop this sinning, for Christ has bought me, body and mind, as His own possession; we are not to live in sin, also not with our mind. No, a fool lets himself go, in contrast with a wise person who remembers that Christ warned: If your eye leads you to sin, pluck it out, and if your hand leads you to sin cut it off. For it is better to go into (eternal) life maimed than that with your whole body you are cast into the hell of fire. The result of letting ourselves go on sinning with our mind as fools will be that we come to sinning with the deed. In our actions we become unfaithful to our partner in marriage. If we do not fear and turn from evil, evil gets us in its grip and we destroy our own life and the life of our family, both spouse and children.

Let us also take the *Eighth Commandment*. One can day-dream about being financially successful in life and becoming rich for oneself and for a good life here on earth. When a person does not restrain himself and correct his thinking in the light of God's Word; when he does not tell himself that his Father in heaven says that he has to love and trust Him and seek Him first and His kingdom and being righteous before Him, then the desire for money can become such a big thing in his mind that his whole life, his speaking and acting, too, will be dominated by money more and more. Soon money is all that he thinks and talks about. Mouth and hand show what lives in the heart. Money has become his idol and his master. He lets himself go, first in his thinking, then in his speaking and in all his actions. His main goal is to make money. But because of this idolatry, he will get the true God against him. Idolatry is sin against the First Commandment too.

Although we can picture the attitude of a fool with all the commandments as well as with other words in which God has revealed us His will, I take my last illustration from the *Fifth Commandment* which deals with the matter of recognition of those in authority. We are inclined through our sinful nature to do our own thing and go our own way. We are prone to reject the authority of others over us. This begins when we are young. We disobey the will of our parents. We rebel against the word of a teacher. And when we are adults and parents ourselves, it happens easily that we go on with such rebellion and take the side of our child in a conflict situation with a teacher. We go on to reject and undermine a teacher's position of authority. (Of course, when we are in a position of authority ourselves, we are inclined to misuse this position. But let us restrict ourselves here to the situation in which we are under authority.) There are many more ways in which we show ourselves rebellious. We are prone to determine ourselves how far the authority of others over us goes. Specifically in a conflict situation, when we think that injustice is done to us, we can allow rebellion to take hold of us, first in our mind, then in our actions.

In particular when we are in our teenage years, we can allow a rebellious attitude to take hold of our mind. We can allow modern (hard) rock and other kinds of music



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EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Editor: J. Geertsema
Coeditors: J. De Jong, C. Van Dam and W.W.J. VanOene

ADDRESS FOR EDITORIAL MATTERS:

CLARION
41 Amberly Boulevard
Ancaster, ON, Canada L9G 3R9

ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS: (subscriptions, advertisements, etc.):

CLARION, Premier Printing Ltd.
One Beghin Avenue
Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5
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with its lyrics to strengthen this rebellion in our mind. The result is words and acts of rebellion at home, in school, at the work place, and so on. We let ourselves go. We do not turn away from this evil. We let it overpower us. The end is a hardening in this rebellious attitude not just over against people, parents, teachers, police, and so on, but, in all this, over against God at the same time. This, too, is the foolishness of sinning and, in this way, becoming a slave in the iron grip of sin.

False Confidence

Thus, our heavenly Father warns us that letting ourselves go in sinning is doing what a fool does. And in His care, the Lord adds that it belongs also to the attitude of a fool to remain confident while letting himself go in sin. The fool sins and trusts. He trusts that everything is and will be well. He trusts that no harm will come to him. He trusts that God will not turn against him but will give him a good life and make all things well. It is obvious that this confidence is without ground. Therefore, it is an unfounded, false confidence. God, in His Word, does not give the fool this confidence. On the contrary, He tells clearly that He hates sin and will punish the sinner who does not repent. God warns that He will punish sin and that sin destroys. This false trust is spiritual blindness. The fool does not see reality anymore.

He wanders about in darkness, without being aware of it. Such a false confidence also prevents conversion from evil. It is indication of being in the power of the deceiving devil. This false confidence, too, characterizes the fool. He lacks the fear of the LORD and does not reckon with what God says.

Purpose

Why does the LORD counsel us with the wisdom of this proverb? It is because He is our loving and caring Father in heaven and our holy God. He does not want to destroy us. He does not want us to destroy ourselves or each other. He seeks to save us in His grace in Christ Jesus. In Him He forgives our sins when, in the way of faith, we repent and turn to Him from our evil. In Christ, God renews our life. God's purpose is that we live with Him and for Him. In this proverb He gives us a picture of what it means to live for Him in fellowship with Christ. It is the picture of a wise man who fears the LORD and turns away from evil, first of all in his mind, and then also in his words and actions.

Therefore, let being a fool scare us. And let us love our God in great thankfulness as wise children who have the word of Christ dwell in our hearts richly. And God will be glorified in our salvation and in the salvation, hopefully, of the neighbour, too. C

A Remark of K. Schilder on Discussions for Ecclesiastical Unity

By N.H. Gootjes

Our gracious God has suddenly given new opportunities for contact with other Reformed churches in this country. I will briefly mention a number of new contacts.

1. The church at Vernon, BC reported that they locally had contacts with the Orthodox Reformed Church of Kelowna. These discussions convinced them that there are no such differences that justify separate existence.

2. Classis Ontario North asked attention not only for the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches but also for the churches that had seceded from the Christian Reformed Church. They asked Synod to appoint a Committee to promote ecclesiastical unity.

3. From the side of the concerned in the Christian Reformed Church two members wrote a book publicly urging consistories of Christian Reformed

Churches to take up contact with Canadian Reformed Churches.

4. Three meetings, organized by the Burlington Reformed Study Centre, were held in October 1992. The point of discussion was how Free Reformed, Canadian Reformed and (formerly) Christian Reformed see one another. The large auditorium of Redeemer College was filled to the brim.

5. Synod Lincoln 1992 decided to appoint Deputies for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity. Their mandate is, among others, to represent the churches, whenever invited, at assemblies or meetings held for the purpose of coming to ecclesiastical unity. Synod Lincoln decided in addition to send two deputies to the meeting of the Alliance of Reformed Churches, 1992. This Alliance consists of formerly Christian Reformed Churches and concerned Christian Reformed Churches.¹ Deputies

went again to the meeting of the Alliance in 1993.

6. Very important are, of course, meetings at local level. At several places consistories of neighbouring Christian and Canadian Reformed Churches have met during the past year.

We can only be thankful for these contacts. We meet churches who want to be Reformed. We meet them at several levels, as local churches and nationally. And we should not forget personal encounters, when we meet members belonging to such churches and speak about our calling as believers today.

In all these discussions, how should we approach one another? At this point I would like to ask attention for a quotation of Dr. K. Schilder. I found it while looking for something else, but it struck me immediately as giving some important guidelines for our atti-

tude in discussions for the purpose of ecclesiastical unity.

Schilder's quotation

Everyone knows that we (= K.Schilder) have argued for years that the division between them (= de Christelijke Gereformeerden) and us (-de Gereformeerden) is sin before God and that this has to be removed. There is here no need for going down on one's knees. What is needed is the action of sons. One need not pass detailed judgment over the fathers. According to Scripture, the children need not atone for the transgression of their fathers. As far as I am concerned we may note in detail their sins of commission or possibly of omission, as committed by each other's fathers, if only we as sons today agree that their theological disagreements may not be the ground for ecclesiastical separation.²

The historical situation

This quotation can be found in a series of articles Schilder wrote on the covenant. The issue of the covenant was extensively debated at the time. General Synod 1936 of the Reformed churches had established a Committee to deal with several controversial issues within the Reformed churches, one of which was the covenant. Two years later, in 1938, one of its members, Prof. Dr. G. Ch Aalders, published a book on the covenant. K. Schilder, another member of the Committee, found it necessary to publicly state his disagreement in a series of ten articles in *De Reformatie*. During the wartime, when Schilder was forced into hiding, the Committee proposed a doctrinal statement on the covenant to Synod 1942. Later, when Aalders' view on the covenant was made binding in the churches it even came to the expulsion of Schilder and the beginning of the "Liberated" churches. Schilder wrote these articles on the covenant at a time when the tensions were rising.

Aalders had stated in his book that God had established the covenant with the elect, and that this was the Reformed position. In his opposition Schilder deals mainly with the latter issue. He disagrees with Aalders' opinion that the Reformed have taught that the covenant has been established with the elect only. There is another opinion in the Reformed churches, namely that the covenant was established with Abraham and his seed, or with the believers and their offspring. Many theologians are quoted to show that the Reformed

did not think all alike on this. Why should the Reformed churches exclude one opinion that has always been allowed in the Reformed churches?

It is in that context that Schilder suddenly brings up the relation with the "Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk" (The Free Reformed Churches in Canada are their sister churches). The Reformed churches should not come with a decision on the covenant which would estrange them for all times from these churches. Schilder is of the opinion that the Reformed churches should not make new doctrinal decisions which could become stumbling blocks for ecclesiastical unity. This in turn leads to Schilder's brief remarks on how to approach the others in our discussions for ecclesiastical unity.

In God's sight

Schilder begins by saying that the division between the "Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk" and the "Gereformeerde Kerken" is, in his opinion, sin before God. Schilder does not begin with our preferences and possibilities but places everything before the throne of God. We know that we all are responsible before God for what we do. How would God feel about the separate existence of these two churches? No doubt Schilder had in mind that text that was so important in his life, John 17:21. The unity of the church is so important that Jesus Christ prayed for it in His prayer on the day in which He was betrayed. He asked His Father on behalf of those who believe in Him through the word of His apostles "that they may all be one." Schilder was convinced that the "Christelijke Gereformeerden" as well as the "Gereformeerden" believed in God through the words of Christ's apostles.

The "Christelijke Gereformeerden" of 1939 in the Netherlands are not the same as the churches that broke away from the Christian Reformed Church in the eighties. Is there belief in the Christ of the Scriptures in these churches? Synod Lincoln has gone on record with the following statement:

The Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches in North America have... declared to "seek unity with all Christians and congregations who wish to live together in Christian harmony through the humble submission to God's infallible Word, as this has been summarized in our Three Forms of Unity.... Furthermore, independent Reformed churches have expressed similar sentiments."³

If we can say that, then we should not begin with summing up all the difficulties we may expect in our discussions. We should not stay with our thoughts on earthly level, but ask what is God's will for our time. We can be grateful that these churches have been faithful to the Christ of the Scriptures. In the light of God's Word we are duty bound to seek contact, and to try to find ways to meet together.

No kneeling

Schilder next emphasizes that there is no need for kneeling. He means obviously that one church need not kneel down before the other. There is not a battle going on between churches, in which one church is the victor, who forces the other on its knees. No church can require the other to kneel down before it.

How does this translate in our own situation? Let me give an example of how we as Canadian Reformed Churches could act as conqueror. We would enter the discussions with the conviction that we had been right all along. We could begin with referring to the situation of 1944, and show how maintaining the reformed doctrine was made impossible. We then say about all the churches on this continent: You have to recognize that all of you were wrong by maintaining contact with those churches in the Netherlands, and that we were right all along. And after you have gone down on your knees before us we will graciously begin discussions to see whether we can let you in.

The church is not in the business of fighting to subdue everyone around to it. We do speak, however, about our kneeling down before the Head of the Church, the Christ of the Scriptures. When we discover that we have the same submission to Jesus Christ as another federation, we say to one another: Should we not kneel down together, instead of separately? We should discuss how we can serve Christ together.

No judgment about the past

Schilder continues by saying that we need not judge the actions of our fathers in detail. He is thinking here of the situation of 1892. Many seceded people joined the union, but a minority did not. Should the majority and the minority in 1939 have to come first to a common opinion about the actions of 1892?

Schilder is of the opinion that discussions concerning unity in 1939 need not go back to 1892. We need not hold every action, from the side of the Synods and from the side of those who did not join, under the microscope, in order to judge who was right at what moment. In talks about union, the issue is not to make out who was right in the past. The real issue at this point of time is, what is right today. What does God require of us in our present situation?

Schilder gives a Biblical justification for this when he says that the children need not atone for the sins of their fathers. This is an allusion to Ezech. 18. Israel says to God: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." That means as much as: Our fathers have done wrong, and we are punished because of their sins. God answers: That is not true. The one who sins shall die. If the son of a righteous man sins, he shall surely die (v. 13). But if the son of an evil man acts in righteousness he shall live and not share the punishment of his father (vv. 17,18). The application to Schilder's situation is clear. What is decisive is not whose fathers were right in 1892, but who is obedient in 1939. You may not hold the sons responsible for the sins of the previous generation.

What does this say for the situation we are in today? Do the people with whom we have our discussions on unity, have to confess that the Christian Reformed Church was wrong in not dealing with the issue of 1944? No, that cannot be the point. Even when we are personally convinced that they should have dealt with the doctrinal decisions, the discussion should not focus on 1944, but on our calling today. Those who made decisions in 1946 are different from the people that have now decided to leave the Christian Reformed Church. The sons have their own responsibility to make the right decisions today. That is what they are accountable for. In other words, our discussions should concentrate, not on who was right in the past, but on what is God's will for us today.

Historical investigation is free

This does not mean that everything that happened in the past should be glossed over. According to Schilder, we are allowed to point out sins in the fathers. We are free to call a certain action, not only of our own forefathers in

the church but also of someone who went in a different direction, a sin.

Here Schilder keeps the way open for investigation of church history. If you are bound by party policy you have to say that your party was always right, and the other group always wrong. Historical investigation is then, just as in the good communist fashion, only to bolster your own party, not to bring to light what really happened. Historical investigation, however, should be free. Wrongs and sins may be pointed out on either side. We should be free to do that. It will not always be clear, however, who was right. We will not always know exactly what went on at a certain time, so that a different evaluation may be possible. Sometimes the two parties will disagree about the correctness of a certain action.

This means that the events in the past of the church can be discussed. And different people can evaluate the events differently. That is no news, however. Even within one federation we do not all think alike about all events in the past of our own federation. Discussion about the past is allowed. But what counts is whether we can recognize each other as faithful churches of Jesus Christ in the present.

Theological differences

Finally Schilder speaks about the theological differences between the fathers. Again, he means the differences between the theologians from the "Secession" and the theologians who later followed Kuyper out of the national church. They did not agree on all points. The "seceded" brothers disagreed with a number of ideas of Kuyper. That was one of the main reasons why some did not join the union of 1892.

Schilder states that these differences of 1892 should not be the reason why in his own time the "Christelijke Gereformeerde" churches and the "Gereformeerde" churches should not come together. This may look as if no theological differences should hinder a union between two Reformed churches. That is not Schilder's intention, however. He speaks about "their" theological differences. He does not mean that no theological difference can prevent church unity.

What, then, is required for union? Schilder does not say that in this place, but his opinion can be found everywhere in his writings: the confession of the church. We have agreed that the content of the confession agrees with the Word of God. Disagreements we

may have must stay within the limits of the confession. In discussions with other federations the confession should always have a central place. We have to ask the question whether we can agree that the doctrine of the confessions is the doctrine taught in Scripture. Church union should have a confessional basis. But we do not bind to a theological opinion, whether Calvin's, Kuyper's or Schilder's. They are theologians, and we can learn much from them. But their theological differences should not cause separate existence of churches.

Christ gathers his church

Just like everyone, churches too, bear the marks of their past. Every church has developed certain sensibilities because of what it has experienced.

It has learned certain things, and it is thankful for its theological heritage. Most of us will feel at home in the church we grew up in. Christ, in the meantime, continues to gather His church. He works through His Word, and can bring about new situations anywhere He wants. We have to recognize this continued activity of Christ. That is also what Schilder taught us: Christ's word is not bound. Where His word is faithfully preached He may bring about faith and obedience. We today live in a time when we see new avenues for discussions on church unity. Let us in obedience to Christ engage in such discussions.

1. See *Acts General Synod Lincoln, ON 1992 of the Canadian Reformed Churches* (Winnipeg, MB: Premier Printing, 1993) 22-25, 60; Th. Plantinga ed., *Seeking Our Brothers in the Light: A Plea for Reformed Ecumenicity* (Neerlandia, AB: Inheritance Publications, 1992); C. Van Dam, *The Challenge of Church Union* (Winnipeg, MB: Premier Printing, 1993).

2. The Dutch text is: "Men weet, dat wij al jaren lang betoogd hebben, dat de scheur tusschen hen en ons zonde voor God is, en de wereld uit moet (knievallen zijn daarbij volstrekt overbodig, de daad van de zonen is noodig, en (men) behoeft niet in details te oordelen over de vaderen, voor wier overtreding, naar de Schrift, de kinderen niet behoeven te boeten; en wat mij betreft, mogen we dit zondigen in details in bedrijf of misschien wel in nalatigheid, over en weer van elkaars vaderen constateeren, mits we maar als zonen van heden met elkaar het hierin eens zijn, dat hun theologische meeningsgeschillen geen grond mogen zijn voor kerkelijke gescheidenheid)," in "Het verbond Gods" nr. 7, *De Reformatie* 19, nr. 46 (1939), p.364.

3. *Acts General Synod Lincoln, 1992*, 24.



REMEMBER YOUR CREATOR

By R. Schouten

Call Upon God¹

Bringing forward the topic of prayer tends to produce a variety of thoughts in our minds. On the one hand, we are all aware of the Biblical command to pray. We also know that our deepest joy and fellowship with God comes in times of prayer. Prayer, we realize, gives strength and wisdom and inner peace. On the other hand, most of us have a sense of guilt with respect to prayer. Remaining steadfast in prayer is not easy. Often the cares and business of life seem to leave little room for prayer. Even when we do pray, we find that our minds are prone to distraction. In other cases, people admit that prayer does not really grip their minds. Entering into communion with God holds no allure for them. They are too bored with God to pray.

What is Prayer?

In order to deal with the matter of prayer, we will need to first remind ourselves of what prayer really is. Scripture uses a huge variety of expressions to describe prayer. Some of these are: calling upon the Lord; seeking the face of God; crying to the Lord; drawing near to God; thanking the LORD; asking; supplicating; Interceding; praising.

The unifying concept in the vocabulary of prayer is communication with God. At bottom, prayer is speaking to the Lord. Such communication with the divine Creator is possible only because He has taken the initiative in establishing a relationship with His people. Prayer communication does not take place in a vacuum, but in the context of God's covenant of grace.

In prayer, we call upon God's Name. His Name stands for His fame, for His glorious reputation as the creating and redeeming God. His Name is Yahweh, the LORD, and this holy Name reveals that God is faithful to His covenant (Ex. 3:13-16). The Name of God means that He is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression

and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty. . ." (Ex. 34:5-7).

This unchanging, revealed Name of God forms the basis for all prayer. In prayer, we call not upon an unknown spirit. Prayer is not a despairing scream into the darkness of the night. It is not an appeal to a possibly existing deity. Instead, in prayer, we call upon the revealed Name of the God of the covenant, who has already drawn near to us in His grace and mercy. Prayer flows from a believing response to the divine invasion of our lives.

Since we know the Name of the Lord in all its glorious content from Scripture, there can be no vibrant and persistent prayer life without massive exposure to God's Word. Word and prayer form a partnership. We cannot understand the Word without a mind of prayer and we cannot pray without a mind for the Word. Without frequent reading of the words of the Spirit in Scripture, our prayer life will soon become shallow and idle.

The words of Paul in Romans 10 are relevant here: "But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a preacher?" In preaching, we meet the Name of God. The Name is proclaimed to us in the fullness of salvation and judgment. Our response to the preaching must be calling upon the Name.

It follows that where there is no regard for the revelation of God's Name in Scripture, prayer degenerates into empty babbling. In answering the question, "What belongs to a prayer which pleases God and is heard by Him?", Lord's Day 45 of the Catechism gives this concise answer: "First, we must from the heart call upon the one true God only, who has revealed Himself in His Word. . . ." If human beings seek to approach God outside His self-revelation, their words reach no further than the confines of the room in which they stand. Prayer must always be offered to God in the context of the Bible. People who pray much but

have little interest in Scripture or the preaching of Scripture are a species worthy of careful watching.


When we understand that prayer is covenantal response to divine initiative, the practical implication is that one's private prayer best follows the reading of God's Word. Many people who confess great difficulty in private prayer acknowledge rich increase upon adopting the practice of first reading God's Word. Then their prayer truly becomes a response to the Lord who first addressed them.

Most Important Part of Gratitude

When we understand prayer as covenantal response, we can also grasp why the Catechism in Lord's Day 45 calls prayer "the most important part of the thankfulness which God requires of us." We would be inclined to say that not prayer, but good works are the chief part of Christian gratitude. However, we know that the Lord created human beings for fellowship with Himself (see Lord's Day 3, Q.A.6). Man and woman were made to walk with God. Their lives made sense only in the framework of a relationship with their Creator exercised and cemented in prayer. When God redeems alienated sinners and reconciles them to Himself, the most immediate result is the opening of mouths in prayer. In this God delights and is glorified. For this communion with God we were saved.

Carl Henry writes the following on this point: Prayerlessness is a spurning of that fellowship with God for which man was fashioned, a snobbish preference for solitude and self-reflection above conversation with the Almighty. Likewise, it involves a shameful neglect of spiritual and moral resources. Whoever prefers a monologue with himself to a dialogue with the Creator-Redeemer actually shapes an idol of himself."¹

(to be continued).

(1) Carl F. Henry, *Christian Personal Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), pg. 575. 

By C. Van Dam

NDP Seeks to Muzzle Pro-Life

The New Democratic Party (NDP) which forms the government at the moment in Ontario has initiated numerous pro-abortion actions since coming to power. Now it is seeking to ban pro-life activity at abortion centres across the province. The Attorney General has asked the courts to issue an injunction which would prevent anyone from protesting, sidewalk counselling, handing out information, or even praying at 23 locations across Ontario. These locations include private abortion clinics and public hospitals performing abortions.

The Campaign Life Coalition of Toronto has recently issued a leaflet entitled "Unjustly Accused" followed by a boxed note: "When the government seeks to prevent something as basic as quiet prayer or peaceful communication on the public streets, it's a sad day for Canada."

What follows is a reprint of the brochure.

The NDP government is seeking an injunction which would ban all pro-life counselling, picketing, and praying outside 23 locations across Ontario, including abortion clinics and public hospitals which perform abortions.

The government is also seeking \$500,000 in damages from the 18 pro-lifers it has named as defendants in the case. In addition to having to find the funds to defend themselves, these pro-lifers could also be compelled to pay for the government's legal costs.

The Attorney General began the court action on the recommendation of a Task Group Report on access to abortion. The Task Group was composed entirely of abortionists and activists who have campaigned for abortion on demand.

The injunction would be an unprecedented restriction of the rights of individuals to assemble and protest peacefully. The Attorney General is seeking to restrict the

right to speak freely and give out information on public sidewalks.

The lawyers representing pro-life defendants against the Attorney General are calling this a classic civil-rights case. "I think it's certainly going to be one of the most important civil rights cases in Ontario in the 1990s," says one of the defence lawyers, David Brown.

Peter Jervis, one of the other defence lawyers, agrees: "When the government seeks to prevent something as basic as quiet prayer or peaceful communication on the public streets, it's a sad day for Canada," he points out.

In a statement of defence filed in court, the lawyers argue that the injunction is a politically motivated attempt to halt the activities of a group which opposes the government's pro-abortion views.

The pro-life defence has included testimony from experts such as Dr. Bernard Nathanson, a former abortionist from New York, and

Dr. Vincent Rue, an expert on post-abortion syndrome, as well as affidavits from women who were helped by pro-lifers outside the Toronto abortion clinics and continued with their pregnancies.

Lawyers representing the Attorney General have been joined by Morris Manning and Clayton Ruby, representing the Toronto abortion clinics. Their cross-examinations of the defendants and other pro-life witnesses took over four weeks, and at times resembled interrogations. Some defendants were questioned for up to two days about their pro-life beliefs and activities.

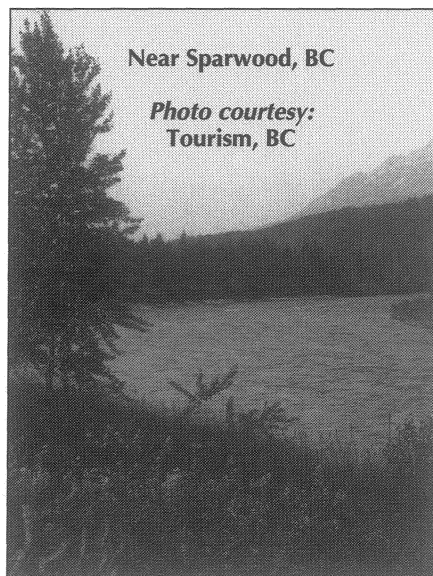
During the December 10th examination of Attorney General Marion Boyd, her lawyers admitted that the government hired a private investigator to infiltrate the 1992 Campaign Life Coalition/Alliance for Life "Save the Planet's People" conference in Toronto. The private eye attended workshops, picked up pro-life literature and purchased audio tapes, which she then turned over to the government.

The 18 pro-lifers being targeted by the government include Jim Hughes, National President of Campaign Life Coalition, and Errol Alchin, a Pentecostal pastor who once attended a Life Chain in 1991 and sometimes preaches against abortion from the pulpit.

The hearing begins on January 12th and is expected to last three weeks. The government of Ontario has spared no expense in its effort to gag pro-life expression, with at least four lawyers and four articling students working on the case.

The pro-life defendants, on the other hand, do not have the luxury of endless public resources. They have to rely on donations to help cover their legal costs, which are already over \$100,000. Transcripts of the cross-examinations alone will cost about \$20,000.

OUR COVER



This month's Court hearing will add considerably to these costs.

A Pro-life Defence Fund has been set up to help fight for the basic civil rights of all pro-lifers. Donations can be sent to the Legal Defence Fund, 53 Dundas St. East, Suite 305, Toronto, ON, M5B 1C6.

The brochure also includes a list with photos and data of all the defendants. Some are ordinary citizens who are marginally involved in the pro-life movement, others are deeply involved. All are sensitive to the heinous of the crime of abortion being committed in

our society. It is interesting to note that one of the defendants is also a member of the Canadian Reformed Church in Toronto (Mrs. Joanne Dieleman).

It should be emphasized that none of the defendants who are appearing before the court are being accused of doing something wrong or of disobeying any existing legislation. It is not so that these people have taken the law into their own hands and are for that reason now being sued for damages. Their sole "crime" in the eyes of the NDP government is their concern for the unborn and their desire to commu-

nicate this fairly to anyone who cares to listen outside the abortuary, or (in the case of the minister) to preach against the evil of abortion.

May this testimony in defence of the unborn who cannot speak for themselves not be blotted out in high handed government court action. Governments are called to defend and promote life and not to facilitate the murder of innocent life! The very action now undertaken must grieve and anger the Lord and Giver of Life. It should therefore also distress us and motivate us to help where we can. **C**

Pursuing Ecclesiastical Unity

A Discussion-paper on the mandate given by Synod Lincoln to Deputies for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity

Preface

The Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches meeting in November, 1992 appointed Deputies for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity with the stated purpose "to promote the unity of Reformed believers who have left the Christian Reformed Church." After a year of internally discussing matters pertinent to our task, it seems appropriate to publish a discussion paper on our mandate that has taken shape within the circle of the deputies to that the purpose for which the deputies have been appointed can be furthered.

This paper is being released now as deputies consider it important that the Canadian Reformed Churches and the churches which have seceded from the Christian Reformed Church know how the deputies are thinking about the issues relating to the goal of unity. It is the hope of deputies that this may help in furthering the discussion that is presently underway between consistories meeting to discuss unity, as well as the interaction that is taking place among individual members of the churches involved.

To prevent possible misunderstanding, it should be noted that this discussion paper is only that. It lacks official status and does not contain directives backed by the authority of a synod.

*The address of the deputies is:
Deputies for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity
110 West 27th Street
Hamilton, ON
L9C 5A1 Canada*

I. The Unity To Be Promoted

A. The concept of unity

a. The Lord gathers His one Catholic Church as local churches, organized under the eldership as the only governing body in His church, for the purpose of keeping His church in all things under His Word.

According to this Word (John 17, Galatians 5, Ephesians 4), local churches will seek to enter into a confederation with one another to express the oneness of the Church of God and to assist each other in the calling to keep the church under His Word.

These local churches identify themselves as catholic churches by adopting a Confession in accordance with the Word and by adopting a Church Order in accordance with the confessed nature of the church, for the organization of both their local church-life and their confederative life.

This expression of the unity of the Catholic church has been realized for us in our federation, based on the Three Forms of Unity and practised according to the Reformed Church Order. This is the form of unity the deputies must

promote with regard to local churches and federations which likewise identify themselves as Reformed in Confession and Church Government. In other words, we should seek federative or organic unity with others.

b. There are different concepts of unity. Some may want to promote a unity that is a loose fellowship, or a broad ecumenical synod by which each federation can maintain its own spiritual culture, tradition and practices, distinctives and specific history and mission. This is not our view. Also views promoting an independentistic model with cross-federative fellowship and cooperation should be rejected.

c. The refusal of Reformed churches to enter into federative unity in order to preserve their particular distinctives or their freedom to locally develop their own opinions and practices must be seen as in conflict with the catholicity of the church and in conflict with the call to serve one another with advice and help in order to keep the churches under the Word.

d. The tendency to preserve one's own non-confessional distinctives and the fear of losing them by entering into the unity of one federation with other Reformed churches is natural and understandable. Still, the preservation of particular distinctives has to be made subordinate to the call given with the

unity and the catholicity of the church. The twelve tribes of Israel were very distinct, yet expressed their fundamental oneness in their one worship at one altar in Jerusalem. This principle also applies to our day. Staying apart in order to preserve one's own non-confessional distinctives is basically sectarian (cf. 1 Cor 1:10ff.).

e. It must not be forgotten that the Canadian Reformed Churches also have their own distinctives, determined by background and history. Sacrifices and compromises will also be required from us for the sake of the catholicity of the church when union is pursued. Instructive articles have been published in *De Reformatie*.¹ Dr. M. te Velde (Professor at the Theological University of the Reformed Churches [Liberated]) writes that church-unity may only be refused on issues for which one also would be allowed to break the unity of the church. Drs. B. Kamphuis (also Professor at the Theological University of the Reformed Churches [Liberated]) writes that in the church we may never make absolute our own customs, traditions and atmosphere. Nothing is more un-catholic in the church than to let everything be determined by tradition. Then we would turn the catholic church into a group-church. As Reformed churches we too have our own specialities, he writes, like covenantal thinking, view of the church and historic redemptive preaching. Beautiful things, but not beautiful enough to sacrifice the catholicity of the church for them. To mind also comes K. Schilder's remark that he could live in one church together with for instance adherents to the concept of the pluriformity of the church (although he opposed such ideas all his life), but that the problem was that they could not do that with him.² The Liberation of 1944 was in the line of the Union of 1892. Both were acts of preserving the catholicity of the church. It will be important that we stress in our contacts with other Reformed churches and bodies that we do not bind them to our idiosyncrasies and that they are welcome with theirs, although they will become subject of ongoing discussion.

B. Conditions for unity

a. Church unity must be pursued with those churches and federations which declare that they submit to the Scriptures and adhere faithfully to the Three Forms of Unity and intend to organize their church-life locally and

federatively according to Reformed principles of Church Polity. Nothing more, nothing less. These were the conditions for the Union in 1892.

b. Concerning the Church Order, we must be flexible. The basic principles are given with what we confess concerning the church in the Confession. Certain articles are consequently non-negotiable, like the two pillars of Reformed Church Polity, Art. 31 and Art. 74.³ The same goes, for instance, for what is stated about the offices, subscription form and church discipline. More could be mentioned. Other articles however could be changed, if necessary to come to a common church order, provided that the Reformed principles and the basic ecclesiastical structures in our present Church Order remain intact.⁴

C. Advice to contacted churches

a. The Independent churches should be advised to organize themselves into a provisional federation of churches, in order to identify themselves as churches who desire to be Reformed in doctrine and Church Polity. Their federation should be consciously provisional, serving as an expression of their intention to unite with other Reformed churches. (Cf. similar development in 1887 with the establishment of the provisional federation of Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerken and the appointment of deputies for seeking unity with churches of the Secession).

b. The OCRC has already declared in its Act of Secession that it is their desire to unite with other Reformed Churches.

c. Further, the above-mentioned churches should be advised not to aim at and wait for a new church which would include also churches of Presbyterian background, via the planned Confessional Conferences, instead of immediately pursuing unity with Reformed churches. Let us first be obedient in the obvious matter laid so close at hand by the Lord. From there the churches may work for a broader and more comprehensive unity of the Catholic church.

II. Local Contacts

a. In contacts at a local level, our consistories should try and convince the other church to share the views developed above.

b. If a minister is invited by an Independent Church or an Orthodox Christian Reformed Church to preach,

it should be considered if the invitation is motivated by a sincere desire for unity, or if the invitation is placed in the context of cross-federative cooperation and fellowship, in which ministers of many different backgrounds are equally welcome. Our ministers should not lend themselves to be used in such an un-Reformed view of unity and church-polity. It is important in our local contacts to make sure of the intentions and aims of the other church.

If the invitation is motivated by a sincere desire for unity, the speaking of an edifying word can be helpful in this time of transition. In this way, one can also get to know each other's preaching.

The motive for speaking an edifying word instead of official preaching is that there is not yet any church orderly determined recognition by the churches involved of one another's status and offices.

On the other hand, deputies recognize that the speaking of an edifying word by a Canadian Reformed minister in an independent church may not always be the way to go, but that it may be better to wait for a complete pulpit exchange (cf. point c below). Experience teaches us that this practice of speaking an edifying word is not always understood in the independent churches. Moreover, it does not appear to be completely understood in the Canadian Reformed Churches either and there is no agreement in the Canadian Reformed Churches on the appropriateness of speaking an edifying word in the above mentioned circumstances.

c. If talks progress to the point that both churches recognize each other as Reformed, both churches should declare of one another that they are true churches of the Lord which ought to seek ecclesiastical unity. This includes that both churches will advise the churches with which they live in one or another form of fellowship to seek unity on the basis of the Three Forms of Unity and a Reformed Church Order, possibly to be negotiated to mutual agreement.

d. Both churches may then consider drawing up an accord which provides for pulpit exchange and admission of their members to one another's Holy Supper and recognizing one another's attestations (discipline). Such an accord should be subject to regular renewal by both churches involved. It shall not be implemented without the advice of Classis.

e. Good order requires that Classis be informed regularly about the initiation

and progress of the contact. It is advisable that also the deputies are informed and asked for input, if only for enabling the churches in the federation to follow a common policy. It goes without saying that the local congregation is also kept fully informed of the developments.

1 In Vol. 68:3, October 17, 1992.

2 In a 1952 article reprinted in K. Schilder, *De Kerk*, III (1965), pp. 486,491.

3 Art. 31: "If anyone complains that he has been wronged by the decision of a minor assembly, he shall have the right to appeal to the major ecclesiastical assembly; and whatever may be agreed upon by a majority vote shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proved to be in conflict with

the Word of God or with the Church Order."

Art. 74: "No Church shall in any way lord it over other Churches, no office-bearer over other office-bearers."

4 Cf. M. te Velde, "Kerkerde en kerkverband in Kerkelijke samensprekingen," *De Reformatie*, 66:40, July 6, 1991; also published in P.J. Trimp, e.a., *Kerkelijk samenspreken. Hoe gaat dat in zijn werk?* (1992). **C**

Institution of the Canadian Reformed Church of Aldergrove

By Bert and Linda Vane

On the first Sunday of the year of our Lord 1994, January 2nd, we had the privilege of becoming the Canadian Reformed Church of Aldergrove. This is the forty-sixth church instituted in our federation. It was a rich and blessed Sunday indeed. Rev. J. Visscher, our minister at the time, led the worship service, reminding us to look to the future with God's benediction. The theme of the sermon was "The prayer for the maturity of the Church," focusing on: a) love being central in our fellowship, b) sincerity being basic to our character and c) righteousness being evident in our service.

Rev. J. Visscher proclaimed God's Word using Philippians 1:8-11 as the text. We were taught that Paul's love for the Philippians was intense, Christ has bound Paul to Himself and it is Christ's love flowing through Paul to the Philippians. Nothing competes with love. Love is a lot of things, the basic component however is giving. We are to be willing to give ourselves to others, for nothing surpasses love. Paul wants this seed of love to grow and grow. Love is to motivate us, then we cannot go wrong, especially when there is also knowledge and discernment. Love needs knowledge to grow to maturity. The more we know the Lord the more we shall love Him. Knowledge knows what to love, discernment knows how to love.

Rev. J. Visscher continued by saying we are not to tolerate misunderstandings. We are to work for the Lord and for one another and so make congregational life sparkle. We are to conform to God's will inwardly as well as outwardly. God sees everything. How of-

ten are we a stumbling block to others? If there is insincerity there will be no growth. God wants our spiritual fruits, fruits of righteousness, working in His Kingdom. God wants our whole life. Fruits come through Jesus Christ. We must abide in Christ just like a branch must be in the vine or there will be no fruit. Christ is central to the whole manner of growth. Concentrate on Christ, listen and learn, be active in His Service. Spiritual fruits bring glory to God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

After the sermon we could witness the ordination of the five elders, Brs. F. Beintema, H. Berends, P. Vanderpol, B. Vane and B. Van Goolen as well as three deacons, Brs. H. DeGelder, H. Van Delft, A. Vander Gaag.

After the worship service was over, Br. P. Vanderpol requested the congregation to be seated. He expressed that this was a great day that the Lord has given us. It is the Lord who continues to gather His Church.

Br. P. Vanderpol invited various speakers from our sister churches to come forward. The first one being Br. P.H. Torenvliet on behalf of the Canadian Reformed Church in Abbotsford. He extended his congratulations and reminded us of the privilege from the Lord to put a lampstand here in Aldergrove. May our love be sincere and pure and may the Son see this sincere love so that the lampstand may shine and others be won for Christ.

Rev. J. Visscher, now our former minister and representative of the Canadian Reformed Church of Langley, was the next to speak. He ex-

pressed his best wishes, as he also did in the sermon. He expressed that the Lord may bless this day and may we grow on this, granting to the brothers ordained and the rest of the congregation strength and wisdom. He added that today his feelings were bittersweet, just like when a child leaves home, you are both happy and sad, so were his feelings about a part of the congregation of Langley leaving.

Br. H. Bosscher was the next speaker, representing Classis Pacific and the American Reformed Church of Lynden. He congratulated us on behalf of the churches of Classis Pacific and welcomed us onto the ranks of Classis Pacific. He reminded us that we as churches are blessed with healthy growth. God uses generations to preserve His Church (Lord's Day 21). He continued to say that he had personal and sentimental reasons for speaking. Exactly forty years ago, on the first Sunday of 1954, Aldergrove ward started meeting separately from the church of New Westminster. Aldergrove instituted on March 7, 1954 with 89 members. Aldergrove begot Langley, Langley begot Cloverdale then Cloverdale begot Langley and now coming around in full circle, Langley begot Aldergrove.

Br. H. Bosscher ended by giving us words from Colossians 3 "Let the Word of God dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

Next to speak was Br. P. deBoer from Port Kells. He started by saying Port Kells was a young church and so a short speech. He extended his Christian greetings and heartfelt congratulations. A new church is sign of growth and we are to pray to receive harmony and wisdom. We are also to sing and make melody.

Br. P. Vanderpol read a letter from the Canadian Reformed Church of Vernon. They expressed their heartfelt congratulations. In this time when churches

are on the decrease it is a blessing to institute a new church, showing that God continues to work. They also said their wish was that the Lord would soon give us a minister of the Word.

Br. C. Onderwater representing the Maranatha Canadian Reformed Church of Surrey also spoke. He gave his congratulations from the mother church of the valley. Forty-three years ago was the first time a church was instituted in the Fraser Valley. We are to hold fast to

the heritage of the doctrine and are to receive help from above.

Br. P. Vanderpol thanked Rev. J. Visscher for his teaching and admonishing. He also thanked the church of Langley. Rev. J. Visscher will continue his work with us as our counsellor. He continued by saying we cannot do things ourselves and so we bowed our heads in prayer to ask for God's blessing. After this coffee and oliebollen were served. C

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor:

In the October 8 *Clarion*, Prof. Van Dam accepts an anonymous observer's explanation of the OPC General Assembly's termination of the Lord's Supper study committee. This is surprising since it appears to ignore the explanation given in the official publication of the OPC. By taking the observer's view, Prof. Van Dam is led to believe that "this committee had finished its work and answered Canadian Reformed concerns about the Lord's Supper." In a recent conversation with a member of the Committee for Contact with the OPC, it was reported to me that no such resolution has been worked out.

The decisions of our last General Synod to establish ecclesiastical fellowship with the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK) and Free Church of Scotland (FCS) may well be understood by some in the OPC to represent a double standard on both the issue of the Lord's Supper and that of confessional membership. In perusing the Acts of various Synods regarding our relationship with the PCK, I can find no documentation suggesting that they either practice the kind of Lord's Supper restrictions which we do, nor that they require confessional membership. Given the strong influence of American Presbyterianism on the Korean churches, I would think the burden of proof is on us to show the OPC that we fully investigated such matters and found their practice to be in accord with ours, thus invalidating any charge of a double standard. If such documentation is not available, then perhaps the synodical decision to es-

tablish ecclesiastical fellowship ought to be questioned.

With regard to the FCS, the issue is not so clear. The evidence in our various Acts do not provide sufficient information for an outside observer to determine whether or not these churches indeed hold to the same principles as our churches on these issues. Here also it seems that our churches should be able to verify these matters so that any question of a double standard is removed.

Prof. Van Dam suggests that establishing ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC is overdue. But this would only be so if his information is correct that the issues have been resolved.

Prof. Van Dam also suggests that the differences between our churches and the OPC with regard to confessional membership and the Lord's Supper are ones with which we can live since they are due to different histories and traditions. If this were so, then Laurel and Blue Bell seceded from the OPC wrongly. For neither of these churches found that the differences were matters of mere history or tradition. Rather there are clear principal differences between us on these issues, and they result in profound practical consequences. For this reason, Laurel and Blue Bell could not accept nor live with such differences.

Indeed, it is ironic that the very next article in the *Clarion* containing Prof. Van Dam's remarks is one by Rev. Van Popta about the Lord's Supper which exposes the errors of the type of communion practiced by the OPC. Rev. Van Popta correctly upholds a central principle with regard to admitting visi-

tors to the Lord's Supper, namely, that the elders must exercise the final judgment over both the confession and the life of the visitor. This final judgement by the elders should not be confused with what in the OPC is sometimes called "elder supervision" of the table. Indeed, the view which Rev. Van Popta ably shows is incompatible with our standards is virtually the one held and practiced by the OPC. And as Rev. Van Popta points out, this view grows out of a different view of the church. Whatever the connection of these views with history or tradition, they are ones which we cannot merely accept and live with as our Synods have shown.

The differences between us and the OPC on membership may appear on paper to be so slight as to be non-existent. But in fact, a careful review of their standard and ours reveals a substantial difference that is again the result of major differences in views of the church. And the practical consequences of these differences result in a substantial difference in the actual composition of the membership of the respective churches (for example, the OPC allows into communicant membership those who do not accept infant baptism). We should be very careful about simply accepting such views as mere variations from history or tradition which we can easily accept.

I for one am eager to see these issues removed as barriers between our churches and the OPC, but I don't think that cause is helped by the kind of mitigating comments made by Prof. Van Dam.

Barry R. Hofford

Response to the letter of B.R. Hofford

A. In the first paragraph, Rev. Hofford makes the point that I accepted an anonymous observer's explanation of the OPC General Assembly's termination of the Lord's Supper Study Committee over that of the explanation given in the official publication of the OPC. I would like to note in the first place that although the publication (*New Horizons*) is official, the report itself can hardly be so characterized as it is full of personal impressions, etc. This makes for colourful reading, but it should not be made more than it is, namely a personal account of what transpired. Secondly, the recent Press Release of the Committee on Contact with the OPC would appear to substantiate the observer I quoted. (See *Clarion*, January 14, 1994).

B. With respect to the other issues which Rev. Hofford raises, I would like to note the following to keep matters in the perspective of our own Reformed history and tradition.

1. Reformed Churches have never hesitated to accept the Presbyterian Churches in their specific ways of doing things. We do well to remember that the churches of the Secession (1834) sought ecclesiastical fellowship with Presbyterians in Scotland and in their Synod of 1860 the churches of the Secession welcomed official delegates from the United Presbyterian Church (whom the Seceded Churches had invited) into their midst. The Acts of this Synod give clear evidence of the joy of exercising the communion of saints with these Presbyterian brothers in recognition of the agreement "in doctrine, discipline, and service" (Art. 24).

2. The issues that are now isolated for special discussion with the OPC, namely the so-called confessional membership and the fencing of the Table of the Lord have to my knowledge never before been specifically isolated for ecumenical discussion with Presbyterians as real impediments to mutual recognition and fellowship. It is good to discuss issues of course and work to becoming of one mind as to what the Lord expects of us. But, we should not now make these issues into an obstacle to ecclesiastical

fellowship which they apparently have never been in the past. In this context it needs to be remembered that no church is perfect in its execution of its task and obligations. This takes me to a next point.

3. There can be miserable things in a church federation. But that is not always reason enough not to have fellowship with such a church, either as an individual or as churches in ecclesiastical fellowship. Calvin earnestly warned against breaking fellowship too easily with a church (*Institutes*, IV.I.10-22). Even if "some fault may creep into the administration of either doctrine or sacraments" one must be very careful not to break the unity of the faith too readily. (IV.I.12). The church is holy "in the sense that it is daily advancing and is not yet perfect" (IV.I.17; also see IV.I.13).

4. Rev. Hofford mentions (as a strike against the OPC) that the OPC allows into communicant membership those who do not accept infant baptism. Although Rev. Hofford does not state this, such an action is of course an exception. The OPC acknowledges both in their confessions as well as Directory of Public Worship that the baptism of the children of believers is a divine institution and that it is a great sin to neglect this ordinance. The report on this matter that served the Thirty-third General Assembly of the OPC (1967) as well as the decision made by the Thirty-fourth General Assembly of the OPC make the exceptional nature of such an admission clear. Such a person should also promise to submit to the Reformed teaching of the church on this point.

Leaving room for exceptions such as this is also in line with our own heritage. In a similar decision, the Synod of The Hague (1914) of our Dutch sister churches decided that toleration can be exercised toward a brother who in good conscience errs in a point of doctrine. This follows the example of the apostolic church. The point of issue in this 1914 decision, (namely, whether one could be tolerated who denied infant baptism), was left up to the

consistory to decide, if need be in consultation with the classis. Also in this case, such a person would be expected to submit to the continued Reformed teaching of the church (F.L. Bos, *De Orde der Kerk*, (1950) 226).

C. Van Dam

Dear Editor:

Allow me to comment on the acts of classis as reported in *Clarion* volume 42, Nov. 5/93 and about the extensive interview with Rev. Visscher in *Reformed Perspective* Oct. 93 Volume 12, Number 12.

It appears that we are practising some formidable inconsistencies. In the case of Christ Reformed Church of Denver, Co. we practise church polity rules that are intended to be part of our checks and balances in order to keep hierarchies from forming and therefore invite deputies of Regional Synod to (wrongly) veto a classis decision. On the other hand we allow ministers and others to yearly attend the ICRC meetings.

Why are we so concerned that a wrong decision may have been made by properly delegated brothers to a classis, many of whom are rotated periodically and the classis itself only exists for a short duration? Why are we concerned that elders and deacons should have a clearly defined term? A rule that is practised even right down to school boards, men and women's societies, etc, and do not seem to have any problem with the same people from year to year attending the ICRC meetings, (of all events). My concern is that this will lead to a lack of objectivity. It is human nature to be agreeable with people whom we know rather well.

Our objectivity decreases especially when we become more acquainted with others who come from a different culture, language, and church history. The object of the ICRC is to obey the command of our Lord to be one with those who are of the true faith. This means that we must in an honest way look critically at each other, not at the person, but at the other's confessions and way of life, including each others manner of church government.

In other words, dare to criticize in a manner of love. In my opinion objectivity would be greatly enhanced if the members of the ICRC committee are rotated in two or three year terms.

Yours in Christ,
Terry M. Veenendaal



BOOK REVIEWS

By C. Van Dam

Calvin's Wisdom

J. Graham Miller, *Calvin's Wisdom*. An Anthology Arranged Alphabetically by a Grateful Reader. *Banner of Truth Trust*, 1992. (cloth, 424 pages; \$ 35.95 US)

While a missionary, the compiler of this book read Calvin's Institutes and recorded in a filing system all the items that struck him. Once retired, he read the fifty-five volumes comprising Calvin's Commentaries and Tracts and again recorded the fruits of his reading. All the quotes extracted from Calvin have now been "arranged in themes which should appeal to the serious reader as an introduction to the actual words of Calvin" with the sources given (p. xxvii). Miller wants to let Calvin speak for himself and suggests that "the serious reader will gain most benefit by taking one theme or sub-theme a day, giving time for assimilation and reflection. In this way the Anthology may prove an ideal primer in Reformed doctrine and practice, worship and churchmanship, personal and social life." (p. xxviii)

This is a useful book and one finds an inroad into aspects of Calvin's thinking through it in a way that could be difficult without this volume. For example, under the entry of "family," we read among others:

The offspring of believers is born holy, because their children, while yet in the womb . . . are included in the covenant of eternal life . . . Nor . . . are they admitted into the Church by baptism on any other ground than that they belonged to the body of Christ before they were born. (Antidote to the Council of Trend) *Tracts III:275*.

Piety towards parents is the mother of all virtues. *Gen. 1:302*.

(On Ham) . . . in the hallowed sanctuary of God, among so small a number, one fiend was preserved. *Gen 1:302*. . . .

Every family of the pious ought to be a Church. *Gen. 1:455*.

Christian households . . . so many little churches. *Philipp. - Col. 230*.

Another example are some of the entries under Liberty.

Liberty . . . will be destructive to us, until God undertakes the care of us, and prepares and forms us, that we may bear his yoke . . . When we obey God, we possess true and real happiness. *Jer. IV:15*.

The liberty of believers in external things cannot be reduced to certain rules. *Inst. III:x.4*. . . .

God confers his blessings on us for the support of life, not for luxury. *Inst. III:xix.9*.

On Unity of the Church, the anthology notes, among others,

A departure from the Church is a renunciation of God and Christ . . . criminal dissension . . . Nor is it possible to imagine a more atrocious crime. *Inst. IV:i.10*

The Church . . . is the society of all the saints . . . spread over the whole world, and existing in all ages, yet bound together by one doctrine, and the one Spirit of Christ, cultivates and observes unity of faith and brotherly concord. (Calvin's Reply to Sadoleto) *Tracts 1:211,213*.

The unity of the Church, such as Paul describes it, we protest we hold sacred, and we denounce anathema against all who in any way violate it . . . A holy unity exists amongst us, when, consenting in pure doctrine, we are united in Christ alone. (The Necessity of Reforming the Church) *Tracts 1:214, 215*.

We ought . . . to beware lest the unity of the faith be destroyed, or the bond of charity broken, on account of outward ceremonies. *Syn. Gosp. 1:405*.

The range of topics covered is wide and listed in alphabetical order (from Adoption to Worship). As can be expected, there is a subjective element in the choice of both topics and passages quoted; but both the minister and the simplest student of Scripture will find much food for thought here.

One note of criticism: the references to Calvin's *Institutes* is done according to book, chapter, and section so that any edition can be used. Unfortunately, Calvin's commentaries and tracts are referenced according to the

Calvin Translation Society's edition of the previous century. This means that it may not be easy to find the passages in question using newer editions of Calvin which are already available (such as the New Testament commentaries) or are being made available (such as the Old Testament commentaries). In some instances, the chapter and verse reference is given, but this is not done consistently. Perhaps a future edition of this work can improve this feature.

This is a most worthwhile book. It makes important aspects of the thinking of Calvin available to a wide audience and it will also encourage one to go directly to his work for more on a particular subject. Heartily recommended!

As Christians Be Different!

The Banner of Truth has published two booklets that are very easy to read and are quite helpful for equipping oneself to be a Christian in a world of darkness and sin.

The first stresses the great significance of reading good Christian material. It is written by Sinclair B. Ferguson, Professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia and is entitled, *Read Any Good Books?* (22 pp., \$1.95 US). Ferguson correctly underlines the importance of reading books which help us to be Christians who measure up to the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:13). Through the reading of books we can sit under the ministry of Augustine or Calvin and if we give books as gifts, others can do the same.

Ferguson rightly stresses that we should read the great works and not go too quickly to abridgments.

Have you ever read the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, by John Calvin? Now, there is a work whose reputation and length sometimes frightens us off from even beginning it. But pick it up (especially in the visual more pleasant translation by Ford Lewis Battles) and you will find it far easier to read than you feared. It is far more heart-warming, far more instructive, far more Christian than you ever imagined! And worth a box full of recent paperbacks!

Ferguson goes on to stress reading according to a plan, selectively, a balanced variety of books. A suggested bibliography closes this useful booklet.


We are blessed with a variety of reading materials right from our own circles. Think about it. Are you reading enough good books? This booklet will help get you going.

In his *A Life of Principled Obedience* (22 pp., \$1.95 US), Dr. A.N. Martin, a Baptist minister, stresses the central place of obedience to the

Word of God in the life of a Christian. Not what man says, but what God says is decisive. After all God has chosen and destined His people "for obedience to Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 1:2). Without obedience, one cannot be a Christian (cf. 1 John 2:3, 4). Martin's booklet is essentially a running exposition of Psalm 119:57-60.

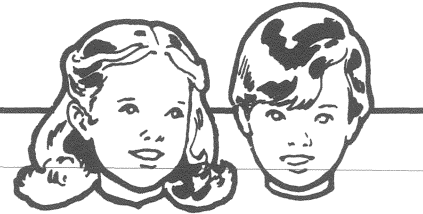
The Lord is my portion: I have said that I would observe Thy words. I entreated Thy favour with my whole heart: be merciful unto me accord-

ing to Thy word. I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto Thy testimonies. I made haste, and delayed not, to observe Thy commandments.

In explaining these verses in the light of the New Testament, he makes many sound and practical points which should be of great help, also for young people, in living a life of obedience to the Lord. He also warns of the consequences if our life is not one of submission to the Word. Heartily recommended. 

OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



Dear Busy Beavers,

"He gives snow like wool;
He scatters hoarfrost like ashes.
He casts forth His ice like morsels;
Who can stand before His cold?"

Psalm 147:16, 17

Who is this talking about? The LORD, of course. He is the One who gives snow, ice, and wind.

We might complain "It's so cold outside!" "Do I have to go outside for recess?"

But, let's remember, the LORD is making our weather. This is awesome, isn't it?

Our God can actually make all those tiny, beautiful snowflakes! He is the One who makes the wind roar!

This God also takes care of us. He makes sure that **you** have what you need everyday.

Most of all, He has promised us that our sins are forgiven by Jesus Christ. He is our Father! Isn't that wonderful?

So, let's show how glad we are. In whatever we do, let the Lord see our **thankfulness**.

Quiz Time!

Men of the Bible

1. Man healed of leprosy (2 Kings 5) _____
2. Name for Thomas (John 20:24) _____
3. Son of Eshek (1 Chronicles 8:39) _____
4. A deacon must be _____ (1 Timothy 3:10)
5. Prime Minister for King Ahasuerus (Esther 3:1) _____
6. One of David's soldiers (Hint: This word starts with the letter S) (1 Chronicles 11:44) _____
7. Men who say there is no resurrection (Acts 23:8) _____
8. Surname of John (Acts 12:12) _____
9. Titus' nationality (Galatians 2:3) _____
10. Old Testament man of God (2 Kings 2:19) _____

NUMBER SEARCH

by Busy Beaver Tracy Breukelman

Find these numbers!

1856	1881	1781
1754	1941	2134
1681	5123	5611
1990	1246	

1	9	0	5	8	1	1	2	3	
6	5	8	1	3	4	6	7	3	5
7	6	9	8	7	1	8	8	1	9
2	1	7	5	4	6	1	1	6	5
5	2	1	9	6	8	9	4	6	9
3	4	1	4	4	3	1	2	2	4
4	6	0	9	3	2	1	5	2	3

FIGURE OUT THE MESSAGE!

by Busy Beaver Deanna Wierenga

2 Ys U R	
2 Ys U B	U R 2 nice
1 C U R	2 B 4-gotten!
2 Ys 4 me.	

ATTENTION BAKERS!

Busy Beaver Allison Vanderveen sent in this delicious recipe to share with all of you.

Why don't you try this at home (after asking your Mom's permission!)

Chocolate Drops

2 cups white sugar	1/2 tsp. vanilla
1/2 cup cocoa	1/4 cup margarine
1/2 cup milk	

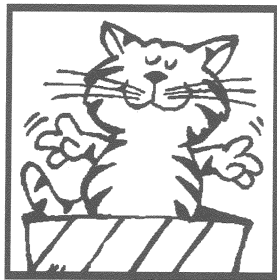
Bring these to a boil, and stir for 1 minute. Remove from heat and add:

3 cups oatmeal
1/2 cup peanut butter
1/2 tsp. vanilla

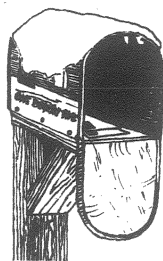
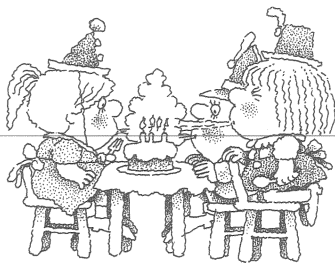
Mix well.
Drop by teaspoonfuls on waxed paper.
Cool.
ENJOY!

MARCH BIRTHDAYS!

I hope you all have a very Happy Birthday with your friends and family.



Brian Dykstra	March 2
Jessica Bos	3
Jennifer Hoogerdijk	4
Andrew Bos	8
Lisa VanRaalte	8
Meghan Ludwig	9
Melanie Muis	10
Janina Veldman	10
Julie Bratcher	11
Sherri Malda	12
John Boerema	13
Monica Dalhuisen	14
Linda Schouten	20
Rebecca Stel	21
Jeffrey Vandergaag	22
Suzanne Schouten	26
Elisa Vandergaag	27
Erika Hopman	30



FROM THE MAILBOX

Lots of letters this time!

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club *Lisa VanRaalte!* I think you really enjoy having a niece, and being able to see her baptism! Hope to hear from you soon, Lisa.

Welcome to the Club, too, *Cynthia Vanleeuwen.* What do you draw pictures of, Cynthia? Maybe you could send one with your next letter. Bye Cynthia.

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Michelle Linde.* Do you enjoy playing with your brothers? I hope to hear from you soon, Michelle.

A big welcome to you too, *Lynette DeHaas.* Thank you for the Christmas card. Bye Lynette.

Welcome to the Club, too, *Florence Bouma.* Did you eat your gingerbread house? What did you make the stained glass window from? Your little brother is good at printing! Hope to hear from you soon, Florence.

Welcome to the Club, too *Justin Broekema!* What kind of computer games do you like to play? Do you enjoy playing the piano? Bye, Justin.

A big welcome to you too, *Erica Broekema.* It's good to hear that you enjoy your teacher. Thanks for the nice draw-

ing and decorations on your letter. Hope to hear from you soon, Erica.

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *John Boerema.* Do you like grade one? Writing letters is good practice for your printing, isn't it? Thanks for the picture, John. Bye.

Hello, *Allison Vanderveen.* Welcome to the Club! Could you please send me a letter with your birthday and age? Hope to hear from you soon.

Hi, *Heather Muis.* Thank you for the picture you sent in. Hope to hear from you soon. Bye.

Hi, *Harold Sikkema.* Thank you, too, for the picture you sent in for the contest. It was good thinking to send in a black and white picture. Bye, Harold.

Hi, *Deanna Wierenga.* I see you had a very exciting Christmas holiday, going to the airport, and the mall (even though you had to wake up at 4:00 a.m.)! Bye!

Hello, *Colette VanderBos.* It's good to hear that you enjoy doing the activities in the Busy Beaver column, and what the other kids put in. Thank you, Colette. Bye

Hello, *Candace Schuurman.* It's exciting to make a new friend, isn't it? I hope you get along well with Rebecca. Thanks for the beautiful paper doll. When is your birthday? Bye Candace.

Hi, *Jaclyn DeHaas.* Thanks for all the puzzles you sent in. I'm sure the other Busy Beavers will enjoy doing them.

Hello, *Francine VanWoudenberg.* Thanks for your nice letter and card. It must be interesting to have so many pets. I think you must work pretty hard in school! Keep it up, Francine.

Hello, *Tanya DeHaas.* You've been busy in the Christmas holidays. Thank you for the card and finished quiz you sent. Thank you Tanya, Bye!

Hello, *Jolene Lootens.* How are you? I don't have your address. Could you please send it to me? Thanks. Bye.

Thanks for all your letters.

I really enjoy reading them.
Bye!

Love to you all.
Aunt Betty



10. Elisha
9. Creek
8. Mark
7. Sadducees
6. Shama

5. Haman
4. blameless
3. Ulam
2. Twin
1. Naaman

Bible Quiz Answers

Aunt Betty
c/o The Busy Beaver Club
Premier Printing Ltd.
One Beghin Avenue
Winnipeg, MB
R2J 3X5