

Clarion

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Reformed Apologetics

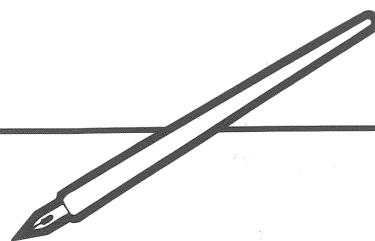


Paul preaching at Athens

Numbers

10:1-10

By J. Geertsema



Toward only one Worship Service?

It is a general rule that larger, more liberal churches have only one worship service per Sunday. In contrast, the Church Order of Reformed churches stipulates that there shall be (at least) two worship services every Sunday. However, also among the Reformed, there is a growing trend of people attending and consistories calling together only one service. One example of this trend is a decision of this year's CRC Synod. Another example is found in a local congregation in the federation of the Netherlands Reformed churches in the Netherlands.

A CRC synod decision

In the June 21, 1995, "News Release" of the *United Reformed News Service*, Darrell Todd Maurina presented the following information about the CRC synod's decision regarding the second worship service.

Synod voted this evening to change a 376-year-old practice of requiring churches to have two service on Sunday. The requirement, dating back to the 1619 Synod of Dort which required ministers in the Dutch Reformed state church to conduct evening services even if only their own families attended, has fallen into widespread neglect in many Christian Reformed congregations despite a church order mandate that "the congregation shall assemble for worship at least twice on the Lord's Day to hear God's Word, to receive the sacraments, to engage in praise and prayer, and to present gifts of gratitude."

This year's synod proposed a church order change that the congregation must "assemble for worship ordinarily twice" on the Lord's Day. . . .

"This report [from the synodical advisory committee with the proposed change, J.G.] is submitted in an attempt to address reality," said [the] advisory committee reporter. . . .

[One of the opposing delegates said:] "The last thing we need in the church order is something that undermines us, and that is what this does." . . .

The change in the church order article is the insertion of the word "ordinarily." This word is also used in Article 54 of the CRC's church order in relation to the preaching of a sermon on the Catechism: "At one of the services, each Lord's Day, the minister shall ordinarily preach the Word as summarized in the Heidelberg Catechism." Article 54 makes clear that "ordinarily" means as a rule, but not as an iron rule. Exceptions can be made.

The CRC synodical advisory committee proposed the change in the church order out of a desire to "address reality." With respect to Article 54, it appears to be "reality" that many CRC congregations practically take the word "ordinarily" to mean that one does not have to maintain this rule of preaching the Word as summarized in the Catechism at all. Does this "reality" mean that the practice of many CRC mem-

bers is to attend only one service on a Sunday, not just once in a while but as a rule? The reason for the change ("to address reality") seems to point in this direction.

A consistorial enquiry in a (Dutch) Netherlands Reformed congregation

The consistory of the Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerk at Oegstgeest held an inquiry concerning the practice and desires of the members of the congregation regarding the practice of calling together and attending two services. A report about the results of this inquiry appeared in *Nederlands Dagblad* of July 4, 1995. We read this:

A majority of the Netherlands Reformed people who worship in Oegstgeest prefers one service on Sundays. . . . The congregation is discussing how they "could organize the church services in the most valuable manner." Only 28 percent prefers two services on a Sunday; 55 percent favours one service, and this on the Sunday morning; 8 percent likes one service but in the afternoon, and 5 percent prefers one service alternating between the morning and the afternoon.

What is the present practice of these church goers? The result of the inquiry tells us that 30 percent indicate attendance twice per Sunday, 59 percent only once, and 11 percent less than once every Sunday. Of those members who do go twice 50 percent views two services as ideal and 34 percent considers once per Sunday as the ideal. Of those who go only once or less every Sunday 75 percent considers once as ideal and 15 percent still is of the opinion that twice would be ideal. . . .

The consistory is busy considering the data.

In the Netherlands Reformed Churches it is custom to have two worship services. It says in this federation's Accord of Ecclesiastical Cooperation (Kerkelijk Samenleven), "The consistories shall call the congregation together ordinarily twice on the Day of the Lord." Together with some other [local] churches, the church at Oegstgeest has not signed this Accord. This was not strictly required. The introduction of this Accord states, "The churches decide that accepting or not-accepting the Ecclesiastical Accord cannot be allowed to be the cause of a separation or alienation between churches that are one in faith and in confession."

The sad reality in many a CRC congregation appears to be the same as in this local church in the Netherlands Reformed federation.

I call the attention of the readers to this sad matter not in order to point an accusing finger to others but to use this as a warning. A decline in faithful attendance of two worship services easily goes together with a decline in faithfulness to the Lord's Word and a decline in membership. Why is this so?

The seriousness of the matter

Without analyzing the situation in either the CRC or in Oegstgeest, one can ask different questions about the decline of the second service. Why has it happened? Is it there still a faithful and powerful preaching of God's Word from Sunday to Sunday? Do these churches still consistently hear, "Thus says the Lord"? Is clear to them that what is preached does come from the very text of God's Word? If preaching is lacking in authority and fidelity to Scripture, one can expect a decline in attendance.

There is also the possibility that while the preaching in a church is faithful and clear, the people, in unfaithfulness, no longer desire the good food of God's Word. A third possibility is that faithfulness is lacking with both the preacher and the congregation. In this case, we can refer to the picture of God's people that Jeremiah paints before our eyes (5:31): "An appalling and horrible thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule at their direction; *my people love to have it so*" [emphasis added]. The leaders can just do what they want because the people like it that way. The people are no longer called to repent from their sins, but can freely follow their own direction in life. The words of the LORD in Jer. 5 are concluded with a question: "But what will you do when the end comes?"

However, rather than analyzing this problem of a declining church attendance in terms of preaching and the response to preaching, I would like to approach it from the angle of God's blessing. "Neglecting to meet together" with the congregation while "the Day [is] drawing near" (Heb.10:25) results in missing God's blessing in one's life. Even worse, neglect of worship brings down God's wrath. "For if we sin deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there remains . . . a fearful prospect of judgment (Heb.10:26-27).

The question is often asked: where does it say in the Bible that we have to go twice to church on Sunday? This is a wrong question. God does not give us any legitimate ground for this question in His Word. Moreover, we could pose a few similar questions. For example, where does God say in His Word that we have to go only once per Sunday to worship Him and to receive His blessing, when the consistory calls us twice? Where does God tell us in His Word that we have to worship Him three times or four times? To all these questions, Scripture gives no answer. It is therefore evident that we have to ask

different questions. One of these different questions is: What does God promise in the worship service? For one thing, He promises and gives there His blessing.

To avoid misunderstanding, it needs to be said that we speak here about wilful neglect of meeting together. There are situations of persecution or illness, or of having to take care of the sick. In such cases one has a legitimate reason for not meeting with God in worship together with His people.

God's blessing disappears

In and through the worship services, God blesses His people. When Christ sent His disciples as apostles to proclaim the gospel of the kingdom, He told them to say first: "Peace for this house." In doing so, the disciples placed the peace of God's kingdom on that house. For Christ added the promise, "And if there is a son of peace there, your peace [that is, the peace of Christ that you bring with you] shall rest upon him." Christ also added the covenant threat: "But if not, your peace shall return to you" (Luke 10:5-6).

When Paul greets congregations at the beginning of his letters, he places this same apostolic peace upon them. He says: "Grace and peace for you from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." The church has placed these

apostolic words at the beginning of the worship services. This means that at the beginning of these worship services, God Himself places His blessing of "grace and peace" upon the congregation.

As Christ says, however, this grace and peace will remain upon the congregation only on the condition that those present are "sons of peace." "Sons of peace" are people who eagerly listen to the message of grace and peace as revealed in God's Word. God's grace and peace are not received automatically, but are realised in the way of faith. Faith is shown in listening to and living by the Word of God as proclaimed.

If there is no son of peace, nobody who is eager to receive the message of grace and peace, this grace and peace return to the Lord and disappear out of the life of such people. Wilful neglect of worship means that a person will miss the blessing that God gives through the proclamation of grace and peace in the meeting with His people. This is the seriousness of the matter. Instead of God's covenant blessing comes God's covenant wrath. That is the end of which Jeremiah speaks.

May the Lord give this insight of faith to us and to the CRC as well as in the Netherlands, and to all who call themselves by the name of Christ. **C**



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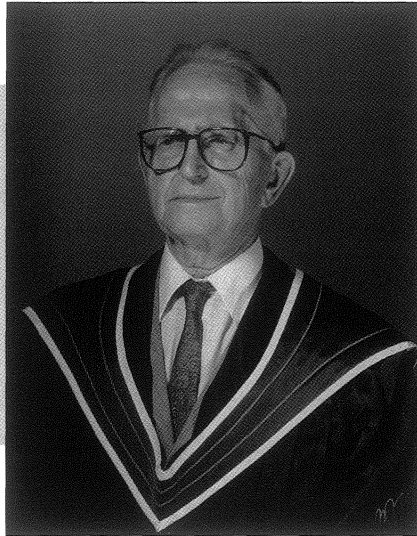
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~ *In Memoriam* ~

Rev. G. Van Dooren, Minister of the Divine Word

13 August 1911 ~ 5 September 1995



by C. Van Dam

Every death of a child of God is a momentous historic occasion and it gives reason to proclaim God's glory and salvation. After all, "such a death puts an end to sin and is an entrance into eternal life" (Heid. Cat., Ans. 42). Rev. Van Dooren's death is notable also in another way. With his being taken to glory, one of the last of the very first immigrant ministers has finished his earthly service. Indeed, he was the last one in Ontario and active to the very end. This too calls for reflection and praise to God.

Gilbert Van Dooren was born in Kampen on August 13, 1911, the eldest son in the home of a shoemaker who was known above all as a highly respected elder in the church community. It is striking that the house of his birth was opposite the Theological College of the Reformed Churches where he would later study. The young Van Dooren received his entire education leading up to ordination

as minister of the gospel in Kampen. At the Theological College he studied under Professors H. Bouwman, S. Greijdanus, T. Hoekstra, A.G. Honig and J. Ridderbos. After the death of the dogmatician, Dr. A.G. Honig, student Van Dooren became the first student to be examined by Dr. Honig's successor, Dr. K. Schilder. That was in October 1935, the year in which his theological study was finished. Although there were more candidates than calling churches, candidate Van Dooren received a call from Mussel in a matter of weeks and he accepted it. After three years in Mussel, the young minister's family moved to Wezep where he experienced the ecclesiastical liberation. It was a struggle that made a deep impact on him and enriched his understanding of God's covenant. The flesh and blood story of what happened then, Rev. Van Dooren has published nine years ago in book

form, with the telling title . . . *And We Escaped*. After Wezep came Enschede where he ministered from 1946 until the move to Canada early in 1954. First Orangeville and then Burlington became his home. In spite of the very heavy pastoral load of his large congregation and his work for the federation, Rev. Van Dooren managed to continue his formal studies and received the Master of Theology degree from Knox College in Toronto in 1963. His thesis was a dogmatic study on the origin of the concept of the invisible church. He retired from the active ministry in 1977, but he still continued to preach and do pastoral work.

The bare biographical facts are easy enough to recount. But how does one go further to speak properly of this servant of God with gratitude to his sender? Having been privileged to have known Rev. Van Dooren for forty years, it is difficult to focus quickly. If I

may speak a personal word, he influenced me as no other minister has. In a real sense, he was to me a spiritual father. His sermons, catechism instruction and also his teaching at the Theological College have literally molded me in many important ways. He remained my pastor, but we also became colleagues and friends.

If we may characterize Rev. Van Dooren with one word then it must be said that he was in the first place a pastor and teacher with a deep love for the gospel and the sheep entrusted to him. Preaching and visiting the flock was his life! The Sunday was the highlight of the week when the results of his study and reflection of the Word could be proclaimed to the congregation. He had also discovered the joy of covenantal redemptive historical preaching. This gave his sermons depth, unity and direction and so made them relatively easy to follow. As a serious student of Scripture, Rev. Van Dooren had contributed to a first volume of redemptive historical studies on the Old Testament, edited by I. De Wolff, before his immigration to Canada. He was a powerful preacher especially in his prime. I still remember in considerable detail, sermons I heard in my youth. The admonitions could make you tremble, but he always reminded us of the glorious promises of our gracious God and Father. He preached the glad tidings of salvation! We left church with joy in our hearts and with a firm resolve to serve this our God who had been pictured before us with renewed zeal in gratitude for His redemption. Rev. Van Dooren also knew the congregation to whom he preached very well. He said more than once, as lecturer at the Theological College, that a minister must carry the congregation on his heart as the high priest in Israel carried the breastpiece with the twelve tribes represented in the twelve gems. Rev. Van Dooren's ministry was priestly. How he knew his flock. He will

be missed by many even now who regularly received visits from him right up to the end. Rev. Van Dooren know what it meant to be in the service of God and to be messenger of that glorious Word in the homes and on the pulpit. He loved to preach and he did it even this past Sunday. The Lord granted his wish to be able to preach to the end.

In the second place, Rev. Van Dooren also meant much for the young federation of the Canadian Reformed churches. He was a real "church man." He loved the churches and gave all his energies for them. How he worked to fill the *Canadian Reformed Magazine* as editor from 1954 to 1966. It was a weekly in those days! Along with others he laboured for a responsible *Book of Praise* as a deputy since 1954. What joy he must have experienced when the first complete edition was published in 1972. He loved music and the Psalms in particular. He also contributed to the church federation in other ways. For example, he was appointed convener of the Committee for Contact with the Christian Reformed Church in 1965, a position he held for the life of the committee (to 1971). When the Synod of Orangeville decided to establish the Theological College and he was appointed to be lecturer in diaconology, he accepted wholeheartedly, although he had had misgivings about this course of action before the final decision was made. He even served the Theological College until the age of 74. His book, *The Beauty of the Reformed Liturgy*, is a fruit of his labours. As one concerned for the well-being of the churches he also encouraged evangelism. A healthy church evangelizes. One's faith has to be lived. This concern was also expressed in his publication *Get Out! A Guideline for Reformed Congregational Evangelism*.

Finally, Rev. Van Dooren was also a family man who cherished his wife and children. In all his work as shepherd of the flock and as

preacher, he enjoyed and boasted of the tremendous support of his dear wife. Mrs. Van Dooren was the model he used when he spoke to students about "the minister's wife" and he treasured her deeply as helpmeet in the fullest sense of the term. The last number of years the roles were somewhat reversed and he had the opportunity to minister to her special needs in an encouraging and helpful way. The last while he did not feel well and he knew that the end of his earthly life could come anytime. He said more than once to his children "Take care of mother!" That same ministering care was also evident in his attention for the lives of his children. He rejoiced when they rejoiced and he also suffered and grieved with them when they experienced trouble and anguish.

Our Lord and Saviour has called our brother and His servant away from this earthly life. His task was done. To the end he stood in the middle of life and knew of power of evil and the seduction of the spirits of our time. That is why he was in the process of preparing a sermon on Gen. 11:6 which speaks of the evil that men united in sin are able to do. Last Tuesday he came to the Theological College to study this passage. It was his farewell to the College community.

The last time we spoke together he talked about what it means to die as a Christian. He touched on a theme that was dear to him. Life is a pilgrimage. How often he told the sick that as he accompanied them in the process of dying. Now he is no more with us. He is with His Lord and Saviour. His earthly course is finished. Our pilgrimage continues (cf. Heb. 11:13-16; 1 Pet 2:11). The promised land of a new heaven and a new earth beckons (cf. 2 Pet 3:13). May our gracious heavenly Father comfort Mrs. Van Dooren and the family. We thank our God for His gifts in Rev. Van Dooren to the congregation in Burlington and the churches in common. Praise and honour be to Him alone! **C**

Meditation

By G.Ph. van Popta

Read Acts 15:1-11

“ . . . why do you put . . . a yoke upon the neck of the disciples. . . ?”

CUSTOMS

Some self-appointed Jewish teachers from Jerusalem went to Antioch. They taught the Gentile brothers there that unless they were circumcised according to the “custom of Moses,” they could not be saved.

The law of Moses nowhere required Gentile converts to the Christian faith to be circumcised. These Jews simply assumed that they had to be. They reasoned that if Gentiles were going to be members of the church of God, equal with Jewish Christians, they would have to be circumcised. In order to be grafted into the congregation in the Old Testament, a man had to be circumcised (see Gen. 17:11ff; Ex. 12:44,48). These men from Judea figured this must still apply for the New Testament congregation.

Paul and Barnabas, who were working in Antioch then, got into quite a debate with these Jewish believers. They could not resolve the question so they decided to travel to Jerusalem to lay the matter before the council of apostles and elders.

Paul and Barnabas told the council all that God had done through them among the Gentiles. But some believers who were still card-carrying members of the Pharisee party said: “It is necessary to circumcise them.”

Peter, Paul and Barnabas debated strenuously and convincingly that Jesus Christ had done away with the Jew-Gentile distinction of the old covenant by His work. Gentiles do not become Jews when they embrace the faith. Nor do Jews become Gentiles. Rather, both become Christians. The early church spoke of “the third race.” There used to be two races: Jews and Gentiles. Now there is a third: Christians made up of both Jews and Gentiles. As Paul would write to the Ephesians: Christ has made both Jews and Gentiles “. . . one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two . . .” (Eph. 2:14,15).

Christians are not circumcised; they are baptized. Circumcision involved the shedding of blood. Christ put an end to all shedding of blood by His perfect and final sacrifice on the cross. To insist upon circumcision for religious reasons is to misunderstand the sacrifice of Christ. The blood of Christ saves us from sin. Jesus Christ commanded the apostles to baptize with water as a sign of this cleansing.

The Christian Pharisees were needlessly placing a yoke upon the Gentile Christians, one which God did not require. The apostles and elders at Jerusalem agreed that Peter, Paul and Barnabas were right and issued a statement to that effect. The Gentile believers were saved from having to conform to someone else’s custom.

Sadly, some of the Jewish believers who insisted that their customs be maintained did not accept the council’s judgment. They formed a group which troubled the church and often made Paul’s life miserable by continuing to insist that Christians maintain the old Jewish customs.

We all have customs. They are part of the baggage we carry through life. Many of the things we do, we do without thinking. When asked why we do a certain thing, often we cannot give a solid reason because “it’s just a custom.” There is nothing wrong with customs. If we had no customs, our lives would be much less orderly and disciplined. Customs can be good.

However, customs become deadly if we make them the standard for judging others. How often do we not elevate our customs to the level of law? We do this in our personal, family and ecclesiastical life. We want to see others become like us.

How do we judge others? Do we tell them to become like us? Or do we urge them to conform to the Word of God?

What’s Inside

In the lead editorial, Prof. J. Geertsema addresses the growing trend among churches which call themselves Reformed to do away with the Reformation custom of having two worship services on the Lord’s day. One of the strengths of Reformed churches is the annual cycle of preaching the Word of God as it has been summarized in the catechism. Why would any church compromise this strength?

Mr. Wes Bredenhof begins a three part series on Reformed Apologetics – sort of a primer on the subject. We hope you enjoy it and learn something as well.

These pages also include updates on life in our two federations of churches, decisions of various ecclesiastical assemblies, and the continuing struggle for the Reformed faith in the Middle East.

Finally, several readers express their opinions on a few matters.

GvP

Reformed Apologetics – An Introduction

By Wes Bredenhof

Part One of the modified text of a speech given at the CRUCS Retreat at Evans Lake, BC, February 24, 1995.

Whenever apologetics is mentioned there are always some people who are a little confused. This usually goes for Christians as well as for unbelievers. The word usually brings thoughts of making apologies in the sense of making amends for some wrong. You need to say sorry to someone. You apologize. But that's not what apologetics is about. We're not saying sorry when we apologize for the Christian faith. So how can apologetics be defined?

There are many different definitions for the term, but they usually focus around the idea of making a defense for the faith. The late Dr. Cornelius VanTil, professor of apologetics and systematic theology at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, gave a now commonly heard Reformed definition. He said that "Apologetics is the vindication of the Christian philosophy of life against the various forms of the non-Christian philosophy of life."¹ This is an excellent basic definition. VanTil defines apologetics in terms of what it seeks to accomplish, namely the reasoned defense of the Christian faith against the attacks of the kingdom of darkness.

Other scholars have also defined apologetics in terms of the tasks that it should do. John Frame, another Westminster theologian, writes that apologetics has three functions:

1. Apologetics as proof: presenting a rational basis for faith or proving Christianity to be true.
2. Apologetics as defense: answering the objections of unbelief.
3. Apologetics as offense: attacking the foolishness of unbelieving thought.²

The third point given by Frame deserves more emphasis. More than just a defense, apologetics is also a tool by which we may attack the intellectual bastions of Satan. As Christian soldiers, we may use the sword with which we've been provided, namely, the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. In a short while the role which this

sword, the Bible, plays in apologetics will be examined.

Is apologetics biblical?

First, however, we should examine how apologetics is mentioned in the Bible and also look at the question of whether or not apologetics is actually biblical. The first thing that should be noted here is that the very word "apologetics" is derived from the Greek word "apologia." It basically means a reasoned defense. The verb that comes from this word means to make a rational defense for something. In Acts 26:1, when Paul is making his defense before King Agrippa, he is said to be "apologizing" or doing apologetics. Earlier in Acts 22:1, Paul makes his "apologia," his defense, before all the people in Jerusalem after his arrest and imprisonment. In 1 Corinthians 9:3, Paul writes that "This is my defense [apologia] to those who would examine me." And in 2 Timothy 4:16, he refers to an earlier defense that he had to make. In each of these examples, it becomes clear that Paul is making a reasoned defense of the Christian faith. It can be seen, then, that there is a biblical basis for the study of apologetics. Because of its strong emphasis on contact with unbelievers through mission work and evangelism, the New Testament strongly encourages Christians to take up their apologetical task.

This brings us to the most important verse in the Bible dealing with apologetics, 1 Peter 3:15: . . . *but in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to make a defense [apologia] to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is within you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence.* This verse clearly explains that we are to be prepared always to defend our faith. But how are we to defend this faith? How are we to approach our task as apologists?

The first, and perhaps most obvious item to note is that apologetics must be rooted and firmly grounded in the Bible, for only Scripture can provide us with the roots and direction we need to go about our apologetical task. Some peo-

ple might argue that the Bible is the wrong starting place for apologetics.³ They believe that human reason ought to be the foundation. They will say that the Bible must be defended from reason and not the other way around. This kind of a situation results in the house of apologetics bending underneath the weight of Scripture. The house cannot support the Bible; it must be the other way around. The Bible must be the starting place for a defense of our faith, as well as often the object of our defense.

We are not saying, of course, that apologetics consists merely in providing unbelievers with quotes from the Bible. When we say that the Bible is the foundation for apologetics, we mean that God's Word determines our methodology, the way that we approach our apologetical task. The Bible tells us that we are to be apologists, and it also tells us how to go about doing apologetics.

Reasons for apologetics

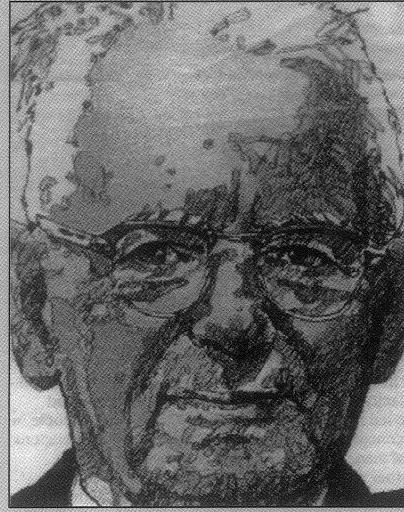
Scripture also tells us why we should do apologetics and why this work is important. The primary reason for doing apologetics is quite straight-forward and maybe obvious: it is for the glory of God. Apologetics is far deeper than just an intellectual exercise of rhetorical abilities. If we are doing apologetics because we love arguing, we are in it for the wrong reason. God demands that He be glorified in all we do, and that includes the task of apologetics.

Apologetics also provides reassurance for our own faith. As we defend our faith, we come to realize how strong the Christian position truly is. We recognize that Christianity isn't mere superstition. Therefore, apologetics will often have more benefit for the apologist than for the unbeliever.

Most importantly of all, we must recall the imperative of 1 Peter 3:15. Peter is telling each and every one of us to be apologists – without exception. Regardless of whether we're theologians, history students, engineers, mechanics, or housewives, apologetics is our duty. It's a scriptural imperative that not one of us can ignore.



◀ Calvin, J.



Dr. Cornelius Van Til ▶

The significance of this imperative becomes even more clear when we consider the relationship between apologetics and evangelism. We're all called to be evangelists as well, not hiding our light under bushels but shining forth before all men. The Great Commission which Christ gave in Matthew 28:19-20 means that the preaching of the gospel through evangelism is to be the concern of us all. Where does apologetics come into this evangelistic task? Quite simply, evangelism is the "what" and apologetics is the "why." We can proclaim the gospel, but quite often we have to give a reason for the hope that is within us – that's the job of apologetics. Similarly, apologetics must always have evangelism as its goal. The goal must be the glory of God through the proclamation of the gospel. If this isn't done, then the apologist is working in vain.

Objections to apologetics

Why do some Reformed people argue against apologetics as a theological discipline? Most of the time it seems that the objectors view faith as something rationally indefensible.⁴ "Credo quia absurdum est" ("I believe because it is absurd") seems to be their way of thinking. This has apparently been the position of not a few Reformed people. It would appear that Reformed people of the Dutch tradition have abandoned apologetics as a theological discipline because of the teachings of Abraham Kuyper, the famous Dutch statesman and theologian.⁵ This alleged influence of Kuyper is not a totally accurate assessment, though Kuyper was occa-

sionally accused of leaning towards mysticism.⁶ The accusation that Kuyper was against apologetics arose partially because Kuyper refused to grant the idea of neutrality in apologetics. However, he did not totally oppose apologetics – just apologetics of a certain type, the only type around at his time.⁷

The apologetical system with which Kuyper was familiar led him to conclude that reasoning with an unbeliever is a useless activity because of the effects of sin upon the intellect.⁸ He doesn't seem to have come with an alternative, short of an experiential view, with the result that most Reformed people went their merry way not sure about what to do when it comes to apologetics. Some became fideists, meaning they believed that faith is indefensible and comes primarily from an internal religious experience.⁹ Some have taken over the very apologetical system which Kuyper opposed as Arminian and unscriptural. Most people have simply chosen to be ignorant of the subject. We've been slothful in fulfilling our evangelistic task and this has carried over into apologetics as well. If we don't do evangelism, we have no need for apologetics. We can go our way with our heads in the sand, not being concerned with such "trivial" things as the Great Commission. Thankfully this attitude is changing and evangelism is receiving much more emphasis.

That a Dutchman should come up with the solution to somewhat of a Dutch problem is almost ironic. That Dutchman was Cornelius VanTil (1895-1987). VanTil was born in the Netherlands and moved to the United States

at a very young age. He grew up in the Christian Reformed Church, went to Calvin College and Seminary, and was ordained in 1927 in the CRC. He also received his Ph.D. from Princeton, where he eventually taught apologetics for one year. VanTil later left the CRC and joined the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, becoming professor of apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary, where he taught until his retirement at the age of eighty in 1975. It was at Westminster that VanTil took on a formidable task – extracting what was rotten in Christian apologetics, replacing what was missing, and revising what was inconsistent.

To understand what VanTil was up against we have to look back through history at the development of apologetics. I'm going to make this as brief as I possibly can – a whirlwind tour of the history of Christian apologetics, if you like.

Whirlwind tour of apologetics

To be really thorough, we would have to begin with the early church, since many apologetical works were written by the early Church Fathers. For the most part, however, these do not deal with apologetics in the technical sense. For that reason it would be most prudent to begin this brief overview with the Roman Catholics before the Reformation. Theology in the Roman Catholic Church was heavily influenced by Greek philosophy. The study and practice of apologetics is one place where this influence is very recognizable. In fact, the very basis for Roman Catholic apologetics was the works of Aristotle. They relied on his views of human nature and reason rather than on the teachings of Scripture. Aristotle placed man's reason on a pedestal, stressing the primacy of the intellect. Of course, this fit in quite nicely with the teachings of the Roman Catholic religion. Over the centuries, Romish writers began to embrace Aristotle, whom they lovingly referred to simply as "the Philosopher." The Roman Catholic appreciation of Aristotle is particularly evident in the apologetics of Thomas Aquinas, who synthesized Aristotelian philosophy with Augustinian theology. His book *Summa Contra Gentiles* [The Main Point Against the Gentiles] was an apologetical work which taught that Christian doctrines must be accepted by faith, but they can be defended and explained by reason. This approach looks good at first glance, but a deeper look at Aquinas shows that he had a very perverted sense of the effects of sin on the rational mind.

This perversion was caused by the Romish doctrine of Man, based mostly again on the teachings of Aristotle. Dr. VanTil explains this teaching very well in his book *The Defense of the Faith*:

According to this [Roman-Catholic] view the disturbance [of sin] is endemic to human nature [it's always found there] because man is made up, in part, of non-rational elements. To the extent that man consists of intellect he does not and cannot sin. The "disturbance" in man's make-up is not due primarily to any fault of his own. It is basically due to "God" who "made" him.¹⁰

In other words, our intellects are not affected by the fall into sin. Therefore, the unbeliever should be approached on the common ground of reason. Both believer and unbeliever share a reasoning mind unaffected by sin. If the unbeliever hears the arguments and does not ignore the evidence for Christianity, he should become a Christian – because he has a rational mind. This is the traditional Roman Catholic approach to apologetics.

Of course, the Reformation changed theology in many respects. However, the Reformers such as Calvin and Luther did not really approach apologetics as a discipline in the same way as Aquinas.

Perhaps one of the reasons for this was that they were so busy with other things. Still, many of the works of the Reformers, including Calvin's *Institutes*, have been classified as apologetical, and indeed some of them do include proofs for the existence of God and other apologetical material.¹¹ We may also consider that the *Institutes* were written as an apology for the Reformed church to the king of France. In the *Institutes* and elsewhere, Calvin clearly rejects the methods of Aquinas and uses a method very similar to that later employed by VanTil.¹² Yet, the intended audience for this material consisted of believers rather than unbelievers. The Reformers, then, did not really deal with apologetics in the technical sense. However, they did provide important critiques of the Roman Catholic and Aristotelian philosophies which had dominated the study and practice of apologetics up to this point in time.

Following the period of the Reformation, apologetics lay nearly dormant for a couple hundred years. Not until the Enlightenment and the rise of Deist thought (which propounded the idea that God was just a clock-maker and was not really involved with the world) was apologetics once again given serious attention. In 1736, Joseph Butler,

an Anglican Bishop, published his famous book *The Analogy of Religion*. This work was a response to the teachings of the Deists. Butler tried to show that there are no sound objections to the Christian religion and that all evidence points to the truth of Christianity. Men ought not to reject Christianity because there is an abundance of evidence which is so clear to the man who doesn't ignore it.¹³ Butler took over a large part of the Roman Catholic methodology and argued for the supremacy of reason. He wanted to demonstrate the truth of the Bible through facts, evidence, and logic, all the while presupposing man's free will and the consequent belief that "possibility" or "chance" is pre-eminent, even over God.¹⁴ Bishop Butler wanted to argue the truth of Christianity on the grounds of probability, using man's reasoning faculties.

Butler laid some more of the foundation for modern day Arminian-style apologetics which had already been partially laid by Aristotle and his Roman Catholic disciples. This modern-day system is also sometimes called Classical, Evidential, or Traditional apologetics, but it is anything but scripturally based. Similar to the Roman Catholic apologetical system in many ways,¹⁵ the Arminian apologetic discounts the effects of sin upon the mind and intellect. It neglects the biblical truth that a man cannot interpret the evidence properly when he is in complete bondage to sin.

This neglect was also noticed by Abraham Kuyper. Kuyper realized that if there is to be a Reformed view of apologetics, it must be grounded in Reformed principles. There can be no area of neutrality between the believer and the unbeliever. To put it in very strong terms, the unbeliever is, with his whole heart, soul, and mind, in covenant with Satan, the great deceiver. The believer is in covenant with the source of all truth, knowledge and reason. How can the believer then be on the same wavelength as the unbeliever? The two are separated by a huge chasm which only the Holy Spirit can bridge. This realization led Kuyper to state that contemporary apologetics was really quite useless.

At this point, Cornelius VanTil comes into the picture. Having studied at Princeton University, VanTil came into contact with all the different views of apologetics. He also encountered the teachings of Kuyper and several other Reformed theologians. VanTil took the teachings of Kuyper, Benjamin Warfield (a Reformed theologian at Princeton), Herman Bavinck (a famous

Dutch theologian) and John Calvin, and developed what we know today as Presuppositional or VanTilian apologetics. He took a hard look at the teachings of each of these men and drew out what was biblical, incorporating it into his apologetical system. In the next article, the preliminary considerations of this Reformed apologetical system will be outlined.

Wes Bredenhof is a student of history at the University of Alberta and a member of Providence Canadian Reformed Church, Edmonton.

Notes:

¹*Apologetics* (Class syllabus), Cornelius VanTil, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, PA, 1966, p.1

²*Apologetics to the Glory of God*, an Introduction, John M. Frame, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., Phillipsburg, New Jersey, 1994, p.2

³*Classical Apologetics, a Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics*, R.C. Sproul, et al., Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1984, p.149

⁴"It is interesting that VanTil, criticized in cosmological circles for being something of a rationalist, is also applauded in other circles for being opposed to the use of reason in religious matters." "Rationality and Scripture," John Frame, in the volume: *Rationality in the Calvinian Tradition*, Hendrik Hart et al. editors, University Press of America, Lanham, Maryland, 1983, p.315

⁵*Classical Readings in Christian Apologetics, A.D. 100-1800*, L. Russ Bush (ed.), Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1983, p.381

⁶*The Defense of the Faith*, Cornelius VanTil, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., Phillipsburg, New Jersey, 1955, p.260

⁷VanTil has pointed out Kuyper's inconsistency in his wholesale rejection of apologetics. On the one hand he rejects apologetics and on the other hand he utilizes it in many instances. Cf. *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Class Syllabus), Cornelius VanTil, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, PA, 1954

⁸*The Defense of the Faith*, p.265

⁹"Experientialism stresses inward religious experience as the foundation of all theology. Its tradition accents the paradoxical character of Christian teaching to the point that it asserts that Christian truth is not capable of rational analysis." "VanTil: The 100th Anniversary of Cornelius VanTil's Birthday," Joel R. Beeke, in *Christian Renewal*, March 20, 1995, pp.10-11

¹⁰*The Defense of the Faith*, p.74

¹¹*Classical Apologetics*, p.198 and p.202

¹²*Classical Readings in Christian Apologetics*, p.303

¹³*The Works of Joseph Butler, Vol.2, The Analogy of Religion* Natural and Revealed to the Constitution and Course of Nature, Joseph Butler, MacMillan and Co. Limited, London, 1900, p.149 and passim.

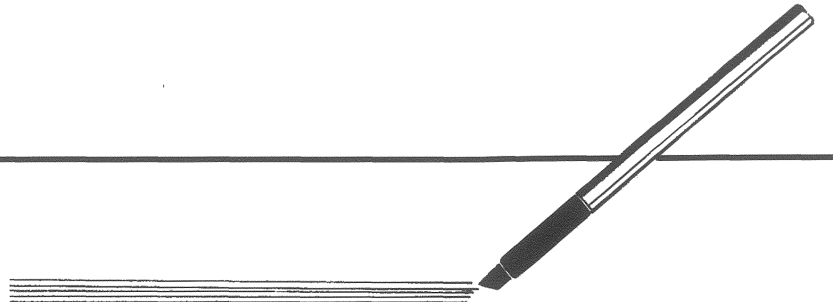
¹⁴*The Defense of the Faith*, p.242

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p.260



THE HI-LITER

By C. Van Spronsen



The Churches in Australia decided to expand their mission activities in Papua New Guinea (Port Moresby) by adding a missionary (ordained minister) to the present mission worker. "Unless we get our own trained workers in PNG we will never achieve the aim of training indigenous ministers and leaders." This would double their assessments.

In case we thought that assessments for mission were high in Canada, we read in the Church Bulletin of the Churches in the Albany region that the new assessment for the Australians is \$ 160.00 per communicant member!

The Deputies for the Ministry (Australia) are assisting br. Frank Dong to study for the ministry in Hamilton. Coming from Northern China, he was introduced to the Bible while studying at Harbin University. By God's providence he came into contact with the Churches in Western Australia. His desire is to return to China as a minister of the Word.

In Tasmania the Church of Launceston concluded concerning the establishing of a congregation in Hobart that "after 12 years of dedicated work in the area, there is still no likelihood of an independent congregation being established." The consistory therefore will no longer encourage members to move to the Hobart area: "The meetings on Sunday will lose the character of official worship services and the elders' responsibility for leading the services will be reduced." Disappointing, indeed, for those who persevered for so long.

Encouraged by the decision Synod '95 of the Canadian Churches re: Bible translation, the Church at Launceston, Tasmania will begin using the NIV for a trial period of six months beginning in August, as we read in their bulletin.

Rev. A. Veldman of Albany WA, who has been a minister for 20 years, will receive a three-month study leave. An opportunity to recharge the batteries!

Cand. J. Poppe accepted the call to the Church of West Albany, WA. It means that at present there is only one vacant church left within the bond of Australia, namely the church of Bedfordale.

In Burlington-West a decision was taken re: "Split or call." It was decided to proceed with calling a second minister. "While it is understood that the second minister will minister to those in the Flamborough area (outside of Waterdown), the exact boundaries of that area will be more clearly defined by September."

Rev. and Mrs. J. Mulder could celebrate their 40th Wedding and Ministerial Anniversary in July and Rev. and Mrs. D. DeJong their 35th. Congratulations with these milestones!

There are different ways of dealing with deficits. In one report, after informing the congregation of a deficit we read: "The committee is asked to come back to council with a recommendation for a replacement for the bookkeeper!"

What is obvious to some, apparently is not so to others. "For safety reasons we request that when you pick up your child from playgroup, you only drive your car through the gate if it's open." What else?

In Chatham the Home Mission Committee requested the use of the church parking lot for road hockey in order to invite neighbourhood children to participate. They also installed an answering service to answer calls that come to the church building and that at present remain unanswered.

In Hamilton the celebration of the Lord's Supper will be spread out over two morning services starting in September: 9:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m.

Belated congratulations to Rev. and Mrs. Cl. Stam on their 25th Wedding Anniversary of July 16th!

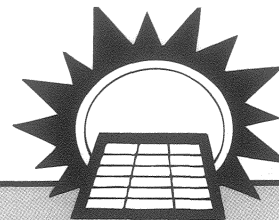
Still in Hamilton we read that gatherings would be organized for Arabic-speaking people in their area starting August 6. Several families and contacts through the Middle East Reformed Fellowship have moved into the area from the Middle East, making these gatherings a much-needed form of outreach and Christian help.

In Winnipeg there is talk of splitting or instituting another congregation. The consistory received a request by a number of brothers asking permission to investigate such a development. The financial aspect is receiving attention as well. "It was decided to place a collection box in the foyer of the church building for donations to future church development."

A question about the frequency of passing on local bulletins gives me a good opportunity to encourage everyone to send on a regular basis, at the most a month's supply at a time. Even then some of the news might be rather old before it appears in your home on the pages of *Clarion*. Thank you for your cooperation!

The reversed seasons of Canada and Australia is also reflected in the ratio of news coming from these opposite sides of the globe at this time. While we are in the Summer lull the other side continues fully active!

C



By Mrs. R. Ravensbergen

"for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? For to the man who pleases Him God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy,"

Eccl. 2:25, 26a

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Our life here on earth is full of changes. When we are used to a certain pattern in our life suddenly things happen that force us to make a change, and to adjust to a new situation. Sometimes the changes are easy, because they make our life easier or more pleasant. There are also changes that make us unhappy; it takes us a long time to get used to them. That is especially the case when the change involves other people. When a close friend, a care-giver, a family member, a minister, or a co-worker moves somewhere else, or when such a person becomes sick or dies, it hurts for a long time and you may even think that life will never be the same again. You may remember many more examples of changes in your life that were very difficult for you. When you think of possible changes, you become almost afraid to go on with your life, for what else is going to happen?

Yet for us, God's children, there is never any reason to become afraid of what the future has in store for us. We have the Bible, and whatever our circumstances may be, there are always words of comfort for us in the Bible. In the Book of Ecclesiastes the Preacher explains that the hand of the Lord is in everything that happens. The Lord has been in control of the earth ever since the day of His creation. He has made history happen through all the ages. He is also in control today. He leads the life of the church, and the life of all His children to His eternal future. During the many years that the church was there, there have been very good, and prosperous times. There were also many years of persecution and difficulties. And in the lives of God's children it is the same. There is always the cycle of ups and downs, good times and bad times. (see Eccl. 3:1-9)

Does it seem to us sometimes that the Lord gives more to the one person than to the other? One person works almost without effort and seems to be successful in everything he/she does. The other works and works, and does not seem to get anywhere. Some people have lots of friends, others are very lonely. Some people are healthy, have nice families, and everything is nice and easy. Others are sick, or handicapped, and have all kinds of difficulties and disappointments in their personal lives. How come there is so much difference, even among the people of the church?

God is the Giver of life. He made every person what He wanted him/her to be. Because He is our Creator, and the Giver of life, God wants to be praised by all His children at all times. When He gives hard times, He wants us to know that He is with us. He enables us to handle our problems, for He gives us His Holy Spirit. With His help we can still see God's hand in our lives, and do what He requires us to do: praise Him. Even in dark days He will still help us to see the remains of His beautiful Creation, and so we can see the Lord in the greatest darkness. His Holy Spirit works faith into our hearts. That faith helps us to look into the future without fear, because we know He will bring our life to a happy ending: a life with Him into eternity. When we praise Him in times when everything seems to break down at our fingertips, our faith may be so strong that we can help those whose lives look rosier, but who maybe have never experienced such a closeness with the Lord. The Lord does not look at *what* we are, for we are nothing on our own. Everything we have is a gift from Him. No, the Lord looks at our *hearts*. He is the only

One who can really do that. He is the only One who knows what is hidden deep inside us. He knows our needs, He knows our desires, He knows our weaknesses, He knows what we maybe do not even know ourselves. God's riches are living deep inside us. Of those riches we want to speak especially when we have no earthly riches or success. When we are lonely, or when we cannot express ourselves, then we can share those riches with the Lord. He hears!

And what about the future? It is hidden from us. But we know what happened in the past. God's only Son came into the world. He was God, but He became man. He was like us, but He had no sin. He had to suffer and to die. Yet He did not fear, but went in faith, following the directions of His Father. His life on earth was full of suffering and humiliation. Before He died He was deserted by His Father. He was alone in His suffering and He went in complete darkness through hell. But He did not hesitate. He did what He had to do until it was fulfilled. He did that for us, so that we would not have to bear the wrath of the Lord on our sins. He also sent us the gift of the Holy Spirit to make us strong, and to enable us to bear whatever we have to bear. Through His suffering we will always be able to see the light. We also have to follow the directions of our Father. He will never desert us. He is there always.

Strengthened by the history that has been revealed to us, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we will be able to face the unknown future with all its uncertainty and hidden changes. Behind the earthly future is a future that has been partly revealed to us. It will be revealed to us in all its fullness when we will enter the gates of heaven, which Christ our Saviour has opened for all His children.

*Thy kingdom shall continue without end,
Thy sovereignty from age to age extend.
Thou art a help and stay to those who fall;
The lowly ones Thou liftest when they call.
The eyes of all look unto Thee with reason,
For Thou preparest food for them in season;
Thou openest Thy hand in gracious giving
To satisfy the needs of all things living.*

Psalm 145:4

Birthdays in October:

- 17: Alan Breukelman**
2223-19 Street, Coaldale, AB T1M 1G4
- 22: Nelena Hofsink**
"BETHESDA CLEARBROOK HOME"
32553 Willingdon Cr., Clearbrook, BC V2T 1S2
- 25: John Feenstra**
"ANCHOR HOME," 361 30 Road, RR 2
Beamsville, ON LOR 1B0
- 28: Mary Ann DeWit**
"BETHESDA," 6705 Satchel Road, Box 40
Mount Lehman, BC VOX 1V0

Happy Birthday to all of you.
Until next month,

Mrs. R. Ravensbergen
7462 Hwy. 20, RR 1, Smithville, ON LOR 2A0

NEWS from MERF-CANADA

Iraqi believers continue to suffer economically and face sectarian dangers

With the UN embargo blocking all possibility of economic relief, the Iraqi Christians, like the rest of the population, are going through much suffering. Close to 60% of them have no regular income, because of lack of employment. Many have lost their businesses because of the overall hardship which continues to hit the country. Others have had to sell their belongings to buy food for their children. The three main congregations in Baghdad, Basra and Kirkuk have set up emergency diaconal committees which seek to distribute aid to the growing number of needy families within the believing community. MERF is now requesting believers and churches in other countries to provide 1700 Pounds Sterling a month in emergency aid to these churches over the next 18 months. One third of these amounts are for medical needs. Twenty-two families face medical costs which are far beyond their own and the churches' abilities. Please remember these needs as you prayerfully consider your own giving to the Lord's causes.

In the meantime, it has become clear that several unsound groups operating out of Jordan and Turkey are seeking to snatch members of the churches to use them in starting their rival fellowships. Food and medical supplies as well as relief funds are being offered to families and individual church members in order to lure them into joining such groups. One of the leaders of the church in Baghdad recently reported that so far four different groups have started house churches in the city, with most members taken from the main evangelical congregation. "Pelagian and sign and wonder teachings are being imported with economic aid from the Jordanian capital, Amman" he says. He added, "the authorities are for the time being too

busy with other more serious security concerns to give attention to such illegal house-gatherings. The main problem is that they all claim that they belong to our churches. When the time comes for them to be required to incorporate legally into the recognized church we will have much trouble."

The churches have requested MERF's help in providing suitable Arabic literature and biblical training which can help strengthen the believers against these sectarian teachings.

The need for a Reformed ministry in Jordan has been highlighted by MERF's Executive Committee

Jordan is one of several Arabic-speaking countries which have significant indigenous "Christian" minorities. Unlike other countries like Egypt, Sudan, Syria, Iraq and Palestine, Jordan does not have one single congregation committed to the historic Reformed faith. It has remained without a viable and continuing Reformed witness. A number of Jordanian, Palestinian and Egyptian believers have expressed a strong desire for such a ministry in Amman, Jordan for the past number of years. Some of MERF's biblical training activities in 1996 will be held in Jordan. A ten-day study term is planned for training Syrian and Iraqi elders. Also, Amman is expected to be the venue for a MERF conference on effective biblical evangelism in Arab and Muslim. This conference will involve not only Arabic-speaking people, but also believers from Iran, Pakistan and West African nations.

The battle for freedom of thought and expression sharpens in Egypt

An high-ranking Egyptian judge has determined in Cairo that Professor Mohammed Nasr Abu-Zaid is to be deprived of his wife (of over 20 years) since he advocates heretical views. Dr. Abu-Zaid continues to claim to be a

Muslim and that he only has come to non-traditional interpretations of some statements in the Koran (the Muslim holy book). The court decided that he has apostatized and is no longer entitled to a Muslim wife. It postulated that his marriage to her is now null and void and his continued habitation with her constitutes an adulterous relationship, punishable by death according to Muslim Shari'a (law). This means that when his wife immediately abandons him, she too would be exposed to that punishment. So far the couple have refused to obey the court's order and have sought an injunction to delay its implementation until a higher court deals with their appeal. In the meantime, many have voiced serious concerns over the consequences of such a court decision. Many Egyptian thinkers, artists, professors, journalists and others have rallied behind the Abu-Zaids. The government now finds itself in an unenviable position as it seeks to chart a course of action to diffuse the situation. This coupled with the most recent attempt on the life of President Hosni Mubarak, while in Addis Ababa to attend the African Summit, is forcing his regime to determine whether it is wise to continue to seek to appease the Muslim fanatics.

A prominent Muslim journalist has declared in his editorial that *"the battle is not really over the couple's right to remain married but over each citizen's right to think and express himself or herself freely. . . . This totalitarianism is far worse than that of the Marxist-Leninists. . . . If this court's decision prevails, we better brace ourselves for a wave of persecutions unparalleled in human history. . . . They will not only deprive us of our spouses and children but also of our minds and life itself."*

A Palestinian Muslim convert has recently expressed similar fears. He says, *"They are not only threatening to kill me if I do not recant my Christian*

profession, they have also forced my in-laws to take away my wife and daughter from me."

Rev. V. Atallah and all those involved in MERF are very grateful for the continuing support which they may receive from Canada. Please continue to support this very worthwhile cause with your gifts, but above all with your prayers. MERF has especially asked for your prayers for the needs of the Iraqi brethren, the growing number of young Muslim converts in closed-in countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Algeria,

three Palestinian believers meeting regularly for Bible Study with two Muslim brothers who had responded to the Gospel broadcasts (they are especially concerned that Muslim fanatics not find out about their meetings), the need for a suitable spiritual leader for the planned outreach in Jordan and the evangelistic endeavours of the local congregation in Larnaca.

If you would like to make a personal donation please make your cheque payable to MERF Canada and send it to

MERF-Canada
1225 Highway 5, RR 1
Burlington, ON L7R 3X4

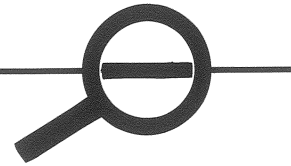
The matter of obtaining charitable organization status is being actively pursued at this time. Hopefully this matter will be resolved in the near future, and we will be able to give donation receipts.

On behalf of MERF-Canada,
J. Mulder, chairman
J. Van Dam, secretary



PRESS REVIEW

By C. Van Dam



Selective Gleanings from Ecclesiastical Assemblies

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church

The 62nd General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) convened at the end of May. The OPC which has a total membership of 20,251 is very active in missions. It was reported to the General Assembly that there was unprecedented growth in home mission activity. In addition to about 15 foreign missionaries, the OPC currently has 23 mission works in the United States, with seven more groups waiting for organizing pastors. It was noted that "we must pray for God to raise up godly and gifted men to serve these churches, and we should ask our faithful Lord to continue to expand our work in extending the gospel in our own land." Surely we must pray the same in the Canadian Reformed Churches. Opportunities do arise to promote the gospel proclamation right in our own nation. May we be able to capitalize on these occasions with the resources God gives us.

With respect to their relationship with the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), the OPC adopted a statement in which it affirms in part that the ordination of women to the office of elder is contrary to the Scriptures and that homosexuality is part of the cor-

ruption of man's nature and that sodomy and all unnatural lusts are sin. The General Assembly met prior to the CRC synod which approved women in office and thus this Assembly could not react to that.

A noteworthy historic event at this Assembly was the "adoption without dissent of a recommendation to establish a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship between the OPC and the Bible Presbyterian Church, General Synod." (The Bible Presbyterian Church was formed when Rev. Carl McIntire and others broke with the OPC in 1937. Abstinence from alcohol was enjoined and at their first synod the Bible Presbyterian Church amended the Westminster Standards to teach premillennialism.) This year's action at the OPC General Assembly represents a major step to full reconciliation between these churches. As more details become available, they will be reported on in *Clarion*.

(Based on a report in the August/September issue of *New Horizons*)

Free Reformed Churches

The Free Reformed Churches (FRC) had their annual synod in early June. The Theological Education Committee reported to Synod that John R. Koopman

will begin theological training at the seminary of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Hamilton, Ontario. We wish him well and God's blessings as he takes up the four-year curriculum there, supplemented by different assignments and readings under the direction of our Theological Education Committee.

Synod approved the institution of the "Iglesia Reformada Libre" in Cubulco, Guatemala. Here fifty to seventy-five Achi Indians regularly come together to hear the Word preached by Rev. K. Herfst. Encouraging news of growth in the home mission station in Bellevue, Washington state was also reported on as well as the evangelistic work of Rev. C. Pronk as radio minister for the FRC, a responsibility he has had for 26 years and which continues to be a blessing for many.

An overture was received from the Abbotsford FRC that requested appointing a committee to look into getting more contact with the Canadian and American Reformed Churches. Synod decided not to appoint a committee for this, but to refer the entire matter to the External Relations Committee, which has the mandate to contact other like-minded churches also. The main point of the struggle about

closer contacts with the Canadian Reformed Churches is as stated by synod, "that the Canadian Reformed Churches, in general, do not have the same definition of nor appreciation for 'experiential and applicatory preaching' that is prevalent in the Free Reformed Churches."

The fact that such an overture was on the table of the FRC is most encouraging. We share the same confessions and much of the same history. A more intensive contact with a view to true ecumenicity would be to the honour of the head of the church who desires his people to be one. It would however be a shame if non-confessional issues such as a perceived difference in preaching would be a reason for making closer contact impossible. This matter of a possible closer contact on a federative level will undoubtedly take some time to materialize. A similar overture requesting the appointment of a committee for closer contact was also at our synod this spring, but the overture was declared inadmissible on the ground that this is a new matter that should be dealt with by the minor assemblies first.

But, this is undoubtedly not the last that we hear of this matter.

(Based on a report in the July/August issue of The Messenger)

The Reformed Church in the United States

The Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS) held their 249th annual assembly on May 15-18. This assembly was of great historical significance for the RCUS came

full circle to the faith of its fathers. The Synod of 1994 had approved, by more than the necessary two-thirds majority, the Belgic Confession and Canons of Dort as creeds for the denomination in addition to the Heidelberg Catechism.

The Constitution of the RCUS requires that all constitutional amendments and church ordinances, such as creeds, also be approved by two-thirds of its classes. When Synod met in 1995, it was apparent that two-thirds of the classes had indeed approved these creeds. By this action the RCUS once again holds to the three very

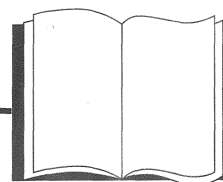
creeds it first adopted in 1748 with the first Coetus constitution.

The RCUS maintains several ecumenical relations. The sister relationship was continued with the Reformed Churches (Liberated) in the Netherlands and two delegates from these churches were received at synod. Also further plans for continued cooperation in joint mission efforts in Zaire were made. The RCUS has had a 35 year history of fraternal relations with the OPC, including 26 years in which the RCUS commissioned and supported missionaries sent out under OPC administration. Continued discussions between the OPC and RCUS will continue with the focus on differences "which need to be resolved in order to move towards closer unity." After several years of opposition from the Christian Reformed Church and the Presbyterian Church in America, the request of the RCUS to be admitted into the North American Reformed and Presbyterian Council (NAPARC) was finally granted. The report on this assembly does not elaborate on this point.

(Based on a report in July 21 issue of Christian Observer) 

READER'S FORUM

By H. DeJong



More on "the last days"

The views expressed in Reader's Forum are not necessarily those of the editorial committee or the publisher. Submissions should not exceed 900 words. Those published may be edited for style or length.

In the June 30, 1995, issue of *Clarion*, br. R. Duker reacts to my submission to the "Reader's Forum" in the April 17, 1995, issue. I am grateful for this reaction, and also to the editor for placement of both articles. In this way matters can be addressed that, in my opinion, generally receive too little attention.

Br. Duker states: "First, the term 'last days' in Scripture generally refers to the time between the ascension and return of the Lord Jesus." This is an assertion that is not substantiated. He continues: "The judgment of 70 A.D. was the first fulfillment of those [last - HdJ] days." This is not correct, for in the Old Testament we could find roughly 14 different "last days" which have come to be fulfilled. The New Testa-

ment also speaks of "the last days," which, in my estimation, have also been fulfilled. Space does not allow further substantiation of this claim, so I will have to leave it at that (unless the editor would make publication of a lengthier explanation possible).

Br. Duker writes: "Br. DeJong states that in 70 A.D. Christ came in His wrath. He refers us to Matt. 16:28ff, Mark 9:1 and Luke 9:27." Although this is not so (these passages came up at a men's society discussion, but were not mentioned in *Clarion*), I would still like to comment on this. We read in these passages: "Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." The Greek for

"kingdom" ("basileia") lends itself better for the dynamic interpretation, and would be more clearly rendered by "kingship." Br. Duker points us to Acts 2:1ff and says "Here Christ came in His Spirit with power as He had promised." In br. Duker's train of thought, *some* of the apostles would have lived to experience this. But Scripture says in the last verse of Acts 1 that Matthias "was enrolled with the eleven apostles," and in Acts 2:1 that "they were *all* together in one place." If one considers the words of the Lord Jesus in Matt. 21:43: "The kingdom of God will be taken away from you . . ." and Matt. 22:7: "The King was angry . . . and burned their city," one comes to the understanding that this occurred in 70 AD, at which

time *some* of the apostles witnessed it. We could also think of Matt. 10:23 and Matt. 26:64 in this context.

A bit further br. Duker states: "Second, Paul explained to the Thessalonians that the Lord's return would happen only after the apostasy or falling away (2 Thess. 2:3). Paul also wrote about this to Timothy in 1 Tim. 4:1 and 2 Tim. 4:3,4. He could also have listed 2 Tim. 3:1-13. However, "in the last days" (2 Tim. 3:1) Timothy had to continue in what he had learned (v. 14) and he had to be "steady" (4:5). It becomes clear that Timothy did not experience the last coming of the Lord Jesus, but that during the last days he would face the difficulties of which Paul spoke. The same holds for the Thessalonians. Paul wrote his letter to them in the year 52 A.D. In 1 Thess. 2:14-16 Paul had already pointed them to the Lord's wrath against unbelievers and the persecuting Jews. "But God's wrath has come upon them at last [or *completely*, or *forever*]." There were deceivers who connected the last coming of the Lord Jesus to this. "Let no one deceive you," says Paul in 2 Thess. 2:3, "The rebellion comes first" (same verse) "and the man of lawlessness is revealed" (same verse). Paul told them this *when he was with them* (verse 5).

The man of lawlessness is mostly connected with the so-called "antichrist" mentioned in the first letter of John. Without going into details due to

space constraints, it is clear that John speaks of the concept "antichrist" as a person or persons. Paul does the same. When we speak of "modern man" or "today's man," we refer to people who live a particular lifestyle or according to a particular norm or principle. "The rebellion comes first," Paul says. The man of lawlessness should be identified with the rebellious people who would capture the temple. The Lord Jesus already said this in Matt. 24:15. It might be instructive to quote the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus at this point: "The Zealots had taken refuge in the temple of God and turned it into a fortress, making the Holy Place their headquarters. . . . The Zealots trampled every human law and scoffed at the oracles of the prophets as fables of imposters. Yet they brought down on their country the fulfillment of an ancient prophecy: it stated that when sedition broke out in the city and natural hands defiled God's sanctuary, the temple would be burned to the ground and the city taken." Thus far Josephus.

Paul wrote this letter to the Thessalonians in 52 A.D., so that it is clear that the apostle means the temple of Jerusalem in verse 4. This becomes even more obvious when we consider that Paul went to Jerusalem in 58 A.D., where all the elders said to him: "You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed; they are all zealous for the



ADDRESS CHANGE:

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at Yarrow**

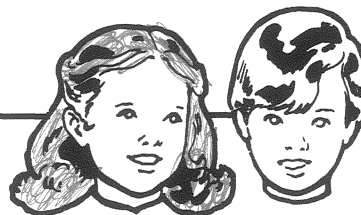
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Yarrow Stn, Main
Chilliwack, BC V2R 5H8

law. . . ." (Acts 21:17ff). When Paul spoke of the temple six years earlier in 2 Thess. 2:4, and six years after that submitted himself to the temple laws in Jerusalem, we are doubtless dealing with the same temple – great imagination would be required to build a different construction around this point.

Having written the preceding, it serves little purpose (even if space allowed), to respond to what br. Duker wrote concerning the Pope as antichrist. It would be beneficial if these things would be more thoroughly discussed among us. This would make it clear that we have come to accept long-standing misconceptions, which have obscured covenant reasoning. C

OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



Dear Busy Beavers,

I like it when you send me pictures that you have made!
Those animals look so cute.
And I like your drawings of people, too.
I think it's time for another

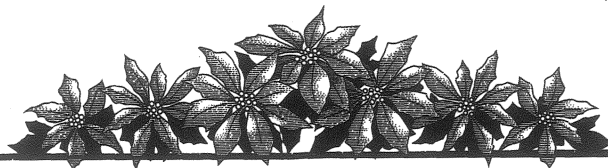
PICTURE CONTEST!

Send me pictures of animals, people, buildings, your farm, whatever you want to draw or paint or sketch!

And there will be prizes at the end, too!

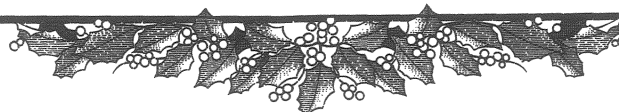
So send a picture, made by you (not copied) to this address:

PICTURE CONTEST
c/o Aunt Betty
One Beghin Ave.
Winnipeg, MB
R2J 3X5



ATTENTION BUSY BEAVERS!!

Do you want to put a puzzle, picture or poem in the *Christmas Clarion*? Well, send it to me *now*, and I will be able to put it in. I hope to get *lots* of letters!



Quiz Time!

MATCH THE HUSBAND AND WIFE

Below are 10 husbands and wives from the Bible.

Match the wife's name from the right with the husband on the left.

- | | |
|------------------|--------------|
| ___ 1. Jacob | A. Hannah |
| ___ 2. Zechariah | B. Bathsheba |
| ___ 3. Adam | C. Ruth |
| ___ 4. Elimelech | D. Sarah |
| ___ 5. Joseph | E. Naomi |
| ___ 6. Abraham | F. Rachel |
| ___ 7. Boaz | G. Elizabeth |
| ___ 8. Isaac | H. Mary |
| ___ 9. David | I. Rebekah |
| ___ 10. Elkanah | J. Eve |

FISHERMEN

In Bible times, people often fished for a living. Name the person in each sentence.

- The fisherman who brought the boy with five loaves and two fish to Jesus was _____, John 6:8,9.
- A fisherman who with his brother John, followed Jesus was _____, Matt 4:21.
- The fisherman who was told by Jesus to catch a fish with money in its mouth was _____, Matthew 17:26,27.
- The man who promised to make his followers "fishers of men" was _____, Matthew 4:19.
- The man who was blessed by God "And the fear of you shall be . . . upon all the fishes of the seas" was _____, Genesis 9:1,2.
- The fisherman who two sons became disciples was _____, Matthew 4:2.
- Two disciples who are named among those who went fishing with Peter but didn't catch anything all night were _____ and _____, John 21:2.

UNSCRAMBLE!

by Busy Beaver *Jessica Vis*

These Bible names are all mixed up. Put the name on the line after the scrambled word.

- | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1. eStH: _____ | 6. Eev: _____ |
| 2. bIAe: _____ | 7. Deorbah: _____ |
| 3. ianC: _____ | 8. yMar: _____ |
| 4. amAd: _____ | 9. suseJ: _____ |
| 5. bAraahm: _____ | 10. ameJs: _____ |

ANIMAL WORD SEARCH

by Busy Beaver *Jocelin VanDoornik*

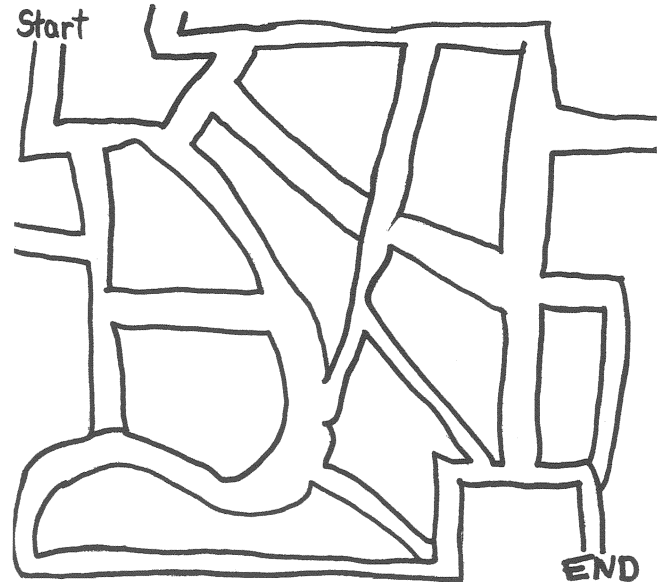
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T U R K E Y O A I W L Q N J N
J Z I M B K R A B B I T M Z S

Find:

- | | | | |
|---------|---------|--------|--------|
| dog | puppy | kitten | cat |
| hamster | mouse | pig | horse |
| cow | turkey | rabbit | duck |
| chicken | rooster | lamb | pigeon |
| dove | swallow | | |

CAN YOU FIND YOUR WAY THROUGH THIS MAZE?

by Busy Beaver *Barbara Bultena*



Here are the answers to unscramble the Bible names:

1. Seth 2. Abel 3. Cain 4. Adam 5. Abraham 6. Eve
7. Deborah 8. Mary 9. Jesus 10. James

That's all for this time, Busy Beavers!

Love, Aunt Betty