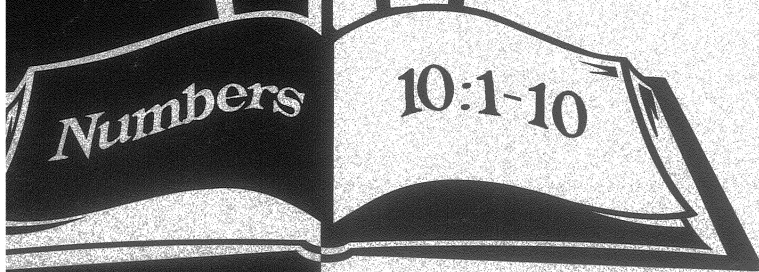
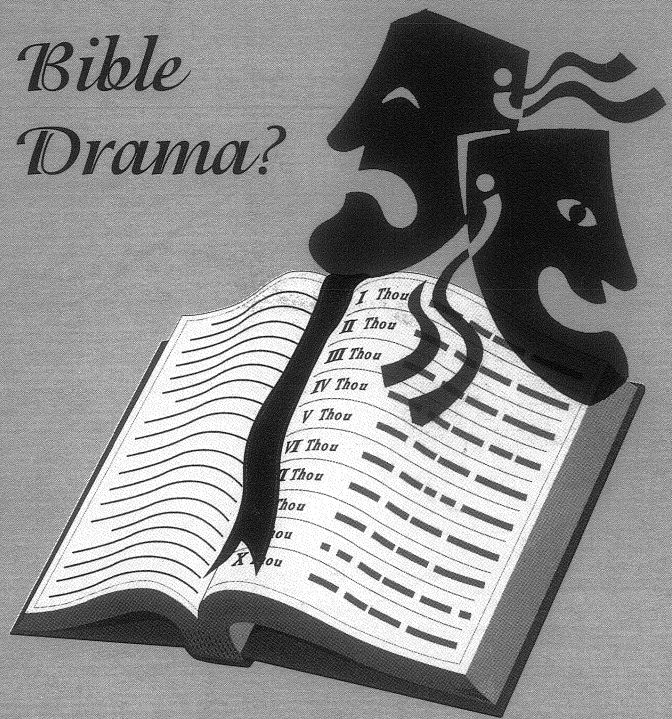


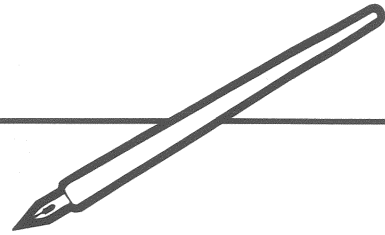
Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE
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*Bible
Drama?*



By R. Schouten



Real and Responsible

By the time this article appears, hundreds of young people and dozens of ministers will be well into a new season of catechetical instruction. In accordance with baptismal promises, believing parents send their offspring to be instructed in the doctrines of the church. Among the different classes taught by the church, we also find “pre-confession” classes.

We know that not long from now, God willing, many of these young people will stand before Christ and His church to publicly acknowledge and state their agreement with the Way, the truth and the life.

Upon such a joyful and positive testimony, the young people are admitted to the Lord’s Table as communicant members of the church. As we observe this process, the question may arise whether these young people were truly members of the church before this profession of faith.

Real members by covenant position

The answer of Scripture is that the youth of the church definitely do belong. They belong to God’s covenant and congregation, says Answer 74 of the Catechism, and therefore they must be baptized. In Article 34 of the Belgic, the church states her belief that *these children (of believers) ought to be baptized and sealed with the sign of the covenant, as infants were circumcised in Israel, on the basis of the same promises which are now made to our children*. On what basis can the church say that children are church members, sanctified in Christ?

The answer to this question has everything to do with God’s covenant of grace. From Scripture, we learn that God establishes His covenant with believers *and* their children. The natural structures of human families are not pushed aside but are instead sanctified to serve God’s church building work. When we say that children are members of the church we mean that they are included in the covenant.

The privileged covenant position of the children of believers is richly portrayed and confirmed in baptism. Baptism shows that “redemption from sin and the Holy Spirit who works faith” are promised to the children no less than to adults (Answer 74 of the Catechism).

We may conclude, then, that the children of believing parents are to be regarded and treated as real members of the church, not second, but first-class (after all, there is only first-class travelling in the church – no economy class available).

Responsible membership because of covenant position

The real membership of young people brings with it great responsibilities. Our reasons for saying this are found in the biblical characterization of the church as the gathering of *believers*. Church membership necessitates faith. This could be demonstrated with many Scripture refer-

ences, but we content ourselves with the well-known summary found in article 27 of the Belgic Confession: **We believe and profess one catholic or universal church, which is a holy congregation and assembly of the true Christian believers, who expect their entire salvation in Jesus Christ, are washed by His blood and are sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit.** The Church, then, is the congregation and assembly of the people of faith.

Obviously, Church membership makes personal faith and trust in the promises of the Gospel an absolute necessity. Nobody should be surprised by a description of the church as the gathering of believers. After all, the whole Bible demonstrates that faith is the thing that joins us to Christ. By faith we have a bond with our Saviour and all His benefits. Apart from faith, there is no sharing in Christ. This truth has to be made clear also to children who have been ingrafted into God’s covenant.

Covenant theology must never be allowed to diminish the faith character of church membership. Even in the book for the children of believers which we call the *Heidelberg Catechism*, this essential faith dimension of the church is clearly brought forward. Repeatedly, the faith bond with Christ is presented as an urgent necessity for a church member. A few examples will suffice. First, Lord’s Day 7 seven states that *only those are saved who by a true faith are grafted into Christ and accept all His benefits*. This confession statement does not say that only those are saved who by a true baptism are grafted into Christ.

To go on to another example, consider that the youth also memorized Lord’s Day 20, where they learn to say about the Holy Spirit that *He is also given to me, to make me by true faith share in Christ and all His benefits*. . . . For a last instance, we can refer to Lord’s Day 23 which speaks about our justification. In this answer, the covenant young people learn to say: *I can receive this righteousness and make it my own by faith only*.

Thus, throughout the Catechism, the privileged young people of believers who are real members of the church, are instructed in the faith character of the church. Over and over, they learn that they must *accept* the promises of the covenant.¹ The Catechism is a book of instruction for covenant youth and yet, precisely in this document, we find the repeated recognition that the church is the gathering and fellowship of believers.

Urgency for confession

The implication of the above material is that while the covenant and church are overlapping concepts, they are not to be identified. God’s covenant of grace serves His Church-building work, but is not identical to the Church. One can be in God’s covenant, a son or daughter of promise and yet, due to unbelief, outside of the church. A baptized

child who goes astray and abandons the church cannot any longer be called a church member. Yet, God's covenant promises remain real for that person and increase the level of his guilt (compare e.g. Matt. 11:20-24).

Therefore, we can say that because the children of believers are really members of the congregation, they must hear in the Church the constant and urgent appeal for personal faith.

As children move from childhood to adolescence and young adulthood, there occurs a nearly imperceptible transition from covenant immaturity to the time of personal responsibility. The Lord is sovereign in this developmental process, with the result that the advent of personal responsibility cannot be tied to a certain age. Each child has a distinct growth pattern. Spiritual maturity varies wildly at each age. We can say, however, that the age of responsibility is

A church which cultivates a feeling of immunity among its youth is heading for a difficult future and is robbing its teenagers of the necessarily urgent call for faith.

the age of understanding, the age of attaining a more settled thinking than is common in early teenage years. Whether fourteen or sixteen or twenty, the Lord who searches the heart and mind knows the age of responsibility and does hold people responsible for covenant response.

The children of believers have been born into unique wealth, privilege and power. It remains to be seen how they will react. Will the promised treasures and gifts from above meet with faith in the hearer? Will the Christ proclaimed and taught to them elicit faith and trust and love? Do these young people have a desire to publicly share and join in the confessed faith of the congregation? Do they thirst for the righteousness of Christ's body and blood conveyed in the Lord's Supper?

In order to bring the youth from their position of minority to the mature position of personal confession and trust, the church insists on instruction in the Way, the truth and the life which is in Christ. The forgiveness of sins and the Holy Spirit promised in baptism must be explained and applied. Creation, fall, redemption, atonement, union with Christ, justification, sanctification, glorification – all these and more must be clearly set before the minds and hearts of the privileged covenant youth.

What must a young Christian believe? The answer is: all that is promised in the Gospel, which the Articles of our Christian faith teach us in a summary (Answer 22 of the Catechism) and which are also further explained in other confessional documents of the congregation. When young people make a profession of faith, they must know whereof they speak. When they come to the Lord's Table, they must be able to "discern the body" and "examine themselves;" they must know what it means to "remember Christ" and to "proclaim His death until He comes" (compare 1 Cor. 11:23-32).

The doctrinal instruction of the youth is laden, however, with the urgency caused by the real, yet responsible nature of their membership. This urgency does not consist of a panic to come to the Table. Instead, the urgency comes out in the steady and loving exhortation to our youth not to ne-

glect the promises. Also covenant youth need to hear the consistent call to repent and believe to accept Christ and all His benefits as proclaimed to them.

Similarly, unfaithful covenant youth need to be admonished not only by their parents, but also by the church community as a whole. Their ungodly and unbelieving lifestyle profanes God's covenant and puts them into grave danger of condemnation. A church which cultivates a feeling of immunity among its youth is heading for a difficult future and is robbing its teenagers of the necessarily urgent call for faith.

Baptism, therefore, is not only a mark of privilege, but also a mandate for faith and perseverance. As the *Form* states so well: . . . *we are, through baptism, called and obliged to a new obedience. We are to cleave to this one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to trust Him, and to love Him with our whole heart, soul and mind, and with all our strength. . . .*

For these reasons, we should not cultivate the attitude among our youth that they are free to delay believing and confessing until the time of their own choosing. Rather, we need to remind them gently and firmly that the Lord is waiting.

Obviously, young people should not be herded into the pre-confession class because, after all, everyone else who graduated last year is going, too. This kind of mob idea about confession of faith is also a disgrace to God's covenant. No herding, no panic is needed, but simply the quiet and persistent reminder that God is waiting for an answer, namely, the amen of faith.

Limits of covenant membership

The foregoing argument implies that the Church does not recognized older members by baptism who have neglected to give their response to God's initiative in their lives. Members by baptism who do not believe in their hearts and confess with their mouths (see Rom 10:9-10 for the believe-confess connection) have no permanent place in the congregation. Obviously not, for they are not part of the gathering of true Christian believers.

The truth is that God has no grandchildren, but only direct offspring who have put their faith in Christ. The perhaps unconscious habit of minimizing or understating the faith demand for covenant youth leads ineluctably to a kind of "people's church" concept. In such a view, church membership is a natural privilege much like citizenship – regardless of faith. Such a concept has often held sway in many parts of the world. For example, in Scandinavia, being Lutheran was formerly as much a natural right as it was to be Danish or Swedish. Similar practices are found in many Romanist countries and also in many Canadian cities where "being United," for example, is just a town or family tradition. In such scenarios any connection between Church and personal faith has been lost with the result that the church became a monstrous caricature of the gathering of believers.

Real and therefore responsible membership enables us to keep the concepts of covenant and church in balance. This view protects our identity as the community of faith as well as Christ's glory as our only Head.

¹It is worthwhile to note the frequency of the word "accept" in the Heidelberg Catechism. We find it in Answers 20, 21, 30, 60, 76 and 84. This word again points to the responsible nature of the membership of the covenant youth. God is waiting for their response to His Word of promise. He has taken covenant initiative and now awaits conscious response from the youth. **C**

MEDITATION

By G.Ph. van Popta

READ DANIEL 7

FOUR BEASTS, ELEVEN HORNS, AND THE SON OF MAN

Daniel received an amazing vision one night. The four winds of heaven were blowing and stirring up the sea. Out of the sea emerged four beasts – a lion, a bear, a leopard, and a veritable monster.

In the Bible, the sea often symbolizes humanity. When Daniel saw the turbulent waters of the ocean, the raging sea with its huge, destructive waves rising and falling, what he saw symbolized the rise and fall and the turbulence of humanity. The four beasts coming out of the sea represent earthly powers.

On November 11, we remember the rise and fall of humanity. We remember the wars that took so many lives. We remember the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II. But we also remember that, through it all, Christ rules as King of the world. As we confess in Lord's Day 19 of the Heidelberg Catechism, "Christ ascended into heaven to manifest Himself there as Head of His church, through whom the Father governs all things." Christ holds the reins of history and of the individual nations in his hands. He is in control of the universe. We remember that on November 11. And it comforts us.

Back to Daniel's vision – he saw four beasts emerging out of the sea, one after another. The four beasts represent four empires. An empire emerges, dominates the world scene, but then another replaces it.

The first beast was a lion that had eagles' wings. The lion is the king of the beasts. But the majesty of this lion was combined with the power of an eagle. This beast could fly where it wanted and swoop on its prey. This beast symbolized the mighty Babylonian empire of Nebuchadnezzar that lasted for about 90 years, from 626 - 539 B.C. But then it was humbled. Its wings were clipped and it was made to stand upon the ground.

The empire of the lion was replaced by the empire of the bear. It had three ribs sticking out of its mouth from its last kill. Yet it is told, "Arise, devour much flesh." The bear is the Medo-Persian empire which replaced the Babylonian and lasted for about 200 years, from 539 - 330 B.C.

The empire of the bear, however, was destroyed and followed by another – that of the leopard, the third beast to emerge from the sea. Leopards are very fast, but this one was faster than most. It had four wings of a bird on its back. This represented Alexander the Great who suddenly swooped down upon the Medo-Persian empire and established the empire of Greece which lasted for about 265 years, 330 - 63 B.C. The leopard had four heads because when Alexander died, his empire was divided among his four generals.

Like the two great empires before it, this one fell as well. It fell before the

fourth beast, the indescribable monster. This beast had iron teeth. It crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. This monster also had ten horns. This beast is the Roman empire to which the Grecian empire fell in 63 B.C. It was an empire of iron, of the sword. Its legions of soldiers tramped across Asia, North Africa, through Europe, all the way to Britannia.

The ten horns are the many kingdoms and nations that have warred and fought and struggled during the last 2,000 years. Many have tried to dominate the world: the Vandals of Germany, the Huns of Asia, the Khans of Mongolia, the Holy Roman Empire of the Middle Ages, Napoleon, Hitler, Stalin. These aggressors are the horns of Daniel 7. Twice this century the world was at war because horns exalted themselves. But there have been more than the World Wars. There was the Korean War, the Vietnam War, the Gulf War – nations and men continuing to act in the spirit of the horns of the fourth beast.

Daniel saw more than four beasts and ten horns. He saw an eleventh horn which sprouted from among the ten. It had the eyes of a man and spoke boastfully. This horn waged war against the saints of God and defeated them. This horn, this king, had the nerve to speak against the Most High and to oppress God's people. The believers were even

What's Inside

In the lead editorial, Rev. Schouten continues the discussion on the role the confessions and making a public profession of faith play when it comes to membership in the church.

We publish the last installment of Wes Bredenhof's Reformed Apologetics primer. He ends this series with a concrete example of how to "do" apologetics. Appropriately, you will also find an *Outreach* riding piggy-back with this *Clarion*.

Rev. J.L. van Popta addresses the question of the dramatization of Biblical narrative and shows how such dramas attack the Word of God.

You will find a Reader's Forum contribution commenting on something we published a little while ago.

In this issue you will also read an anonymous letter from a woman who has been sexually abused. This is a painful topic. We could wish that it were not a problem in our churches, but we know better. May God grant His strength, peace and healing to those who have been sexually abused. And may God grant true repentance to those who are guilty of such abuse.

GvP


turned over to him for a little while. This is the Antichrist who persecutes the people of God.


Daniel's vision is not a political almanac; rather, it is revelation of God that shows that the empires of the world will become increasingly hostile towards God and His people. The four beasts, the ten horns, the eleventh horn – it culminates in one who is anti-God, anti-God's-people, the Antichrist.

This may fill us with some fear. But we need not fear. For Daniel saw something else. He saw the eleventh horn thrown down to the ground and completely destroyed forever. He saw a vision of the heavenly throne room. He saw the Ancient of Days, God the Father, seated on a fiery throne surrounded by millions of angels. He saw the Son of Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, approach the Ancient of Days and receive a kingdom – the fifth kingdom.

This fifth kingdom, replacing all other kingdoms, is an everlasting kingdom. It rises but will never fall. It does not rise from earth – from the sea of humanity. It comes down from heaven. And the King of the kingdom shares it with us, the saints.


That is our comfort as we remember the two World Wars and the other wars. We live during the time of the ten horns. Nations fight and gouge and kill. God allows that to happen. He raises a nation up and then sends it smashing to the ground. But in the midst of it all, Christ is in control. Christ is seated at the right hand of God. When he ascended to heaven, he sat down as King of the world through whom the Father governs all things. Christ holds the reins of history and of each nation.

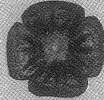
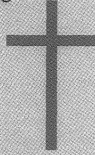
We remember, we do not forget, those lying in Flanders Fields and unmarked graves whom Christ used to beat down horns. We do not forget. We do not know what the future holds. Will we suffer the oppression of the eleventh horn? We do not know but we do not fear. For the Son of Man, our King Jesus Christ, is in control. The Word of God directs our gaze beyond the swirling mass of angry nations stirring up the sea of humanity. It directs our attention from earth to heaven, toward the throne room of the Ancient of Days. And it reminds us that we, the saints of the Most High God, will receive the kingdom. The Son of Man will share it with us. With Him, we will possess it forever and ever. 



IN FLANDERS FIELDS

*In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row and row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.
We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.
Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.*



This poem was written by a Canadian Lt. Col. John McCrae in 1915 during the Second battle of Ypres while mourning the death of a friend.



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Reformed Apologetics – Practical Considerations

By Wes Bredenhof

Part Four (Conclusion) of the modified text of a speech given at the CRUCS Retreat, Evans Lake, BC, February 24, 1995.

A concrete example

I'll conclude with making things concrete. So far, the practical application (in the previous article) has been very "theoretical" and lacking in concrete examples. I'd like to go through a suggested structure for a Biblical apology, using the question of God's existence as an example. This is only meant to be a suggested structure – there are many parts that won't work in every situation.

Let's suppose that you get into a conversation with an unbeliever about Christianity. The unbeliever says that the existence of God is highly improbable, if not absolutely impossible. How do you begin to answer this unbeliever? You're in a perfect position to use your apologetical knowledge. The first thing you must do is admit your presuppositions. Admit to the unbeliever that the main reason for your belief in God is your faith in Christ. Having done that you can proceed to what is called an argument by truth. You can then move to the argument by folly, which will be explained further in a moment. This is a little reversal of VanTil's procedure. Instead of putting yourself in the unbeliever's shoes first, you're asking him to step into your shoes. What are the Biblical reasons for using the arguments by truth and folly and in this particular order?

The author of the source for this suggested apology, Richard Pratt, explains that this is done on the basis of what God says to us in Proverbs 26:4-5:

Answer not a fool according to his folly,
lest you be like him yourself.

Answer a fool according to his folly,
lest he be wise in his own eyes.

The author of these Proverbs is saying that we must use varying approaches to the fool, depending on the circumstances.¹ We first present the truth to the unbeliever – meaning we've got to present what the Bible, the natural world,

and our own personal experience says about the existence of God. We have to strive to put the unbeliever into our shoes. Then he will be able to see that the world makes sense with the Christian world-view. Having done that we can use an argument by folly, showing the unbeliever that his views are self-contradictory and useless in making any sense out of reality.

The argument by truth

Our first step is to make the argument by truth. Point out to the unbeliever the evidence from the Bible. For example you could show that the Bible, right from the very first verse, assumes the existence of God without any proofs. The apologist could also point out what the Bible says in Psalm 14:1 and Psalm 53:1 about those who do not acknowledge God's existence. Of course, such information would have to be relayed to the unbeliever with great tact and love. There are ways to say things that are offensive without actually being offensive. If you are one of those people that have difficulty with tact, it might be best to leave the "fool says in his heart, there is no God" out of your argument by truth. Anyway, besides these examples, plenty of other things could be used from the Bible itself to point to God's existence, such as the fact that the fulfillment of prophecy demonstrates God's hand in history.

Having done that, the apologist could also point to how the world around us points clearly to the Christian God. You could make mention of Psalm 19:1 and Romans 1:18. The beauty of this world points straight to God's creation and His existence.

The Christian can also use evidence from his own personal experience. The Christian can speak of God's wonderful grace in his life, how God has made Himself known through the preaching and message of the gospel. The Christian can speak about how he may have experienced the presence of God in his life at one time or another.

In case the unbeliever presents you with another question or argument to which you may not know the Biblical answer, then point to the fact that the Bible also states that there are some things which men are not able to know. This is the Dependent Uncertainty section of the argument by truth. You may be uncertain, but you are still dependent upon God. It may be pointed out to the unbeliever that "We may be ignorant (of the answer to the question) because of our finiteness as human beings."² Yet, if there is an available answer to the unbeliever's question, it can only be found by dependence on God's revelation, for God surely knows the answer.

The argument by folly

Having followed the above steps, the unbeliever will probably not be convinced of the truths of Christianity. The Christian must tell the unbeliever that the reason the arguments by truth are not convincing is because the non-Christian is committed to independence. With that thought in mind the apologist can show that commitment in the argument by folly. The Christian apologist can demonstrate to the unbeliever that his commitment to independence, upon which all of his objections rest, cannot be justified.³

There are two kinds of positions that the unbeliever may take – a position of absolute certainty or a position of total uncertainty. As an example of a position of absolute certainty – the unbeliever may just make the claim: "There is no God." What you have to do then is show the unbeliever that he has not searched everywhere for God and will never be able to do so. Therefore, he cannot say with certainty, "There is no God" because what it would take to convince him of the reverse may be in a place where he hasn't searched.

As an example of a position claiming total uncertainty, the unbeliever may claim that "We cannot know whether God exists or not." This is a typical agnostic/atheist position. In fact, most "raw" unbelievers will use

this kind of statement, because it seems to be a neutral or objective position. The Christian can point out to the unbeliever that though this seems to be a “neutral” view, in fact, the unbeliever is saying something pretty strong about God. He is basically saying that God hasn’t made Himself known in a way that is strong enough to be accepted by everyone. The Christian can then point out to the unbeliever that he has not searched everywhere and cannot come to such a certain conclusion about God’s existence. The unbeliever cannot even be certain about his uncertainty.

By this time the Christian apologist can demonstrate to the unbeliever the futility of his position. There can be no certainty about anything, including uncertainty. Intellectual autonomy will be demonstrated to be a complete dead-end. It’s self-contradictory and self-defeating. To even attempt getting out of this bind, the unbeliever must use the Christian world-view – which is precisely what often happen in discussions with unbelievers.⁴

After pointing out the futility of supposed independence and autonomy, the Christian apologist must present the message of the gospel. Speak to the unbeliever about the necessity for repentance and faith. Explain that the Christian faith is the only way out of futility and sin.

Summary of apologetic method

You may not have the opportunity in each case to follow the suggested structure. Therefore, I would like to offer a summary of the most important points:

- 1) The use of the arguments by truth and folly. This is a necessary part of Reformed apologetics. The unbeliever must be presented with the truth and must be shown the folly of his thinking.
- 2) The presuppositional use of evidence. Other apologetical systems rely almost exclusively on evidence and logic. Presuppositional apologetics recognizes that the unbeliever, without the Holy Spirit removing the scales from his eyes, cannot interpret the evidence for Christianity properly, even using the laws of logic.⁵ Evidence has its place in the argument by truth, but should not be expected to carry the burden of apologetical proof. Books like Josh MacDowell’s *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* and *More Evidence that Demands a Verdict* are therefore useful for apologetics, though only for the argument by truth. It should also be recognized that these types

of books take an Arminian approach in any discussion about apologetical methodology, and should therefore be used only with extreme discretion.

- 3) We must recognize the fundamental presupposition of all unbelievers – a commitment to independence from God. The unbeliever is in slavery to his sin and this slavery has affected his mind as well as his soul.
- 4) The unbeliever’s presuppositions must be challenged in order for him to forsake his independence. This is part of the argument by folly and is extremely necessary to keep in mind.
- 5) Scriptural and Confessional knowledge are of the utmost importance. Since it is necessary to know what is being defended, daily personal Bible study and meditation is of great value.
- 6) Do not give any ground to the presuppositions of the unbeliever. In other words, don’t fall into the trap of assuming intellectual autonomy.
- 7) Don’t underestimate human sinfulness. As John Frame says, “sinful attitudes can be present, no matter what kind of argument we employ . . . Nothing less than the whole armor of God (Eph. 6:10-18) will allow us to gain victory over Satan’s intellectual devices.”⁶ Remember that because of the effects of sin, no argument is going to persuade all people. Only the Holy Spirit can do that work.
- 8) Also, remember that “apologetics is person variable.”⁷ This means that apologetics will change from apologist to apologist and from unbeliever to unbeliever. No one strategy can remain static. This does not mean, of course, that there are not certain Biblical principles which should be adhered to in apologetics. What has been discussed in these articles are only suggested strategies based on general principles. It’s up to each and every one of us to put these principles into practice.
- 9) Apologetics must always be done with tact and love. Remember that the unbeliever is a person, not just an argument.
- 10) Lastly, we must always remember the power of prayer. It is God who does the heart changing in the final analysis. Pray for the people with whom you discuss Christianity. Pray that the Holy Spirit may remove the scales from their eyes that they may see the truth. More-

over, we must pray that our apologetical efforts will be to the greater glory of God.

Conclusion

To conclude this series of articles, I’d like to offer these three short points about Reformed apologetics:

Firstly, Reformed apologetics must be consistently Biblical. All apologetics that we do must be completely grounded in the Word of God. We can look nowhere else for guidance.

Secondly, Reformed apologetics must be intelligible and teachable. Apologetics should be taught in Christian schools to prepare God’s covenant children for their duties as Christian soldiers. It must be taught in catechism, so that everyone may understand how to defend the truths of the Reformed confessions. But in order for this to happen, apologetics must admittedly be made easy to understand. This has been a particular problem with presuppositional apologetics because of the level of theoretical knowledge required for its effective use. However, there are books available which surmount this obstacle. Richard Pratt’s book *Every Thought Captive*, which is meant to be a textbook on apologetics, is an example of one of these books and is highly recommended. It’s written at a high school level and is very easy to grasp.

Thirdly, Reformed apologetics ought to be practiced wherever possible to the glory of God. The LORD has given us apologetics as a tool for His greater honour and glory. He has given it to us that we may be instruments in His hand to draw in all the elect, that Christ may return. Reformed apologetics is a powerful weapon in the hands of God to attain that goal. We can therefore understand why VanTil wrote that “Reformed apologetics is the hope of the world.”⁸

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

Notes:

¹*Every Thought Captive*, pp. 85-97, and *Proverbs*, Charles Bridges, The Banner of Truth Trust, Edinburgh, Scotland, 1846, p. 486

²*Every Thought Captive*, p. 87

³*Ibid.*, p. 101

⁴An example of this can be found in “Justifying Non-Christian Objections,” Douglas Wilson and Farrell Till, *Credenda Agenda*, Vol.7, No.1, pp. 24-25

⁵*Apologetics to the Glory of God*, p. 25

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 77

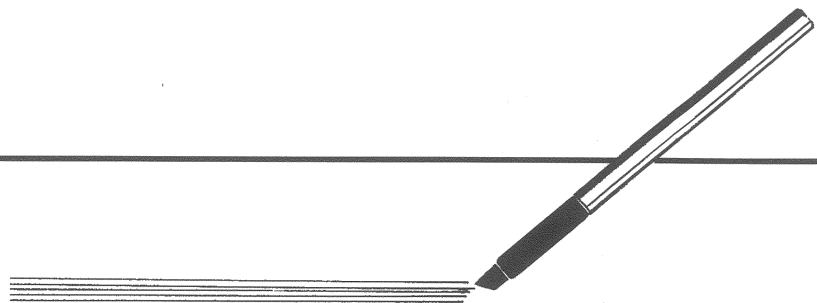
⁷*Ibid.*, p. 89

⁸*The Defense of the Faith*, p. 222



THE HI-LITER

By C. Van Spronsen



In Bedfordale, Australia, the possibility was investigated to do missionwork in Indonesia. They concluded that it would be of greater benefit to support the missionwork being carried out by the local consistories of the sister churches in Sumba/Savu. Since this was not considered mission work and thus not a consistory matter as such, a number of brothers took the initiative to form a committee with the intention of collecting \$100.00 per month. "This will be enough to support four of the missionaries currently employed" the bulletin informs us. Sounds like good stewardship!

The increasing number of catechism students (over a hundred) in the Providence Church of Edmonton, AB keeps adding to the workload of Rev. R. Aasman. It is good to have a retired minister around: "Rev. M. Van Beveren has been found willing to instruct some of the students. Consistory thankfully agrees with this."

Large numbers were also the reason for the Young People's Society of Burlington-West to be innovative. "To make it easier to learn what God has to say to us, a major focus this season is going to be on small groups. We're taking our study from the church basement into homes to make our studies more informal and friendly – but we're not going to lose the large group. About every month and a half, instead of a regular study meeting, there will be a large group meeting where we'll participate in praise, worship, and prayer, partake of speeches and discussions, and enjoy plenty of social time."

From the same announcement we also glean some good advice for preparation for a meeting:

"To prepare for tonight's meeting, try reading through the book of 1 Corinthians this afternoon (it takes about one and a half hours). It's worth the effort." It makes sense to read a letter in its entirety before zooming in on separate parts of it, be it chapters or paragraphs.

In Calgary the consistory and the school board are exploring possibilities to build joint and shared facilities. The practicality and legality of such an arrangement will be investigated.

The consistories of the Free Reformed and the Canadian Reformed Churches in Chatham, ON continue their joint meetings. Questions that were to be discussed were: a. Is the distinction true/false church of the Art. 27-29 of the Belgic Confession still valid? b. How do I know that I am a living member of this true church? c. Where must we agree on

and what can be tolerated in the pursuit of ecclesiastical unity? d. May we maintain the distinction formal/confessional agreement with the truth? Members were also invited to attend as observers.

Also in Chatham (as well as a number of other congregations) a positive report could be given of the recent Vacation Bible School. We read: "The response from the neighbourhood has been very positive. They are pleased with what their children are being taught and the way in which the program is run. Our church is becoming familiar to them, especially since many of them are sending their children year after year. This year we sent a questionnaire home with the children and some parents requested to know more about "our" church and/or school." Encouraging!

In Hamilton they also rejoiced in a successful VBS program this past summer and decided to run a "follow-up" program. They named it "Year Round Children's Bible School Program." It will be offered to any child in the neighbourhood between the ages of 6 and 13." It will be run on alternate Saturdays from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon.

From the Family Post of Attercliffe and Smithville the following: "At times you notice that those who do not know that Attercliffe is a village may have difficulties with spelling our name correctly. This time we had a very interesting address. We received a letter which was directed to the Canadian Reformed Church of the Afterlife!"

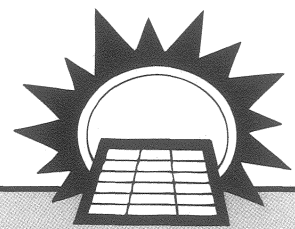
In Australia they are still struggling with the question of the position of the mission worker sent out by the Churches to Port Moresby, PNG. We read that: "The Consistory Albany is still convinced that a brother sent out by the churches with an ecclesiastical task also needs an ecclesiastical mandate and ordination." They again put on the agenda the earlier proposal to ordain this brother as a missionary elder. "We hope that this time the churches may see the need for adopting this proposal." So far they were not successful in finding a missionary to be called for the work in Papua New Guinea. It seems there is an increasing need for the position of evangelist in our churches.

In the Fraser Valley a beginning is made with a Bible Study/Fellowship or a Friendship Club (provisional name) as "a catalyst for people whom God has allowed to have a mental handicap."

A number of companions and volunteers are still needed.

C

RAY OF SUNSHINE



By Mrs. R. Ravensbergen

"As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace."

1 Peter 4:10

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

What is a gift? It is something that is given to you, or you give it to someone. We do not work for a gift as if we earned it. No, a gift is more like a surprise, something unexpected. You may receive a gift for a birthday or another special occasion. Whatever the reason may be, receiving a gift makes you feel very special. For the person who offers you a gift expresses his or her feelings of love and/or appreciation to you. Therefore receiving a gift, no matter how small, makes you feel special.

When you want to buy or to make a gift for someone, it sometimes takes you a long time before you think of something that is really suitable for that person. Everyone is different, and not everyone is happy with the same thing. You always want to come with something that will make that person happy, for you want him/her to feel special. You have to know a person in order to offer him/her a suitable gift.

What do you do with a gift that you have received? That depends maybe on how well you like it or the person who gave it to you. If you like that person very much, you will put it in a place where you can see it all the time, or you start using it immediately, even when you do not like the gift all that much. But if you do not care for it, you will put it somewhere on a shelf, or give it to someone else. When you notice that a person is not very happy with a gift that you bought for him/her, then your feelings are hurt because you feel that he/she does not care much for you either.

In the Bible we often read about gifts. Those gifts are not the things that you buy in the store for somebody, but they are gifts that the Lord gives to us. The Bible teaches us that we all have a special gift from God. That means that the Lord has chosen a personal gift for everyone of us.

It is easy to see that some people indeed have received special gifts from the Lord. When we look around us we know of many gifted people. Some are very smart at school or in their work, some people paint, others can make almost anything in crafts, some sing or play the piano. There are very gifted ministers and teachers, some people are always there when something needs to be done, some people are easy to talk to, and some are always running around and doing everything. It is clear enough that those people have special gifts which they use as much as they can. But not everyone is like that. And when we look at ourselves then it is hard to believe that we have received gifts, too. We are not good at anything, and physically we may not be able to do anything either. We are sick, or handicapped, or slow. We have a hard time doing our own things right, so how can we help others? Nobody ever asks us to help with something, nobody talks to us, nobody invites us, nobody likes us anyway. So what about our gifts? It is obvious that we did not receive any!

But Peter says that we all received our own gifts. And we have to be good stewards, by using them for each other. How can we do that when we know that we cannot do anything useful?

The most important thing is, that we have to find peace with what we are. The Lord made us, He created us

in His image. He is working out His plan of salvation, and we are taken up in His plan. The way we are is exactly the way He wants us to be. There is nothing missing, there is nothing there that should not be there. Our whole life long He guides us in the way that is best for us. Everyone of His children is equally important to the Lord. We have to believe that first in order for us to discover the gifts that we received from the Lord. When we are content with our life, then we will be able to work with the gifts that the Lord chose for each of us. Maybe some people can do many things, and they are always busy. But is it their responsibility to be good stewards. Do they maybe spend too much time on one thing, and not enough on the other? We all have to employ our gifts to one another. And we can do that when we accept our gifts as precious gifts from our Father. We cannot put them on a shelf because we do not like them. We have to be happy and excited with them, and so put them to use all the time.

Is that easier said than done? But the Lord is there to help us! He will make us see that we did not deserve anything. We are all sinful people, and we are inclined to hate God and our neighbour. Yet, out of grace, the Lord chose us to be His people. He gave us His Son, Who died for our sins. Through Him we can come to our Father with all our needs and difficulties. When we try to really be aware of that privilege, then we can only be happy, for we have nothing to worry about. And when we show that happiness to everyone around us, then everyone will be happy to be with us. No matter how limited we are to do things that need to be done, we accept those limitations from the Lord. With no chance to do much else we will have more time to praise Him, to thank Him, to pray for other people, to pray for the Church, and for all those who are so very busy, that they may have hardly time left to pray themselves.

So, with the Lord, we can do things that seem impossible to others. Even when we are sick, or when we have to face a physical handicap, or when in other ways we cannot participate in regular activities, we still know that the Lord is with us, and that His gifts are with us. We have to use those gifts to fulfill the personal task that He designed for us: that we may employ those gifts for one another, and to His honour and glory.

And when we think that we cannot do it, then God, the Father, is there to help us. For none of His children is left to fight the battle alone. Thanks to the Lord for His infinite love and His grace through which we may be called His children!

*Be merciful, be merciful to me,
O God, for I my refuge take in Thee.
Beneath Thy mighty wings I'll seek protection
Until the storms pass by. To God I flee -
To God Most High who charts my life's direction.*

Psalm 57:1

There are no birthdays of which I know in December.
Until next month,

Mrs. R. Ravensbergen
7462 Hwy. 20, RR 1, Smithville, ON L0R 2A0

May My Four Sons Play The Lord Jesus, Judas, Peter And Pilate In A School Easter Play?¹

By J.L. Van Popta

Some time ago the Rev. R. Schouten published a lead editorial for this magazine with the title *Doctrine or Experience*.² His editorial pointed out that experience, Christian experience, is gaining the upper hand in the search for unity among Christians. Doctrine and confession is taking a back seat to feeling, emotion and experience. This shift of focus is also becoming prevalent in the Christian school classroom. While this change might be more obvious in a general Christian school than in our Canadian Reformed schools, we should not close our eyes to this development.

One of the places where “experience” comes to the fore in the classroom is in drama and particularly in Bible drama. My children have attended the general Christian schools of the Ottawa area and here we were confronted with the dramatization of the Biblical text. At a Christmas assembly a nativity play complete with shepherds and wise men, Mary and Joseph, and baby Lord Jesus (a doll) in the manger was presented. Confronted with this as parents, we asked ourselves the question, “As Reformed confessors, may we allow our four sons to play the Lord Jesus, Judas, Peter and Pilate in a school Easter play?” Before we proceed to the question itself, however, we need to ask a few other questions and perhaps define some terms.

What is drama?

A working definition that we found is as follows: “Drama is an idealized representation of human life – of character, emotion, action – in forms manifest to the senses.”³ Some have said that imitation, and imitation only, accounts for the appeal of drama. Its appeal lies in its imitation of the multi-varied action, emotion and feeling of life. We need to understand that drama always requires action. It is the action which makes drama different from epic story or from plain poetry or prose. We



can define drama as a form of artistic endeavour that portrays stylized life.

Drama is presented so that others can watch. It must be presented on a stage. This stage can be anywhere. It can be in an auditorium or in a theater. Even the street or the playground or the back of a class room is a stage if drama is performed there. A stage is the place where the drama is performed so that others may watch. The stage is where the art is acted. We can, therefore, define drama as “an art form which more or less imitates life, by action, performed in public for the purpose of being watched.”

Why watch drama?

We can also ask: Why do people watch drama? What is the purpose of drama? Why do people want to watch life imitated by action on a stage? The primary reason for drama is the sheer enjoyment that people get by being entertained. Much drama is simply fun to watch.

Underlying good drama, however, is a message. Through the medium of the stage and through actors, the playwright is attempting to present to the audience his view of the world and of various kinds of relationships in the world. Drama is art in action which presents a message. This message is re-

ceived by those who watch the stage. A secondary part of drama is the experience of the actors. In their portrayal of the characters the actors attempt to “become” the character. They try to “get inside” the person in the script. They need to experience their character and so be able to understand the person in the play.

History of Bible drama

Bible drama has been around for many centuries. In the middle ages when choirs would sing passages of scripture set to music, actors began to act out the story. The earliest records of Bible drama in the church appear in the 9th century.⁴ Before that, the church had consistently repudiated any contact with pagan drama. The earliest drama consisted of four characters in the Easter story which was set to music. One priest in the church would represent the angel at the tomb while three others played the three Marys. The actors began to recite the story and included all sorts of extra material. This became a mini-opera. As the years progressed the mini-drama evolved and more and more material was added. Characters appeared who are not in the Bible story. An example of this is the merchant who sells spices to the women who were on the way to the tomb of the Lord Jesus.

This merchant and King Herod play silly characters to bring some laughter to the play. All sorts of other actors and characters are added – many for comic relief.

Later, instead of a few isolated Biblical events, whole sequences of events were used to provide material for the dramas. These plays became the basis for the instruction of the town's folk. Because of the size of the drama, the play often moved out into the church yard.⁵ The popularity of these plays increased and by the 13th century had become so large and complex that they were banished from within the church buildings. Because they went out into the church yard and into the town square, the plays became less liturgical and more secular and so were taken over by the quasi-religious trade guilds. The Fishermen's and Sailors' Guilds presented Noah and the flood. The Goldsmiths re-enacted the visit of the wise-men. The Butchers graphically staged the crucifixion. Whole cycles of 30 to 50 dramas were produced. They included material from creation to the last judgment. To fill in the dialogue, all sorts of extra material was added. Many characters, not in the Bible, were introduced for dramatic effect. One of these was Noah's wife who shouts and screams and lectures Noah whom she considers to be half crazed. In an other play sheep stealing characters are introduced. With these characters, all kinds of inaccuracies and error crept in.

Because the biblical accounts are brief, additional material was necessary. This material was neither true nor accurate. All this false information was presented, however, as the Word of God. The same process happens today. The data in the Bible is usually not enough to fill out the dialogue and action of a stage production. Thus, if our children act out a drama based on the Bible, they will be using a script which includes all kinds of extra material, actions and characters, as well as inaccuracies and misrepresentations.

Adding to Scripture goes against the very command of Scripture as we find it in Revelation and Deuteronomy. The Lord forbids us to add to the Scripture. The Bible is God's revelation to us. It is the record of God's acts in history. It is the account of redemptive history accompanied by a prophetic interpretation of God's redemptive acts. Re-enacting God's acts as if they were human acts, attacks the very nature of Scripture and revelation.

Education


As we enter into the field of school drama we also enter into educational philosophy. For many years now education has been moving towards child-centered learning. The child is encouraged to look inward for answers. The child is encouraged to learn by experience.⁶ The student is not taught to accept things on the authority of others. The teacher no longer brings knowledge and instruction. Rather, the teacher becomes a knowledge facilitator. The teacher helps the student discover and experience. Child-centered learning says that the student must find things out for and by himself. How the child experiences and responds to new knowledge is of primary importance. Added to this is the belief that, like the rest of mankind, the child is free. The student is free and creative. He defines and determines the truth for himself. No longer is the student a receiver of knowledge and truth – one who learns and then reproduces what is learned. In child-centered learning the child is an active creator. In this theory of education we find also the aspect of children's play. Play is truly free expression. Play has no rules. It is imaginative. It is creative and it is experiential. Playing is learning. This type of learning comes to its climax in drama. Here the primary root of educational activity is not in the presentation of external material that is to be learned. Rather, the foundation of education becomes learning by doing; education by play; learning by drama.⁷

Children are to act out the material in a text book and so get to understanding the facts. We can see three principles. 1. Learning comes not from reading and listening but from action and doing, from experience. 2. Good work is often the result of spontaneous effort rather than from good and studious application. 3. The natural means of study for children is playing and acting.

Here then, the center, the focal point is self-awareness and self-realization. Accuracy and facts are not that important. Rather, symbol, story and experience are the most important. Without evaluating this theory of education we now come to the theological developments of the 20th century.

The New Hermeneutic⁸

A theory that parallels the educational philosophy of learning by experience can be found in the world of theology and the Bible. It is called, "The



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New Hermeneutic," or "the new way of interpreting the Bible." The New Hermeneutic is the way in which many modern non-reformed Bible scholars interpret the Scripture. This hermeneutic has infiltrated the whole of 20th century Christendom. As we examine this new way of interpreting the Bible (with just a thumb-nail sketch) imagine how this might effect the way that the Bible would be taught in school.

To those who support the "New Hermeneutic" there are two kinds of history. First, there is the external world history, in which is included the story of Jesus' life and a record of ideas, reports and beliefs surrounding Him from His day, which are found in the Bible. Second, there is our internal personal history. This is the history that concerns me and my spiritual life. The New Hermeneutic teaches that it is only in the internal personal history that revelation from God occurs. Events occur in external history, but events have *revelatory meaning* only within my internal history.⁹

Revelation and meaning are supplied by me in the revelatory moment. When we read the Bible, they say, we are not reading revelation from God. No, revelation happens when we experience something. The revelation of God is not Word, but Event.¹⁰ This would mean that revelation is not objective truth coming to us from God who is outside us. Rather, revelation is our subjective personal experience of God. Revelation happens over and over again in our experiences. As Christians *rehearse* the memory of Jesus Christ,

revelation occurs. If this were true, however, then the Bible which God gave to us through the prophets and apostles is not revelation at all. The New Hermeneutic teaches that we can only re-live and experience revelation. This means, therefore, that the written Word of God is not enough. New Hermeneutic theologians say that God does not actually reveal himself to his people in the Bible. Rather, the Bible becomes the basis of an event. They say that revelation from God itself is actually an internal event in which we experience God. As Reformed confessors we reject this.

Evaluation¹¹

So, if we combine child centered learning and the New Hermeneutic and include with it the use of drama as a teaching tool we can re-ask that question, "Can my four sons play the Lord Jesus and Judas, Peter and Pilate in a school Easter play?"

When the dramatization of the Biblical text is used as a teaching tool we must understand that there has been a fundamental shift in the role of scripture. I can only conclude that my children cannot participate in this or any other Bible drama for the following reasons.

1. Bible dramas need to add to scripture in word and action. This in itself is enough for us to reject the dramatization of the Biblical text.
2. Bible dramas will be inaccurate and will present something different from the Bible text itself.
3. Bible dramas attack the once for all historical character of God's redemptive acts. The Bible is the record of God's acts in which he reveals himself to mankind. These acts cannot be repeated nor re-experienced.
4. Bible dramas are man centered, not Christ centered.
5. Bible dramas attack the scriptural teaching that faith comes by hearing the Word of God. The Word of God is something that comes with authority from the outside – from God through prophets and apostles in Scripture, taught by parents, preachers, elders and teachers. Instead of faith coming by *hearing* the authoritative Word of God, the use of Bible drama supports the teaching of the New Hermeneutic that faith comes by *re-living* the experience of the biblical characters.

6. Bible drama attacks the character of the sacraments. Drama with its visual emphasis depreciates the visual signs and seals of Baptism and Lord's Supper.¹² The sacraments are not re-enactments but signs of the covenant promises of God. They are the only legitimate visual instruction that Christ has ordained for His New Testament church. We should not be wiser than God in this matter and we should serve Him as He has commanded in His Word. (See the Catechism, LD 35, on the second commandment.) Images were rejected by the Reformation church as books for the laity. We should not enter again a world that rejects the Word in favour of images – in this case, speaking images. We should realize that God wants His people to be taught by the living preaching of His Word.
7. The interpretive principle of the New Hermeneutic and its effect on Bible drama is that man must experience and "re-live" the text. The Bible becomes something that must bring the Word of God to life again and again as an event. The Word of God, in this way of thinking, is something that is internal and so it says something different to different people because everyone's personal experience is different. This means, however, that the objective character and the authority of the Word of God is attacked. Reformed teaching, on the other hand maintains that scripture need not be experienced; instead, it must be proclaimed.
8. Bible dramas also present us with some secondary problems:
 - a. Who would dare to play God?
 - b. Who would dare to play the sinless Jesus Christ?
 - c. Who would dare to play Judas, the son of perdition?
 - d. Would anyone dare to play Satan in a drama about the Fall, or in the story of Job or the account of Christ's temptation?
 - e. Who would dare to play the resurrection of the Lord?
 - f. Would anyone dare to repeat the words of Thomas, "My Lord and my God," as he knelt before a sinful creature, a fellow student?
 - g. Would any dare to be Peter and deny the Lord?
 - h. Would any dare to be Pilate and condemn the Lord Jesus?

- i. Dramas depicting the crucifixion would necessarily become very emotional and superficial. The audience as it participated and experienced the pain of the cross would miss the real meaning of the cross. The Lord Jesus would become a tragic figure in a martyr play.¹³

The Belgic Confession

As Reformed believers, we need to maintain the authority of scripture as God's revelation to sinners. We can go to the Belgic Confession to get a concise summary of that teaching.

ART 5 *We receive all these [66] books [of the Old Testament and New Testament] and these only, as holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith. We believe without any doubt all things contained in them, not so much because the Church receives and approves them as such, but especially because the Holy Spirit witnesses in our hearts that they are from God, and also because they contain the evidence thereof in themselves; for, even the blind are able to perceive that the things foretold in them are being fulfilled.*

ART 7 *We believe that this Holy Scripture fully contains the will of God and that all that man must believe in order to be saved is sufficiently taught therein. The whole manner of worship which God requires of us is written in it at length. It is therefore unlawful for any one, even for an apostle, to teach otherwise than we are now taught in Holy Scripture: yes, even if it be an angel from heaven, as the apostle Paul says. Since it is forbidden to add to or take away anything from the Word of God, it is evident that the doctrine thereof is most perfect and complete in all respects.*

Conclusion

It seems that with the rise of Bible drama and the incorporation of extra-biblical data the Word of God itself begins to take a subordinate place. Students now present the medieval "mystery plays" in Christian schools. In a unit on medieval history the *Carpenters' Guild* presented "Noah and the Ark" and the *Bakers' Guild* presented "Jesus Feeding the Five Thousand." Yet, Bible dramas attack the confession of the church concerning Scripture. They attack the very teaching of scripture about itself. Bible drama attacks the

self-authenticating testimony of the Word of God. None may add. None may take away. The Word of God is complete. I can only reject any possibility of my four sons playing in a Bible drama. I also believe that Canadian Reformed schools must withstand the attack on the Word of God by the New Hermeneutic and so also reject the use of Bible drama in their curriculum. Let us not be afraid to mark out the confessional and doctrinal boundaries not only in matters of ecumenicity but also in matters of education.

Rev. J.L. Van Popta is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church of Ottawa.

¹This article was first presented as a speech at congregational meeting in Ottawa [February 1994] and later presented in a revised form to the Metcalfe Community Christian School education committee [February 1995]. For many ideas presented in this article, I am indebted to Ken Herfst, a former fellow student (now working in Guatemala as missionary of the Free Reformed

Churches) who, in April 1990 at the Theological College, presented an Ethics seminar on "Drama and Scripture."

²Schouten, R. "Doctrine or Experience, *Clarion* vol. 44, no. 6.

³Gray, L.H. "Drama." *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*. Vol. 4. Ed. J. Hastings. Edinburgh: T&T Clark.

⁴*The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. 2nd ed., Ed. F.L. Cross. s.v. "Drama, Christian." Oxford UP, Oxford:1974.

⁵*The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*. Ed. J.D. Douglas. s.v. "Drama, Christian." Grand Rapids, Zondervan: 1974"

⁶The "Montessori" theory of education uses this method.

⁷Courtney, R., *Play, Drama and Thought: The Intellectual Background to Drama in Education*. New York: Drama Specialists, 1974 (42).

⁸A good discussion and explanation of new hermeneutics can be found in – A. C. Thiselton, "The New Hermeneutic." *New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Principals and Methods*. Ed. I.H. Marshall. Grand Rapids:Eerdmans, 1977. (pp. 308-333). He shows how the German theologians, Fuchs

and Ebeling, have influenced much of 20th century biblical interpretation. Their whole purpose was to make the text speak anew (309). Their purpose is, not to understand, but to communicate and to experience the text in creative ways, rather than to proclaim it.

⁹Fore, Wm. F. "Communication for Churchmen." *Communication: Learning for Churchmen*. ed. B.F. Jackson. Nashville: Abington Press, 1968 (p. 75).

¹⁰Fore (Pg. 80).

¹¹Z. Rittersma has written on this topic in *Het Dramatiseren van Bijbelse Geschiedenissen Door Jeugdigen*. Leiden, 1972. The present author has not consulted this work.

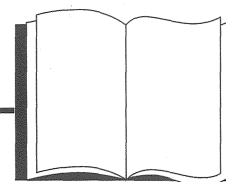
¹²Van Rongen, G. "Drama and Holy Scripture." *Clarion*, vol. 25, no. 6, March 20, 1976. Pg. 98. Rev. Van Rongen published four articles in *Clarion* on Drama. [vol. 24, no. 22. Nov. 1, 1975; vol. 25, no. 2, Jan. 24, 1976; vol. 25, no. 4, Feb. 21, 1976. vol. 25, no. 6, Mar. 20, 1976.]

¹³De Vries, W.G., "Gods Woord een Scenario?" *De Gereformeerde Levenswandel*. Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1964. (214).

C

READER'S FORUM

By W. DeHaan



The rest of the story . . .

I am convinced that Br. Hordijk has done a bad service to the readers of *Clarion* July 28th, 1995. Prof. Douma tells only part of a long history. The first thing which may be noticed is that Douma used the word "liberated" many times (24) when he is referring to the Reformed churches. That is not the name. The name is: Reformed.

I have many objections to this article. They start on page 350, in the first column, where Douma states, "For many it became unpleasant to remain 'liberated.' They were turned off by the 'liberated,' for they would not go along with what was presented as 'continual reformation.'"

Already in 1948, Rev. B.A. Bos was the spokesman for several church members who together had started conferences with the synodical churches in order to come to reunion. General Synod Amersfoort 1948 declared that Rev. Bos was responsible for "creating confusion and hindering the peace." In fact, Rev. Bos *et al* were turned off by

the **faithfulness** of the church members who would not go back with him under the synodocratic yoke. For some years already, Rev. Bos had been looking over the "church wall." These people blinded themselves to the work of the Lord in the Liberation.

Then Prof. Douma starts writing about 1967. He questions the wisdom of General Synod Hoogeveen, 1969. To make such a statement, especially in *Clarion*, is out of place, for the younger generation does not know much about that part of church history. As a matter of fact, we cannot isolate the events of 1967 and following from what happened before, namely what was started by Rev. A. v.d. Ziel in Groningen. On Nov. 27, 1961, the consistory of Groningen-South was confronted with a letter of Rev. v.d. Ziel along with 13 others, who declared that they would seek contact with consistories of the synodical churches in Groningen. In response, the consistory pointed to a decision **not to enter into contact**, due to the con-

tinued deformation which could be observed in the synodical churches. Consistory pointed out that if the writers could not agree, the road of appeal was open (Art. 31, Church Order). Nevertheless, this response of the consistory was ignored and the writers of the letter continued in the same way. Too much space is needed to point out all the difficulties created by Rev. v.d. Ziel. On Feb. 14, 1963, the consistory came to the conclusion that Rev. v.d. Ziel was guilty of sins which are not to be tolerated in a servant of the Lord (the sin of creating schism). This difficult matter came on the agenda of General Synod Rotterdam-Delfshaven, 1964. After wide-ranging discussions, the delegates came to a vote. The vote was 14 against 13 in favour of the action of the consistory. Then the delegates who voted against (13) requested the decision to be taken back. This is not in accordance with the Church Order, Art. 31. Twelve of those who voted against left the meeting of General Synod. They declared

that they were not able to continue in this General Synod.

In April, 1967, General Synod Amersfoort-West was convened. One of the delegates was Rev. B.J.F. Schoep. He was the composer of the so-called "Open Brief" which was signed by 25 ministers and church members. This "Open Brief" was addressed to the so-called "Tehuis-gemeente" of Rev. v.d. Ziel, a name chosen after he and his followers had separated from the Reformed churches. They make the statement in that letter that the consistory of Groningen-Zuid created a schism in suspending Rev. v.d. Ziel.

General Synod Amersfoort pointed out that the "Open Letter" was not in conformity with signing the subscription vow and that therefore Rev. Schoep could not be received as a delegate to General Synod. Rev. J.O. Mulder at Kampen had also signed the "Open Letter." Together with the ministers C.H. Lindeboom and G. Visee at Kampen, they were in opposition and were leading in the direction of establishing the Netherlands Reformed churches (Buiten Verband Kerken). Before this, Rev. Visee, Prof. H.J. Jager and Prof. C. Veenhof had declared that doing profession of faith in the Reformed churches only means that the confessor acknowledges what is confessed in the 12 articles and not what is written and confessed in the Three Forms of Unity.

Kampen seceded from the Federation of Reformed churches on June 21, 1967. General Synod Hoozevee 1969 declared that the officebearers who had called the congregation away from the separated consistory (Visee *et al*) were faithful in doing so. Prof. Jager declared that it must be possible to have disagreement about Lord's Day 22, Qu. and A. 57. Rev. Telder, for one, had written a book about his view and declared that our confession did not have a "doctrine" about the dead between dying and the resurrection. This doctrine of Telder is still tolerated in the Netherlands Reformed churches. One minister, Drs. H. de Jong, declared that "God's Word has a small border of insecurity. The authority of it must be relativized." Some congregations have female deacons and elders. Some accept children at the Lord's Table. There is a wide gap between the Reformed and the Netherlands Reformed churches. The latter also have very easy pulpit exchanges with other churches.

Was General Synod Hoozevee "unwise" as Prof. Douma suggested? Now we are seeing the **result** of the unfaithfulness of the Netherlands Reformed churches. Prof. Douma maintains that Synod Hoozevee was unwise, for he is pleased about the contacts with the Netherlands Reformed churches. We can see similar trends in our churches. It seems that it becomes easier also among us for Pro-

fessors and ministers to speak an "edifying word" in independent churches without first resolving divergences. Rev. VanOene, in *With Common Consent*, writes about Art. 15 of the Church Order: "Ministers are not allowed at all to conduct services in another 'denomination' whether with or without permission of a consistory or board within that 'denomination.'" I am very concerned about the situation in our federation which more and more becomes "liberated" from the Reformed confessions and Church Order.

Synthesis does not pay off. Therefore, G.P.V. did not win. Schutte declared, "The confession is valuable, but cannot be norm for **all** times and places. There can come a situation that politics on confessional basis is no longer justified." Faithful people do not accept that. Let us not be blind to the writing on the wall.

(The editor-in-chief will make some comments about this article in the next issue.)

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.

I Was Sexually Abused

Anonymous

I am a woman in your congregation. I seem normal enough. I attend church regularly, I go to Bible study as much as possible, I like to get involved in outreach programs, and I volunteer for various school and church activities. If you see me on Sunday and ask me how I am, I will say "not too bad" or "I'm fine" – but that is not really true.

The year I turned 7, a cousin came to stay with my family for six months. I didn't know it then, but he was a very troubled and sick person. I am not making excuses for him, just stating a fact.

I thought he was the nicest person on earth. He was so kind to me, and he treated me like I was quite special. My

siblings were jealous because of the special treatment that I received from him. My parents were quite busy that summer, and it was great to have our cousin there to play with us. Then the abuse started. I won't go into the details, because they don't matter. It wasn't until I went to high school, and read an article on sexual abuse, that I realized that what my cousin had done to me was abusive.

Now I am hurting. Sexual abuse wounds the heart; it is murder of the soul. I feel empty inside. Not all the time, mind you, just when I am remembering. I just started to "deal" with my abuse this year. I have been doing lots

of reading, talking with people who are close to me, and seeing a Christian counselor. It has not been easy, but already I feel better. My relationship with my husband is improving, and so is my spiritual life. I was afraid to pray about my problems because I could not verbalize what had happened to me. My spiritual life was suffering because I could not trust God.

What can we do?

Studies show that one in three women have been sexually abused before the age of 18. Counselors say this is also true, or worse, in churches. Someone you know has been sexually

abused. It may be a friend, it may be your wife, it may be you. Do you really know what sexual abuse is? Do you know how it affects the victim? Do you know of the shame that it causes? If sexual abuse is rampant in our churches, and it is, why do we not hear more about it? Apparently we are either ashamed, or in denial.

All of us can do something about sexual abuse. As individuals, we must educate ourselves. There are numerous books written on the subject of sexual abuse, many of them from a Christian perspective. I could not possibly list them all here, but a very complete book written from a Reformed perspective is Dan Allender's *The Wounded Heart*. Our libraries should acquire a good selection of books about sexual abuse since not everyone has the resources to purchase them.

As parents we have to learn how to protect our children from abuse. We have to give them the proper terminology for their genitals, from a very early age, so that they will have the right vocabulary in case something does happen to them. We must make it clear to our children that it is OK to talk to us about anything, including sexual matters. We have to let our children know

that even though we teach them to obey those in authority, if any person does something they find uncomfortable, they are allowed to say "NO!" In our churches and schools, we must continue this education. Sad as it is, some parents are abusing their children, and therefore we must as a community teach and protect these children as well. Appropriate sexual education cannot be optional for any child.

There must be someone that victims of abuse can turn to when they realize that they need help. Not all victims can talk to their husband, many feel uncomfortable talking to their minister or elders. They may be afraid to talk to any man about their difficulties. As churches we must be prepared to help those who need help. The status quo is just not good enough: providing and advertising victim services must be a priority for all congregations.

Perpetrators of sexual abuse must know that what they are doing is unacceptable, and that they must stop. We have to hear this from the pulpit too. It is not enough just to mention it as a side issue, or in a general list of sins every once in a while. Sexual abuse causes spiritual problems for everyone involved, so our ministers must be sensi-

tive to the fact that there are both victims as well as perpetrators in their congregations.

Men have to change their attitudes toward women. Lewd glances, sexual innuendo, "dirty" jokes, pornography of any sort, are unacceptable. Men must not treat women as objects, or as servants. If we all remember the command to love one another, and if we all try harder to serve each other, then sexual abuse can be stopped. One book which solidly applies Biblical principles to gender relationships is Larry Crabb's *Men and Women*.

Thankfully, I was able to talk to my husband, although it did take him some time to realize I needed some help since this problem would not just go away with time. It would have been better for me and my family if I could have gotten help much earlier. I have not told you who I am because it is not important. My story is real, but it is only one of many. A person sitting near you in church is me or someone like me.

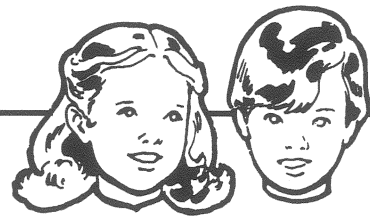
Pray for me and other victims. Pray for the perpetrators that they may see the error of their ways and repent. And pray that we as churches may become open to the subject of sexual abuse and willing to help those affected by it. **C**

Oppression

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>I. <i>Why does it happen?
Does God sleep at night?
Does He forget about me?
Why does He let him?</i></p> | <p>VI. <i>Am I a victim?
Or a survivor?
An enemy?
Or an ally?
Is love real?</i></p> |
| <p>II. <i>In the darkness
I am my worst enemy
I make it happen
I know it's my fault
He says so
And I know so.</i></p> | <p>VII. <i>Questions, questions.
Lord, can you answer?
Why? Why? Why?
Grace sufficient – lilies white,
Can they really get me through the night?</i></p> |
| <p>III. <i>Yes God works all for good
At least on Sundays
The rest I just don't know
It's easy to say to me
But you don't know
Too many unnumbered hairs have fallen.</i></p> | <p>VIII. <i>Did Job know?
Did he really know pain?
And Christ?
Sting and suffering incarnate?
For me too?</i></p> |
| <p>IV. <i>It happens again
And again and again
It never stops
Will it ever stop Lord?
Can you stop the pain?</i></p> | <p>IX. <i>She is there
God's gift espoused
Sharing my journey
Through this valley of death
Being alongside, giving water
For my parched soul.</i></p> |
| <p>V. <i>I have a wounded heart
My soul has been slayed
A sword has pierced
A kiss betrayed.</i></p> | <p>X. <i>Lord, I know you.
I know you're there.
For me as always.
Help me to know.
Comfort me in Your whirlwind.</i></p> |

OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



Dear Busy Beavers,

*"The sun did not shine,
It was too wet to play,
So we sat in the house
All that cold, cold wet day.*

*I sat there with Sally.
We sat there we two.
And I said, "How I wish
We had something to do!"*

(From *The Cat in the Hat* by Dr. Seuss)

Have you said that lately?
Can't play outside.
Don't know what to do inside?
Well, here's some ideas for one, two or more bored people!

Idea 1 - one or more people.

Get a big cardboard box. Ask for permission or help to cut half-circle openings in opposite sides of the box. Get a ball that will fit through. Roll the ball through both openings. Can you play this by yourself and keep track of how many times you get it through, or play with more people.

Idea 2 - two or more people

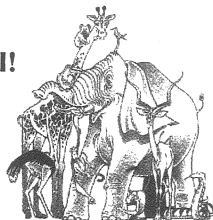
Get a number of different sized boxes. (They have to be big enough for you to put your foot in and out.) Cut off tops. Put the boxes a small ways apart across a room to make a path. Take turns walking across the room, using only the boxes to step on(in). When a player misses and steps on the floor, he is out of the game.

Idea 3 - one or more people

You will need a piece of cardboard or stiff paper about 15 x 20 inches, crayons or markers, a long nail and a box of rubber canning jar rings. Colour a face on the cardboard and insert nail from back for nose. Put the board on a chair. Stand a few feet in front of the chair and use the rubber rings to toss over the nail nose. Keep score for the fun of it!

MATH GAME - EQUATION SAFARI!

Object of the game: To find as many equations as you can!
Directions: Get a different coloured pencil for each player. One minute timer



1. Each player takes a turn at trying to find as many equations as he can in one minute. One point for each equation.
2. Start anywhere on the gameboard. Draw a circle around the numbers you want to use in your equation. Then fill

in the right symbols. Example: circle 5,6 and 11. Write in + and = making the equation $5 + 6 = 11$.

3. A number can be reused in more than one equation.
4. Equations can be formed vertically, horizontally, diagonally or around the corner and any of these either forwards or backwards.
5. You lose your turn when you can't find an equation in one minute.
6. The game is over when no one can find an equation on the gameboard.

Here are the example equations on a part of gameboard.

9	3	6	81	60	7
45	2	x	3	12	48
3	35	18	x	4	72
15	5	10	9	=	12
72	38	8	36	÷	6 = 6

Here is the whole Gameboard:

9	3	6	81	60	7	12	19	57	76	23
45	2	x	3	12	48	6	8	14	25	33
3	35	18	x	4	72	42	30	56	3	44
15	5	10	9	=	12	5	28	11	17	35
72	38	8	36	÷	6 = 6	4	27	31	5	1
48	8	80	4	20	11	7	4	9	36	2
64	4	24	8	3	5	15	45	40	3	10
7	13	12	32	35	19	8	3	6	18	3
32	33	28	4	7	6	9	4	19	21	5
58	18	40	36	3	7	21	28	36	4	9
24	54	37	26	63	13	49	57	20	25	45
3	72	17	4	7	6	52	2	26	50	72

Have fun!!

Here are the answers to last time's Bible quiz:

1. Hamutal, 2. Joseph, 3. Phut, 4. James, 5. Preacher,
6. Porch, 7. Slept, 8. Leper, 9. Nisan, 10. Nain 11. Lasha,
12. Mire, 13. Mist, 14. Er. Unknown letter E

I hope you enjoy these new games. Most busy Beavers must be very busy in school and with other things, because I haven't received many letters lately. I hope to hear from you soon!

Here's my address:

Aunt Betty
c/o Premier Printing Ltd.
One Beghin Ave.
Winnipeg, MB R2J 3X5

Love to you all, Aunt Betty