

# Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE  
VOLUME 46, NO. 3 FEBRUARY 7, 1997



*Role of Women  
in the Church*



By R. Schouten



## Thinking Biblically about the Role of Women in the Church

A recently published book described feminism as one of the teeth in the mouth of the wolf who is attacking the bride of Christ.<sup>1</sup> Radical egalitarianism continues to erode understanding of the distinct roles given by God in creation to male and female, roles which God has not nullified but maintained in redemption. As Christians we need to reflect deeply upon the office and calling of men and women in family, church and society. If we don't undertake this study, we might well be swallowed up alive into the gender confusion of modern society. Another danger is that, without reflection, we might define our own view as Christians simply in *reaction* to radical egalitarianism rather than by *thinking biblically*.

Thinking biblically on any issue can be hard work. It can also be upsetting for those who are content with simple slogans and who find their guidance in pat answers to complex matters. Thinking biblically puts us out of step with the spirit of the age animating feminism, but it may also put us at odds with deeply-entrenched attitudes in the church of Christ. Yes, thinking biblically can make us an offense all around, to the right and the left and even to the center. Sometimes, we too readily adopt the model of "finding a balance." When there are opposing points of view on a question like "the role of women in the church," we sometimes respond by striving to "find a balanced view." However, a merely "balanced" view is not yet a biblical view although a biblical view will, of course, always be balanced. Thinking biblically about a topic like "the role of women" will therefore produce surprises for those who have not yet attempted the exercise.

For example, a "traditionalist" may find it surprising and even mildly threatening that in the days of King Josiah, when the book of the Law was discovered in the temple, the prophetess Huldah was consulted for direction – this at a time when Jeremiah was also prophesying and readily available (see 2 Kings 22:11-20).<sup>2</sup> Similarly, it may seem disorderly that the woman Priscilla had a hand in instructing the eloquent and famous Pastor Apollos (Acts 18:26) and that women were indeed prophesying in the early Christian worship services (1 Cor. 11:4-5; compare Joel 2:28-29).

On the other hand, a "progressive" will find it an offense that women were clearly barred from the priesthood in the Old Testament times and thus had no role in leading worship or in the regular instruction of God's congregation.

A radical feminist and also a so-called "evangelical" feminist may point to the surprising and refreshing way in which Christ interacted with many women. Compared to the uptight and chauvinist ways of the rabbis of the first century, Christ was relaxed and open in his contact with women.

He admitted them to the inner circle of His disciples, traveled with them and taught them the Gospel of the Kingdom as he would any man. Women were his faithful companions and showed greater courage and loyalty than the men in the time of His passion. They were also the first witnesses to His resurrection.

And yet, the "evangelical" feminist must also reckon with the unavoidable fact that when the time came to set aside twelve to be apostles, not one of them was a woman.

A chauvinist may feel vindicated when he reads passages such as 1 Cor. 14:33-36 where there is apostolic instruction about the need for women to "keep silence" in the churches.

He will, however, have difficulty with other passages which describe women as "fellow-workers" with Paul the apostle. I think, for example, of our sisters Euodia and Syntyche, women of whom Paul states that they "laboured side by side with me in the Gospel together with Clement" (Phil. 4:2-3). Or, what must we say of Romans 16, where we hear about a certain "Mary" who "has worked hard among you," and about Tryphaena and Tryphosa as well as about Persis, all women whom Paul describes as having "worked hard" in the Lord (Rom. 16:6,12)? The terms used by Paul for the contributions of these various women shows that they were directly involved in the work of spreading the Gospel.

Then, too, people of all opinions will need to take account of "Phoebe," described by Paul in Rom. 16:1 as a "deaconess" of the church at Cenchrea. While the term "deaconess" as found here in the RSV need not point to an "office" as we understand it, it does point to a woman with a special task and function within the congregation.<sup>3</sup> Good exegetical arguments can also be put forward to show that the "women" of 1 Tim. 3:11 are a reference to something like "deaconesses," that is, to women who had a special role of service within the church.<sup>4</sup>

If we take the risk of attempting a summary after so brief a survey of the biblical material, we can say that Scripture indicates a broad and respected contribution of women in the missionary task, prophetic ministry and diaconal service of the church. At the same time, we see that positions of ordained leadership such as priest and elder or pastor in the congregation are restricted to men. Thus, the pattern of male headship in the home is also reflected in the church which is the household of God.

Naturally, the reality of any closed doors will be offensive to the radical and even, alas, to the "evangelical" feminists. Their feminist presuppositions make it impossible for them to accept a *creation order* in which God has assigned different functional roles for male and female, roles which are not cultural and time-bound, but timeless and theological. The



gender-blending role interchangeability promoted by most contemporary feminism is an attempt to redefine our humanity in violation of the Lord's already given definition (a definition we also learn from nature itself – if only our eyes are open).

Equally, however, the reality of many open doors for women will be offensive to the champion of the status quo who may disguise his unconscious chauvinism by appeals to select Scripture passages. In the context of male leadership, the gifts of women must be mobilized for the up-building of the congregation and the propagation of the Gospel. Of course, it goes without saying that the functioning of women in the congregation is greatly impeded by the abandonment of leadership by Christian men. There is a desperate need in the church for godly men who are growing in the Lord and the knowledge of His Word and can thus offer biblical guidance and government for the congregation.

What works of supportive service can be performed by women in the congregation? Here is a short list of activities pertaining to women as "deaconesses": ministering to women, especially older women to younger women; reaching women and offering counsel in situations where men, especially young pastors or elders might have difficulty, such as caring for unwed mothers, divorced wives and mothers, abandoned wives, abused wives, abused children, drug-addicted children, emotionally distressed people, women with eating disorders, marital tensions, sexual difficulties, illness, emotional disorders and so forth.

In terms of the prophetic and missionary ministry of women, we can mention the following possibilities: a woman with teaching gifts can teach a Bible class; she can teach a class of women studying Scripture; she can teach outsiders the faith and instruct new converts; other women can lead the struggle against pornography and abortion, visit prisoners, assist missionaries, lead the youth and teach in Christian schools.

Thus, while we must respect the limits set by God (not by Moses or Paul) for female ministry, we must also stress the many and varied possibilities for service. Only then can we work together as men and women for the glory of the Lord.

As a final word, it should be said that for many women, the primary calling of being a wife and mother will dominate life. Also in this work, a woman uses her gifts for the Kingdom. Here, too, in her family life, she is a "fellow-worker" in the Gospel. Nobody is ultimately served if a family is consistently neglected because a woman is too busy with the needs and possibilities outside the home. Different stages of life give differing possibilities for other service in the congregation and for the Gospel.

<sup>1</sup>J. Sittema, *With a Shepherd's Heart. Reclaiming the Pastoral Office of Elder* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Fellowship, 1996), pg. 70ff.

<sup>2</sup>It can be shown, however, that Huldah as well as other prophetesses exercised their ministry differently from the men who had the same gift. The main difference is that the prophetesses did not publicly proclaim God's Word. See T. Schreiner, "The Valuable Ministries of Women in the Context of Male Leadership," in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. A Response to Evangelical Feminism* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1991), ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem, pg. 216.

<sup>3</sup>See J. VanBruggen, *Ambten in de Apostolische Kerk* (Kampen: Kok, 1984), pg. 112.

<sup>4</sup>For a summary of the exegetical reasons for not identifying these women as wives of deacons, see VanBruggen, op. cit., pages 112-113, as well as T. Schreiner, op. cit., pgs 213-214.



Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd., Winnipeg, MB

**EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:**

Editor: J. Geertsema  
Coeditors: J. De Jong, R.A. Schouten,  
C. Van Dam, G.Ph. van Popta

**ADDRESS FOR EDITORIAL MATTERS:**

CLARION  
5621 - 51 Street  
Taber, AB T1G 1K6  
Fax: (403) 223-0149  
E-Mail: clarion@compuserve.com

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

CLARION, Premier Printing Ltd.  
One Beghin Avenue  
Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5  
Phone: (204) 663-9000 Fax: (204) 663-9202

SUBSCRIPTION RATES	Regular	Air
FOR 1997	Mail	Mail
Canada*	\$34.00*	\$59.00*
U.S.A. U.S. Funds	\$39.00	\$52.00
International	\$55.00	\$84.00

\* Including 7% GST – No. R104293055

Advertisements: \$11.25 per column inch

Unless a written subscription cancellation is received we assume you wish to continue to subscribe. You will be invoiced prior to the subscription renewal date.

Publications Mail Registration No. 1025  
ISSN 0383-0438

**IN THIS ISSUE**

Editorial – Thinking Biblically about the  
Role of Women in the Church — R. Schouten .....50

Meditation – Our Pursuit of Knowledge:  
Is it Proper? — J. Vanwoudenberg .....52

By Virtue of the Covenant (part two) — J. Ludwig .....53

Press Review – Godly Compassion — J. De Jong .....56

Reader's Forum – False Dilemma – Again  
— J.A. Roukema .....57

Poem: The Oldest Christian Hymn .....58

Ray of Sunshine — Mrs. R. Ravensbergen .....59

The Hi-Liter — C. Van Spronsen .....60

Letters to the Editor .....61

His Steadfast Love Endures Forever — E. Rook .....62

Ordination of Candidate J. Van Vliet and  
Welcome Evening — John Schutten .....63

Book Review — C. Bosch  
Divorce and Remarriage by Dr. C. Van Dam .....65

Our Little Magazine — Aunt Betty .....66

By J. Vanwoudenberg

## Our Pursuit of Knowledge: Is it Proper?

*Based on 1 Cor. 8:1-3*

**Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that we all possess knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know. But the man who loves God is known by God.**

Our pursuit of knowledge: is it proper? Are we doing the right thing in attending study societies, in attending catechism classes, or in sending our children to catechism classes? What about all our personal Bible study: is it proper?

Undoubtedly most will answer in the affirmative – and will perhaps even be surprised with the question. Does not scripture make abundantly clear that we should be a people of knowledge? Take, for instance, Prov. 3:13-14: “Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man who gets understanding, for the gain from it is better than the gain from silver and its profit better than gold.” We need knowledge of God’s Word in order to deal with problems and trials in life.

Before closing the issue, however, listen to what Paul says in 1 Cor. 8:1b, “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.” Paul contrasts knowledge to love, extolling love and depreciating knowledge. Does Paul indeed support the sentiment, “Don’t worry about knowledge, but only love?”

Before drawing such conclusions, we should realize that our text is not

the only place in 1 Cor. where Paul speaks about knowledge. Paul opens his letter by thanking God “that in every way (the Corinthians) were enriched in Him with . . . all knowledge” (1:5). Elsewhere he calls the utterance of knowledge a gift of the Spirit (12:8). Evidently Paul does not resist the pursuit of knowledge per se.

What Paul does resist, however, is the pursuit of knowledge in the way the Corinthians were going about it. Paul speaks of knowledge “puffing up” (cf. 4:6). One who is “puffed up” has an inflated ego. He takes pride in his own knowledge, and sees himself as a few notches higher than others. In verse 2 Paul continues in a rebuking tone of voice, “If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know.” He speaks of someone who thinks he “has arrived” when it comes to knowledge of God’s Word. About such a person Paul says, “He does not yet know as he ought to know.”

In contrast to such knowledge, Paul presents true knowledge. Over against the man who “imagines that he knows something,” Paul presents the man who “loves God . . .” One who loves God is one who gives himself to God completely (cf. Eph. 5: 2). Such a person “is known by God.” In other words, he is in a living and intimate relationship with God. True knowledge, then, is a knowledge intimately connected to love; it is a knowledge that functions in a rela-

tionship of love. It is the kind of knowledge that a loving husband, for instance, has about his wife.

Instead of saying in verse 3, “But if one loves God, that one truly has knowledge,” Paul says, “But if one loves God, (that) one *is known by Him.*” By speaking in this way, Paul teaches us that true knowledge has its source in God: before we can know God, God must first know us. Before we can truly have knowledge, God must first know us. Especially considering that true knowledge is inseparably united to love, the famous text of 1 John 4:10 comes to mind: “In this is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the expiation for our sins.”

That’s what the man of true knowledge realizes: before He knew God or loved God, God first knew or loved him. The man of true knowledge never forgets that His knowledge has its source in God alone: it’s all a matter of God’s grace. Hence he does not get “puffed up,” even though he may be very brilliant and may possess a great wealth of facts and depth of understanding about the teachings of scripture. Neither does he use his knowledge to cause problems in the communion of saints. Rather, as Paul says in verse 1, “love builds up” – and true knowledge is always associated with such love. Instead of using knowledge to inflate his ego, and hence inevitably to cause problems in the communion of saints, he uses his knowledge to promote relationships. He uses his

### What’s inside?

Since we have finished publishing the meditations on Proverbs by the Rev. H.J.J. Feenstra, we are pleased to inform you that some dozen or so of our ministers have committed themselves to publishing some meditations for your edification this year. We lead off with one by the Rev. John Vanwoudenberg, minister in Watford, ON.

Rev. John Ludwig of London concludes his two part article about the baptism of the children of believers.

In addition, you will find some reviews, reader responses, and reports.

About reports. . . . *Please keep them brief.* We love to publish reports of installations of ministers and other noteworthy local events, but please keep them short – under 1,000 words. Otherwise they will fall victim to the editor’s black marker. Also, *if possible*, please send reports (and anything else around 1,000 words or more) on diskette to the editorial address (in Word, Works, Word Perfect, or TEXT).

GvP

knowledge in self-sacrificing love for God and the neighbour.

Clearly, then, Paul does not at all despise knowledge. Although the pursuit of knowledge has gone off track in Corinth, Paul does not throw out the baby with the bath water. Paul agrees that as Christians we need knowledge in order to face the problems of life. That is exactly why he deals with the topic of knowledge before delving into the ethical problems surrounding the matter of food offered to idols (vv. 1,4).

However, this knowledge must be proper knowledge. It must be a knowledge about God's Word that is shaped by the glory of the gospel – the gospel of God's love! It must be a knowledge that functions within relationships – a knowledge that promotes our walk with God, and that promotes fellowship with those whom God has given us as brothers and sisters.

Once again: is our pursuit of knowledge proper? It's an important question, for just as the Corinthians had ego in-

flating tendencies, so do all of us. So easily our study of scripture can be motivated by a desire to inflate our ego – to look good before others – to be the top shot at society meetings, for instance.

Let us indeed pursue knowledge, the knowledge of scripture. But let that knowledge be a knowledge of love – a knowledge that knows the grace of God – a knowledge that promotes those covenant relationships, with God, and with our brothers and sisters.



---

## By Virtue of the Covenant (part two)

By J. Ludwig

*In the first part, we briefly surveyed the history of conflict regarding baptism and dealt with the first Baptist objection against infant baptism, namely that there is no express command or example in the Bible showing that infants must be baptized.*

### Baptism and God's covenant of grace

The second Baptist objection (that infants do not have faith and therefore they may not be baptized) springs from a wrong understanding of God's covenant of grace. With this matter, we come to the heart of the differences between Reformed and Baptist on this sacrament. The case for infant baptism rests upon the continuity of the covenant, and upon the divine command that the children of Israel had to receive the sign and seal of the covenant in the old dispensation.

Before explaining the covenant doctrine from Scripture, we should take note of the fact that what Baptists say about the covenant *sounds* very reformed. David Kingdom in his book *The Children of Abraham* (1973) professes that "there is one Covenant of Grace which has been operative in human history since the Fall. . . ." He acknowledges one church of God purchased with the blood of Christ, and one way of salvation, namely repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Mediator of the eternal covenant. These are all Scriptural truths. Yet, what Kingdom gives with his right hand he

takes back with his left hand, as it were. For he goes on to explain that the covenant in the old testament had two aspects – an earthly, temporal one and a heavenly, eternal one. To the earthly aspect of the covenant belonged circumcision. Since all shedding of blood has been fulfilled by Christ, we cannot derive from circumcision that infants must be baptized in the new covenant which is now only a spiritual affair.

The same line of reasoning can be found in Paul K. Jewett's *Infant Baptism and the Covenant of Grace* (1978). Following the ideas of Karl Barth he writes: . . . all Israelites had a right to the sign of circumcision **by virtue of their participation in the earthly blessings of the covenant community** (emphasis mine): they were citizens of the nation Israel by birth. However, since this outward form of the covenant was done away in Christ, to baptize indiscriminately in the New Testament age is either to abuse discipline in administering the rite or to be guilty of hypocrisy in receiving it.<sup>2</sup>

However, this separation of earthly and temporal aspects from the heavenly and spiritual is illegitimate. That much is clear from Galatians 3 where Paul, quoting Genesis 12 and 17, says that God "preached the gospel beforehand" to Abraham, and that Abraham's offspring is Christ. God determined to bring that promise to fulfilment through the line of Abraham's descendants living within the boundaries of the land of

Canaan. Thus, the promises of land and descendants, though necessary, was always subservient to the promise of salvation through Christ. Abraham himself was fully aware of that. When God finally blessed his marriage with the birth of a son, that was a reason for great laughter. In fact, the name Isaac reflects their unparalleled joy, for his name means "laughter." Upon his birth Sarah exclaims: "God has made laughter for me, everyone who hears will laugh over me" (Gen. 20:6).

To interpret this merely as an emotion of maternal joy – "finally my own child" – would be superficial to say the least. By choosing this name, Abraham and Sarah were confessing Isaac's birth as a mighty breakthrough in the history of redemption. "Everyone who hears will laugh with me." Sarah's words brim with the perspective of true faith. She rejoices that now the way is open for THE SEED, not of Ishmael, but of Isaac. Through the son according to the promise the salvation of the world would come. I think Christ was referring in John 8 to this joyful moment when he said: "Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad" (Jn. 8:56). From the loins of Abraham would be born the Messiah, the Seed of the Woman, whose one sacrifice on the cross would make the covenant once again universal, opening it to all nations and peoples. So, the foundational promise to Abram was: salvation through Jesus Christ.



With respect to the promise about land we can quote the writer of Hebrews: "By faith (Abraham) sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land. . . . For he looked forward to the city which has foundations whose builder and maker was God" (11:9,10). Contrary to the Baptist teaching, then, we may not drive a wedge in the one promise of God, splitting it so that the earthly aspect of land and descendants temporarily receives a higher status in the old dispensation.

What about the Baptist method of setting "birth in the OT" over against "faith in the NT" as the portal into God's covenant? That approach, too, is completely unfounded. Abraham received the sign and seal of the covenant after almost 25 years of living by faith in the Word of God. God called Abraham from Ur when he was 75 years old. The divine command to circumcize came in his 99th year. The apostle Paul notes that relationship between circumcision and Abraham's faith in Romans 4:11: "He [Abraham] received circumcision as a sign or seal of the righteousness which he had by faith while he was still uncircumcized." Paul refers us here to Gen. 15:6: "Abraham believed the LORD, and He reckoned it to him as righteousness."

We should bear in mind that Paul is writing in Galatians against the haughty claims of Judaists who were glorying over the uncircumcized Gentile-Christians. They were boasting in their birth as Jews, their descent according to the flesh. What does Paul do? He uses the OT sign of the covenant to show that they have absolutely no reason to boast in their origin. Circumcision is proof that God's people are justified by faith alone. Just look at Abraham, the father of all believers!

In effect Paul is showing that circumcision was not a national symbol of a dividing wall between Israel and the Gentiles, as the Baptists would have us believe.<sup>3</sup> Instead, in its deepest meaning circumcision pointed to the communion of Israel with other nations.<sup>4</sup> In Genesis 17 the many nations are in the foreground – not just Israel. At the institution of circumcision, God changes the names of this covenant couple. The name changes highlight exactly the point that circumcision points to communion of Israel with the nations. "Your name shall be Abraham," he says, "for I have made you a father of a MULTITUDE OF NATIONS. . . ." And as for Sarai, God says: "Sarah shall be her name . . . she shall be a mother of nations. . . ."

The Baptists tend to empty circumcision of its spiritual significance by emphasizing its national significance. But again that is not doing justice to this OT rite. This rite involved blood and in the context of the OT the shedding of blood was symbolic of atonement for sins, just as baptism, which has replaced circumcision, signifies the washing away of our sins through Jesus Christ. Through procreation the pollution of sin was transmitted. Every single child inherits that corrupt nature of his or her parents. The act of the removal of the foreskin impressed upon the believers of old the impurity of their souls. It reminded them of God's demand that they separate themselves from sin and consecrate themselves to the God. With this sign the Lord graphically represented to His people the crucifixion of the old man and the coming to life of the new. That the physical sign had this spiritual meaning is evident from what Moses writes in Deut. 10:15,16

Yet the Lord set His heart in love upon your fathers and chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as at this day. Circumcize, therefore, the foreskin of your heart and be no longer stubborn. (cf. Jer. 4:4).

### The ground for baptism

As we have already noted Baptists object to the baptism of infants because according to them faith as evidenced in walk and talk is the ground for baptism in the new covenant. However, we may not baptize on the ground of one's faith but on the ground of God's covenant promise and demand. We begin with the Scriptural truth that there is one covenant of grace which, in both the old and new testaments, has the same promise (salvation) the same demand (faith) the same Mediator (Christ) and therefore the same parties, namely: The believers AND THEIR CHILDREN. Because the covenant of old and new testaments are identical (except for the administration), we may rightly appeal to Genesis 17 in our Form for the Baptism of Infants. There we confess:

"For the Lord spoke to Abraham, the father of all believers, and thus speaks to us and our children saying: *I will establish My covenant between ME and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you.*"

In his marvellous wisdom, God decreed that he would establish, maintain and perfect His covenant with believers

and their children. "And their children" – that phrase resounds throughout the Scriptures. God furthers the line of His grace through the generations. He revealed that as soon as man had fallen into sin. To the Serpent in the Garden he said: "I will set enmity (not just between you and the woman but) between your seed and HER SEED."

Many of the psalms also rejoice in that comforting and glorious reality. That's why David could pray in Psalm 22: Yet thou (O Lord) art He who took me from the womb; thou didst keep me safe upon my mother's breasts. Upon thee was I cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me thou hast been my God.

Did you catch that? "Since my mother bore me thou hast been my God." That's the promise the Lord gave to Abraham in Gen.17: "I will be your God . . . and the God of your children."

Think, too, of Psalm 103: The Lord's righteousness is to "children's children." What a God we have – one whose glory above the heavens is chanted by the mouth of babes and infants (Psalm 8).

That same covenantal line (Abraham and his seed) continues in the new dispensation. Only, now it is even more glorious. The Great Son of Abraham has come, and through the shedding of His blood has worked the fulfilment of the promise: "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Now it is not just the Israelites and their children who are the recipients of God's grace but all those who believe in Christ whether Greek or Roman, Dutch or Canadian . . . AND THEIR DESCENDANTS. Peter also testifies to this when he says "For to you is the promise and to your children and to all that are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Him" (Acts 2:39).

When Baptists come with the rejoinder that infants do not even know about the covenant, we can reply, on the basis of the continuity of the covenant:

"Of course, they don't know yet about the promises and demands. God doesn't demand that from them either. Isaac was only eight days old when he was circumcized. And yet God sovereignly and graciously extended to him His salvation. Without his knowledge he was received into grace in Christ. Therefore, although our children do not understand all this we may not exclude them from baptism."

In the gospels we read of Jewish mothers bringing their children to Jesus for His blessing. These were babes (Lk. 18:15),

not children of advanced years and intelligence. They had to be “brought” (Matt. 19:13) to Jesus, carried in their mother’s arms. The disciples, you may recall, attempted to shew them away. Their Master was too busy with more important matters. He had no time for kids. But what was Christ’s reaction? He became indignant. He was livid. These babies had no understanding of what Christ’s blessing entailed and yet Christ forcefully rebukes his disciples, saying: “Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.” If ignorant infants receive the blessing from the Mediator of the Covenant Himself, and if He declares that they belong to the kingdom of heaven, then who will refuse them the sign and seal of those blessings, and the mark of the kingdom?

### Arminian subjectivism

By saying that the ground for baptism is the believer’s testimonial that he has accepted Christ, the Baptists are espousing Arminian subjectivism. Man has to do something in order to become a Christian. God, however, is the Alpha and the Omega. Our salvation from beginning to end is from Him and through Him and unto Him. That too is illustrated in the life of Abraham. In chapter 17 God does not sit down with Abraham to discuss promises and obligations. He literally says in verse 2: “I will GIVE my covenant. . . .” There is no bargaining. Abram just has to take it all as God gives it – promises and demands. He says nothing at all in the first 16 verses. He can only do one thing (verse 3): “Then Abram fell on His face.” In the ancient near east this was the way of expressing your utter humility and submission to someone.

God speaks and Abram listens. Why does it go this way? Because the covenant is the means of God to convey HIS gifts. Therefore it is rightly called a covenant of grace. It is not that God gives something to Abram and Abram gives something to God in return . . . or the other way around. The only giver at first is God. Because He is the only giver He can determine the way in which Abram will receive the gifts, namely, along the way of the obedience of faith.

Besides that, look at the conditions surrounding the birth of Isaac. Abraham is 100 years old; his wife 90. They were biologically dead; completely incapable of contributing anything toward the birth of Isaac. Paul really brings that out in Romans 4. Yes, Abraham became the father of many nations but in the presence of God “who gives life to the dead

and calls into existence the things that do not exist” (verse 17). He repeats that in verse 19 where he describes how Abram strengthened by this new revelation did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was AS GOOD AS DEAD because he was about 100 years old. Most often we focus on Sarah and the impossibility of a woman producing an egg at the age of 90. But Paul does not exclude Abram either. His own body was as good as dead. So, from both sides there is no longer any human possibility for the conception of life. And that’s precisely when the Lord steps in – to show that the salvation of His people is from Him alone. Now you see the significance of God’s opening words to Abraham in chapter 17: “I am God almighty.” What is impossible with man is possible with God.

True, the covenant is bilateral in its existence. But that bilateralness does not rest upon the religious response of man. It is a bilateralness determined and established by God. This means that also in the demand of faith and repentance His grace is active in our life. Our response to the promises signified and sealed to us in our baptism is really the response of the Holy Spirit within us. He is the One who works faith in our hearts by the preaching of the Gospel and the use of the sacraments (LD 25). He imparts to us what we have in Christ. That is the same for children of believing parents and for an adult outside the covenant who is converted to the Christian faith.

That sovereignty of God is symbolized in Genesis 17 as well. Circumcision was a custom practiced by Phoenicians and Egyptians in the days of Abraham. The Lord, however, does not just mimic the custom of the nations. He gives this rite new content and meaning which becomes clear when we compare what it meant for the nations with what is revealed in the chapter we read together. For these heathen nations, acquiring many children, especially sons, was a sign of great strength and fertility. To facilitate that, young men were circumcized in preparation for marriage. It was a type of initiation before marriage in which the young man’s vigour and sexuality were extolled. Through circumcision they sought to remove any hindrances to their own procreative powers.

What does the Lord now require from His people? He makes one fundamental change and that concerns the TIME of circumcision. Verse 12: “He that is eight days old among you shall be circumcized, every male throughout

their generations. Instead of having it done just before marriage, it is done just after birth . . . on a new-born child. At this age, not only the impossibility of marriage is emphasized but also the helplessness and powerlessness of the child. In other words, God is saying:

The entrance to life in the covenant with me, and the continuation of life in fellowship with me is in my hand. Every day in my covenant from your birth to your death is a day of my grace and power.

It is by virtue of the covenant that we baptize our children. So truly and certainly are they members of that covenant that “God-fearing parents ought not to doubt the election and salvation of their children whom God calls out of this life in their infancy” (CD.I.17).

Your children are God’s children. He laid claim to them already in your womb. You may not speculate about a “seed of regeneration” in their hearts. You may not presume they are reborn until the opposite is proven. As parents you have one duty, and that is to teach them, by word and deed, this marvelous doctrine of salvation to the utmost of your power.

<sup>1</sup>Quoted in C.G.Kirby *Signs and Seals of the Covenant* (1986), p.137.

<sup>2</sup>P.Jewett, p.102. Errol Hulse, another “Reformed Baptist” asserts the same in his brochure “Baptism and Church Membership.” He writes:

“In the light of this it may be asked what our response would be if our children asked why they could not be baptised on the grounds that they are children of believers. In the Old Testament the children were circumcized. . . . The answer to this is that under the Old Covenant administration the whole nation of Israel without exception was embraced. Spiritual salvation was worked out within an external national framework. The spiritual implications of the Old Covenant now find their complete fulfilment in the New Covenant (Col. 2:10-12). The externals are removed and now a new nation is revealed which embraces people of all kindreds and tongues (Rev. 5:9). It is required that every single member of this spiritual nation that he be born again. . . .” pp. 8, 9.

<sup>3</sup>Kingdom writes: “Did not circumcision have a national reference as a mark of national separation to God; marking off Jews as a race from the nations round about?” Then he goes on to warn that we must not say “that circumcision had a spiritual significance” without at the same time recognizing its national significance. Cited in Kirkby, p.139.

<sup>4</sup>C.Trimp, *Woord, Water en Wijn* (1985), p.51.



## Godly Compassion

Under the column "In Spirit and Truth" Dr. W. R. Godfrey writes an article in *The Outlook* concerning a mission conference held by the Reformed Ecumenical Council in Grand Rapids last summer. One of the speakers at the conference was Dr. K. Runia, professor emeritus of Homiletics at the Theological University of the Synodical Reformed churches in Holland. In the speech Runia challenges the idea that Christ is the only way of salvation. Godfrey explains:

This debate has recently surfaced in our Reformed circles. Professor Klaas Runia from the Netherlands, usually viewed as a conservative theologian in the GKN, lectured this year in Grand Rapids. In his lecture he too adopted a view very much like that of Karl Rahner: Everyone who is saved is saved by Christ, but some are saved by Christ without knowing Him. He is perhaps not as confident about the extent of that salvation as Rahner was, but he does answer affirmatively his own question, "Does this mean that there is no truth in all the other religions and that all the adherents of the other religions will be lost forever?" [Here from the context I assume the word *not* has dropped out, i.e. that Runia does not answer this question in the affirmative, JDJ]

The Rev. Sierd Woudstra, a retired CRC minister, took the same view as Runia in a letter to the Grand Rapids Press. He wrote, "Since salvation is by grace alone, may we perhaps hope that, through Jesus Christ, the almighty (sic, JDJ) has ways and is powerful enough to bring the majority of the human race into His eternal kingdom?" Woudstra clearly answers yes to his own question.

Both Runia and Woudstra plead compassion for the lost as at least part of the motivation for their view. Runia stated, "I can't believe that God would not have heard the cries

of the Old Covenant people when they cried out in Auschwitz." Woudstra wrote of "the millions" who "have lived and died in a hell on earth": "Fine Christian minds have long held that it is unthinkable that following their hell on earth the almighty would send them to another hell, one far worse than the first and presumably lasting 'forever'."

Everyone can sympathize with the concern of Runia and Woudstra. They have compassion, especially for non-Christians who have suffered greatly in this world. But has their compassion become in fact ungodly?

Godly compassion must be Biblical compassion, that is, it must be compassion defined by the Bible. To have Biblical compassion for the lost is to believe what God says about them. And what the Bible says about them is really quite clear (although Woudstra suggests that the Bible is no clearer here than on women in office!).

The Bible's view is that non-Christians in their sin do not seek God, but oppose Him. Remember Psalm 2:1,2: "Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One." Jeremiah wrote, "This is what the Lord says: 'Do not learn the ways of the nations. . . . For the customs of the peoples are worthless.' . . . Pour out your wrath on the nations that do not acknowledge you, on the peoples who do not call on your name. . . ." (Jer. 10:2,3,25). Paul makes the same point: "Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. . . . Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called 'uncircumcised' by those who call themselves 'the circumcision' (that done in the body by the hands of men) – remember that at

that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and be without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ" (Eph. 2:3, 11-13). The consistent teaching of the Bible is that those who are not faithful members of the covenant of grace are alienated from God.

Tormod Engelsviken in his article referred to Cornelius, a noble, religious Roman but one who was not saved until he believed in Jesus. Peter's word to Cornelius was: "Everyone who believes in him (Jesus) receives forgiveness of sins through His name" (Acts 10:43). Apart from faith and covenant connection with Jesus there is no salvation – even for noble pagans.

Jesus teaches us the same lesson: "Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent" (John 17:3). Knowledge of Jesus is fundamental to salvation.

Some may ask about the children of believers who die in infancy or about severely mentally retarded persons who are children of believers. Can they have faith or knowledge of Jesus? We cannot limit the power of God to give knowledge and faith: John the Baptist had faith in his mother's womb. We must also remember that the Word comes to them in baptism declaring them holy children in the covenant of grace. They are not a case of persons being saved who are strangers to Jesus and His covenant.

The distance between the clear teaching of Scripture and the positions espoused by Runia and Woudstra is very alarming. Runia stated his views as part of a study committee of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod. Dr. Henk de Waard of Australia,



moderator of the Reformed Ecumenical Council, defended Runia's views as "responsible," noting: "I don't think it was a new view or even a very radical one." De Waard did insist that there are limits to what would be tolerated theologically in the REC. He said, "If any church would say we no longer believe in the deity of Christ or the physical resurrection, I have no doubt that would be dealt with." In effect Dr. de Waard said that Runia's views about non-Christians are not a matter of salvation (that distinction between saving and non-saving truth so often appealed to today). *But Runia's views are a matter of salvation to non-Christians.* If the views of Runia and others undermine our missionary efforts, then indeed it is a matter of salvation!


The threat to salvation, however, goes beyond the impact on missions. Think carefully of Dr. de Waard's words. He says that faith in the deity and resurrection of Jesus is necessary. But Runia has argued that many around the world can be saved without believing in the deity and resurrection of Jesus. If sincere, religious people in China and India and the concentration camps of Europe can be saved without believing in the deity and resurrection

of Jesus, why not sincere, religious people in the church in America and Europe?

The "compassion" of Runia and others leads perhaps unintentionally, but inevitably to the destruction of the uniqueness and work of Christ. Such compassion has undermined missions concern and activity in many liberal denominations. We need rather a genuine compassion for the lost that eagerly seeks to preach the Gospel so that the lost might be saved.

Still a deeper issue of compassion must be faced. What do views like Runia's ultimately do to our compassion for Jesus? Do we care that He suffered on the cross in our place? Do we remember the full measure of His agony as He died for His own? Do we trivialize His death if we say faith in Him is not necessary for salvation? We must have compassion above all for Jesus who is still despised and rejected in this world.

We cannot allow ungodly compassion to replace godly compassion – for Jesus and for the lost who need to be called to faith in Him. Godly compassion says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever



**C**HURCH NEWS

DECLINED to Carman, MB  
**Rev. P.G. Feenstra**  
 of Chatsworth, ON

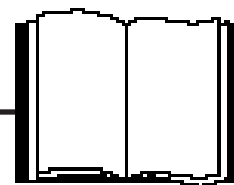
\* \* \*

DECLINED to Fergus, ON  
**Rev. J.E. Ludwig**  
 of London, ON

er believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."

One could add some critical notations to Godfrey's remarks at certain places. For example, it seems problematic to speak about the faith of John the Baptist while he was still in the womb. But these are only asides. The main point is well taken: our missionary effort will soon come to nothing if we take the demarcation line of the Gospel away. The apostle Peter gives the clear manifesto for Christian mission: "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we can be saved," Acts 4:12.

## READER'S FORUM



### False Dilemma – Again

Having read, and appreciated, Dr. H. Boersma's essay, "Federative or Local? A Wrong Dilemma" (*Clarion* 45:23), I was rather disappointed to read Dr. J. De Jong's reactions to it (*Clarion*, Nov. 29, 1996). Allow me to reflect upon a few points:

1. I find the comparison of a federation of churches to a marriage unity a faulty one. The federation is not the Bride; the church is. The primary allegiance of the churches

is not to the federation but to Christ, the Groom.

2. De Jong wishes to be "more hesitant in speaking out about 'other Reformed denominations' since that approach betrays a view of the church which neither accords with the confessions (of Dort) nor its Church Order." I find such designations libelous. Is the jury out on Boersma and those who happen to agree with his views on local

autonomy? Let's not get into fear-mongering and labelling, which neutralizes the work of the Holy Spirit, but encourage each other, in the spirit, thereby building up the Church.

3. De Jong has difficulty with Dr. M. te Velde's (professor of Church Polity at the Theological University of our sister churches in the Netherlands) approach to the issue of local recognition. In De Jong's

opinion, te Velde's approach "fails to introduce a safeguard which would keep the process on track, . . . will lead to endless formalized wrangling, and . . . result in a weakening of any sense of ecclesiastical identity among the younger generation." These are conjectures and, as such, do not address the issue at hand; namely, does a local church have the autonomy to take up various forms of ecclesiastical fellowship with a local church from another federation?

4. Boersma frequently uses Dr. S. Greijdanus' essay in *Bound Yet Free* (pp. 13-62), Premier Printing, 1995) to substantiate his views regarding the federation and local churches. De Jong wishes to remind his readers that this essay was written "in a situation in which the claw of hierarchy sought to destroy the spiritual unity of the Church. He wrote in opposition to a Synod involved in unlawfully giving all kinds of authority to itself." As a matter of fact, Greijdanus' opposition to hierarchy is less context-sensitive than De Jong suggests. Greijdanus' opposition was not only to Synods 1942 and 1944 but already to Synod Assen, 1926, which deposed Dr. Geelkerken. While Greijdanus most certainly did not agree with Geelkerken, he objected strenuously to an authority that Synod had assigned to itself. Is that not precisely the point Boersma is making? Professor Kamphuis' contribution to the above-mentioned book should also be seen as written in a certain context.

Whatever Kamphuis' motivations were during those turbulent years of the '60s in our sister-churches, I for one do not read his view as "balancing" that of Greijdanus. To me the two essays voice different interpretations.

While De Jong may agree with Kamphuis' "controlling-approach" may anyone who disagrees be labelled as an independentist? De Jong reads from Boersma's essay that the latter has little use for federative unity. Nowhere do I read that in Boersma's essay. Boersma simply does not wish to make the federative and local approaches a dilemma. Nevertheless, De Jong wants Boersma to prove himself innocent of independentism.

5. In his above-mentioned essay Kamphuis repeatedly impresses upon his readers that the federative bond is a matter of the communion of the saints and that we are "divinely obligated" to exercise this federative bond (*Bound Yet Free*, p. 203-249). I love the Church and the federative bond we may have in Christ, but if a local church has reasons to declare with gratitude that a local church from another federation is a true church are we divinely obligated to *restrict* the communion of the saints?
6. The Church Order is a limited set of rules regulating several matters as these pertain to the good order of the churches. As well, to stick to our discussion here, the Church Order regulates that major assemblies may deal only with matters which the particular churches cannot finish themselves, and, matters which concern the particular churches in common. Is a set of ecclesiastical fellowship agreements between the local church of one federation and the local church of another federation subject to these purposes of the Church Order (Art. 1 &

74)? In other words, does such an ecclesiastical fellowship jeopardize "the good order?" There is no Church Order regulation, nor a synod or classis decision, that demands approval for implementing local ecclesiastical fellowships. If a major assembly takes upon itself tasks it is not asked to do, it is human arrogation (Greijdanus, p. 27,28,34); it's unlawful hierarchy.

J.A. Roukema,   
Aldergrove, BC

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.

## ***The Oldest Christian Hymn***

*Shepherd of tender youth,  
Guiding in love and truth ~~  
Through devious ways,  
Christ, our triumphant King,  
We come Thy Name to sing;  
Hither Thy children bring  
Tributes of praise.*

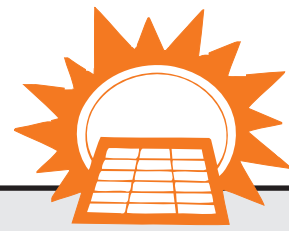
*Thou art our holy Lord,  
The all-subduing Word  
Healer of strife;  
Thou didst Thyself abase,  
That from sin's deep disgrace  
Thou mightest save our race,  
And give us life.*

*Ever be near our side,  
Our Shepherd and our guide,  
Our staff and song;  
Jesus, Thou Christ of God,  
By Thine enduring word  
Lead us where Thou hast trod  
Make our faith strong.*

*So now, and till we die,  
Sound we Thy praise high,  
And joyful sing;  
Let all the holy throng  
Who to Thy Church belong,  
Unite and swell the song  
To Christ, our King.*

CLEMENT of ALEXANDRIA, Cir. 200  
TR. Henry Martin DEXTER, 1821-1890

# RAY OF SUNSHINE



By Mrs. R. Ravensbergen

*"But the steadfast love of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon those who fear Him, . . . to those who keep His covenant and remember to do His commandments."*  
Psalm 103: 17a,18

## Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It is winter time, and many of us are faced with that reality because of cold temperatures and lots of snow. The only comfort is that the days are already getting longer, and that we know that the spring is not that far away anymore.

But when you are young and strong and healthy, you like winter and snow and ice, because it gives you the opportunity to do many fun things. One of those things is making snowmen. When you have the right kind of snow, that "sticks," you see the children rolling balls of snow that get bigger and bigger. Finally, they pile them on top of each other. Then, with a few finishing touches, there is your snowman. Smiling, or sad, or tall and skinny, or fat and plump, they all look different. If the weather stays cold for a while you may get used to your snowman decorating the front yard of your house. But when the weather turns warm, slowly but surely your cold friend will wither away. Finally there is nothing left, and you cannot even find the place where it was.

Actually that compares to how we are as people. We are born; we live and do our work; then we die. And after a while we are forgotten. Or is there a difference? Yes, fortunately there is a big difference. We are not made the same way a snowman is made, but we are created by the Lord. He carefully made each one of us in our own unique way. The Lord made us exactly the way He wanted us to be. And when we were made, and born, the Lord also gave each one of us a special task: we have to serve Him. He placed us all in a different position as well. Some of us seem to have a very easy life: healthy, smart, popular, enough money, nice family, etc. Others have to cope with a lot of difficulties; for some people one problem comes after another. Yet our task is always the same: serve the Lord, praise Him and give thanks to Him.

Why do we have to do that? Because the Lord did not make us the way we make a snowman: here today; tomorrow, gone and forgotten. The Lord made us to live everlasting. He enabled us to praise and serve Him, and He wants us to do that always. First, as long as we live here on earth. Even when our life is not so easy, our faithful Father is with us. He helps us and encourages us so that we do not have to stop serving Him.

And when we die, does everything end then? Just like the snowman is forgotten soon after it has melted? Actually we deserved that we would be punished for our sins and that we could never serve Him again. But here comes the great miracle: after we die we can serve the Lord even in a better, a perfect way. As long as we live, we sin in thoughts, words, and deeds. Yet the Lord gave us His Son, out of grace, for we did not deserve that. God's Son came to earth to die for our sins. Yet He Himself was without sins. He made everything right for us. Through Him the Lord set us free from our sins. When we believe in Him and confess our sins, then we can be sure that they are forgiven. We deserved death and eternal punishment; we receive

life and eternal glory. That is a great miracle. None of us could ever do anything like that. Only the Lord could do it, because He is our loving Father.

So what do we do now? We serve the Lord, and we accept our lives out of the hand of our Father. We accept ourselves the way we are, with the limitations He gave us. For He made us the way He wanted us to be. The Lord does not make any mistakes! We make mistakes. We sin when we are thoughtless, complaining, unhappy, or when we forget to pray and want to do our own things that are not right to the Lord. We even sin when we do not praise Him and give Him thanks that we belong to Him. But no matter how many mistakes we make, the Lord will still listen to us when we go to Him and confess our sins. He forgives because His Son became our Saviour.

So we keep serving Him with many mistakes and imperfections as long as we live here on earth. One day we will be with Him. Then we will be able to serve Him in a perfect manner.

The Lord did not make us the way we make a snowman: made today, next week forgotten. No, the Lord made and shaped us, inside and out, with love and care. He made everything on us just right. Even when we have eyes that do not see or ears that do not hear, or legs that cannot carry us. With the body that He created for us He wants us to serve Him now. When this earthly body is wasted away, we will not be forgotten, but He will give us a new and perfect body. Then we will be able to serve Him and praise Him without making any mistakes. And we will be with Him forever.

*Let them proclaim His Name with dancing,  
With harp and song His praise advancing,  
For in His people God takes pleasure;  
They are His joy and treasure.  
The humble ones who to Him flee  
The Lord adorns with victory.  
Let all the just their glory voice  
And in their God rejoice.*

Psalm 149:2

## Birthdays in March:

### 3: Trevor Hofsink

4249 Academy Street, Box 772, Beamsville, ON L0R 1B0

### 12: Gerry Eelhart

9713-151 Street, Edmonton, AB T5P 1S6

### 15: Jim VanderHeiden

7162 Canboro Road, RR 1, Dunnville, ON N1A 2W1

### 18: Roselyn Kuik

68 Lynn Lake Drive, Winnipeg, MB R2C 4N7

Happy Birthday to all of you and until next month,  
Mrs. R. Ravensbergen  
7462 Hwy. 20, RR 1, Smithville, ON L0R 2A0

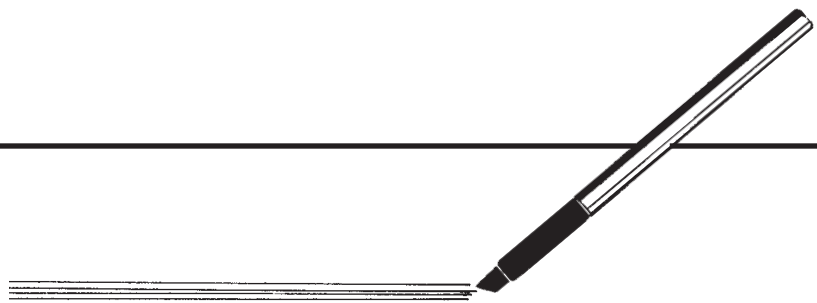


# THE HI-LITER

---

## News from Here and There

By C. Van Spronsen



The Church at Rockingham, Australia, will have occupied its new church building by the end of 1996 if all went as scheduled. An exciting time for the congregation!

\*\*\*

The mission workers in Port Moresby, PNG, Mr. and Mrs. W.S. Fokkema repatriated to Australia after a three year stay in the mission field. The Church of Albany organized a special evening to thank them for the work done.

\*\*\*

Jumping over to another mission field almost on the other side of the globe: Mr. Hilco DeHaan reports in the "Bulkley Valley Echo" that the mission among the native people is going well. On the Fort Babine reserve they are now meeting in the community hall rather than in a home of a family. This neutral ground has increased attendance for the services. Interest for the Sunday services in the Christian Indian Centre in Smithers also saw a good increase. The soup kitchen held during the week provides a good opportunity to meet many more of the local natives and is boosting attendance at other activities as well.

\*\*\*

The Houston, BC congregation is about to embark on an exciting endeavour as they are getting closer to begin construction of a new church building!

\*\*\*

The Brampton "Messenger" informs us that several families living in the Trenton, ON area are looking into the possibility of forming a house congregation there. Undoubtedly this would open up new opportunities and challenges!

\*\*\*

One of the bulletins informs us that Rev. & Mrs. H. Versteeg will be making a farewell visit to Irian Jaya. Also a farewell reception for them will be hosted by the foreign mission board of Toronto for their many years of faithful service. Mission Board is at the present time looking for another field to spread God's Word.

\*\*\*

Dr. N.H. Gootjes, professor in dogmatics at the Theological College in Hamilton made a speaking tour through the Churches in Alberta and Manitoba. The goal of these regular tours by the professors is to maintain a strong bond between the churches and the school of the churches.

\*\*\*

The Middle East Reformed Fellowship is in the process of building a new training centre in Cyprus. Volunteers from as far away as the churches in Western Australia and Tasmania have joined in this labour of love.

\*\*\*

The Council of the Providence Church in Edmonton, AB discussed whether the deacons should also collect for the needy from the minister on the pulpit. After receiving advice it was decided not to continue this practice. "The minister represents God who calls and invites His people to give something for the needy. For this reason traditionally the minister has not participated in the giving of alms, except through his wife." An interesting thought!

\*\*\*

Workloads of ministers often keep on increasing and most councils will have an open eye for this. In one congregation they acted upon it as well. "The minister's workload was again reviewed and council decided to grant him 4 "free" Sundays. This means that the regular work goes on, but a guest minister will preach on those Sundays. This will free up some time for other pastoral work."

\*\*\*

From various bulletins we learned that the congregation at Chatsworth, ON has moved into their new building located on the Highway 6 by-pass towards Owen Sound. Times for worship services were set at 9:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. The name of the church has been changed to the "Owen Sound Canadian Reformed Church."

\*\*\*

In Winnipeg security during the worship services was discussed. It was decided that from now on the doors will be locked during services. A sad necessity!

\*\*\*

This being the first Hi-Liter of the new year we wish to thank all those who faithfully send the bulletins during this past year. Also our thanks for the occasional personal note of greetings and encouragement! We would remind you again not to accumulate too many issues before sending them since by that time some of the "news" might be rather stale. Have a blessed new year!

**Advertise in**



**Clarion**  
THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Please mail, e-mail or fax letters for publication to the editorial address.  
They should be 300 words or less. Those published may be edited for style or length.

## Dear Editor(s):

What sort of magazine are you allowing to be printed? Not the articles, necessarily, but the theme accompanying the Christmas '96 issue. Is this supposed to reflect the identity of the American/Canadian Reformed churches? Then allow me to hide my face in shame.

Every Lord's day we hear the words of God's law: "You shall not make for yourself a graven image. . . ."

In this commandment, we are required not to make any image of God, or to serve Him as we see fit, but according to His Word. This also includes displaying Him pictorially and accompanying the message of Christmas with worldly ideas and its definition of Christmas.

There are pages plastered with paintings of Christ and other figures from God's Word. Besides this, other pages display holly and ivy, snowflakes, and winter scenery.

Then there is the cover.

CLARION: The Canadian Reformed Magazine.

This title sits atop a mail box with Christmas cards, a lantern with a candle and a background of a snow covered coniferous tree. Also included is a brass instrument and a violin with yet again holly and ivy.

Along side this picture we are called to "Rejoice in the Lord always: again I say, Rejoice."

In what are we to rejoice this time of the year when everyone is warmed up again with "visions of sugar plums dancing in their heads?"

How confusing when we see a magazine showing the work of the church of Christ, supposedly reminding us again that indeed a Saviour came into this world to die for us and our sins, and the worldly message of love and families and gift giving.

He died for our sins, also the sin against the Second Commandment. Was something overlooked? Or does this not apply to us anymore?

Are we going to take the Dutch tradition of Dec. 5, and slowly put a 2 in front of the 5, and confuse this yearly

celebration with the only message of Christmas?

Is this Wonderful Gift of God to this world only to be celebrated annually, each December, or is it a reason for thankfulness every moment of our entire lives, all 12 months, 365 days of every year that God gives us in this life here on earth?

Throughout the magazine we see "Seasons Greetings." Do we take one season of every year to remind each other that God has sent His Son into this world? What about Spring, Summer and Fall?

Then on January 2nd, we go on with our lives until another Dec. 25th comes along, and we repeat an annual message only to begin another new year forgetting what was just celebrated.

It is much stronger to exchange "Brotherly Greetings" constantly, than a seasonal "Seasons Greetings" which only warms us temporarily during a couple of cold winter months.

What sort of illustrations are acceptable in this "special" issue? I have no answer to this, but it frightens me to see the "Good news of great joy" tainted with worldly perceptions of this "Good News."

Allow me also to use the words of p. 557 – the words of Hymn 46:2a:

"Watch o'er Thy Church, O Lord, in mercy; Save it from evil, guard it still. Perfect it in Thy love, unit it, cleansed and conformed unto Thy Will.

with "Brotherly Greetings,"  
Bill Doekes  
Rockway

\*\*\*

*The picture on page 565 of the Year End 1996 issue which brother Doekes supposes to be of the Lord Jesus actually represents Absalom (mentioned in the article by Rev. Moes). The illustration was taken from Children's Bible, Golden Press: Racine, WI. p. 256. The text reference is 2 Sam. 14 and 15 and refers specifically to how Absalom, in revolt against his father King David, sought to curry favour with the people (please see especially 2 Sam. 15:5 – "Also, whenever anyone approached him to bow down before him, Absalom would*

reach out his hand, take hold of him and kiss him"). *We hope this clears up any misunderstanding.* – Editor

## Dear Editor,

After reading the responses to Dr. H. Boersma in the last issue of *Clarion*, it left me with some concerns and questions. First, Dr. De Jong in his third paragraph of his response admits that it would involve a hierarchical act by major assemblies to overrule efforts and gains made by the local church. While I certainly agree that the federation must be kept informed of the local gains and efforts made with another local true church (I say true because Aldergrove Can. Ref. and Free Reformed Church of Aldergrove have recognized each other as such), I wonder if Dr. De Jong is trying to call a hierarchical act a safeguard? Why not call a spade a spade?

Dr. De Jong also refers to Dr. Boersma's reference to Dr. Greijdanus book, *Bound Yet Free*, and telling the readers to keep in mind the setting and the date. Generally I agree, but what makes Dr. De Jong so sure that "the claw of hierarchy" is not a danger for the church today, and that spiritual unity can be pushed into second place also today!

He also states that "no new contact can take precedence over the obligations owing to the federation of churches." My questions is, "Do you necessarily need to play one against the other?" In my view that is not at all the position the Aldergrove Can. Ref. Council has taken in their proposal with the Free Reformed Church of Aldergrove.

Where is the basis for comments such as, "I think that we have enough questions to deal with here and that we can solve our own problems without "international" advice. This seems to sum up the tone of the article "Still a Federative Matter." I am beginning to wonder whether there is any rejoicing over the fact that two local congregations have found each other to be true to the Word of God. It sounds to me like the lamenting is coming through loud and clear.

Yours in Christ,  
A. Vandergaag

# His Steadfast Love Endures Forever

By E. Rook

About 500 people gathered in the Carman Community Hall on November 22, 1996, for the Farewell Evening of the Rev. and Mrs. deBoer, and his family. Mr. F. deWit was MC for the meeting. He expressed a hearty welcome to all who came to celebrate the thirteen years of service of Rev. deBoer in our midst – thirteen years of blessing from the Lord.

To proceed with the full program, the Grade 1 and 2 class, sang "Waltzing Matilda." All the while, the staff of DCS performed the actions to this song as Hobo, Sheep, Trees and River, and Policemen, giving new life to the meaning of the words sung.

Over the years Rev. deBoer was a member of the Art Club, Mrs. C. Vandasselaar made a presentation on their behalf and presented him with a framed collage of small paintings done by its various members.

Thereafter, members of the Women's Society came forward. A string of stories in poetic form was read by Karen Huisman, interspersed by songs sung by Society Members, bringing out the more human side of the deBoer family. We



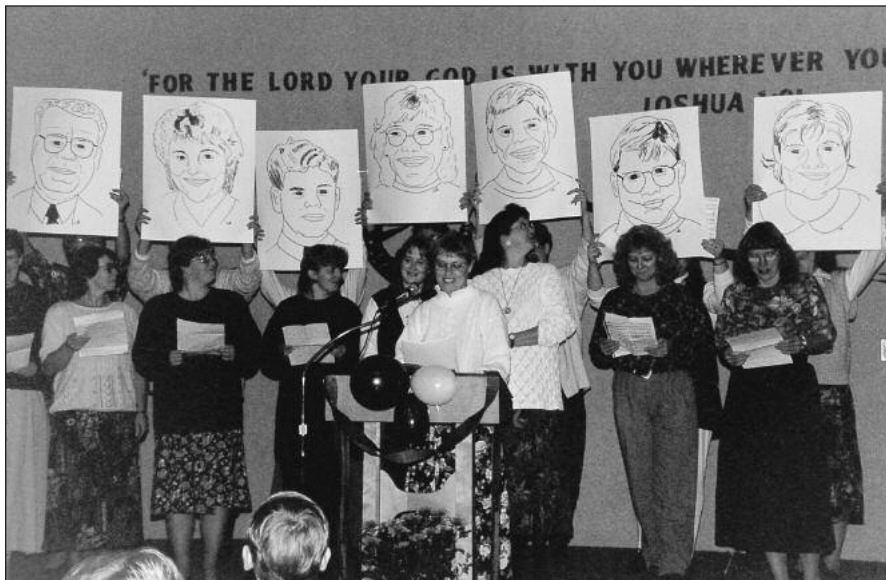
Mr. A. Bergsma presents the congregational gift

could laugh at the family experiences that made them such a part of us all. The deBoer family was given two large albums in which were gathered the faces of all the members of the congregation. In this way we could be taken along to Australia with them.

To help the family remember Manitoba winters, the congregation sang "Jingle Bells." Most likely, opportunity to sing this in Australia is few and far between.

A real Aussie introduction was given by a group with Australian backgrounds – the Jonkers and Buists from Winnipeg, and two visitors from "Down Under?" They sang the National Anthem: "Advance Australia Fair," and gave the deBoer family important "Language Instruction" (Both definitions and pronunciations of Aussie words vary widely from ours.)

Elder A. Bergsma spoke on behalf of the consistory. For more than 13 years, as Minister of the Word, Rev. deBoer proclaimed the Lord's faithfulness, and we were called to faithfulness as well. The deBoer family grew along with the congregation and now many memories bond us together. In all these things we thank the Lord. Along with our best wishes for their new beginnings in Bedfordale, Rev. and Mrs. deBoer were given a beautiful, framed wheat weaving called "Manitoba Heart" as well as a monetary gift from the congregation.



The Women's Society introduces the deBoer family





*Sharing a moment with colleagues*

Then we were treated to three musical performances: the awesome sound of the Dufferin Christian School Brass Band; the gentle voices of the Junior

Choir, and the majestic sounds of the Junior and Senior Choirs together, all under the capable direction of Andy Huisman.

Opportunity was then given for some personal gifts. Joanne Termeer had a huge bag of chocolate chips for the family cravings, (What? No chocolate chips in Aussie?) and Talbot Bergsma gave our well-dressed minister a T-shirt, with tie imprinted, – a new look for Australia.


With Steve deWit as their spokesman, the Young People also expressed their thanks to the Minister for many years of instruction. The Bedfordale Young People are soon to benefit also.

As representative of the Seniors' Club, Rev. J. VanRietschoten thanked Rev. deBoer for his ministerial care among the Seniors and gave their best wishes for their future in Bedfordale.

Our neighbouring minister, Rev. K. Jonker of Winnipeg, mentioned the 13 years of dedicated service in Manitoba, including the work done by Rev. deBoer in the courts to battle the Labour

Unions. As a result many of our members are now exempt from Union Membership. On behalf of the Winnipeg congregation a gift was given: an "official document" thanking Rev. deBoer for his dedicated service as Ambassador for Christ (2 Cor. 5:20) and a set of three books on Manitoba History.

Coming to the close of the evening, Rev. deBoer was given the opportunity to speak. He had sincere words of thanks for the organizers, attendants and participants of the evening, and for the many wonderful gifts. Especially to our Father in Heaven be thanks, by whom they could serve in our midst. He hoped that all shortcomings and failures could be put behind us, and that we look only at the message of the Gospel. We are all in Good Hands, for God is Lord everywhere, and His Steadfast Love Endures Forever.

A season has come to an end in Carman. Even though our pulpit is vacant, our future is certain for – His Steadfast Love Endures Forever – where ever we are to go. 

## Ordination of Candidate J. Van Vliet and Welcome Evening

On November 24, 1996, the congregation of Lincoln was blessed with the ordination of a minister. The morning service was conducted by Rev. J. De Gelder who was our counsellor while Lincoln was vacant. After a sixteen-month vacancy, candidate J. Van Vliet, a student from our Theological College became Lincoln's minister. The text for the morning service was from Isaiah 40:3-5. The theme for the sermon was, "The urgent call to anticipate God's coming as Saviour."

After the service Rev. De Gelder read the Form For Ordination and candidate Van Vliet replied in the affirmative and wholeheartedly to the questions asked therein, after which the congregation witnessed the laying on of hands by Rev. De Gelder, Rev. Van Spronsen and Prof. J. De Jong along with the three elders of the congregation. The signing of the subscription form was done in



*Rev. Van Vliet holding the baby of G. Terpstra*



*Rev. Van Vliet and wife receive framed picture of Lincoln church*



*Kindergarten class*



*Signing the Form of Subscription*

front of the whole congregation as a way of showing that as a minister of the Word of God he would abide by the Bible and Three Forms of Unity. For all members of this congregation, it is a joyous occasion to have our own minister and teacher. A number of guests spoke for their respective churches, or on their own behalf. As well, a representative of the Immanuel Orthodox Reformed Church of Jordan brought greetings.

In the afternoon, for his inaugural sermon, Rev. Van Vliet chose as text 1 Peter 1:22,23. The theme for the afternoon sermon was: "The Word of God leads us to love each other without fail."

During his inaugural service, Rev. Van Vliet could baptize Lucia Joanna Terpstra, daughter of brother and sister G. Terpstra. In this we see the blessing of the Lord that a child of the covenant could be baptized.

Being within close driving distance of the Theological College we as church were blessed that the Professors were found willing on many occasions to perform Sunday services while we were without a minister; also other ministers who preached for us are thanked.

On December 5, we held a welcome evening for our new minister. We were entertained by the kindergarten children of the congregation who sang several songs. As well, the various societies and some individual members made wonderful contributions to the evening in the form of skits, songs or games. A real highlight was the music performed by the Anchor Band.

The Care and Share committee gave to Rev. Van Vliet and his wife several "coupons" for discounts on the services provided in the congregation. The consistory presented a picture of the church building to Rev. Van Vliet and wife to be hung in his study. The evening was filled with entertainment and fun for all.

At the end of the evening Rev. Van Vliet spoke a few words and thanked all who participated. In conclusion Rev. Van Vliet requested that Psalm 100 be read and that we also sing of Psalm 100:1-4, after which he closed in prayer and we all enjoyed a social hour in the basement.

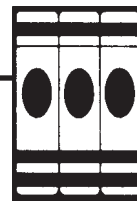
We as believers should be thankful to our Lord and Saviour, that in a free society we may have an opportunity to go to church and hear a portion of the Bible in peace. With many people unable to read or study the Word of God without punishment or hardship, it is a gift of our Lord to receive a pastor and teacher. May we all learn from what our Saviour teaches us.

*John Schutten* 



# BOOK REVIEW

Reviewed by C. Bosch



*Divorce and Remarriage* by Dr. C. Van Dam, (Premier Publishing, Winnipeg, 1996), 69pp. \$ 5.50.

This booklet is an expanded version of a speech Dr. Van Dam delivered at the 1995 Spring meeting of the Office-bearers of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Ontario. It must be considered a very welcome guide, especially by the office bearers who are confronted with questions concerning legitimacy of divorce and remarriage today.

It is as much a booklet about the sanctity of marriage as it is a booklet about divorce and remarriage. Dr. Van Dam stresses the fact that holy marriage was "not designed to be broken but to be enjoyed" (p. 2). It is clear that Dr. Van Dam treasures Christian marriage as "... one of the most beautiful gifts God has given us in creation" (p. 50). Yet there is the reality of sin causing separation even in that close covenant of Christian marriage.

Even while discussing divorce and remarriage, Van Dam would have us remember that our Lord is a God of reconciliation. When His people become spiritually promiscuous He issues them a certificate of divorce (cf. Jer. 3:8). Nevertheless He goes to great lengths to call them back that He might forgive their sins and reunite them to Himself (cf. e.g. Hosea 1-3).

In his usual concise and lucid style Van Dam first considers the Old and New Testament evidence for divorce and remarriage and concludes with the implications of the biblical teaching for today. There are also two appendices. In these Van Dam examines the meaning of the biblical phrase, "one flesh" in its various contexts, and has a close look at what has been called "the exception clause" in Matt. 19.

As a result of his scriptural investigation the author maintains the historic Reformed view that divorce and remarriage are allowed in the case of a spouse's marital unfaithfulness or adultery and after desertion by an unbelieving spouse (p. 42). In coming to this conclusion Dr. Van Dam interacts with Christian writers who interpret the Scriptural givens differently. There are those, e.g., who hold that in becoming "one flesh" a kinship (blood) relation-

ship is established in marriage. This would make those who remarry after divorce guilty of incest. Van Dam finds, however, that this view has no support in either the Old or the New Testament. There are others who insist that Matt. 19:9 allows divorce but never remarriage, but the author clearly shows that this cannot be maintained. The great value of Van Dam's contribution is that he compares scripture with scripture. His conclusions therefore have a very strong basis and cannot be negated. He also draws upon the careful scholarship of others in examining the relevant scripture passages.


In discussing the biblical legislation re divorce and remarriage Dr. Van Dam is conscious of the "changing seasons" of redemptive history. He shows that in Matt. 5 and 19 our Lord "went further" than Deut. 24 by insisting that a divorce not based on unchastity does not really undo a marriage making a subsequent remarriage adulterous (p. 39). He reminds us of the unity of scripture when he points out that Paul's teaching in 1 Cor. 7 "... must be read along with that of Christ. It is all the Word of God. . . ." (p. 40).

This booklet will be a valuable reference for all office bearers. It should be found on every church council's reference shelf. Van Dam gives some helpful, practical advice throughout and especially in, "The state and church, and

divorce and remarriage" (pp. 46-49). He is of the opinion that

... many problems can be avoided if at an early stage office bearers are involved in marriage problems and church discipline is faithfully applied to give full access to the full treasures of the Gospel also to those who have marriage problems (p. 48).

It is a well-founded opinion. While we must guard against legalism which attempts to blockade the grace of God, we must also not give in to that spirit of the age which treats marriage as a human invention, allowing divorce for many frivolous reasons. The office bearers do indeed have a God-given calling to be "... instruments in rescuing marriages from the devastating effects of sin" (p. 50). May their efforts not be in vain.

I trust this book will receive a wider audience as well for the subject is of importance to all of God's people. It could certainly serve as a valuable study guide for those who might wish to make marriage/divorce/remarriage a subject for discussion in Bible study groups and societies. Though it is extensively footnoted I would have liked to see a recommended "For Further Reading" list. There are a few "typos" that no doubt will be eliminated in the second printing. 





# OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



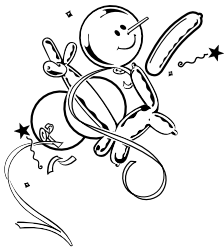
## Dear Busy Beavers:

Another new year has begun. You've been back in school for a while, already.

I hope you had a wonderful Christmas holiday. With those memories, and the new year ahead, we go back to work, or school.

God has given us more time to do what He has given us to do.

Let us use the time doing things that will please Him. Happy New Year, 1997!



## HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

### FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

To all Busy Beavers who have or will celebrate their birthdays in February. May our Lord bless you in the year ahead.

Melissa Hovius	5	Nadine Barendregt	21
Stephanie Post	7	Nelena Bergsma	23
Henriette Vandekamp	17	Francien Breukelman	24
Alicia Koolsbergen	18	Rianne Boeve	28
Tanya Dehaas	20	Amanda Zwaagstra	28
Jonathan Slaa	20		

## Quiz Time!

### GIVE THE DIRECTION

Can you find the direction that fits in the verse? (North, South, East, West)

- God planted the garden \_\_\_\_\_ of Eden (Gen. 2:8)
- Out of the \_\_\_\_\_ comes the whirlwind according to Job. (Job 37:9)
- The wilderness of Zin formed the \_\_\_\_\_ border of the land of Israel. (Joshua 15:1)
- The river Jordan flows \_\_\_\_\_ (See map)
- The tribes of Manasseh, Gad and Reuben were given land \_\_\_\_\_ of the Jordan. (See map)
- The \_\_\_\_\_ wind drives away rain according to the author of Proverbs. (Prov. 25:23)
- The angel told Philip to arise and go \_\_\_\_\_ . (Acts 8:26)
- King Hezekiah brought the water straight down the \_\_\_\_\_ side of the city of David. (2 Chron. 32:30)
- The wise men said, "We have seen his star in the \_\_\_\_\_ . (Matt. 2:2,9)
- The Lord turned a mighty strong \_\_\_\_\_ wind, which took away the locusts in Egypt. (Ex. 10:16-20)
- The court of the tabernacle was on the \_\_\_\_\_ side. (Ex. 38:9)
- After the Flood God made a \_\_\_\_\_ wind to pass over the earth. (Gen. 8:1)

## LOVES

Match the person with the object of his or love.

- |                             |                  |
|-----------------------------|------------------|
| 1. Christ, Eph. 5:25        | a. Husbandry     |
| 2. Father, Luke 15:20       | b. An adulteress |
| 3. God, John 3:16           | c. Salutations   |
| 4. Isaac, Gen. 27:1-4       | d. Tamar         |
| 5. Amnon, 2 Sam. 13:4       | e. World         |
| 6. Young Ruler, Matt. 19:22 | f. Rachel        |
| 7. Uzziah, 2 Chron. 26:1,10 | g. Savoury meat  |
| 8. Jacob, Gen. 29:18        | h. Prodigal son  |
| 9. Scribes, Mark 13:38      | i. Church        |
| 10. Hosea, Hosea 3:1        | j. Possessions   |

## SCRAMBLED WORDS! PRINTS AND PROPHETS

- |          |            |               |
|----------|------------|---------------|
| 1. Essom | 5. Nasan   | 9. Albama     |
| 2. Lejo  | 6. Ledina  | 10. Hinoph    |
| 3. Raze  | 7. Kiihhal | 11. Hantan    |
| 4. Chami | 8. Ashlie  | 12. Paaiehzhn |



## From the Mailbox!

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Yolanda Boeve*. We're glad to have you join us. I hope you enjoy being a member of the club. You can make puzzles and send them in, to put in the *Clarion* for other Busy Beavers to do. Bye for now, Yolanda.

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Christina Aasman*. I hope you will soon get a pen-pal. Do you enjoy writing letters? You can also send in your own puzzles for other Busy Beavers to do. I hope you enjoy being a member of our Club. When is your birthday? Sent it in a letter soon, so I can put you on the birthday list. Bye, Christina.

Hi, *Deanna Wierenga*. Thanks for the Christmas card, and puzzles. I guess you are learning how to cook now, if your mom is gone in the afternoons. It sounds like your place is fun to live on, with pets and lots of winter fun. Bye for now, Deanna.

## !PEN PALS WANTED!

Christina Aasman, age 9 would like to exchange letters with another Busy Beaver. If you would like to be that person, here is her address.

Christina Aasman

936 Millgrove Sideroad, Millgrove, ON L0R 1V0

Deanna Wierenga, age 13, would also like a pen pal.

Deanna Wierenga

Box 156, Neerlandia, AB T0G 1R0

Answers to Scrambled Words Puzzle. Zephaniah, 12. Nathan, 11. Hophni, 10. Hophni, 9. Balaam, 8. Elisha, 7. Joel, 6. Daniel, 5. Annas, 4. Micah, 3. Ezra, 2. Moses, 1.

## AUNT BETTY

c/o Premier Printing Ltd.  
One Beghin Avenue  
Winnipeg, MB R2J 3X5

That's all for this time.  
Love to you all,  
Aunt Betty.

