

# Clarion

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*Accidental death:  
Does it make sense?*



By J. Geertsema



## Accidental death: Does it make sense?

This editorial deals with death as a hurting enemy. Families in the midst of the churches have been hurt by the sudden death of loved ones. It also deals with serious accidents as the cause of death and of painful handicaps. Both cause intense suffering and bring great turmoil. But there is the comfort of God's Word too. We may place our broken life and this life shattering death in the frame of God's Name and Kingdom.

### Death is our enemy

Death strikes every day. Sometimes death comes after a long illness with much pain or at an old age that became difficult through physical and/or mental problems. In such cases death can be experienced as a deliverance from suffering, even though the beloved one is still missed. Since Christ obtained life for those who belong to Him, for Christian believers such a death is accompanied by the comfort of God's promises. Those who lived and died "in the Lord" have been taken home. They are with their Lord. When He returns, they will come back with Him (1 Thess. 4:13-18). It is as Paul writes in Philp. 1:21-23: To die is gain for it means to depart from this life and be with Christ.

However, death can also hit unexpectedly, sometimes through a sudden, brief but fatal illness or a heart failure. More often a sudden death occurs through accidents. Here death takes away people in the strength of their life or in their youth. Fathers and mothers, needed so much in their family, leave an empty place. Young people, full of plans and ideals for building up their life, or little children, just beginning their life, are no longer there. Vibrant lives suddenly are broken off. A life full of plans and actions is shattered. Deep is the grief and profound the pain of those who remain. Their life is in turmoil.

Questions come up. Why? What is the sense of it? What is the sense of going on with living? A spouse, a parent, a child is not just another person. He or she is part of one's life, of a family. And this part is suddenly broken away. Indeed, life is broken, shattered into pieces. The mind constantly focuses on those empty places. Death sure is a terrible enemy.

### Comfort in a God's perspective

Those who believe in Christ Jesus as their Lord place themselves in the light of God's goal for the history of heaven and earth. It is His goal with their lives too. This goal is expressed by Christ in the first three petitions of the prayer He taught us: "Our Father Who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name, Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth, as in heaven."

In the obedience of faith to Christ's will, which is the Father's will, we address the LORD God as our Father in heaven. Doing so, we express our trust in Him, the sovereign heavenly Majesty, governing all things in such a way that His

goal is reached, as our almighty and faithful, caring Father. And when, in the same obedience of faith, we pray these first three petitions, we make the goal of our heavenly Father for our life our own goal. We pray that God will grant us that, under all circumstances and in every situation of life, we do His will by acting and speaking in such a way that we serve the realization of His purpose. Our Father, we pray, grant that through us, Thy children and servants, Thy Name be glorified and Thy Kingdom come, not only in prosperity when we receive so many good things, but also in our adversities, when we are confronted with difficult and hard situations.

Such situations can be, for instance, the things we are dealing with, accidents or illnesses that cause a sudden death or a becoming handicapped for a long time.

Praying this prayer when you are faced with the breakdown of your life on earth is not easy. It requires total surrender into the hands of the Lord in faith and trust. This is only possible through God's Holy Spirit working in us. And we see this work of the Spirit time and again. When the need is great, God's supporting grace and upholding strength is there in the heart and life of His children.

It is especially through such surrender in faith that His Name is glorified and His work of grace becomes known so that His kingdom is advanced. I point to two of the fatal accidents which happened earlier this summer.

In Ontario, a young boy was hit by a car and rushed to the hospital where he died. The funeral was attended not only by the school community and the church family but also by many neighbours and others. The message at the funeral was Biblical, comforting and strengthening. There was deep grief. There was also surrender into the hands of the heavenly Father. Through the grace of God, parents, brothers and sisters, grandparents, dealt with their grief in faith, as Paul speaks about it in 1 Thess. 4:13: grieving but not without hope. While there were tears in the eye, there was the experience of deep joy in the heart. It was joy in the LORD and His promises. In this way the gospel of salvation through Christ was heard and seen. For the gospel was "lived." God's Name was glorified and His kingdom advanced.

We were again shocked when we heard of the accident in Alberta. There, too, the LORD gave His power to bear up in trusting surrender to Him. His strength was received and was shown and impressed also here not only the church community but also the people around. The result of God's power as this was manifest in the trusting surrender to Him was written about in the newspapers. With amazement, we see how God glorified His great Name and proclaimed His kingdom with its grace. Accidents happened to the glory of God through the faith of His children. What happened here can be linked to what we read in John 9 about Christ and the man who was born blind. This man had to suffer for


many long years, he and his parents. The suffering through his life-long handicap was not only physical and mental; it was also spiritual since being born blind was, by the Israel of that time, considered a punishment from God for sins. Christ, however, explained that this handicap of many years had been there in order that the saving work of God in and through Him, God's Son, might become manifest.

This saving work became manifest in the healing of the blind man. This same saving work becomes manifest today in the enduring faith of God's children under hard circumstances. And we are richer than this man. He suffered for the coming of God's Kingdom without knowing it. When God leads our way through sufferings, we may know what God's purpose is, and that we suffer for Him and His Name and Kingdom through our trust and surrender, in obedience of faith.

Principally, it is here the same as with the death of the Christian martyrs. They were and are imprisoned, tortured, and killed. And their enduring and persevering faith was and is to God's glory, serving the coming of His Kingdom and the gathering of His church.

### Conclusion

Do illnesses and accidents that cause death or a handicapped life make sense? Yes, they do when we look at them in the light of God's Word! It makes sense for God, for the coming of His Kingdom and the glorification of His Name. Therefore, they are not senseless for us either. God will reach His goal with them. That goal we may serve with our faith and trust. This gives direction to our life in the midst of grief and suffering. It provides purpose. It helps us to bear up and strengthens us to go on.

God promised that He will not fail nor forsake us. Christ Jesus is the same Helper, yesterday and today and for ever (Heb. 13:5,8), Who did not and does not fail. May this God continue to provide His help and strength, His comfort and power to those who have to go difficult ways for the sake of His Name and the coming of His Kingdom. 

## What's inside?

Rev. John Van Popta finishes his four-part series on Evangelism. May all, and especially the men, feel challenged to be active in speaking to colleagues and acquaintances about the call every human being has to worship the one true God, and about the glad tidings which are in Jesus Christ.

Rev. Klaas Jonker finishes his two-part report on his visit to Scotland and the Free Church of Scotland.

Mr. Vandervan contributes a "back to school" article. Now that the children are back to school, I'm sure that some of the concerns Vandervan writes about have passed through the minds of parents and students.

We've included a poem written by Michael Van of Surrey about the persecution of Christians in Sudan and the anti-Christian bigotry growing in our society, and especially the public schools.

We all are convinced that the political sphere of life is also under the lordship and claim of Christ; however, there are differing opinions as to how we ought to work out this conviction. In "Reader's Forum," Mr. Harke of St. Albert, AB, takes issue with a recent editorial of Dr. Van Dam.

In addition to the above, you'll find a few reports, reviews and letters.

GvP



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By D. Moes

## In all things God is working for our good

*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

Romans 8:27

*A little while ago, someone I knew was involved in a serious traffic accident. A car failed to yield the right of way causing him to hit this car broadside with his motorcycle. The result: a broken jaw, various lacerations and bruises and a lot of pain and discomfort.*

*At a time like this, the question about God's power can arise in your mind. Where was God during this accident? Is what you believe about God really true? And if it is, how do you harmonize your belief during a time of discomfort and pain?*

I'm sure most of us have asked these types of questions at one time or another. For there simply is a lot of pain and hurt in the life of every child of God. Some of you may have been abused in one way or another when you were young. Where was God when this abuse was being perpetrated? Some of you may be struggling with chronic health problems for many years already. And you wonder whether you are ever going to get better. Some of you may have had financial difficulties for many years. And the question that is on your mind is, "Is God ever going to give me some financial breathing room?" Some of you may have a lot of stress and tension in your home. And you wonder, "Why is God doing this to me? If He is so good and powerful, why does He not bring a change in my domestic situation?"

Yes, why? We all have our *why* questions about God. So much so that we sometimes have difficulty believing what we confess together about the might and faithfulness of our heavenly God and Father.

At a time like this, it is good to go to the Scriptures and ask the Lord to enlighten our minds and encourage our hearts. Today, we would like to do this by having a brief look at Romans 8:28.

### Blessed assurance

The text for our meditation begins with the words *we know*. That is a pro-

found statement of assurance. There are many things the apostle Paul does not know. He does not know exactly why God does what He does. He does not know the precise goal God has with everything that happens in his life. He does not know what will await him when he wakes up the next day. But he does know that in all things God is working for the good of those who love Him and are called according to his purpose. And this knowledge is a source of great and blessed assurance in his life – and our lives as well.

### All-inclusive

It is easy to believe this statement when we limit it to so-called good things. When we receive good health from the Lord, we easily think this is working for our good. When we receive financial success from the Lord, we tend to think the same. When things go the way we would like them to go, we have no difficulty in believing in God as our Father. A Father who is good to us. A Father who cares for us. A Father who is able to provide for all our bodily and spiritual needs.

And yet, Paul's statement cannot be limited to these so-called good things in our lives. For Paul is clearly speaking about *all* things. The accident we spoke about is included. The abuse as well. Likewise, the chronic health problems, the financial problems and the domestic stress. In all these and other trying things, God is working for the good of those who love Him and are called according to his purpose.

### The great Watchmaker

That is, as we have said, sometimes very hard to believe. How can accidents and abuse ever work for your good? How can health, financial and domestic problems do the same?

Well, the answer to this question lies in the little word *faith*. To use the words of Hebrews 11:1, we have to celebrate in the present already the re-

ality of the blessings of our hope and the proof of events as yet unseen. God has promised that in all things He is working for our good. Through faith we have to pull the reality and proof of this promise into the present and celebrate it right in the midst of our hurts and pains.

In order to help us do this, someone once came to our aid with the following example.<sup>1</sup> He began by stating that the text for our meditation appeared to contain a contradictory statement. Good things seem to be working in one direction; bad things in an opposite. How can we say that the things that appear to be working in opposite directions are working for our good? He then said, "Take your watch and open it. What do you see? You see that one wheel is turning in an anti-clockwise direction, but it is attached to another wheel that is working in a clockwise direction. You look at this machinery and you say, 'This is mad, this is quite ridiculous; here are wheels turning in opposite directions; the man who made the watch must have been a madman.' But he wasn't He has so arranged this watch and put in a main-spring to govern all the wheels, that when it is wound up, though one wheel turns this way, and another that way, they are all working together to move the hands round the face of the watch. They appear to be in contradiction, but they are all working together to the same end." The man then drew the conclusion for our lives. And he advised us in the seemingly contradictory things in life to look at the great Watchmaker and not to jump to premature conclusions. If we look with a spiritual eye we will soon begin to see that God knows what He is doing.<sup>2</sup>

### The good of Christlikeness

"What is this good God is working for?" you ask. Is it being protected from an accident? Is it being spared abuse? Is it being freed from difficulties, be they physical, financial or domestic? Not

necessarily so. We may think this would be for our good. Our heavenly Father may have other ideas about what is good for us. As a matter of fact, we can even say that sometimes these things and more may not even be good for us at all. For just imagine if our health was always good. Just imagine if we went through life without any emotional scars or difficulties. Do you really think this would be good for us? Do you really think this would keep us close to God? Keep us dependent upon Him? Help us live for His glory alone?

I'm sure you know the answer. All these so-called good things and more have a tendency to weaken our bond with our Father. They have a tendency to make us feel self-sufficient and independent. On the other hand, what we may call bad can be used by God to draw us closer to Him. To make us more dependent upon Him. To help us live more for His honour and glory alone.


Knowing this also helps us understand what this good in our text is all about. It is nothing less than learning to love God more and more, learning to live for God more and more, learning to look like God more and more. In short, it is nothing less than being conformed to the image of our Lord Jesus Christ more and more. As Paul also confirms when he says in the following verse, "For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers" (emphasis added).

### How do we know?

How do we know whether this is all true? How do we personally know that this is true? Well, if we love God, we will know. If we have been called by God, we will also know. This calling by God refers to our being brought to faith and repentance by the Holy Spirit. This loving God refers to our living in

communion with God by submitting our lives to his holy Word. When that is the case, we will know for sure that in all things God is working for our good. To be sure, there will be the struggle of faith. But in faith, we will be able to trust God and experience the blessed assurance of the text of our meditation.

<sup>1</sup>You can find this example in D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans. An Exposition of Chapter 8:17-39. The Final Perseverance of the Saints*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), pp. 169f. The example is not Lloyd-Jones'. He acknowledges it as one an old preacher used about 100 years ago.

<sup>2</sup>Needless to say, comparing God to the great Watchmaker does not mean that He winds up creation and then lets it unwind as it should without personally involving Himself with you and me. That was the contention of 17th and 18th Century Deism. The illustration of the Watchmaker was simply meant to show that things which seem to be working in different directions can indeed work together for our good. 

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# Evangelism: The church's missionary calling in the world<sup>4</sup>

By J.L. Van Popta

## 1. The missing piece

In previous articles we concluded that there is a need for Reformed people to develop scriptural, confessional and church directed material for evangelistic outreach programs. The programs that we use are a good ground work, but should be molded and adapted to a more confessionally based and church directed format. We noted however, that there was one more missing piece. We need to attend to that before we do some evaluation of all these programs.

Where are the fathers in all this? No one attempts to reach the fathers, the men. We reach out to children. We contact mothers and women, even young people, but not men. We make no concerted effort to reach the leaders of households. We ignore the covenant heads of households. When we see the powerful movements of *Promise Keepers* and of Louis Farakan's

*Million Man March* of Black Muslims going to Washington then we see that there is a tremendous hunger for spiritual nurture among the men, black or white or coloured in our society. Look at the appeal the Mormons have with their accent on family values. Hundreds of men are drawn in with their families. But the church says by its silence, "We have nothing to say to them. We cannot reach them. We cannot reach the fathers, the husbands, the men of Burlington, or Hamilton, or St. Catherine's or Winnipeg or Carman or Coaldale or Ottawa. VBS? Sure! Coffee Break? Sure! But men? No, we cannot reach them!" And why not? I think because the men of the church are too busy with their own lives. Yes, many are hard at work trying to make a living. They are trying to pay for mortgages, and school fees and kids' braces. I also think, however, that they spend time watching *Hockey Night in Canada* or

*Monday Night Football*. They are relaxing on the chesterfield, or taking in a ball game or playing a round of golf. The men of the church need to get involved also.

## 2. Men's Bible Study

What we need to do is develop a well rounded evangelism program. For the men perhaps a men's breakfast Bible Study and prayer meeting. I suggest that some men from the church all invite a friend from work, or the neighbourhood, or the golf course, or business and meet others for breakfast down at the local restaurant. Arrange to have ten breakfasts ready for 6:30 AM and meet together over eggs and toast and coffee with open Bibles. Let these men know what Christ can do for them and their lives. Teach them that there is hope in the world. Teach your neighbours the truth of the gospel. And don't say they won't come. If Farakan

can get a Million Men to Washington, then you can get five down to Archie's cafe. And realize that ultimately it is not you who will bring them in but God working by His Holy Spirit and His Word.

### 3. Some suggestions

What can we do to make our many efforts work better? I do not propose that we get rid of them, but rather bring them into a Reformed, that is into a covenantal, confessional and church oriented context. But even that is not enough. John Calvin is called the theologian of the Holy Spirit. Though the Heidelberg Catechism has but one question and answer directly on the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit permeates the catechism from start to finish. The Reformed faith is the faith of the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who works faith. It is the Holy Spirit that changes churches. It is the Holy Spirit that softens hearts and breaks down church doors and church walls (often from the inside out).

#### 3.1. Prayer and the Holy Spirit

We need to pray, pray fervently, for the power of the Holy Spirit working in our congregations. We should not begin evangelistic attitudes of defeat as if we don't expect a harvest. (I wonder if your church has a bigger budget item for mowing the lawn and tending the flowers than it does for its evangelism programs. There is often more money for harvesting the grass than for harvesting the souls. The Lord Jesus says that the fields are white for harvest. "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few," the Lord Jesus says and we can add, "And the budgets are small.")

#### 3.2. Integrated programs

We should tie VBS to Coffee Break. Not just for two weeks in the summer but there should be a year round program for the pre-schoolers. There should also be a Sunday school for the school age children. We could begin adult Sunday school for the mothers and fathers who attend coffee break and breakfast meetings. Of course this should not be during church services but before or after. Maybe we even need to change the time of our church services to accommodate Sunday School. We have church at 9:00 a.m. in Ottawa because we share facilities with our landlords. But many churches could have 9:00 a.m. church services and then have Sunday school for all sorts of people from 10:30 - 11:30,

Maybe serve a light lunch. Let the congregation befriend the people who come. Open up your hearts and homes to them. Open the Bible for them. Get them to read Reformed literature. Teach them the confessions and urge them to come to church. We can incorporate all of our outreach and evangelistic efforts if we are willing to give up a part of our Sunday even if we need to get up a little earlier.

#### 3.3. The welcoming church

It is often easier to inspire the church to send missionaries overseas than to welcome our neighbours into our lives. But the New Testament church must be a welcoming church. The church between Easter and Pentecost was a fearful church. With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost the church became a bold and fearless church. They worshipped and prayed in their homes. Thousands came in by the overpowering work of the Holy Spirit and the members welcomed them all. Are you prepared to welcome sinners into the church? Are you prepared to welcome strangers into church? Will you be the one who extends the hand of fellowship to a newcomer?

I want to end with a few true stories.

A woman I know was somewhere in Canada, west of Ottawa. (Every Canadian church in our federation is west of Ottawa). She went to one of our large churches. She was visiting her elderly and invalid mother who, with her other relatives, was a member of another Reformed federation. On Sunday she went to the Canadian Reformed Church. She slipped into church just before the service started, without a *Book of Praise* or Bible expecting to find some in the pew. She did not. There were no greeters or ushers. She could have been anybody. She stands about 5 foot 2 and (being in her 60's) is silver-haired. Perhaps a widow from down the street, for all anybody knew. After church she waited in the foyer for the one person she knew in the congregation. 300-400 people walked past her and nobody greeted her! That is not a church that can say it is oriented to a European contemplative, worshipful and majestic attitude.<sup>1</sup> It is not a church which desires to reject American activist Christianity. It is a church that has forgotten how to welcome strangers.

Another anecdote. A young woman becomes a Christian at university. She becomes a member of a Reformed church. She marries a Reformed young

man. They raise a family. She attends Bible study faithfully. She works hard for the Ladies' Auxiliary. Then at a Canadian Reformed congregational meeting she suggests that perhaps the church lacks evangelistic zeal. Another woman is overheard saying, "What can you expect from an outsider!" Even members who come from the CRC are often known as such – Outsiders! Or as many have been heard to say, "Oh well, what do you expect? They're Canadians." Well, so am I! A church that speaks this way is not a welcoming church. It is a church that needs to consider and reflect on the grace of God. Paul writes that Jesus Christ breaks down the dividing wall of hostility between Jew and Gentile. The Lord is also able to break it down between those born Canadian Reformed and those who were not. Who are we to build it up?

#### 3.4. The welcoming Christian

When we bring the gospel to our friends and acquaintances in the world we also need to be welcoming on an individual basis. We need to have compassion. We need to learn to accept people where they are at. The young man with tattoos and earrings needs to feel welcomed, not judged. When you speak with him, however, you need to do so with confidence. That means that you need to engage in personal Bible study and meditation praying for the grace and the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. You need to be prepared to be a constant friend. Constancy in all sorts of situations, ready to be a friend all the time. This is perhaps the hardest as those whom we evangelize often fall and stumble on the way.

#### 4. Where do we go from here?

Where do we go from here? I think that each and everyone of us has a duty to shine like stars in a dark universe, like the lights in the cosmos.<sup>2</sup> That means that we must engage the world with a lifestyle evangelism, in the church and outside. We must not buttonhole people with the gospel but rather befriend the people of the world with the stated intent of bringing them to knowledge of the gospel. They need you as a Christian presence in their lives. So then let us as a church community reach out with the gospel to those around us. Individually, corporately, and as church. But each of us must do that in a lifestyle and friendship evangelism that never compromises the truth of Scripture but rather

confronts those in the world around us with the demand and promise of the gospel. We need to proclaim the truth to those whom we befriend. "Repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved." And we must be willing to receive sinners into the church. Christ Jesus did and so must we. He took me in, accepted me. (I pray, "Lord, do not remember the sins of my youth.") As sinners come to hear the gospel we must persuade them of the truth as we welcome them.

As someone in the discussion in Coaldale pointed out, "We must love God above all and our neighbour as ourselves." Evangelism must be motivated by our love for God who is to be

worshipped by all, and by our love for our neighbour, lest he by our silence and uncaring attitude be condemned eternally.

### 5. Summary

Here is a helpful way to remember the things we have discussed in these four articles:

Three C's – Church (official), Committee (group), Christians (individuals).

Three more C's – Confession (basis), Church (direction), Covenant (theology).

And then three P's – Presence, Proclamation, Persuasion.

And then three more C's – Compassion, Confidence, and Constancy.

### 6. Conclusion

Develop an open, prayerful, welcoming, friendship and lifestyle evangelism depending on the power of the Holy Spirit and Christ's life transforming Word. Have a Christian presence in your neighbour's life; proclaim and persuade him with the good news of Jesus Christ. Be a willing instrument of Christ who by the outward voice brings sinners to faith and into his church and God's covenant. Do so with compassion, confidence and constancy. Your neighbour down the street, or on the job, in the university cafeteria, or in the office car pool may one day thank God you did.

<sup>1</sup>See the second article in this series.

<sup>2</sup>See the second article in this series.



## Report of the visit to the Free Church of Scotland from May 17-28, 1996, including the visit to the General Assembly 1996 (Part 2)

By K. Jonker

In part 1 of my report on my visit to the 1996 General Assembly (GA) of the Free Church of Scotland (FCS) I gave an account of all that led up to the actual business of the Assembly. What follows is a report on the proceedings of the GA, and on my activities of the rest of my stay in Scotland.

After the address of the Moderator on the Family, the Assembly started to deal with Reports, Overtures and Orders of the Day. At "Orders of the Day" the Assembly received Delegates from other churches or Christian organizations, Her Majesty's High Commissioner, Missionary Delegates, and a few young people for presentation of sabbathschool awards.

### d. Reports and other Agenda Items

#### d.1. Ecumenical Relationships

The discussion on the reports started with the interesting issue of the proposal of our sister churches in Australia (FRCA). Their proposal was to change the Constitution of the ICRC III:1 to read: "to express and promote unity in the reformed faith which the member Churches confess." The FCS men very well understood that this proposal arose from the non-acceptance of the Westminster Standards as a full-fledged con-



*The Presbyterian Ridge, so-called, because of the colleges which predominate the skyline of Old Edinburgh.*

fession by some within the FRCA. The GA didn't go for the proposal. They reasoned that if the ICRC will have to mean something for the churches then the participating churches must not suspect one another but confess unity of faith which they do have in common with one another.

The acting moderator reported on his visit to the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia. He had represented the FCS at their 150th Anniversary.

The PCEA had traditionally drawn its strength from Scottish migrants. Throughout the years Christians from other churches have joined the congregations in Australia. He also reported that the PCEA had recently gone through a time of upheaval. He could report that the PCEA remained faithful to the confessions. Other contacts were briefly discussed and letters of greetings from churches abroad were read.

#### *d. 2. Youth*

Under this item the following matters were discussed: Youth camps, Sabbath school work, Education and Publications. During the discussion about the youth of the church the tragedy of Dunblane was often referred to. There was also a tone of despondency: "we are losing our young people, why?" Some elements of the Moderator's address were emphasized. We must witness to our children. When they are young they are pliable. It was also acknowledged though that salvation is God's work. The first task of the church is to bring the children in prayer to God.

The youth camps were characterized as oasis in a spiritual desert. They created the possibility to be together as young people in a healthy climate, free from the pollution of modern trash. There was a great deal of appreciation for the youth magazines. Although a few considered the contents too modern, e.g. pictures of young people with long hair, references to sport on the Lord's Day. Those sentiments were refuted by emphasizing that the church must do its utmost to reach the youth. The presenter of the Committee remarked: "We have an obligation to ensure that the historic Reformed faith will be the basis of religious and moral education in our schools. The threat is no longer that people will call what we believe untrue, but that they will say it is only true for us."

There was another speaker, Rev. David Robertson (where I would stay the coming Sunday), who made an ardent plea for their own Christian Schools. "In the past we had our own schools, he said. It's time that we get them back." I had the impression that his plea fell a bit on deaf ears. That is to be regretted especially since the FCS is losing its youth at a rate that is worrisome. Instead of going to regular Catechism Classes the young children in the FCS receive biblical instruction at Sabbath schools. The students who were the best were present to receive their awards.

#### *d. 3. Liturgy*

From the report of the Select Committee on Psalmody, the presentation of the report, and the discussion, I received the distinct impression that a lot of attention is given to God's praise in the FCS-worship. New up-to-date versions of metrical Palms are produced; special workshops for precentors are organized; in Glasgow the 25th Psalmody Recital was held; young people can take part in the Psalmody Test. In the discussion all this work was enthusiastically promoted.

The convenor stressed that "one of (their) main purposes was to foster and

develop the Reformed tradition of Psalm-singing among all ages in our churches. They sought to do this: by providing metrical Psalms for congregational and family worship and suitable tunes with which to sing these; and by seeking to encourage high standards of praise in our congregations." This remark shows that the FCS doesn't just traditionally stick to a certain method of Psalm singing. They also are busy to enhance this singing by holding on to the regulative principle of worship. Listening to this debate, and being part of the singing during the Sunday worship services and at the GA, I have appreciated their Psalm singing now more than I did in the past.

#### *d. 4. Public Questions, Religion and Morals*

The FCS wants to be a church which plays an important part in the developing life of the nation. This has been characteristic since the times of Thomas Chalmers. Because of this approach the whole church stays in close contact with public life. This contact became also evident in writing of the loyal address to the Queen. The FCS offered congratulations on the occasion of her 70th birthday. The address made reference to the lessening of violence in Northern Ireland, her visit to the Polish and Czech Republics, and the visit of The Princess Royal to the Assembly. That visit of Princess Ann took place on Wednesday at noon. As Her Majesty's High Commissioner, she was attending the GA of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, which was meeting across the road from the GA of the FCS. So, she crossed the road for half an hour and briefly addressed the FCS brethren. She spoke about giving leadership. In our hectic society the leadership of ministers is necessary especially in helping others to cope with the pressures of our modern society.

The report of this Committee on Public questions dealt with contemporary issues. Some of the themes are: Prospects for Scotland 2000; Homosexuality; The National Lottery; mental health problems, divorce, coping with bereavement, depression and addiction. This (condensed) list shows for sure that the FCS is in touch with the world she lives in. With the little manpower they have, it is amazing what they produce and are involved in. The Lord blesses them with capable men. During the presentation of the report by convenor Rev. Alex. J. MacDonald, the assembly was listening spellbound. During the discussion of this report "Dunblane" was referred to again. That tragedy shows how wicked man's

heart is, one remarked. He urged everyone to be faithful in reaching out into the whole community.

For our Canadian Reformed feelings many of the matters discussed at this item are not really ecclesiastical matters according to Art. 30 of our Church Order. Point of difference here is how we see the relationship between Church and State, Church and Society. We emphasize more the individual responsibility of the church member within our society. These, however are practical differences. Both churches confess that the Word we have received is a Word for the world. This brings us to the next report.

#### *d. 5. Church Extension*

The FCS is fully aware of her place within an ungodly world. It wants to be a witness to this world. In the discussion it was said: "Heeding the call to go into all the world starts with our own doorstep." This discussion was again served by a well written report and a competent presentation. The FCS brothers know what they are talking about. They also know what needs to be done. However, their work was badly hindered by a lack of funds. There is an embargo on new projects. Progress reports were given on existing projects. I felt that the work of evangelism received a balanced approach. It was emphasized that the church as a whole had a task, but also each individual congregation. The Church should not be just in a maintenance mood but be a living and therefore active church in a post-modern world.

Sentiments were heard as we can hear them also within our own Canadian Reformed circles: "we should not have just the open-door mentality; we must go out with the gospel; we should not be speaking about and promoting our own church; we are concerned with the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ."

#### *d. 6. Foreign Mission*

Again the discussion was served by a well-documented report. The FCS has several mission fields: Peru, South Africa, India, North America (sic.), Christian Witness to Israel, involvement in the Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF). For sure the small FCS does not take her responsibility to the commission call of our Lord lightly.

It was reported that the ICRC Mission conferences were a great success. It was interesting to hear that the Church in Peru had its own Christian School. In his presentation the missionary from Peru, Rev. Marcos Florit was promoting Christian education very much. Afterwards I had a personal discussion with him and encouraged him to continue





*Holyhood Palace where Princess Anne stayed during her visit to Edinburgh.*

promoting this important task within his circles. I found Rev. Florit very sound in his outlook and approach.

Two of the missionaries of the FCS were previous members of the FRC of Launceston, TAS, the congregation I served in the 80's. Rev. David Miller is a missionary in South Africa, while sr. Marie-Christine Lux is a mission worker in Peru. The latter was present at the Assembly, and it was great to meet her again after many years.

#### *d. 7. Eventide Homes (Old peoples homes)*

The FCS is also active in an other area: the care for the aged. The Church has two homes: Maxwell House in Glasgow and Thomas Chalmers Housing Association in Edinburgh. Also here the pinch was felt as far as lack of funds was concerned. Because of this lack there were too many vacancies which should be filled. The assembly was encouraged to remember and promote this "thrilling example of Christian care."

#### *d. 8. Theonomy*

From the few overtures submitted to this GA the one on Theonomy was most interesting. The Presbytery of Edinburgh and Perth was concerned about the growing influence of the movement known as Christian Reconstructionism or Theonomy. The GA was requested "to reaffirm the teaching of the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) concerning the threefold division of the Law into moral, ceremonial and judicial. In particular WCF. Ch 19. section 4. And that the GA therefore repudiate, as heretical, those teachings currently known as Theonomy or Christian Reconstructionism, and declare that no person holding to the view that the judicial laws have not expired and that the judicial pun-

ishments described in the law are still to be exacted, can be an Office-bearer in the Church."

In his presentation of this overture the Rev. D. Robertson was very strong in his feelings against Theonomy. It has to be rejected for six reasons: it is un-Biblical, un-historical, anti-Confessional, anti-Scottish, anti-church and anti-gospel. In brief he was convinced that Theonomy was a distortion of the true doctrine of salvation. The discussion made Rev. Robertson much more careful in his judgment. He was prepared to change the judgment "heretical" to "contradictory to the Confession of Faith and the Word of God." Two viewpoints developed in connection with this overture. The one was that no action needed to be taken since office-bearers subscribe to the whole doctrine of salvation. So, if anyone has evidence that an office-bearer deviates from the truth than the means of dealing with him are in place. The other view was that the matter war-

rants more study. A deeper analysis should take place. In the overture things remained too vague; the statements about Theonomy were too general to come to a fair conclusion. This view became the decision of the Assembly. The matter was given to the Public Questions Committee.

I found the discussion on this topic enlightening since I clearly observed their genuineness to be faithful to the confessions. Repeatedly it was confirmed that their binding is to the whole doctrine of salvation, and not just to the system of doctrine or something similar.

So, I am pleased to report that the FCS wants to subscribe to the whole doctrine of the Westminster Confession of faith. Later on in a personal discussion with Prof. Cartwright he strongly confirmed this point.

#### *d. 9. Evangelical Alliance*

A matter on which not everyone thought the same was the overture of the same Presbytery to receive the delegate from the Evangelical Alliance. Opposition to receive him was voiced by Prof. Cartwright. His point was that the EA was not on the list from which delegates could be received. Since 1974 no representation had taken place. He was far from happy with the openness of the EA to charismatics and to its broad ecumenical stance. Rev. D. Robertson defended the request of his presbytery by pointing to the fact that FCS was part in the founding of EA, that the delegate of EA, Mr. Calver, was a Christian minister and that many FCS people participate in the work of EA. A vote revealed that a moderate majority favoured the reception of the representative of the EA. I expect that the ties with the EA will be re-evaluated by the FCS.



*Princess Anne addressing the Assembly Journal.*

#### d. 10. Several other matters

The GA dealt with a number of other matters, more general and administrative of nature: legal and financial matters, the supply of ministers, appointments, Training of the Ministry, Publication and Bookshop, and a few private matters which were dealt with in closed session. These housekeeping matters (which showed that matters in the FCS are much more centralized than with us) and appeals didn't take much of the GA's time.

#### e. Speech

As reported earlier, the normal business of the Assembly is interrupted by Orders of the Day. In the evenings at 7:30, the Order of the Day was usually the reception of delegates from other churches. My turn came on Wednesday evening May 22. Rev. Donald McDonald introduced the speakers. He ensured that we should not speak longer than 10 minutes. In a few lines I now report on my address to the GA.

I first explained my background and the body of churches which I represented, passed on greetings and thanked for the warm and brotherly reception. I briefly outlined my experience with Presbyterian Churches in Australia (PCEA) and in North America (OPC). In those contacts I have come to the conviction, which was reinforced by my observations at this GA, "that we build on the same foundation, holding on to the same Truth." I stated that I was greatly encouraged by all what I had observed so far. I concluded with a word of encouragement from God's Word. That Word is very near (Dt. 30 and Rom. 10); that Word is the one thing you need (Luke 10); that Word is very powerful (Hebr. 4); that Word proclaims our great success (1 Cor. 15:58).

At about noon on Friday the Assembly finished its agenda and was closed in a Christian manner.

#### 6. The final days of my visit

The Friday afternoon, after the closing of the General Assembly, I had an appointment with the Principal of the College, Prof. A.C. Boyd. I spoke with him about Christian education, the standards of the College, how quickly a candidate would receive a charge and some other matters. After this talk with the principal I had a talk with the new Moderator about his various functions, and about Church life in general.

On Saturday I visited John Knox House and strolled Princess Street, especially (of course) through some bookshops. At 18:10 I took the train to Dundee to stay the Sunday over at the

manse of Rev. David Robertson. I had a most pleasant stay with him and his family. Rev. Robertson conducted both services in the historic church, the St. Peter's. This is the church of the well-known minister Robert Murray Mac-Cheyne. I heard two biblical sermons. Rev. Robertson works there for five years now and during his ministry the Church is growing. He has 80-100 people in attendance every Sunday.

In the morning service I received the opportunity to tell the congregation about the Canadian Reformed Churches and bring them our greetings. In the evening, after the service, the minister had organized a meeting in which they wanted information about our Christian Schools. I explained why we promote Reformed Education in our churches. I had to answer several questions.

On Monday morning I met Rev. Colin Macleod and his wife. I was informed about his work among the Internationals, mainly Pakistanis, in Dundee. Colin also was interested in getting information about our Churches and our church life in Canada. Colin brought me back to the railway station and by 2:00 I was back in Edinburgh. The distance between Dundee and Edinburgh is about one hour by train.

I was back in the College to meet Prof. Cartwright at 3:00 pm. As reported earlier on, he is professor in Ecclesiology. We discussed topics like the nature of the Church, Church government, the function and the binding to the confessions.

Prof. Cartwright gave me his lectures on Presbyterian Church government. During the Assembly week I had presented him a copy of Dr. J. De Jong's edition: Bound Yet Free. I took some copies of this book along, as well as a number of sets of the Rev. W. Pouwelse's books, as presents for my hosts. I hope that with this gesture our Canadian Reformed thinking gets more known and appreciated. I ensured e.g. that the books of Rev. Pouwelse would be given to the Committee on Public Questions, Religion and Morals.

On this Monday evening I enjoyed a delicious meal at the home of Prof. A.C. Boyd. He and his wife took me out for a beautiful drive into the country. Through this detour they brought me back to the hotel for my last night in Scotland. The next day I left Scotland being enriched with precious memories.

#### 7. Conclusion

I had a very beneficial trip to the Free Church of Scotland. Throughout my stay I enjoyed the true Christian spirit prevalent among our brothers there. They repeatedly expressed their appre-



ACCEPTED to Toronto, ON for Mission work in Papua New Guinea

**Candidate Stephen 't Hart**

of Hamilton, ON

\*\*\*

CALLED and ACCEPTED to Chatham, ON

**Rev. H. Versteeg**

of Toronto, ON

\*\*\*

DECLINED to Coaldale, AB


**Rev. W.B. Slomp**

of Neerlandia, AB

ciation for my presence as a delegate of our churches. They not only said this in words but also showed this in actions. The brothers didn't ignore me. On the contrary they generously welcomed me, looked after my transportation, paid for my lodging, approached me on several occasions, shared with me their love and concern for the work of the Lord in their country. I received all the Assembly papers and was duly informed about procedures etc.

There is no doubt in my mind that the Free Church of Scotland is a struggling but a living Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. My love to the brothers and sisters in Scotland has been deepened through this visit. I am thankful that I received the opportunity to represent the Canadian Reformed Churches at the General Assembly 1996 of the Free Church of Scotland.

On my question: "what is your message for the Canadian Reformed Churches," I repeatedly heard: "share your rich Reformed heritage."

This visit affirmed me in my conviction that the relationship between faithful churches of Christ should be made profitable by learning from each other's work in Christ. The FCS has much to encourage us as fellow workers in Christ Jesus (Rom. 16.). In turn we have much to encourage them, so that we together hold our ground in the victory of our exalted Lord, longing for the coming of His Kingdom. 



## Remembering Gresham Machen

This year marks the sixtieth anniversary of the death of J. Gresham Machen, the Princeton scholar and churchman who founded Westminster Theological Seminary and spearheaded the reform movement in the Northern Presbyterian Church of the US that led to the formation of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Machen was a methodical and well rounded scholar, and he left his impact on many successors and followers, including Cornelius Van Til.<sup>1</sup> Machen was also known and respected by the leading figures of the Liberation in Holland.

In the *Outlook* (May 1997) Daryl G. Hart, the librarian of Westminster Theological Seminary (East) gives a brief summary of the life and work of Machen. In the latter part of his article, he describes Machen's stand in the conflict that rocked the Presbyterian churches in the 1930s. Since this is an account with which we are not readily familiar, it may be of interest to reproduce key elements of it here. Concerning the conflict Hart writes:

Machen's experience during the first World War also turned out to be a form of training for the battle with theological liberalism of the 1920s and 1930s. After studying in Germany he knew first hand the destructive nature of recent Biblical scholarship. But seeing how thoroughly the mainline denominations in the United States had identified liberty, democracy and social justice with the cause of Christ made Machen all the more resolute in opposing the witness of the American church. He believed most Protestants had become so concerned with the economic and political problems of this world that they had abandoned all interest in Christ's conquering sin and death and giving hope for the world to come.

Evidence of liberalism in the Northern Presbyterian Church took a variety of forms. It could take shape in such obvious forms as Harry Emerson Fosdick's sermon,

"Shall The Fundamentalists Win?," in which the noted modernist reduced such doctrines as the virgin birth and the inerrancy of Scripture to old fashioned ideas that were no longer appropriate for educated Christians. Or liberalism could manifest itself in the various denominational agencies which did not so much deny cardinal doctrines but did pursue a range of activities, from medicine to education, which undermined the church's task of proclaiming the gospel and saving souls from sin and death. As Fosdick himself said in his notorious sermon, the world order was being torn to shreds politically and economically and all fundamentalists offered in response was the virgin birth of Christ and his literal second coming. "What incredible folly!"

But Machen was up to the challenge. He worked with other conservatives to organize a movement that opposed liberalism within the denomination. He also became a major reason for conservative students enrolling at Princeton Seminary, many of whom would also join conservative ranks. And one of the reasons for Machen's increasing visibility was his important, even if short, book, *Christianity and Liberalism*. In that work he made a clear case for the essential antagonism between historic Christianity, a religion of sin and grace, and theological liberalism, a religion of morality and uplift. Even though the book rankled many liberals, it remains what one historian has called "the chief theological ornament" of conservatives.

Still, despite the favourable reception Machen's book received from journalists and observers of the ecclesiastical controversy, Christianity and Liberalism met with opposition from fellow Presbyterians. In fact, when the 1925 General Assembly appointed a committee to study the cause of the dispute within

the denomination, the committee's report blamed conservatives for name-calling and failure to use the formal procedures of church polity.

The irony of the church's refusal to condemn liberalism was that it did so in the name of tolerance and diversity. Yet, such liberality did not extend to conservatives. In fact, the policies of toleration embraced by the Northern Presbyterian Church could be quite vindictive. This was especially the case for Machen who over the last ten years of his life experienced numerous indignities from church officials who prided themselves on Christian love, forbearance and preserving the unity of the church.

In 1926 the directors of Princeton Seminary nominated Machen to fill the open chair of apologetics, a decision that required the ratification of the General Assembly. But his opponents at the seminary, who were moderate evangelicals, as well as denominational officials used his political views against him (he opposed Prohibition in a church that voted Republican more often than today's Christian Right) and circulated rumours that he was temperamentally deficient and not equipped to assume the new teaching responsibilities. To make matters worse, Machen's opponents used this episode to launch an investigation of Princeton Seminary, the only denominational agency that consistently affirmed the church's theological standards and also criticized liberalism aggressively. The committee given the task of investigation recommended a reorganization of the seminary's administration, a change that moved conservatives from a majority position on the old board to a minority status on the new board. Machen believed that this administrative shake-up compromised Princeton's theological identity and so he founded Westminster Seminary in

1929 to perpetuate the theological and polemical tradition of Old Princeton.

Perhaps the greatest indignity Machen faced because of his consistent and faithful opposition to liberalism in the Presbyterian Church came a few years before his death. In 1933 he led the formation of the Independent Board of Presbyterian Foreign Missions, an agency designed to send out conservative missionaries and protest the liberal policies and practices of the official denominational missions board. Of course, church officials objected to the new agency as a rival to their own. But rather than following due process, church officials drafted an official document, the Mandate of 1934, that declared the Independent Board unconstitutional and required presbyteries to bring Independent Board members to trial. In the winter of 1935 Machen was eventually brought to trial by his presbytery. When it came time for Machen to present his defense the judicial commission ruled that it would hear no evidence concerning liberalism in the official missions board or the legality of the Independent Board. As he said, "I am to be condemned on the ground that I have disobeyed a lawful order but am not allowed to be heard when I offer to prove that order is not lawful." He added that the judicial commission had "dishonoured Christ" before it had humiliated him. But the humiliation Machen experienced at the hands of the Northern Presbyterian Church's denominational machine was truly astounding for its blatant unfairness. According to the religion editor for a Boston newspaper, the ruling against Machen was "deplorable" and "unpardonable," especially since Machen affirmed "the very letter of the church's belief."

Yet, Machen was undeterred. After appealing his case to the General Assembly and losing the appeal he and 5,000 other conservatives formed in 1936 the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. And only six months later he travelled to North Dakota to rally support for the new denomination and answer charges from local mainline Presbyterian ministers that he was a disreputable fellow. During that trip in late December Machen came down with pneumonia and died on New Year's Day, 1937.

It was an ironic end to an impressive life. A man who had grown up in the lap of wealth and refinement and who gave himself unceasingly to the cause of the Reformed faith died in the Roman Catholic hospital of a small provincial mid-Western town. Machen's life could have turned out very differently. He could have completed a Ph.D and contented himself with a teaching career. He could have won the approval of friends and peers by avoiding the controversy in the church. But Machen had the courage of his convictions. He knew that it was not enough just to lecture in the classroom or write scholarly books. The cause of Christ demanded an ever vigilant stand for the truth and opposition to error. It also demanded the integrity of the church's witness. It was one thing for individual ministers and church members to be orthodox. It was another entirely for such orthodoxy to be reflected in the agencies and policies of the denomination at large.

Machen also had the comfort of his convictions. He knew that his only true hope both in life and death was in his Saviour Jesus Christ. On his death bed he wrote in a telegram to a colleague at Westminster: "the active obedience of Christ, no hope without it." That hope gave

Machen the courage to stand for his Lord even when that stand was very unpopular. And that same hope provided comfort when he suffered the consequences of his faithfulness. It is no less the case today that the church of Jesus Christ needs the same kind of faithfulness and courage that Machen exhibited in his day.

We can be thankful to God for Machen's courageous stand in the struggle of the truth.

The fruits of this can still be seen today. The OPC has come to the point of breaking its tie with the CRC because of the toleration of liberalism in that church. This year's General Assembly will need to decide on the issue, but nothing short of a miracle can stop the ties from being cut. And that after many years of cooperation and an expression of long standing debt and commitment to the CRC!

We can only applaud this stand. Not that these divisions are pleasant. On the contrary! But retaining integral faithfulness to Scripture and the Reformed interpretation of Scripture is the only way that truly echoes and honours Machen's stand. We hope that the sons and daughters who honour the fathers will live in the same spirit.

<sup>1</sup>Van Til wrote a short *In memoriam* in *De Reformatie*, Vol. 17, #19 (February 5, 1937) pp. 150-151



## *Abel's Blood*

(Gen. 4:1-12, Rev. 7:9-17)

Here cry the children of our nation  
In schools of brick but no foundation  
(Defying Nature and Creation)  
Where Abel's blood cries on . . .

Hide us – Jesus – Hide us!  
Safe where they can't guide us  
Guide us to extinction  
Racing to extinction  
Our cry goes on and on . . .

Their Sudan sisters and their mothers  
Cry for fathers and their brothers  
Enslaved and killed their faith to smother  
And Abel's blood cries on . . .

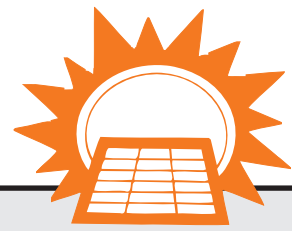
Hide us – Jesus – Hide us!  
Safe where they can't find us  
Find and persecute us  
Bind and execute us  
Our cry goes on and on . . .

Our rulers offer no solution  
Nor is there aid in revolution  
In same-sex love or evolution  
While Abel's blood cries on . . .

Hide us – Jesus – Hide us!  
Safe where they can't guide us  
Guide us to extinction  
Racing to extinction . . .  
Come to judge the living and the dead!

*Michael Van*

# RAY OF SUNSHINE



By Mrs. R. Ravensbergen

*"I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from you can do nothing."  
John 15:5*

## Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Summer is a nice time of the year. Not only because of the warm weather or the holidays, but also because of all the delicious, fresh fruit you see. In the farm markets, or on the little fruit stalls along the road, or even while it is still growing on the trees, everywhere you can pick or buy fresh fruit. Maybe you even grow some of it in your own garden.

What do you do in order to grow your own fruit? Maybe you have an apple tree, or strawberry plants. When you want to grow nice, big fruits, you take good care of the plants. Early in the spring you start with sprays and fertilizers. You don't want the weeds to choke out your plants, so you keep them out. You water them when the weather is dry. You do everything you can to keep the plants big and healthy, so they will carry nice juicy fruits. At harvest time you pick your fruits. When the crop was good, you continue to take care of the plants, so they will be able to produce a beautiful crop again the following year. But what do you do when the tree did not bear good fruit, or when the strawberry plant had only some dried-out little berries? You chop down the tree, or pull out the plant. After all the care you gave to your plants they still did not grow good fruit, so there must be something wrong with that plant. You get rid of it, and maybe you will plant a new one. But the old one has to go. If your plants do not produce fruit what good are they to you?

The example of plants bearing fruit is often used in the Bible. The Lord is the One Who takes care of the plants, and we are the plants that have to bear fruit. The Lord takes care of us and gives us everything we need. Or, in the text that I used at the top of this page, the Lord is the main branch of the grapevine, and we are the branches. Everything we need comes from the Lord. As long as we stay put and expect everything from the Lord, we will be fine, we will be bearing much fruit. But when we try to go our own way, do not want to stay on the vine and try to grow on our own, we will not be able to bear any fruit. And fruit, that is what the Lord is looking for.

But on fruit trees or grapevines it is easy to see whether they grow fruits or not. But how does it show if we are bearing fruits? Maybe we are sitting at home most of the time and we are unable to help other people. Maybe we are unable to do anything at all because of a handicap or an illness or old age. Sometimes we cannot even go to church on Sundays. When we totally depend on other people's help, does that mean that we are not bearing any fruit?

Oh no! The fruits that the Lord wants to see grow in our hearts. They are the fruits of our faith. It does not necessarily mean that we have to be running around and do many things. The Lord planted us and He takes care of us. He does not expect a little blueberry bush to grow huge watermelons! The Lord knows each one of us, for He made us just the way we are. To some people He gave talents so they can become ministers, or elders, or mothers,

or caregivers. But to other people He gave different talents. When we bear fruit that is pleasing to the Lord, we use our talents in His service. We serve Him and love Him with all our heart. We do things that may not make us very famous, but yet when we live our lives in obedience to Him, the Lord sees us as fruitful trees. It may mean that we pray to the Lord with all our heart, or maybe we can sing a psalm, or smile in spite of pain or difficulties, or live with a severe illness or handicap without ever complaining. There are many fruits that other people never see, but to the Lord they do not go unnoticed.

Further down chapter 15 of the book of John it says, "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples." (v. 8) So that is what really happens, when we bear fruit by living our lives in obedience to Him: the Name of the Lord is glorified. Then, in v. 11 we read, "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full."

So, belonging to the Lord, being planted into His covenant by Him, and bearing fruit for Him is our comfort and our joy. Let us be thankful to know that we are His, and let us pray that we may bear much fruit. And the next time we see a beautiful ripe, shiny, juicy apple or peach, just remember that we are allowed to be just as nice and perfect to the Lord. Out of grace, in prayer, and through the redeeming work of our faithful Saviour Jesus Christ.

*Behold, the righteous man is like a tree  
Which by the streams yields fruit abundantly,  
Whose leaves are green and shall not fade or perish;  
In all he does, the righteous one shall flourish.  
But wicked men are not like him, for they  
Resemble chaff that winds will drive away.*

*Psalm 1:2*

## Birthdays in October:

- 17: Alan Breukelman**  
2225-19 Street, Coaldale, AB T1M 1G4
- 22: Nelena Hofsink**  
"BETHESDA CLEARBROOK HOME,"  
32553 Willingdon Crescent,  
Clearbrook, BC V2T 1S2
- 25: John Feenstra**  
"ANCHOR HOME,"  
361 30 Road, RR 2, Beamsville, ON L0R 1B0
- 28: Mary Ann DeWit**  
"BETHESDA,"  
6705 Satchel Road, Box 40,  
Mount Lehman, BC V0X 1V0

From the oldest to the youngest, Mary Ann will be 41, John 39, Nelena 37, and Alan 31.

Happy Birthday to all four of you, and until next month,

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



## Going to School . . .

*Though we don't go to school with our children, our concerns do. While some children love school and breeze through, others have a more difficult time. For a small minority, school is one of the most exquisite forms of punishment the world has ever invented (Mike Yorkey in THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY ANSWER BOOK, Victor Books).*

### ■ What will the new school year bring for children and parents? How can we make school profitable and enjoyable for our children?

Schooling takes up a large chunk of our lives as children and adults. Children spend more than twelve years in school in one way or another. As innocent grade one students, they hopscotch to their classroom, perhaps annoyed that they cannot read yet after their first day in school. As time goes by, the influence of the world becomes stronger; peers exert their presence; the home has to step back. Teenagers worry about school and its related social issues, especially personal acceptance. Possibilities for the future often seem to depend on how well we do in school – a diploma can open doors. Young adults experience a range of emotions and worries about themselves as persons, and about their future careers.

Parents also live with the fact that school demands much parental attention. There is potential conflict between the family and the world. It is not an easy matter for mom when her little darling hops enthusiastically out of the car, and, seeing her classmates, runs off without a good-bye. Later, the influences from outside begin to creep into the family: *Oh, mum, please no; nobody else wears those!* And those teachers . . . why don't they spend more time with my son? If they would, he would not fall behind.

In addition, Christian parents are also continually confronted with requests for support of our Christian schools. We might find ourselves involved as a school board member or a

committee member. These are challenging and time-consuming tasks, often met with more criticism than praise. And even when we are not directly involved, there is the heavy financial burden of the weekly school contribution (in addition to so many other financial obligations). It is an expensive business to send your children to a Christian school, and it is not always easy to remain enthusiastic about school.

These brief flurries sketch some of the thoughts that may well have crossed your mind while thinking about the new school year. As we ponder the *how to deal with these things* question, it is good to remind ourselves of the purpose of our schools, and the relation between home and school. Our Christian schools are community schools; a reformed school is a school established, governed, and financed by parents who belong to the same church community. Why? Because as members of the communion of saints we wish to educate our children in the fear of the Lord. That means, we want to tell the coming generation of the mighty deeds of our God as we read of them in Scripture, as we notice them in nature and the world around us. Home, church, and school belong together because they have the same goal: to (learn to) live a Christian life as demanded by God in his Word. Some have called that *covenantal education*, a beautiful description that points to the relationship we have with our God and with our fellow brothers and sisters, old and young. And since this is so, we must endeavour to support each other, providing assistance where needed. In order to do this, we must come to know each other. Therefore, do not send your children to school without knowing where they go and who their teacher is. Take the time to discuss with their teachers the concerns and questions you may have about the schooling of your children. Why not take your (Grade 6+) son along on a parent-teacher visit? Let your children

gradually take ownership of their own learning – that's part of the goal of education, and it will diminish the chance that the school becomes that *exquisite punishment*. Be part of the school community in as many positive ways as possible. Your attitude will rub off on your children (be aware that a negative attitude rubs off so much more easily than a positive one!). Looking for ways to help (at) your school? Phone your local principal, and s/he will direct you to the right person.

### ■ I would really want my daughter to be successful this year. Last year I did not always make time for her, but in the coming year I will make sure that she will do her best. Any advice?

I cannot imagine that there are parents who would not want their children to be successful in school. Seeking the best for your children is a most natural parental desire. Equally natural is the fact that often the best intentions seem to run foul in the daily hustle and bustle of life. Plans are readily made, but not so easily executed. As I pondered the above question, two thoughts came to mind. First, parents often act out of a feeling of guilt for not giving their children the attention they need. Second, what parents consider best for their children is not necessarily the best. Let me try to explain.

As parents we often find ourselves with guilt feelings of some sort or another. We know ourselves fairly well, and in our more honest moments we will have to admit that we are far from perfect in our efforts to help our children grow up. All too easily we react in a knee-jerk manner, swinging from not enough to way too much attention. We do well to check our own motivation: do we really want to help our children, or do we want to get rid of that guilt feeling?

The second thought relates to this. Helping often means: Listen to me, I'm your father, your mother. I'll tell you

what to do, because I know best. Unfortunately, that's generally not such a good approach with children, especially the older ones. Education means, among other things, *leading to independence*. You do not become independent when you are told all the time what to do and what not to do. There must be space and opportunity to make up your own mind, rather than follow the mind of others. For those 'others', especially for the parents, this means allowing your children their own space and thoughts. And that makes helping difficult. In fact, parents (and other educators) should acknowledge the danger of *over-helping*. Overly helpful parents and teachers can cause children to feel imprisoned; over-helping can suffocate.

How might you help your daughter? Be part of her life and let her be part of yours; master the art of permitting each other to live your own life. Temper expectations that are unrealistically high, and help them overcome those depressing feelings of inability. Do not let your daughter feel that you do not really trust her and that it is necessary to check everything she does. Of course, that will differ depending on age, but it is never too early to teach children that they, too, have responsibilities, and that they, too, can make independent decisions.

Setting time aside to help your children with their homework is fine, but only if it is part of the larger family bond. When children get older you might help them best by leaving them alone so that they can, indeed, be responsible for their own actions. It is a wonderful thing that we are part of a protecting and comforting family, and yet, at the same time, are able to become independent, responsible persons. Within this family setting we learn values and norms; we learn what it means to do our best, to develop our talents properly, to relate to others, to cope with disappointment, to be humble in success, etc. In this sense, the family is a mirror of the manner in which the Lord wants to live with us: within the covenant bond of His church family, and yet with our own individual responsibilities. Whenever we hear the Ten Words of the Covenant as the rules for our lives, the Lord puts us to work, first of all within our families. Let it be said of our families: what we learned from mum and dad enabled us to live and work as children of the Lord.

Enabling – a beautiful word that sums up the goal of home education in

particular. It is what a strong family of parents and children who know that they belong to their faithful Saviour Jesus Christ does for each other. Hence such a family forms the best possible training ground for life. Pray to God to give us such families.

### ■ This fall my son will go to school for the first time. How might I prepare him for that?

Going to school for the first time is a major event in the lives of our children. It is for them an indication that they are now 'big', but it is also a threat to their peaceful and protected life – mom is not there with them in the classroom. As in so many things in life, it's important to be well-prepared. Step by step the youngsters learn how to manipulate fork and spoon at the dinner table, how to keep the bedroom tidy, how to address guests etc. So also they need to learn how to increase the distance between home and the rest of the world. Going to school is probably the first major step into that world! I list some key elements to indicate the direction in which an answer to the question can be found.

- *Confidence without recklessness.* Going out into the world does not need to be a frightening experience. Give your daughter a sense of security which will help her move around with confidence. Much of this will come from your own example. Show that you value the school experience and that you trust the teachers. Do not hold your son back because you do not trust others! Some parents appear to be so possessive of their children that they give the impression that no one can really be trusted. At the same time, teach your children that there are limitations to trust, and that there are boundaries which ought not to be crossed. Perhaps it is sad to say this, but making our children street-wise is not a luxury. Similarly, help your children to become school-wise and social-group wise as well. Even at a young age, peer group pressures can wreak havoc.

- *Teach basic skills.* I think of three sets of basic skills that our youngsters need to acquire. First, *language and ideas*. Language is our God-given tool to explore the world around us, and it is truly a miracle to see an infant master this tool. Since language is learned by interacting with others, speaking with and reading to your children are of crucial importance. In particular, the daily habit of reading from books your

children love is an excellent and necessary preparation for later formal learning. If you have not done so already, adopt the practice of "lap reading" with your youngsters; you will create a powerful opportunity to help your children prepare themselves for future learning tasks! Second, *space and movement*. Youngsters talk and explore; that's the natural way in which they begin to make sense of the world around them (that's what learning is all about!). They need many opportunities to explore the space around them as an important training ground for future learning. Select toys with care because most of the modern gadgets are just that, offering little opportunity for useful play. Take your youngster out of the house to explore its immediate environment. Expand the circle of exploration with walks in the park, swimming in the pool, shopping trips to the mall, etc. Let your son help with the preparation for such trips: shoes, raincoats, snacks. Third, *attention and concentration*. Children have notoriously short attention spans. Often they flutter from one thing to another, and then readily moan: Mom, I'm bored. Such moans usually indicate lack of attention and inability to concentrate, and tend to become patterns and habits if ignored. Children must be trained in this, and consistently so. Paying attention and concentration are attributes that should come from within us (imagination plays quite a role here), and should not depend on a constant stream of changing images (as on TV). Your own example is important to your children: make sure that they see what it means to pay good attention to something, or to concentrate on a task at hand.

- *Check the expectations of the school.* Schools will have a set of expectations for their incoming children. These might include knowing name, address, telephone number; being able to follow instructions and dress oneself; being able to sit in class for a protracted period of time, and play with others, etc. Discuss these expectations with the teacher, identifying any that might cause possible concern. Let the teacher know the strengths and weaknesses of your youngster, and together seek solutions to make the entrance into the school as smooth and as pleasant as possible. You may expect that the school will receive your son as he is, while the school may expect you to have fulfilled your parental responsibilities. And what if she does not know

the alphabet, or confuses left and right? Well, do not label her a slow learner for not knowing these things at the age of five. Ask the teacher to teach what needs to be taught in such a manner that her teaching connects with your child. And be prepared to help when necessary.

I know that these pointers are far from complete, and I also know that every child is unique. There is not one ideal approach that fits all. Fortunately,

parents do not need an advanced degree in order to educate their children. Be scripturally realistic in your own expectations. Not all children will love school, or breeze through it; learn to accept the limitations of your children. Love them for what they are, not for what you want them to be. Stimulate and encourage. Be willing to learn and take note of what others have to say about children and parents; be actively involved with your children first of all at

home. Above all, pray constantly for the wisdom that the Lord has promised those who ask him.

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Please address comments and questions directly to:

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Hamilton, ON, L9C 7M5  
E-mail: tmpvdv@hookup.net



# THE HI-LITER

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## News from Here and There

By C. Van Spronsen



The Church at Launceston, Tasmania, will be sponsoring Mr. and Mrs. B. VanderVelde to go to Cyprus to the Study Center of the Middle East Reformed Fellowship to act as houseparents and as support persons for the church activities there.

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In Armadale, WA, the opportunity arose to go "on the air" with the Gospel with the opening of a Community radio station, "Heritage FM." The local Free Reformed Church was the only church to apply for air time. Everything is in place for a one hour broadcast on Saturday mornings, 9:00 to 10:00. Their program will be called "The Voice of the Church."

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All systems are "go." The Church of Burlington-West will split into two congregations, Waterdown/Burlington and Flamborough as of September. Sunday, September 7, will be the last time that they will still worship together.

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In Grand Valley the congregation has the opportunity for fellowship at a Family Baseball evening every Monday during the Summer.

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Apparently a number of members of the Grand Valley congregation helped the Elora congregation with the building of the new manse. All those who volunteered their time and services were invited to a barbecue hosted by the Elora congregation to express their appreciation.

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A "Marriage Enrichment Camp" was held by the Churches in the Albany (WA) region. It was to start on a Friday evening and continue through to Saturday afternoon. The program included a video, speaker and a closing BBQ.

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In Burlington the annual summer outreach of "Singing-in-the-Park" was again held. It appears that there was good participation and a generous offer of talents. Is it worth it? Allow me to quote from their final report: "Success? How do you measure success for an outreach endeavour such as this? If and when we have touched someone with our songs-of-praise or words, we pray the Lord that He may give fruits in abundance." Certainly it was also a blessing for those who participated!

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Several mission workers are spending some time in their home-country. Clarence and Jeanette Togeretz, who work with Mission Aviation Fellowship in Irian Jaya as well as James and Linda Baartse, workers with the Wycliffe Bible Translators in Guatemala. May they have a good time of rest and be encouraged by the support from the homefront!

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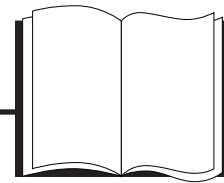
The Mission Board and Council of the Church at Toronto have chosen as their new mission field Papua New Guinea where the Australian Churches have been working and are winding down their work. Rev. Versteeg visited PNG twice while he was in Irian Jaya and reported that there are many opportunities to bring the Gospel without the visa difficulties encountered for Irian Jaya. A call was extended to candidate S. 't Hart.

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Summer gleanings from the bulletins from the Northern hemisphere are meager as many activities are put on hold. One of the highlights for a good number of congregations is the Vacation Bible School, reporting from moderate to great success, at least as far as the number of enrollment is concerned. May the Lord bless these efforts to share the Gospel with those around us.







## In Defence of the Reform Party

Permit me to reply to the Editorial of Prof. C. Van Dam. (*Clarion* May 16, 97).

I think it is clear from this editorial that the only knowledge Prof. Van Dam has about the Reform Party is from the daily media, who generally are against this party, and that he has never read any material from the party itself, such as the "Principles & Policies" or a book written by Preston Manning called *The New Canada*. If he had done so, I doubt if he would degradingly call it "the new kid on the block," and be so judgmental about those committed Christians who have joined this party.

In this material it is explained, for instance, why we should have referendums on issues such as capital punishment, abortion, etc. The reason is that in our democratic system, plus our famous (or infamous) "Charter of Rights" the courts not only do not apply the laws anymore, but start making their own laws.

The result is that at the moment you can kill a child in the mother's womb up to the date it is due to be born and you don't break a single law. Legally it can not get any worse. The Liberal and P.C. parties have both shown they will not touch the issue anymore.

The Reform party, however, promotes a binding referendum. There is nothing to be lost, everything to be gained. When such a referendum is held, you don't just sit back and wait for the results. No, you go out and campaign like for an election and promote your side. As one M.P. once said to me, "If we are ever able to get a referendum on that, then we will need all the help we can get."

Last year the Liberal government passes Bill C 33 Re: Sexual orientation. This bill is the first step on the road to same-sex marriage. At that time Svend Robinson, the homosexual M.P., publicly thanked Allan Rock (author of that Bill) for having the courage to push this Bill through as the first step to same-sex marriage – and Rock did not deny that this was not his intention.

Again it was the Reform M.P.s who voted against this Bill.

If anyone thinks this is not going to happen for a long time, think again. The province of B.C. is about to pass legislation to recognize same-sex couples. The first in Canada!

If a man like Allan Rock is ever given the opportunity to become Prime Minister of our country, it will only be a matter of time before he takes the next step. And after that how long will it be before our ministers are compelled to solemnize same-sex marriages?

And how long will it be before it becomes illegal for a church to discipline members who practise homosexuality, and excommunicate them?

In a newspaper on June 7th I read: "In a landmark case the Quebec Tribunal on Human Rights has ruled that freedom of religion does not allow for discrimination based on sexual orientation." This, I think, is the beginning of the end of freedom of religion in our country.

Are our ministers and consistories prepared to defy such a law when that times comes and face the consequences?

I think it is about time consistories and ministers start encouraging our members to support politicians and parties who are trying to stop and possibly reverse this trend to immorality. And the only party that is in the best position at this time, and willing to do so, is the Reform Party. And if that makes me a "pragmatist" I'll gladly be one. But I sooner call it being realistic.

The Liberals and P.C.'s have both shown to be interested in giving more rights to gays and lesbians.

Prof. Van Dam admits that theoretically it is true that Christians can have an influence. Well is it then not our God-given duty to do so? But then he said "It is not realistic." However, further on, he promotes the C.H. Party. My question is, do they have a realistic change to have any influence? The Reform Party is not a Christian Party by name, but the majority of the members are Christians from different denominations. And a lot of them are supporters, not for the party's economical policies, but for the simple reason that they see this party as the only party which wants to uphold the morals and traditional family values of our society. To some of them I have passed on material from our midst to read and study. But I would not dare to pass on this editorial, because they would shake their head and say: "We can understand why the secular media is against us, but leaders of a church? And they would ask me

the question: "Don't they see what is happening in our society?"

I am sure the intent of this editorial is to direct us in the recent Federal election. But I find it confusing. There seems to be so many labels of Christians. We read about "Christians," "Committed Christians," "Consistent Christians," "Pragmatic Christians," And in the context of the article I think we can add "C.H.P. Christians." They all seem to be worthy of our support, but some more than others. I get the impression we have to put the C.H.P. Christians at the top, and the pragmatic ones at the bottom.

Prof. Van Dam writes, "The C.H. Party deserves our hearing and support in their aim to defend Biblical principles." I fully agree that we have to defend Biblical principles. I can appreciate what the C.H. Party is trying to do. But this party had one problem right from the beginning. They don't seem to be able to come to an agreement among themselves whether they want to be a political party or an evangelization party. When people read their material they don't quite understand whether they are being asked for their political support or are being called to repentance. Very few will do either the one or the other.

Prof. Van Dam ends his editorial with the words "The Lord will use in His own way every faithful testimony in politics that directs the attention to His rights, privileges and commands!" I can say *Amen* to that.

In view of this I also believe that when consistent, committed, pragmatic Christians truly want to give that faithful testimony in a political party, and realize that at this time in the history of our country, the Reform party is the party where this testimony can be the most fruitful, then I think, for the sake of the Church and the future of our children and their children, it is our duty to give them all the support we can instead of expressing our sorrows that they are "infected with the pragmatism bug." A few months ago I read an article in some magazine about prayer. It said: "The Lord will help us fight for a cause, but He will not do it for us." These words may sound a bit strange to us, but I think we will do well to keep them in mind.

A. Harke, St. Albert, AB 

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Dear Editor:

I was happy to read what A. Blokhuis wrote in the July 25 *Clarion* which is as follows: "I am obligated to all baptized children, yours as well as mine, and therefore agree to support their education as well as my own." A. Blokhuis continued: "That is the only acceptable way among God's elect. It means being a hand and a foot to one another."

Scriptures give the parents the responsibility of instructing their children. This leaves it to their prayerful decision whether to do this directly or to release some of this responsibility to our schools.

Since instructing our children personally is such a huge family commitment, it is not often feasible or desirable and so our Christian schools were established. For this reason, homeschooling should not be a withdrawal of support for our schools. Our schools are necessary to ensure the Christian edu-

cation of all our children. On the other hand, if direct instruction by parents is feasible and desirable, this Christian education should also receive the support of the Christian community in respect and prayers.

Is it so difficult for us to behave as Christians to those who do things differently than the majority, to show love and respect for all those who are one in faith? Can we not all support each other, encourage each other, build up each other in our efforts to educate our children in a Christian manner?

Wouldn't it be beautiful if our homeschoolers remained paying and committed members of our school societies, and our schools encourage homeschoolers to participate in their out-of-class activities, rather than tearing each other down?

Yes, in the words of A. Blokhuis, I am obligated to *all* baptized children, yours as well as mine, and therefore agree to

support their education as well as my own. "Yes, that is the only acceptable way among God's elect. It means being a hand and a foot to one another."

*Eric and Annette VanGrootheest,*  
Elora, ON

## Dear Editor:

Re: Dutch War Veterans

In the last few weeks I had a lot of discussions with various cemeteries for our burial society. It was mentioned that, if they wish, Dutch War Veterans and their spouses (provided that the veteran passes away first) can use the Field of Honour in Canadian cemeteries. There are some financial advantages: in most cases: the grave plots are at half price, the upright marker is less than \$600. For further information call your local cemetery and The Last Post Fund in your area.

*Ralph Winkel* 

## CLARION

## ADVERTISEMENTS

### *Births*

With thankfulness to our heavenly Father for His precious gift of life we joyfully announce the birth of our daughter

**BRANDI NICOLE**

Born July 16, 1997

**Dave and Sherri Boersema (nee Blokker)**

4376 Henry Avenue, Beamsville, ON L0R 1B6

With thankfulness to our heavenly Father who has again entrusted to us one of His covenant children, a son

**MATTHEW JAMES**

Born July 21, 1997

A brother for *Harold, Gregory, Richard, Lynetta, Curtis, Brandon, Kenton and Saralyn*

**Jake and Anita Bouwman (nee Vanderee)**

RR#3, Fergus, ON N1M 2W4

*Our help is in the name of the LORD who made heaven and earth.*

*Psalm 124:8*

**Mike and Jody** and big brothers, *Mitchell and Marshall*, praise our heavenly Father for the gift of a son and brother

**LUCAS MARINUS-KRISTOPHER KAMPEN**

Born June 27, 1997

143 Bythia Street, Orangeville, ON L9W 4E7

*To God be the glory, Great things He has done!*

With thankfulness to the Lord, we announce the birth of our daughter

**NATASHA EMILY**

Born June 24, 1997

A little sister for *Breanne and Laurissa*

**Andy and Brenda Vandervelde**

4034 Aberdeen Road, Beamsville, ON L0R 1B6

With thanks to our heavenly Father who made all things well, we joyfully announce the birth of our daughter and sister

**MADELAINE DOROTHY**

Born August 9, 1997

A sister for *Richard, Matthew, Aileen, Scott, John and Ruth.*

**Peter and Margaret Feenstra (nee Aikema)**

3985 Mountainview Road South, Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2

*For the LORD is good; His mercy is everlasting. And His truth endures to all generations. Psalm 100:5*

The Lord has again entrusted into our care another one of His children. We named him

**MICHAEL ANDREW**

Born August 2, 1997

A little brother for *Daniel, Jocelyn, Angela and Justin*

**Jan and Yvonne Harink**

Box 54, Neerlandia, AB T0G 1R0