

# Clarion

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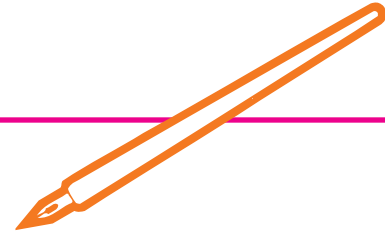


*Israel 1948 - a home-made flag  
on the Red Sea shore*

Numbers

10:1-10

By C. Van Dam



## Israel's 50th Anniversary

It was 50 years ago on May 14, 1948 that the British Mandate in Palestine terminated and the young nation of Israel proclaimed independence. Immediately the armies of Jordan, Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon invaded and tried to snuff out the life breath of this new modern state. After a hard-fought war of liberation, Israel's place as an autonomous self-governing people in the Middle East was assured. The western world sighed relief and rejoiced. After the terror of the so-called holocaust in which about six million Jews lost their lives at the hands of the Nazis during World War II, the newly established state of Israel was finally a solution for their security. The Jews were safe at last.

As Reformed believers, we can rejoice with Israel on this their 50th anniversary. When we think of the suffering that the Jews have gone through over the centuries and especially during World War II, we can celebrate at this milestone. Our sympathies lie with Israel's right to have their own homeland.

### A special people

There is also another reason why we can rejoice with Israel in their having a legitimate place among the nations of the world. Jewish people who make up the majority of the state of Israel are a most special people. Indeed, Jews are in a class by themselves in the world. Of no other racial group can it be said that "theirs is the adoption as sons; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen!" (Rom. 9:4-5). These are the people who have also "been entrusted with the very words of God" (Rom. 3:2) and in God's providence they have preserved the written oracles of God so that we today may have the complete Old Testament!

The Lord God has a special relationship with this people, a relationship that is still in force today (cf. Rom. 11:1). Small wonder that believers have a special place in their hearts for the Jewish people, wherever they are found in the world. Especially on an anniversary like this when Israel can celebrate fifty years of their own homeland who would not rejoice with them? It is the first time that Israel has had a homeland since the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 A.D.! Surely an event worth celebrating!

But does our joy on Israel's anniversary now mean that we see the return of Israel to a place they can call their own as a fulfilment of Biblical prophecy and that we would urge Israel never to give up any land for peace because the land

has been promised to them? No. The land of Palestine has not been promised to present day Israel and the state of Israel should never exist *at the expense of* denying the legitimate rights and aspirations of the Palestinians as defined by treaties and UN declarations. There is no Biblical warrant to insist that the Israel of today has a Biblical claim to the land once promised to Abraham and his descendants.

Those prophecies (Gen. 15:18; 17:8) were fulfilled in the Old Testament days of Joshua (Josh. 21:43-45) and Solomon (1 Kgs. 4:21; 2 Chron. 9:26). Also the prophecies of the return from captivity to the land of promise (e.g. Jer. 29:14; Isa. 11:11) have been fulfilled as a careful study of these and other passages show. Jeremiah 29, for instance, speaks of the return from Babylon after 70 years (Jer. 29:10-14). Then Jews from Babylon and from wherever they may have been scattered (perhaps sold as slaves; cf. Joel 3:6-7) will return. Or

consider Isaiah 11 which speaks of the Lord recovering a second time the remnant of his people (v. 11). The first release from bondage was from Egypt, the second referred to in Isaiah 11 is from Babylon. This is clear from the context and the reference to peoples that no longer exist today (v. 14). The fruits of the fulfilment of the prophecies of the return were experienced in the days of Simon, the Hasmonean priest-king (cf. 1 Macc. 14:8-12).<sup>1</sup> Significantly, there is not even a hint in the New Testament that the land of Palestine would one day be restored to Israel.

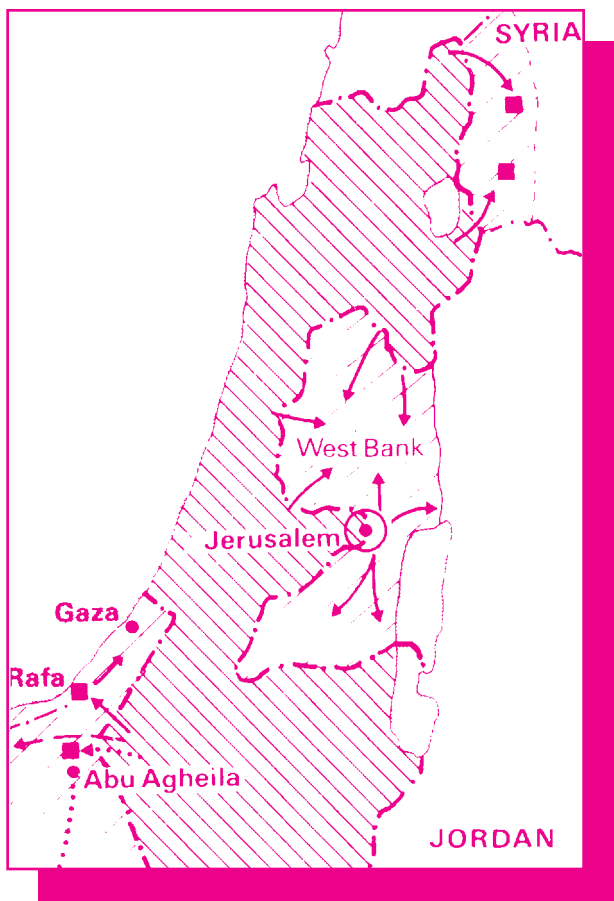
*"The land of Palestine has not been promised to present day Israel."*

### Israel's greatest need

Indeed, we should not seek Israel's security in land that supposedly they still have coming to them. Israel's greatest need is the gospel of Jesus, the Messiah. The modern state of Israel has no particular fondness for Christianity! Yet it is precisely the Messiah of Scripture that will answer their greatest needs.

The Saviour was born of the Jews and the gospel first went to and was believed by the Jews. Although the apostle Paul was apostle to the Gentiles, yet he never lost sight of the necessity for the conversion of Jews. As he wrote to the church at Rome: "Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them" (Rom. 11:13-14).


As non-Jewish believers we cannot disassociate ourselves from the priority of the Jewish people nor forget them. We have come from outside this special people and we have been engrafted as wild olive shoots against nature into the cultivated olive tree that is Israel. We may now share



in the nourishing sap from the olive root and have no ground to boast over against Israel (Rom. 11:17-19). To the contrary, we can only marvel at the grace of God in making us residents in the tents of Shem (cf. Gen 9:26) to enjoy the blessings of salvation. But all this also means that we must never forget the people whose promises we may now share. They need the gospel!

It is not by accident that in the prayer for the needs of Christendom found in the *Book of Praise*, the first ones who are mentioned in the context of mission work are the Jews. Are they remembered enough in prayer in our circles? Only when that is regularly done will we see the opportunities that God may give to sponsor mission work among these special people whom God has not rejected (Rom 11:11). Indeed, the Lord will call his elect also out from the Jewish people and so the complete people of God, the new Israel, will be saved (cf. Rom 11:23-27).

This Israel of God, the church (cf. Gal. 6:16; 1 Pet. 2:9-10), of which we may be members, does not seek the inheritance in a piece of real estate in this fallen world, but looks ahead to the world to come. The promise of the land of Canaan given to Abraham was, rightly seen, only a down payment so to speak of a much more glorious inheritance that will be given to the Israel of God. An entire new creation will be given to the true children of Abraham who are heirs with him (Cf. Rom. 4:13; 2 Pet. 3:13). Now that's cause for celebration – every day anew – as we live in the joyful expectation of the fulfilment of these promises!

<sup>1</sup>Much more could be said on this subject of course. The interested reader is referred to W. Hendriksen, *Israel in Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, first pub. 1968). 



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## IN THIS ISSUE

Editorial – Israel's 50th Anniversary — C. Van Dam .....	230
Treasures, New and Old – Pentecost — G. Ph. van Popta .....	232
Press Review — J. De Jong .....	233
Observation Deck — J. VanRietschoten .....	235
The Hi-Liter — J. De Gelder .....	236
Nurture & Instruction – Advice — T.M.P. Vanderven .....	238
Book Reviews	
J. De Jong, ed., <i>Bound Yet Free: Readings in Reformed Church Polity</i> — J. De Gelder .....	240
Isaac Smit, <i>Praying for Rain, A call for renewal in the Canadian Reformed churches</i> — N. H. Gootjes .....	242
Press Release .....	244
Our Little Magazine — Aunt Betty .....	244

By G. Ph. van Popta

## Pentecost

*I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts (Jeremiah 31:33b).*

Pentecost was a Jewish festival marking the end of the grain harvest. In the Old Testament, it is called the Feast of Weeks. It occurred seven weeks after Passover. In the New Testament it is called Pentecost since it was celebrated on the fiftieth day (seven weeks) after Passover.

It was a harvest festival. Pentecost was one of the three annual festivals upon which all the male Israelites were to appear before the LORD at the temple in Jerusalem. On this day the people of Israel recalled with reverent and thankful wonder how God, who had rescued them from slavery in Egypt, had brought them to a land flowing with milk and honey. The harvests were abundant, gifts of God's grace. The people were thankful. They celebrated.

It was a harvest festival, but the Jews also observed Pentecost as the anniversary of the day upon which the LORD had given His people the Law. From Exodus 19:1 we learn that the people of Israel came to meet the LORD at Mt. Sinai on the third new moon after God had brought them out of Egypt. As it turns out, this is seven weeks after the first Passover (Exodus 12).

The LORD God who rescued Israel from Egypt and was bringing them to a land where they would have abundant harvests met them at Sinai to give them His law of thankfulness. God said: "You must keep my covenant; you must obey my law." The people answered: "All that the LORD has spoken we will do." But they didn't.

They did not keep God's law. They broke it, time after time. The history of Israel, since the days of Moses, is a litany of broken promises. The people, because of their sinfulness, could not keep the law.


What was God to do? He could not change His law. His law stands firm. It must be obeyed. What was God to do? Change the people! Almost 900 years after God first handed down the law to Israel, He promised that He would change the people. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God promised the exiled Jews in Babylon that He would one day write His law upon their hearts – not upon external tablets of stone but upon the internal tablets of their hearts (Jer. 31:31-33).

God told them even more through the prophet Ezekiel. The LORD God

said that He would put His Spirit within them. He would make them walk in His statutes. He would make them observe His ordinances.

God made good on this promise on the first Pentecost after the Lord Jesus ascended into heaven. God poured the Holy Spirit out upon the church, collectively and individually. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit.

Has the Holy Spirit changed your heart from one of stone to one of flesh? Has He changed you from being a rebel who disobeys to a servant of the Lord, a child of the Father, who obeys out of love and thankfulness?

The promise is that all who repent and believe in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Believe in Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit will make you a dwelling place of God. He will put his law in your mind. He will write it upon your heart. And so renewed by the Holy Spirit, it will be your desire to live according to the good law of God in all good works to the praise and glory of God and the well-being of your neighbour. 

### *What's inside?*

Reformed people are readers. Reformed people love books, build up their personal libraries, and read critically. (That still holds true, does it not?) This issue of *Clarion* is largely about books.

In "Nurture & Instruction," Mr. Vanderven passes along some penetrating insights of Dr. P. L. Los and works out some advice on the topic of "advice."

Mr. Isaac Smit, teacher at Guido de Bres Christian High School, has published a book, *Praying for Rain: A call for renewal in the Canadian Reformed Churches*. Dr. N. H. Gootjes reviews the book.

Rev. J. de Gelder of Smithville begins a two part review article of *Bound Yet Free: Readings in Reformed Church Polity*, by Dr. J. De Jong, editor.

In addition to these articles about books, Rev. de Gelder and Dr. De Jong update us on things happening in our federation of churches and in other Reformed churches while the Rev. J. VanRietschoten takes a look at happenings a little farther afield.

Books. Reformed people have loved books. In the midst of our love for books and for reading, we do well to remember the warning of the Preacher: *Of making many books there is no end, and much study wears the body* (Eccl. 12:12). In the midst of your books and your reading, do not forget to read The Book.

GvP





## Other Synods

### The Reformed Church in the United States

Some time ago this column reported on the decisions of the assemblies of other churches in the Reformed world. One of the churches we overlooked is the Reformed Church in the US (RCUS), which held its synod in Sacramento, California in May, 1997. The Observer home page of January 1998 included a report on their synod, whose decisions also have a bearing on our churches. The Observer home page reports:

The 251st annual Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS) met at Sacramento Covenant Reformed Church, Sacramento, CA, from May 19 through May 22, 1997. While this Synod did not include the celebratory aspects of last year's 250th anniversary Synod, it was hardly anticlimactic. The Synod of Sacramento was characterized by brief but spirited debates on important issues, by the absence of several of its elder statesmen who had gone to be with the Lord or who were unable to attend, and by fantastic meals served in the festive atmosphere of a cafeteria tent which covered most of the host congregation's parking lot.

The most important issues decided by the 251st Synod of the RCUS dealt with vows of subscription for ministers, elders and deacons, the approval of a form for the confession of faith, and a proposed Directory of Worship. These three matters were taken up separately and will each have to be ratified by at least two-thirds of the Classes ("classis" is the Reformed name for a presbytery) of the denomination before taking effect. Previous versions of these vows had failed to receive the required ratifying votes by the Classes of the RCUS. Judging by the discussion and voting at Synod, the controversy has been settled and

this writer would conclude that the presently proposed vows will receive ratification by the Classes.

The new form for the profession of faith includes agreement that the Bible is the "inerrant and infallible Word of God; and that its doctrine, as summarized in the confessions of this Church, is the perfect and only true doctrine of salvation." The RCUS holds to the Three Forms of Unity. The new form of subscription for church officers requires them to agree that the articles and points of doctrine of the creeds are "in complete and accurate agreement with the Word of God." In this action Synod also approved basically uniform vows for the three offices of minister, elder and deacon. The vow for deacons is slightly different from that for elders and ministers, to reflect their different functions in the church.

The Directory of Worship proposed to the Classes by Synod breaks up long compound sentences and simplifies their structure to make it more understandable to the listener's ear. When ratified it will be published in both Traditional English (using the forms "Thee" and "Thou") and Modern English versions.

The most tedious job the Synod of Sacramento faced was ecumenical relations. As a very conservative Reformed and Presbyterian denomination, the RCUS has formal and informal relationships with a rather large number of denominations, institutions and ecumenical organizations. Major ecumenical actions included,

- 1) positive response to entering "sister-church" relations with the Canadian Reformed Churches,
- 2) postponement of seeking fraternal relations with the newly founded United Re-

formed Churches as being a matter premature at this time,

- 3) seeking continued joint fellowship and ministry with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church even though our "distinctives make organic union unlikely," and
- 4) continued contacts with the Korean American Presbyterian Church, the Hungarian Calvin Synod of the UCC and the Presbyterian Church in America.

The RCUS is also slated to host the 1998 sessions of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC).

The RCUS continues liaison and support relationships with Christian institutions of education and mercy through members on their boards of trustees and through recommended guidelines for giving. These include Dordt College, Mid-America Reformed Seminary, Westminster Seminary in California and Hope Haven. A special committee was appointed to study the possibility of such a relationship with Knox Theological Seminary in Colorado Springs.

Synod voted to dedicate this year's printed Abstract of the Minutes to the memory of Rev. Norman Hoeflinger, who died in October 1996.

We can be thankful for the steps taken at this synod, and especially for the priority placed on the contact with the Canadian Reformed Churches. The developing bond of the RCUS with our sister churches in Holland has led their federation to seek a more intensive contact with us as well. We hope and pray that the increased contact may bear fruit, and eventually may lead to a form of cooperative ecclesiastical fellowship.

## The Free Reformed Churches of South Africa

Another important synod was held last summer in our sister churches in South Africa. This was an ad hoc synod which dealt with the admission (examination) of Dr. J.A. Breytenbach, who came from the Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk, as well as with the proposal to establish a new seminary for the churches. It appears that the South African sister churches are taking the matter of the training for the ministry for their federation into their own hands. That is quite a project for a small group of churches! Rev E. Vijoen reports on the decisions taken in the paper *Kompas*:

Precisely from out of the overpowering sense of calling to take and maintain responsibility for the continuation of the administration of the pure Word of the Lord, the report of the deputies for theological training was put into discussion. Together with the mandate to preach the word we have the calling to maintain a training for the ministry of that word. Article 18 of the Church Order, which deals with the training for the ministry, immediately follows the description of the duties of the minister in Articles 16 and 17. Already at the synod of 1996 the decision was made in principle that we as churches must make a beginning with regard to our own training for the ministry if this can at all take place in a responsible way. The deputies then received the mandate to report as soon as possible and to make the necessary preparations that, if possible, the training could begin at the start of 1998.

The report of the deputies has clearly shown that the training for the ministry cannot be done if only a sort of "Bible school" is to be instituted. This would not be a responsible execution of Article 18 of the Church Order. High academic standards must be maintained as much as possible, and for this, use must be made of part time instruction from the professors at the Theological University in Kampen and the training institution of our sister churches in Hamilton. The biggest part of the financial budget for the training is then reserved for the travel costs of the professors

from abroad who come here for short periods.

The plan is to bring the teachers in for three weeks in order to supplement the training of the local teachers. But the training is not going to be built on the input of the foreign teachers. Five teachers of our own federation have been set apart to maintain the organization and administration of the curriculum. A governor has also been appointed from each congregation with a view to all kinds of administrative and organizational measures surrounding the training for the ministry.

The training will be structured roughly as follows. A total of seven years of study must be successfully completed before one is admitted to the ecclesiastical examinations. Every student that seeks admission to the college must already be in possession of the B.A. degree in which the Biblical languages (Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic) and Latin are included. Then the student must complete a cycle of four years. All four of the academic years will not be taught simultaneously. The reasons here are first, that this will make the work load of the teachers somewhat lighter and secondly that bigger student groups can be built up with a view to mutual stimulation and encouragement. There is also the possibility to admit students from outside the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa if they agree to submit to the Word of God and the Three Forms of Unity.

This decision, which was taken with great unanimity, does not testify to false courage as much as it testifies to the courage of faith. For this is what is needed for us to fulfil our responsibility and calling as churches in South Africa – faith. The calling to establish this training is not simply a choice that we make, but it is a calling which has come to us through God Himself, and which we have accepted. This was already done at the synod last year [1996, JDJ]. God connects His gracious promise to His obligation, for a calling is not a self-imposed offering to the Lord. And where we find the promise of God, there we may in great expectation pray for the

blessing of the Lord, so that we can witness the salvation of our God.

This step is not taken as a part of the so-called emancipation policy, i.e. divorcing ourselves from Holland. That would only speak of arrogance. There is also no thought of the notion that the training can be done just as well or even better here by our own ministers. The training is being initiated out of the consciousness of our calling to be obedient to God. Not prestige has been our aim, but the synod has been guided by the words of Romans 11:33 which focus our attention on the inscrutable ways of God. We may not have a lot of people with titles, but there indeed may be found faith among us.

Anyone can understand the predicament of our South African brothers and also sympathize with the course of action they have chosen. We can also commend the courage of faith of the brothers, and have no doubt that, according to their own testimony, their action is based on what they see as the calling of God. We all have the calling to be faithful in the context in which we are placed.

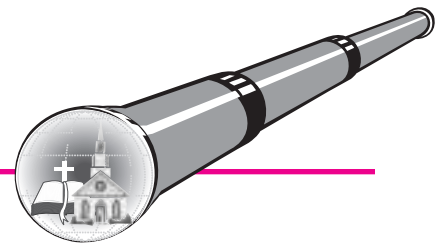
On the other hand, we wonder if all this duplication is necessary. The report indicates that there is a strong affinity between South Africa's educational system and our own, since they are both based on the English tradition. Would it not have been possible for the South African students to study in Hamilton? To be sure, there is a language difference, but most South Africans can speak and work in English anyway, and it is hardly likely that young students coming to Canada would lose their Afrikaans. Further, this would strengthen the ties between our two federations, and could be a vehicle through which other forms of cooperation might be possible.

There is also the question of logistics with respect to visiting professors. Can this be done so easily from Holland, or – perhaps even more pressing – from our College in Hamilton? It seems to me the churches in Canada would need to consider this proposal carefully.

We can understand the approach of our South African brothers, but would have thought that there are other alternatives that might have been considered.

All in all, however, let's wish them well!





# Observation Deck

By J. VanRietschoten

## The Ten Commandments in Public

The case of Judge Roy Moore of Alabama displaying the Ten Commandments in his courtroom has received wide publicity. Judge Moore's action has even caused action in the United States Senate. Presbyterian Week of April 3, 1998 reports the following.

On April 2, the United States Senate passed by voice vote an amendment to a budget bill commending Judge Roy Moore of Alabama, whose display of the Ten Commandments in his courtroom became the focus of a national controversy and called for the display of the Ten Commandments in the White House, Capitol, and US Supreme Court.

*The Ten Commandments Project*, directed by Rev. Rob Schenck has been giving stone artwork tablets of the Ten Commandments to elected and appointed officials in Washington with the request that the tablets be posted where the public can see them.

When we compare this display of part of the Bible in public places of government and courts of justice with the use of the Bible as a whole one wonders. Are the Ten Commandments neutral ground? Certainly not. The Ten Commandments have been fulfilled by Jesus Christ, Son of God, Son of man. No one is able to obey the Ten Commandments in a manner pleasing to God except through the renewing power of the Spirit of Christ. Display of the Ten Commandments is to be commended first of all because the Spirit of Christ is able to use, and will use, peoples' reading of the Ten Commandments and lead them to the whole of the Gospel, to Jesus Christ. Display of the Ten Commandments is not neutral. The Ten Commandments come with the power of the only true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.

From *Presbyterian Week* April 3 comes also this item:

## Sovereign Grace Deaf Conference

The fourth annual Sovereign Grace Deaf Conference will be held in Belair Baptist Church, Bowie,

Maryland, June 25-27. The theme for the conference is the Sovereignty of God. There will be eight deaf speakers with voice interpretation for hearing participants who are sign language impaired. Detailed brochures are available on request. Deaf Reformed Church, a congregation of the Reformed Church (US), has been a key factor in the developing appreciation for the Reformed faith among ministries to the deaf.

At this conference for the hearing impaired there will be translation for participants who are sign language impaired. For once the tables are turned. How many hearing impaired do we have in our churches? Because of the smaller number of them among us they might just disappear and be neglected. It could be very healthy for us to be at such a meeting for the hearing impaired. We would find ourselves unable to understand sign language and crave translation. Such an experience could motivate us to look more closely at the question: "Are we doing enough for our hearing impaired brothers and sisters?"

## Marriage and Family Status in Canada

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada has submitted a brief to the federal government. The focus is on changes in the federal *Marriage Act*. Various groups are seeking to expand the definition of marriage and family for the purpose of obtaining benefits and/or to achieve social legitimacy and acceptance. Provincial and federal human rights boards have found current marital and family status provisions to be discriminatory toward homosexual couples, and the courts are being asked to redefine marriage and family to include these and other groups. The EFC responded to this trend.


In the first four and a half pages the EFC ably outlines and defends the Biblical understanding of marriage and family. In the next five and a half pages we find how the law presently defines marital relationships and how benefits are allotted. At the end of this section reference is made to changes taking place in the Province of Ontario.

In Ontario, a homosexual man brought a complaint before the Ontario Human Rights commission arguing that he was being discriminated against in not having health benefits apply to his same-sex cohabitant. He won before a Human Rights Tribunal since the Ontario Human Rights Code includes sexual orientation in the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination. The Ontario government did not appeal but indicated that they would revise all legislation which discriminated against "gay spouses."

The last two pages contain six carefully worded recommendations. The first five of these recommend that the sanctity of marriage be upheld and be exclusive. The sixth and last recommendation of the EFC reads:

We recognize that people live in a variety of relationships which, while they are fundamentally different from the family, may in some cases perform functions similar to that of the family and may have economic dependencies and functions that require certain benefits and therefore by necessity a distinct definition in law.

Also in this recommendation the EFC makes an effort to have heterosexual marriage declared unique. Yet, it seems to me that, by allowing same-sex relationships certain benefits under a distinct definition in law, the EFC recommends the recognition of relationships which are against the will of God revealed in the Bible. The brief ends with a suggestion. Apparently the distinct definition in law could be "household." The EFC is careful to qualify this by the following sentence: "Extension of rights and benefits would be on the basis of dependency (financial or emotional), not on gender or sexual relationship."

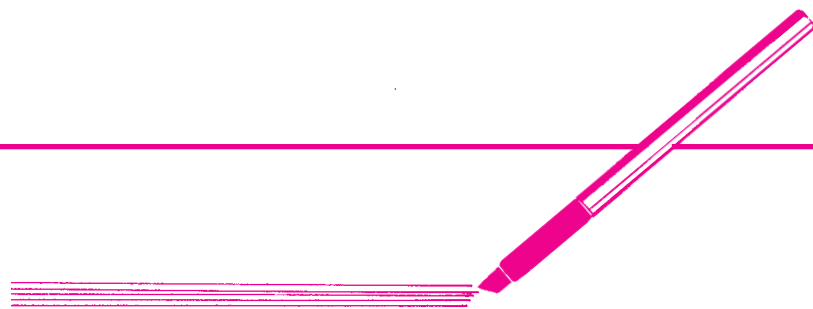
The EFC is to be commended for submitting this brief. Could ways and means be devised that from the Canadian Reformed Churches briefs like this would be submitted to various levels of government? Especially when governments hold hearings there is a prime opportunity to let the voice of the church be heard. 



# THE HI-LITER

News from Here and There

By J. De Gelder



## Rockway

Today we start close to home (my home that is).

Significant developments are taking place in the church at Rockway. Since April 5 the Rockway congregation does not use the church building of Lincoln anymore, but they have moved to Beacon Christian High School in St. Catharines. The following was also decided:

To begin publication of our own bulletin as of Sunday April 5. We thank the church of Lincoln for the excellent cooperation in publishing a joint bulletin for quite a number of years.

Rockway also overtured General Synod Fergus:

To add a paragraph to its voting guidelines to ensure that delegates who have participated in a decision of a minor assembly pertaining specifically to a person or persons, shall not vote nor serve on an advisory committee appointed with respect to an appeal from such a person or persons. The reason for this overture is our desire that even the perceived danger of partiality should be removed when Synod is to pronounce its judgment.

The intention can be appreciated. However, you wonder how workable this will turn out to be as long as we still have delegates from only two Regional Synods.

## London

Rev. Ludwig from London reflects on an important aspect of our worship services:

It is the King of kings who commands us to come before His throne of grace, to assemble before Him as His family. Sure, the elders of God summon us on the Lord's Day, but it is God Himself who by means of 'the call to worship' commands us to stand before Him. Perhaps this liturgical element should be re-instated. By not having it repeated before every worship service, we tend to forget that God is calling us. The 'call to worship', which goes back to the ancient church, high-

lights this aspect of divine summons. It also serves the purpose of impressing upon us that we have come into the presence of the Most High God.

And he concludes:

Should we not try as much as we can to beautify our worship, to be fully aware of what is happening when and why in our worship of the Triune God?

## Orangeville

New possibilities for evangelism occur in Orangeville:

We are almost ready to go on the air! Formerly we had informed you of the possibility of broadcasting sermons on the local community radio station, and we are in the final stages of preparation. However, in order to complete our proposal, we require the assistance of one or more volunteers, who are willing to run tapes and speak on the air at the actual radio station. Our present intent is to broadcast once a week, so the workload could be shared or even rotated among several members of the congregation.

A beautiful opportunity to have many members involved in the local missionary task of the church!

## Toronto

In Toronto we see how ecumenical relations can work between sister churches in the same area. Rev. den Hollander wrote:

After the second service I hope to lead the service yet of our sister church in the city, namely the Free Church of Scotland. The reason for mentioning this is the fact its (recently inducted) pastor, the Rev. D. Allan MacLeod, suffered a serious accident two weeks ago. . . . Certainly not an easy experience for a family just immigrated. Besides this help for his congregation, they need our prayers; perhaps a card with a word of encouragement might do some good as well and strengthen the bonds.

## Fergus-Elora

The Fergus/Elora bulletin informs us of the following:

Classis Ontario N, scheduled for March 13, was canceled because of the lack of material for the agenda. Instead there will be a Classis Contracta, in which only the convening church and neighbouring churches are required to send delegates. At this Classis Contracta the matter of Fergus' second call to Rev. J. Ludwig will be discussed and the Lord willing approved.

The announcement left me wondering about this procedure. Although the Church Order does not speak about a Classis Contracta, most classical regulations give this possibility in case of the approbation of a call, or the release of a minister who has accepted a call (Art.5 and 9 CO). I wonder whether it is proper to deal in the same way with a request to approve a second call to the same minister in the same vacancy (Art. 4C CO).

But all these things have to do with the procedure of calling a minister. So, what is the difference? It seems to me that it is important that we do not lose sight of the difference. In matters of approbation and release classis checks documents, but with a request according to art. 4C CO classis weighs the matter and judges the grounds given by the church involved as to why they want to extend this call.

That is not to say that checking documents is not important, or just a formality. But if it is clear which documents must be available, and what must be in these documents (which is listed in the Church Order, and sometimes in classical regulations) they can be checked by 4 or 6, as well as by 20 people.

But does dealing with a request according to art. 4C CO in the same way do justice to the nature of such a request? Does that reflect the seriousness of the need to carefully weigh the arguments given?

Why is this so important? My problem is that dealing with this matter at a Classis Contracta can easily feed the thought: "Rev. so-and-so declined, but



let's just give it another try." The point at stake is: How seriously do we take the fact that a minister has come to the conclusion that he had to decline this particular call? See also p.30 of Rev. VanOene's *With Common Consent*.

### Winnipeg

We leave Ontario and travel west, finding that now Winnipeg does not only have the Redeemer Canadian Reformed Church, but also the Grace Canadian Reformed Church.

### Edmonton

In some churches the discussion on Bible translations continues. In the short report of the Immanuel Canadian Reformed Church in Edmonton we are informed:

After hearing all members of council, council rescinds the decision to adopt the NKJV for use in the Immanuel Canadian Reformed Church.

### Smithers and Houston

The bulletin of the churches in Houston and Smithers contains the following information about a meeting of the committees of the United Reformed

Churches of Telkwa and Smithers, with the committees of the Canadian Reformed Churches of Houston and Smithers:

It is generally agreed that the ultimate goal is to unite the two denominations into one federation. How do we hope to accomplish this goal? The United Reformed Churches are not restrained from progressing in ecumenical relations by their broader assemblies. The Canadian Reformed Churches proceed in ecumenical relations only after approaching the broader assemblies.

The procedure in order to come to a joint statement shall be to deal with the questions of each member church. The answers to these questions shall be in writing. After each question it will be decided whether there is a principal agreement or disagreement on the issue.

It would be worthwhile if Synod Fergus, or the Deputies for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity, as instructed by General Synod, could provide the local churches with helpful guidelines how to proceed with proper procedures in these matters. This would yield at least

two benefits. First: not every local council has to re-invent the wheel, and second: we would be able to develop a more unified approach in the many local contacts.

### West Australia

An interesting activity has developed in the Church in Byford:

If everything goes as planned together with this bulletin every family will receive the first Bible reading roster regarding the book of Judges. Perhaps somebody will ask: is it compulsory to use this roster? Of course not! It is only a tool to improve – if necessary – our family 'worship services' and to have a guideline in our prep study for the Bible Clubs. Since I also have the intention to preach about passages of the book of Judges in the near future, you may see this Bible reading roster as a kind of preparation for the Sunday worship services.

With everybody's cooperation it may be a good way to make the study of God's Word in the congregation also a tool for growing spiritual unity.

In Kelmscott plans are on the way toward a future split of this congregation due to its growing size. They now meet in the Sunday worship services as two wards. It is reported that so far the exercise has gone smoothly and we rejoice with them in God's blessings in these developments.

### Tasmania

The consistory with the deacons of the church in Launceston met with the Evangelism Committee to discuss its mandate and to have a time of mutual encouragement and prayer. In the brief report the discussion was summarized as follows:

A church that does not make an effort to evangelize is caught by deadness, which is a spiritual problem. It is the task of the office bearers to address this problem in the congregation and to encourage all the members to evangelize. The Committee's task is to find practical ways of doing so, either together as congregation or as individuals. The suggestion is made to make more use of the experience with evangelizing which is available e.g. in the City Mission. By participating in the courses of the City Mission, our members can become more equipped to fulfill their evangelism task and find ways to practice love for needy neighbours.



By T.M.P. Vanderven



## Advice

*I don't know whether you have ever tried to give someone some good advice. If so, then I hope that this person had already made up his mind to do what you advised him to do. Or, if this was not the case, that this person for other reasons had already decided to follow your advice. In all other cases it is most likely that your good advice will have been ignored (P.L. Los).*

Education has much to do with giving advice. Fathers advise their sons in matters of importance such as which career to seek, or how to invest for financial security. Mothers tell their daughters of their own *faux pas*. Teachers advise their students by identifying mistakes and by generously providing suggestions for improvement and correction. Advice is always given to those who do not know what to do, or who have made mistakes. Advice has always the implication that the advisor knows what should have been or what ought to be done by the "advisee." That advice is often based on our own bad experiences: don't make the mistakes I made! And yet most of us who have been asked for advice have groaned when our well-meant comments were not followed (how come that we know so well what is good for others?). Not many of us would be willing to share Los's view.

*My wife and I often have contact with people who for years have been saturated with good advice. Fortunately, more often than not they did not follow those good suggestions. Putting it even more strongly, for reasons of self-preservation they had learned to oppose that good advice with all their might.*

Self-preservation? Is that not a paradox? After all, advice is given in order to help the other person, not to damage him or her. In fact, is Los not guilty of a dangerous kind of flippancy, especially damaging to parents and their children, and teachers and their students? Children are well-known to oppose good advice, which is one of the major reasons for much parental anxiety – *if only*

*they would listen!* And here is an esteemed doctor, *nota bene*, who supports these rebellious attitudes and character traits.

**paradox =  
a statement that seems  
contradictory,  
unbelievable, or absurd  
but that may actually be  
true in fact.**

Before throwing stones at Los, we may want to consider the world we live in – a world of apparently contradictory expectations. Let me illustrate with a few examples. It is the task of the government to serve the people; we speak of government officials as civil servants. However, more often than not we discover that the government is more self-serving than serving, and that law-abiding citizens are known to do their utmost to find loopholes in the laws of the land. All in all, we receive and give quite a range of conflicting messages about our relationship with the government. A second example, closer to home: we observe much confusion when parents genuinely try to seek the good for their children by creating house rules. Those rules are cause of much (sometimes even angry) debate in the home. Teenaged children often do not recognize much good in them at all; they perceive them as stifling hindrances – some may even think that their parents are "out to get them." And a final example: as we survey the rules and practices of our schools, we may wonder at times whether these rules exist for the benefit of the students, or whether the students exist in order to contribute to the greater glory of an orderly school.

Indeed, our society is rife with conflicting, paradoxical messages. How will our children cope with these paradoxes in their lives? Los writes about these things in this manner.

*Surely there are many parents who tell their children in all sincerity that they love them very much, but that their children ought to do their best much more [in order to be loveable children]. And how many Christians have not been drilled to believe that their salvation depends on God's grace only, yet that they themselves should strive hard to enter into heaven. According to this doctrine, parents, and even God Himself, are said to love their children dearly, but not quite the way they are right now. In other words, parents seem to say: we are really glad that we have you, but we do not want you to be as you are yourself.*

Much of our advice tends to tell the other person that there is something wrong with him or her: you are sort of o.k., but really you ought to change this or that. Such advice incorporates certain requirements or standards, all too often generating rather negative feelings: there is something wrong with me because I could not even think of what to do while my advisor seems to know these things just like that. Seeking advice places you in a vulnerable position; it can create much anxiety. It places the advisor in a position of power and responsibility, not always easily and wisely handled – *Dad knows everything, and he sure tells me that; obviously I know nothing; I am just a nobody*. Parents and teachers who have a kind of a binding "ownership" over the children, can readily fall into this trap. After all, they "know," where children and students are considered not to know.

Does our well-meant advice add to confusion and anxiety?

\* \* \*

All education should lead to independence. In order to be successful, educators must make themselves dispensable. This is perhaps one of the greatest, even paradoxical, challenges we face as parents and teachers – we want to be indispensable!

The dictionary tells me that independence means freedom from influence or control of others. Education for independence therefore means that the parent leads his child to the point where the boy or girl is able to live by his or her own advice. Indeed, however strange this may sound, if the job is well done, then parents and teachers will do their utmost to make themselves unnecessary. *Stand on your own feet* should be an important educational goal in the home as well as in the school.

But if this is so, then advice to our children or students should not be contradictory. We should not say: *I'd like to see you grow towards independence, as long as you do what I say.* Educating towards independence means, among other things, that the young people need genuine opportunities to make their own decisions, even if parents or educators may not agree with them. It means that we as parents must learn to recognize that our opinions and decisions may not necessarily represent the ultimate truth for our children, that there are other ways of looking at things, and that decisions can be made in different ways. Our well-intentioned parental advice may not necessarily be the best!

You will object, no doubt, that there is the precept of the Fifth Commandment, requiring obedience from children. *Of course,* you will claim, *I will always draw my advice from Scripture if and when appropriate, and therefore my advice has that additional authority. After all, I am the father, I am the mother.* And it is true, fathers and mothers have been given divine authority to educate their children. It is true that Scripture provides us with much advice, and that in all things we must seek to live according to the precepts of the Lord. And if our children act contrary to what God's Word teaches them, then appropriate discipline is necessary. Let us reject the pictures of family life as drawn in many a contemporary novel for teenagers – fathers without moral fibre, mothers who cannot cope with their own problems, and teenagers who have to save the family and the world. Let us as parents uphold the law of God for all of life in the daily hustle and bustle of our families. That is *the* way in which we may lead our children to the Source of living water.

At the same time, there are many situations in life in which answers are not simple and forthcoming. The Bible itself

contains many (apparently confusing) paradoxes. It tells the story of a seemingly heartless Solomon who orders the death of a small baby (1 Kings 3:16ff). It tells the believer that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone (Jas. 2:24). And then the Proverbs – the sayings and riddles of the wise for the wise (Prov. 1:5) – its puzzles are not easily solved! As parents and as teachers we often seek our way through life's problems with quite some hesitancy and uncertainty. Being honest to ourselves, we will acknowledge that our advice is more often directed to ourselves first of all. Are we willing to admit this to our children?

**advice =  
opinion given as to what to  
do, or how to handle a  
situation; counsel.**

Education has much to do with giving advice, and so great responsibility rests on the shoulders of the advisor. If the advice is to be *corrective*, then the advisor must clearly discern what is right and what is wrong. A mere opinion is not good enough; our advice to our young people must stand the scrutiny of Scripture. If the advice is to *provide direction*, then we should not in some subconscious manner place our own interests before those of our students. Our advice should be *enabling*; it should help the youngster move a step closer to real independence.

The apostle James strongly emphasizes the crucial importance of deeds to demonstrate faith. Similarly, Scriptural advice can only emerge from much practice, as the Proverbs themselves recommend: *let the discerning get guidance* (Prov. 1:5). Therefore, the best advice ought to go to ourselves: listen to your own advice; practise what you preach; show your wisdom in your deeds.

Parents, teachers, how Scripturally-genuine is the advice you give?

\* \* \*

Los, P.L. (1996). *Van gelijke beweging als wij: over leren van -, omgaan met - en behandelen van mensen zoals wijzelf zijn.* Series: Pastoraal Perspectief. Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre.

Dr. P.L. Los is a retired Dutch psychiatrist who has published in this booklet a number of talks to a variety



New postal address for the Canadian Reformed Church at Calgary is:

**Canadian Reformed Church at  
Calgary**

Box 25, Site 8, RR 6  
Calgary, AB T2M 4L5

\* \* \*

New Study phone number for:

**Rev. Barry Hofford**

616-554-1321

\* \* \*

ACCEPTED THE CALL extended to him by the church at Coaldale

**Rev. J.L. Van Popta**

of Ottawa, ON

\* \* \*

DECLINED the second call from Fergus, ON

**Rev. J. Ludwig**

of London, ON

of audiences. His insights are refreshingly frank and down to earth as he seeks to explore how we, human beings, deal with each other. Despite the best intentions, we often make life miserable for others by not accepting them as they are. Los's writings speak of his awe for Him who has given all His children an abundance of special gifts (1 Cor.12). His talks help us towards a Scriptural acceptance of each other (with all our individual peculiarities) as children of one Father. If you still master the Dutch language, this is a treasure trove of pithy wisdom, as is its compendium volume *Onder anderen: zes pastorale lezingen* (Pastoraal Perspectief 1994). Highly recommended.

\* \* \*

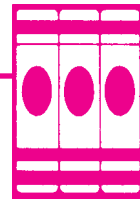
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by J. De Gelder



## Bound Yet Free (first of two parts)

***Bound Yet Free: Readings in Reformed Church Polity.* J. De Jong, ed., Winnipeg: Premier Publishing, 1995. 252 pages \$ 11.00 CDN**

Various Canadian Reformed churches are confronted with the presence of United Reformed or Free Reformed churches. Many are trying to build up contact with either the United Reformed or the Free Reformed, or even with both. These actions are sometimes more, sometimes less successful. In many respects we are facing challenging circumstances in this field.

These developments have also church political implications. For many people church polity may not sound like a very attractive or exciting topic. However, within the discussions concerning possible unity with other churches, much time is spent dealing with church political issues. That is not so strange. Agreement on important principles, like the authority of Scripture and the role of the confessions, does not necessarily mean agreement on how we ought to organize church life.

How important is it to maintain a church federation? What is the role, the position, of the major or broader assemblies? What is the relation between the local church and the federation? This leads to practical questions. As discussed in *Clarion* some time ago: How much freedom does a local church have in moving towards closer co-operation with others?

Here I would like to draw your attention to *Bound Yet Free: Readings in Reformed Church Polity*. It is a collection of five essays by various authors, all from the Dutch church political tradition since the end of the 19th century. The contributions were translated by Mr. J. Plug and edited by Dr. J. De Jong.

The book opens with a brief preface, written by the editor. He introduces the various articles and clarifies the set up of this volume. Then follows some biographical information about the various authors.

### F. L. Rutgers

The first article is by F. L. Rutgers, *The Church-Corrupting Character of Hierarchy*. It was originally a speech given by Dr. Rutgers in 1887 at the Reformed Ecclesiastical Congress, held under the title, "The Yoke of the Second Hierarchy." This congress was convened by the consistory of the church in Amsterdam, shortly after the Doleantie in 1886, with the intention to urge all the churches to reject the synodical hierarchy in the Dutch Reformed church (Nederlands Hervormde Kerk).

The author makes clear what hierarchy is all about, stressing that it robs God's Word of its complete authority in the church, and that it rejects Jesus Christ as the only head of the church. He shows the significance of the struggle against the Roman Catholic hierarchy in the 16th century, as well as the hierarchical dangers in the next centuries. He then speaks about the hierarchical nature of the synodical organization that was imposed on the churches in 1816, and its devastating effect.

History shows, Rutgers warns, that the power of hierarchy develops slowly and gradually. It begins with the intention to bring about unity, regularity and good order. In the end it becomes an instrument of Satan to destroy God's church.

### S. Greijdanus

The next chapter is the brochure of S. Greijdanus, *Scriptural Principles Concerning Broader Assemblies*. In the first part the author strongly emphasizes the basic principle that must determine all our thinking in these matters: The church is the church of the Lord. With many Scripture passages, he makes clear that Christ alone has exclusive and absolute authority over His church, both with respect to its inner existence and its outer actions, its organization, its operation, and its experience. In all things we should simply ask what the Lord's will is.

The will of the Lord has been revealed to us in His Word, the holy

Scripture. This means that we are to regulate all our actions concerning the church according to this Word. There is no other standard by which to go. God's Word is decisive, not our customs and traditions. This holds true also when we come across differences in church political structures in other churches in this world.

There is in the next part of Greijdanus' article a remarkable tension. I remember that I had the same feeling many years ago, when I studied this brochure for my *Church Polity* exam at the Theological College in Kampen.

On the one side Greijdanus emphasizes the contrast between the spiritual unity and the organizational unity of the church. "All local churches throughout the whole earth really form an inner spiritual unity," he says (23). "The unity exists even when all external bond of cohesion is lacking." This external connection or organization "is a matter of secondary or even more remote importance" (37). It is of "entirely subordinate significance" (38). This spiritual unity "does not consist of an organization, nor does it require external, visible relations and organized coherence" (36). He underlines this by saying, "we have no evidence that an institutional relationship existed among the various churches in the New Testament" (24).

On the other hand Greijdanus stresses that the local churches "are called by God to form a co-operating bond" (33). He even speaks about "a divine obligation to form an orderly relation" (34). A federation of churches "is not always strictly necessary," but is at the same time referred to as "a divine calling" (47).

Greijdanus' resistance against any form of hierarchy that could come from broader assemblies makes him so strongly emphasize the autonomy of the local church that there is hardly any room left for the possibility that local churches might benefit from the co-operation in a federation. It is true that the local churches are equal, and not

subordinated to each other, but one wonders where in Greijdanus' position is the protection against independentism. Although his experiences in the time of the liberation of 1944 make his fear understandable, it is simply not true that the destructive power of hierarchy can only come from major assemblies. As Veenhof explains on p.148, hierarchy is not so much in the structures, but in the refusal to submit to the absolute authority of Christ in the administration of the offices in the church.

Hierarchy can also be a local problem. Can a minister or elder not lord it over his local fellow-office-bearers? Can a consistory not lord it over a congregation? And if that is the case, would there be a possible role then for the church federation in dealing with those matters?

Another question comes up in connection with Greijdanus' approach. If a local faithful church refuses to join the federational, the organizational unity, would that break the spiritual unity between the churches involved?

### **J. Van Dalen**

In this respect the next chapter, the article of J. van Dalen, *The Scriptural Principles of Church Polity*, has a better balance in pointing out the danger of hierarchy in the church, as well as the danger of independentism.

He first writes about the local church, and the offices in the local church. Then, focusing on the bond of churches, he gives a clear outline of what Scripture teaches about the calling to form such a bond, and the order and authority in such a bond. He gives special attention to the character and the task of the major assemblies, which he describes in terms of service and assistance: "The churches help each other in carrying out the task which Christ has laid upon them" (94).

This leads to more positive characterizations of the federation of churches. "Just as the instituted churches exist for the perfection of the saints, so also the bond of churches exists for the perfection of the churches" (80). Further, "The churches consider the institution of major assemblies an instrument which Christ uses to work the perfection of His congregations" (100).

### **C. Veenhof**

The contribution of C. Veenhof, *Concerning the Government of Christ's Church* is the longest one. He first speaks extensively about what Scrip-

ture teaches and what we confess concerning the church, as well as the basic principles of church government. His point of departure is that Jesus Christ alone is the King of the church, who engages the offices to govern the church on his behalf. He then goes on to explain the institution of the various offices in the church.

It is interesting that Veenhof gives central place to the "office of all believers" in relation with the "special offices." Throughout his article he consistently stresses that office-bearers are not placed above the congregation; their authority is not higher than that of the other members of the church. They only have the special task to serve with the Word.

This leads to worthwhile observations concerning the relation between the consistory and the congregation, and the way they co-operate. There must be as much openness as possible, and the consistory must always, as completely as possible, involve the congregation in its work, in whatever weighty matters it is dealing with. On the other hand he says, "The congregation is to be called to participate whenever the consistory occupies itself with questions which concern the life of the church."

When Veenhof then continues to speak about Christ's government of the world church, he stresses again that this can only be organized in such a way that it does not violate the fact the Jesus Christ is and remains the only Head of His church. It may not take away from the Scriptural reality that each local church is fully autonomous and is governed only by its own office-bearers. There is no board higher than the consistory.

In dealing with the character of major assemblies Veenhof stresses again that only the local church has an inherent and original authority. The authority and competence of a major assembly to make decisions, therefore, lie in the churches that send the delegates. That is why proper credentials are an essential mark for a legitimate major assembly.

### **J. Kamphuis**

The final article, *The Calling and Duty to Maintain the Church Federation*, by J. Kamphuis has a somewhat different tone. It appears that these pages may have been written as part of an ongoing debate with the Rev. G. Visee. The author challenges Visee's statement: "The New Testament knows

nothing of a bond of churches in the sense of obligations and agreements mutually adopted as fixed in a church order, and as may be appropriate, in the regular meetings of delegates in classical and synodical assemblies."

Kamphuis' study is a thorough and careful reading of many Scripture passages that speak about the gathering and the government of the church. He makes many valuable and interesting observations, although I sometimes wonder if he does not read too much in certain texts. Is his explanation of the word "church" in the singular in Galatians 1:13 and in Acts 9:31 sufficient (214, 215)? Does the willingness for mutual support of the various churches in the New Testament lead to an organized federation of churches, divided into regional jurisdictions (219-229)? In a debate it is understandable that you want to prove your point, but when you read this material again more than thirty years later, certain statements may not really be as conclusively argued as it first seemed.

For Kamphuis an important starting point is that regarding the church, "the distinction spiritual-organizational is untenable." This position obviously effects his exegesis, and leads him to conclusions different from Greijdanus' position.

The last two sections of Kamphuis' article (240-249) are the highlight of this book. He writes about the solidarity of the churches in obedience to Jesus Christ as the most powerful weapon against both hierarchy and independentism.

In this book a valuable collection of historically significant material has been brought together. We should be able to benefit greatly from the thoughts and insights of these authors, each of whom has played an important role in the church political developments in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands, before as well as after the Liberation. We will be able to benefit especially because all the contributors give much attention to the Biblical data, emphasizing that God's Word must be our main source and guidance, also in dealing with church political matters. In that sense we can indeed say, as it says on the cover, "This book provides Biblical building blocks for instituting sound church government today." But I also have some questions. We will deal with those in the next issue.

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By N.H. Gootjes

## Praying for Rain

Isaac Smit, *Praying for Rain: A call for renewal in the Canadian Reformed churches*. Mount Hope, ON, 1998. 255 pages. \$14.99 CDN

Mr. I. Smit published a book privately,<sup>1</sup> in which he wants to call for renewal in the Canadian Reformed Churches. In this book, he gives the results of his study on some key theological concepts. He called it *Praying for Rain*. The title appears to imply that the Canadian Reformed Churches are dry and barren. They need to come alive. They need renewal. The book is passionately written, for the author sees great dangers within the churches. At the same time, he sees positive signs, particularly among the young people (252). Someone who is concerned about the well-being of the churches, and seeks ways to improve them, deserves our hearing.

The author, however, makes it very difficult for the reader to keep listening to him. One reason is that the book contains many unsubstantiated claims. "Often I read in our circles that faith is mostly 'listening in obedience'" (60). Who said this, and did he mean that a holy life is unimportant? "Quite a few of us have studied the Scriptures and challenged the tradition. Most of them left or were pushed (forced?) to leave the church (federation)" (103). The suggestion that they were treated harshly and received no pastoral care is made but not proven. And who said: "It would be 'politically' incorrect to pray for 'the persecuted Church'. At best we can pray for 'the persecuted Christians'" (186)? "Several of our leaders have denied the mandate for all Christians to proclaim the Gospel in word and deed" (210). Three quotes are given, only two are referenced and none states that Christians should not speak about the gospel to unbelieving neighbours. For example, the first quote questions the use of the words 'mission' and 'servants' for a Faith Works camp, not the duty to evangelize.<sup>2</sup> An open discussion requires substantiated claims.

Another problem with the book is that it contains many sweeping statements that are incorrect. For example, the book says: "The Belgic Confession defines Christians as those who have accepted (taken, appropriated) the only Saviour Jesus Christ. Interestingly, this phrase has been deleted in 'our' version" (25f.). However, art. 29 contains this sentence: "They believe in Jesus Christ as the only Sav-

our." It has not been deleted, it has been slightly rephrased. Another example can be found on p. 103: "Since Pentecost the church has been fragmented by schisms. Many of these schisms have their roots in doctrinal differences concerning the covenant and (infant) baptism." This is not correct, the schisms during the first 1500 years do not concern the covenant (see 112). What do we do with the statement on p. 105: "Many of us apparently think that, although 'our' children are in the covenant, children of Baptist parents are not. This is a myth?" This is a very confusing and unsubstantiated statement. For example, if these children are in the covenant, should they not receive the sign of the covenant? On p. 178 C.J. De Ruyter is quoted as suggesting that complete agreement with the creeds is no longer the norm in their federation. The original article, however, shows that De Ruyter meant and said something else.<sup>3</sup>

As a result of such mistakes, the book is not convincing, and one could wish Mr. Smit would have been more careful. The main goal of the book, however, is to identify a major problem in the Canadian Reformed Churches, and to offer a solution for it. In the following, we will concentrate on this issue.

### The problem

Mr. Smit has great concern for the lifestyle of the church people he meets. As a teacher, he is daily among young people. Through them he is confronted with the life of church members, and he has great difficulty with that.

The first section, "Christ and Christian," identifies this problem. The Reformed church should not look back on reformation in the past; it must continue to be reformed. Moreover, faith connects us through Christ with God. This requires of us walking with the Spirit, and should lead to a holy life. The work of the Spirit is explained in its many aspects. And this Spirit urges us to continue in perfection.

If we then look at the life of the church, we notice great shortcomings. To give a lengthy quote:

T.V. shows are watched with minimal discrimination. While I was disgusted by the worldliness of "Who framed Roger Rabbit?," I have seen parents giving this video to their little kids, because "It is a cartoon; it must be innocent." Years ago, in a small class of girls, I heard them talk about the film "Dirty Dancing." Apparently they had all watched it on TV and they loved it. I could not resist asking questions. The girls explained that, although the title sounds bad, it is a beautiful film. They did not hesitate to

advertise it and to recommend it that I watch it too. Many parents, apparently, had watched it with their families, and nobody seemed to have any objection against it. As I had once seen an LP record with songs from the film, I did have something to say. The cover had pictures of the film and lyrics of the songs, which communicated, "Enjoy life. If you fall in love with a boy or girl, jump into bed and have sex!" To my amazement, when I mentioned this to the class, the girls agreed that this was true. Nobody objected to my interpretation. How is it possible to relish in immorality while we claim to be the bride of Christ? Apparently, many never think about this as a problem. Our lack of discrimination must lead to a serious erosion of the norms. Already, I have been told, some congregations find that pre-marital sex becomes the norm for couples (57).

Mr. Smit, as a teacher, hears from his students what is allowed in their homes, and he is greatly disturbed. Something is, obviously, very wrong if this is the outlook of the young covenant people. This problem of worldliness needs to be addressed. He hears, however, many excuses. We should not be surprised that sin occurs. We should, however, be appalled if sins are acceptable, and when they become part of the tradition. "We will hear a general admission that 'no church is perfect,' but when it comes to acknowledging particular sins, we don't budge, but make many excuses" (58).

I cannot judge whether Mr. Smit's statements are correct in general. I have a feeling that there is more struggle against sin, also among the pre-profession youth, than he is willing to admit (58). But I am in full agreement with him that it is wrong to allow sins to continue, and to excuse them. Parents should stand next to their children in their struggle against sin and teach and support them to obey God.

Living in a sinful world, we can easily get used to sin, and no longer notice the evil of it. Sin may even affect us to the extent that we participate in it without feeling any problem. When Mr. Smit wants to call the church people and their children to complete obedience to God, he must receive our attention and support.

### The covenant

Remarkably, this leads to a discussion of the covenant in the second section of the book. Three covenants are distinguished, each of which has an initial phase followed by a completed phase.



"The first dimension of God's covenant started after the Fall and was instituted after the Flood. It was limited in power and revelation, for creation has no speech and there are no words" (95). The second covenant begins with Abram. "He and his offspring were allowed to hear God's Word. . . . This became even more clear after the Exodus, and when God officially instituted the covenant with Israel at Mount Horeb" (96). The third covenant is the covenant of the Spirit. This covenant, as well as two phases: "Throughout Jesus' ministry He formed the foundation of the church. The official transaction took place at Pentecost, when God came closer to mankind than anybody could have imagined" (97).<sup>4</sup>

This covenant view has several problematic aspects. The first covenant begins after the fall, says Mr. Smit. It is a covenant without words and without speech, and it is a covenant of preservation. However, there are words, already in Gen 3:15: "I will put enmity between you (= the serpent) and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." There are words in Gen 9 – the promise that the world will no more be destroyed. Moreover, the covenant with Noah is not a further explanation of the covenant with Adam; they are different in character. The one speaks of the destruction of God's opponent, the other of the continuation of the world.

In the second covenant, the covenant of the Word, Abram and Moses are taken together. However, no clear indication is given of the content of the two and how the one first stage differs from the other. Actually, Gen. 17:7 is not even quoted, let alone explained. Further, the discussion would have benefited from consideration of e.g. art. 25 of the Belgic Confession. In the explanation of the third covenant, it is not made clear what the difference is between the first phase (Christ) and the second (the Spirit). Neither is the question discussed whether the structure of the covenant with Abraham is maintained.

This explanation of the covenant is very unclear and inconsistent. That leads to the question why literature on the covenant was not considered. Several studies are available, from trustworthy authors: J. Murray, J. Van Genderen, J. Kamphuis.<sup>5</sup> Why were they not considered? The answer can be found on p. 110. The author wants to avoid partisan literature, from both the Reformed and the Baptist camp. "I have approached my study of the covenant by going back to the Bible, and not by starting from our tradition. Only Scripture, under the Spirit's guidance, can be

the final criterion in finding the truth." By leaving out an interaction with theologians who have studied the issues, Mr. Smit has given up the opportunity to learn from them. He ends up with a self made covenant doctrine, which, indeed, is too vague to answer questions concerning the meaning and participants in the covenant. I am afraid that by so doing, he has made it impossible for the readers to take his explanation of the covenant seriously.

Mr. Smit has legitimate concerns about the life style of the young people of the covenant. He sees the dangers of covenant automatism. The solution, however, should not be changing the concept of the covenant but attacking an easy going attitude toward sins.

### Baptism

The discussion of the covenant leads to a discussion on infant baptism. Six problems regarding infant baptism are presented with apparent agreement and five arguments in favour of infant baptism are critically discussed (110-114). The outcome is:

For imperfect people, Scripture is not clear. Even though illuminated by the Spirit, sincere Christians who have come to reject the practice of infant baptism may not therefore be ousted from the church of Christ or turned away from the Lord's Supper (114).

This means positively:

To practise the unity in Christ, we must accept the Baptists (who, on Scriptural basis, disagree with us) and we must allow non-baptized, non-professing members in our churches. What else can we do? How many more children of God must we first bar from His table and force outside of our churches? May we, as has been done, apply the keys of the Kingdom and "cast them from heaven" (115)?

Mr. Smit wants the church to allow the contradictory views of the Reformed and the Baptists on baptism as both true and legitimate.

This poses a problem within the Reformed church. This church has formulated the Scriptural doctrine on infant baptism. Art. 34 says:

We believe that these children ought to be baptized and sealed with the sign of the covenant, as infants were circumcised in Israel on the basis of the same promises which are now made to our children. . . .

This obligation ("ought to be baptized") is for the Reformed church a matter of believing and confessing, as is stated at the beginning of this article.

The Heidelberg Catechism deals with this issue in Lord's Day 27, Q&A 74. After having given some reasons, it states:

Therefore, by baptism, as sign of the covenant, they must be grafted into the Christian church and distinguished from the children of unbelievers.

Communicant members of the church cannot go straight against the confession of the church.

Moreover, there is also the Form for Baptism of Infants. One of the questions to the parents of the baptized child is:

Do you confess that our children, though conceived and born in sin, and therefore subject to all sorts of misery, even to condemnation, are sanctified in Christ and thus as members of His church ought to be baptized?

When members of the Reformed Church present a child for baptism they declare publicly that their child OUGHT TO BE BAPTIZED. Mr. Smit has confessed this very thing when he presented his children for baptism.

Now I think I know why Mr. Smit has developed doubts about the meaning of baptism. He sees baptized children leading a worldly life. He suspects that this is the result of their trusting in the covenant and their baptism. They think they are safe, and can, therefore, do what they want (p. 109). If Mr. Smit wants to attack this blatantly unscriptural view of the covenant, he has our full support. But he may not publicly undermine the doctrine of the covenant and of infant baptism. He has publicly stated that this is the true doctrine of salvation. Infant baptism is a confessional issue, which should not be publicly undermined in the church.<sup>6</sup>

Mr. Smit has presented us with a confused and confusing book.


<sup>1</sup>The author can be reached at R.R. #1, Mount Hope, Ontario, LOR 1W0. The numbers between brackets refer to pages from the book.

<sup>2</sup>More examples can be found on p. 31, 37, 58, 59, 158, 176, 191, 213.

<sup>3</sup>Factual mistakes can also be found on p. 104 (Van Bruggen) and 106 (A. Kuyper).

<sup>4</sup>See also the chart on p. 99.

<sup>5</sup>J. Murray, *The Covenant of Grace* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1953); J. Van Genderen, *Covenant and Election* (Neerlandia, AB: Inheritance, 1995); J. Kamphuis, *An Everlasting Covenant* (Launceston, Tasmania: Publication Organisation of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, 1985)

<sup>6</sup>Another issue needs to be addressed, as well. The discussion of evangelism leads to the statement "that Calvinists and Arminians emphasize somewhat different perspectives of the same truth" (225). This is a denial of our third confession, for the Canons of Dort have shown that the Reformed and the Arminian position are not compatible. 



**Press Release of the meeting Of The Inter-League Publication Board (I.L.P.B.) with the Administration Committee, held on March 6, 1998; at Pilgrim Canadian Reformed Church, London**

Present at the meeting: Ed VanderLaan and Harold Olij for the Men's League.

Joanne VanMiddelkoop and Jane Oosterhoff for the Women's League.

Evan Bosscher for the Young People's League – absent: Mark VanDooren  
Administration Committee: Anne Boeringa, John Schouten, Ted Schouten, Bill Buist, R. Pieterman, and Elaine Spriensma

- Opening: The chairman, Ed VanderLaan read Psalm 46, led in prayer and welcomed everyone present.

- Agenda was revised and accepted.
- Personnel:
  - New Board members are: Ed VanderLaan, Harold Olij, Evan Bosscher, and Mark VanDooren
  - New Administration Committee members are: Anne Boeringa, Bill Buist
  - Thanks were extended to outgoing members – Pete Engbers and George Helder
- Reports from the Administration Committee were read and reviewed. The Board was informed that all is going well. The auditors report indicated that financial reports were accurate. Sales show an increase. Work on *Luke* will be discontinued for now. *None Like Thee*, by Rev. Stam is now available. Some of the books in process:

*Acts 1 and 2*, Dr. C. van den Berg  
*Wat is Heirop Uw Antwoord* (being translated), Rev. M.H. Sliggers  
*You His Child, You His Guest*, P.C. vanWijk

- The Revised Constitution was distributed and filed.
- The Marketing Committee will look into creating a website.
- Next Meetings: Board of Directors: April 16, 1998 at J. Oosterhoff residence
- John Schouten led in closing prayer.

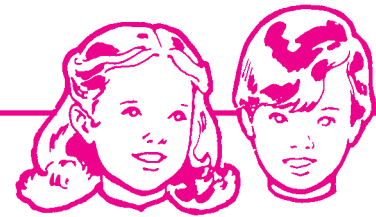
For the ILPB,  
Jane Oosterhoff  
secretary

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## OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



### Dear Busy Beavers

Isn't it wonderful that God sent His only begotten Son into the world? We remember that at Christmas. And isn't it wonderful that His Son came into this world to save us, yes, you and me and many more people, from our sins? We remember that at Easter.

Then we remember Ascension Day. Do you know what Ascension means? Christ, when He died, first had to go to hell, in order to take upon Himself our sins. But then on the third day, He arose from the dead, and appeared before Mary, and the disciples. After forty days, after He had given His instructions to His disciples, He blessed them and then *ascended* into heaven. That means that God carried Him in His hand and took His Son back. And now Christ sits at the right hand of our heavenly Father.

We always have to remember this. Christ did not come just to find out what it was like to live on the earth with the people. No, Christ came to save us from eternal death, and to give us eternal life. Thank God for His great wisdom and mercy.

— — — — A — — — —	1. God live in _____.
— — — — — S — —	2. Another name for Jesus _____.
— — — — C — — — — —	3. He _____ into heaven.
— — — — E — — — — —	4. Jesus _____ before His disciples.
— — — — N — —	5. Jesus did many _____ and wonders.
— — — — S — —	6. Jesus _____ from the dead.
— — — — — I — — —	7. "Let us _____ and give Him the glory."
— — — — O — — —	8. Jesus rose up in _____.
— — — — — N — — —	9. ". . . and sits at the _____ of God."

