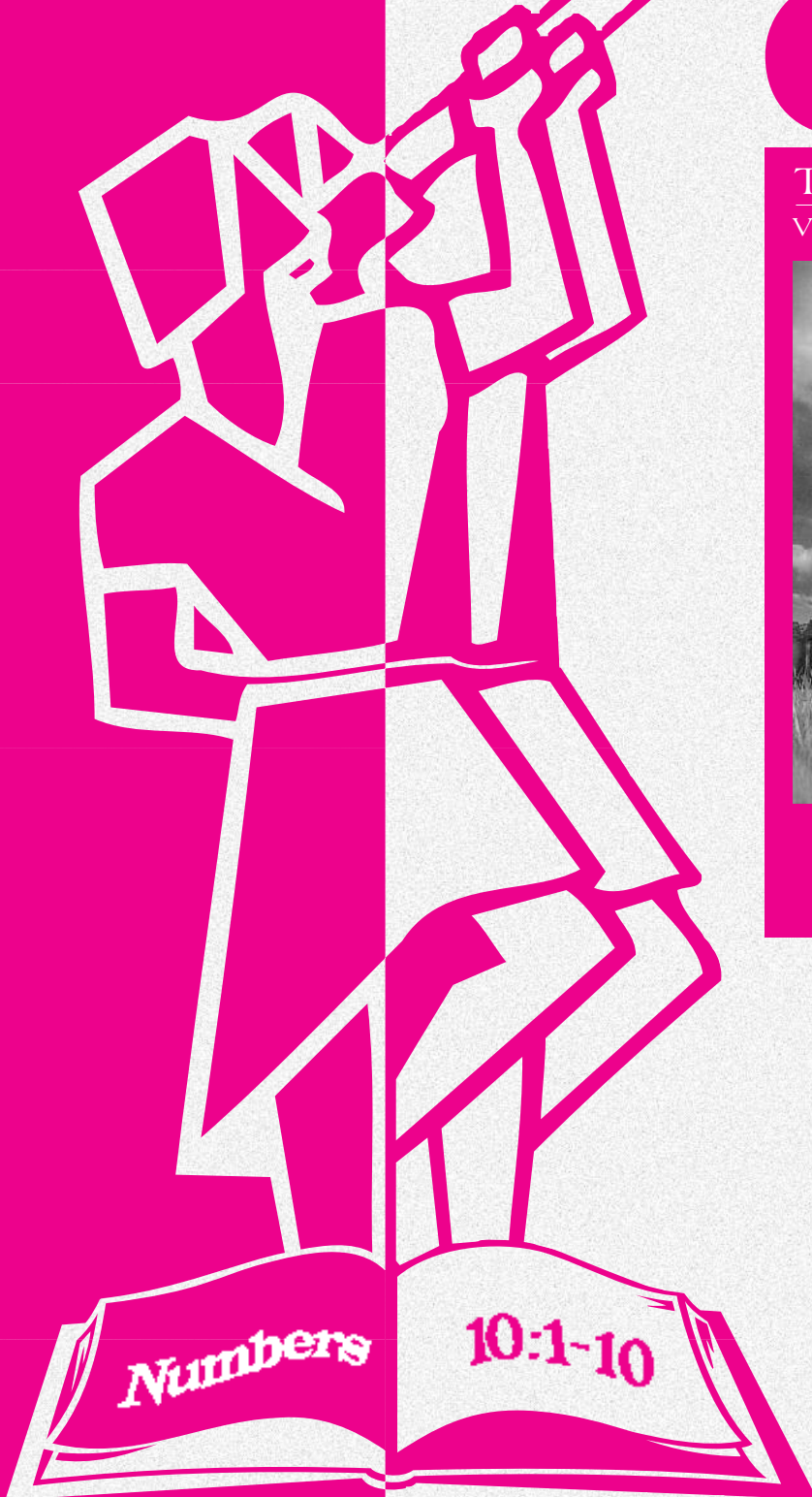


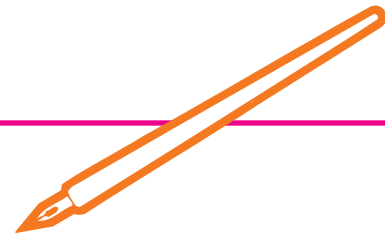
# Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE  
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*The Light of the Gospel in the  
Land of the Mayas*





## Dogmas and Paul

The caption over the article hit me in the eye. In big, bold, black letters it said, “**Paul did not proclaim any dogmas.**” This statement was not made by someone who did not know the first thing about Paul. It was made by a professor of New Testament in a book about Paul.<sup>1</sup> This professor had already stirred up discussion some years earlier when he denied that Paul was the father of the traditional doctrine of the atonement. He was right on that point, for the doctrine of the atonement is much older than Paul. It can be found in the Old Testament. That was not what this professor wanted to say, however. His intention was to emphasize that the Reformed doctrine that Christ made atonement for our sins could not be found in Paul. In his new book he appears to have moved beyond that, for he now seems to think that it was not Paul’s intention to teach Christian dogmas.

Since this is a discussion in the Netherlands, and not in a sister church, we are not directly involved in the debate on this book. The general issue, however, has importance beyond the Netherlands. Did Paul preach dogmas? Before we can answer that question, we have to consider another question: What, exactly, are dogmas?

### Origin of the dogmas

In general, a dogma is a basic doctrinal point. Since here we are discussing the Christian religion, we can say that a dogma is a basic issue in the faith and teaching of the Christian church. These fundamental issues have been formulated by the Reformed Churches in their confessional standards: the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort. Did the apostle Paul proclaim any of these? Obviously not, for the Belgic Confession first appeared in 1561, the Heidelberg Catechism in 1563, and the Canons of Dort date from the next century.

The church already had doctrinal standards before it made and adopted these confessions in the 16th Century. These are the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed. Did Paul, perhaps, proclaim or write any of these? Again, the answer is negative. Notwithstanding its title, the Apostles’ Creed was not made by the Apostles. The origin goes back to the beginning of the third century, about 150 years after the death of Paul. The Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed are later yet. Paul did not write any of our creeds or confessions.

### Paul’s epistles

Whether Paul wrote any of our confessions is not the real issue, however. The statement was made that Paul did not proclaim dogmas. We have to look at the content of the Creeds and Confessions and consider what they teach. Then the question must be answered whether Paul taught this content, or not. Let us begin with the Apostles’ Creed. It teaches us to say that we believe in God the Father, in Jesus

Christ, his only begotten Son, and in the Holy Spirit. In other words, it speaks of the Trinity. Did Paul proclaim the Trinity? He did: “May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all” (2 Cor 13:14). What about ‘almighty’, did Paul proclaim this of God? He wrote, “I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty” (2 Cor 6:18). Did Paul mention that God created the heavens and the earth? He did. He spoke of “God, who created all things” (Eph 3:9).

### “Did Paul preach dogmas?”

Did he place Jesus Christ on a par with God, as the Apostles’ Creed does? An example where he does, can be found at the beginning of many of his epistles. “Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 1:3). He also indicates that Christ was involved in the divine work of creation. After he has said that the Lord Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God, he continues: “For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him” (Col 1:16). He also spoke of the Son coming into the world (Phil 2:6-8), of his death, burial and resurrection (1 Cor 15:3-5). We could go on. Paul did not write the Apostles’ Creed. This statement was made later. But we can safely say that all that is brought together in the Apostles’ Creed was taught by Paul.

What about the dogmas mentioned in the three Reformed confessions? Did Paul teach those as well? We cannot go through them all. But let us briefly look at the Canons of Dort where the doctrine of election is worked out (see I, 7).

- Election is the unchangeable purpose of God made before the foundation of the world. This can be found in Ephesians 1:4.
- God elected according to his own pleasure. See Ephesians 1:11.
- He chose us in Christ. That is again in Ephesians 1:4.
- God chose a definite number of specific persons, neither better nor worse. See Romans 9:23,24,28,30.
- God decided to reprobate others. See Romans 9:22.

The issue we are dealing with in this article is not whether we are able to give Scripture proof for all the doctrines formulated in the confessions; rather, we are considering whether Paul taught dogmas, or not. We must give a double answer to this question. No, Paul did not make any of our creeds or confessions. The church made these later. But yes, Paul did teach the things we now have summarized in our creeds and confessions. Moreover, the same could be



said for other parts of Scripture. They provide the material the church has included in its confessions.

### Consequences

Does it matter for us whether Paul taught these dogmas, or not? Are dogmas important to our faith? The easiest way to answer these questions is to consider what happens if the dogmas are taken away. Let us begin with the Apostles' Creed. Take, "I believe in God the Father almighty," and change that to, "I believe in God the Father who is not almighty." That would mean God does not have all things in his hand. His government does not control everything. If that were true, how could I pray to Him for help. It would be questionable whether He could do anything about it. My prayer could no longer be a confident prayer to God who is able to do whatever He wills.

## *"Dogmas are like the frame of a house."*

Or imagine that Paul did not preach that God is the Creator of heaven and earth. That would mean God is not the absolute owner of everything, who requires obedience from everyone living on this earth. This would change my perspective on life. My primary concern would become how to survive in this world and not how to serve the owner of the world.

Another example: What if Paul had not preached that Jesus Christ is God's only-begotten Son? That would mean Jesus is no more than a man. To be sure, He was a good man, and his life can be an example for us. I can try to become as good as He was. I need not believe Him absolutely, however. After all, He was not God, but merely a good man. I may decide for myself where to follow Him and where not.

Consider what happens if Paul had not proclaimed the dogma that Jesus Christ died for my sins (1 Cor 15:3). In that case, I need to find my own solution for my evil deeds. Either I have to do many good things to ensure that my earnings are greater than my debts, or I must somehow try to please God with special gifts so that He will like me.

And what about the doctrine of election? What difference does it make whether Paul taught this or not? Actually, Paul himself answered the question for us: If it is not by election, then it is not by faith, but by works (Rom 9:30,31, see also v. 16). Election is election in Christ, who has paid the price for my sins (atonement!). Rejection of election means I myself somehow have to compensate God.

All the dogmas Paul (and the Bible in general) preached have direct consequences for our lives. It usually requires some thought to find exactly where the consequences are, but take away a doctrine and the Christian life and attitude changes. Dogmas are like the frame of a house. They are usually invisible, only in the basement are they exposed. Yet, they hold together the whole house, and determine the whole structure. Take away the frame and the house collapses; no one can live in it. If Paul did not proclaim dogmas, the house of the church becomes a ruin. It would be like the ruin of the church described by Calvin in his *Institutes*, book IV, chapter 2, sections 10-12.

<sup>1</sup>The article appeared in the *Nederlands Dagblad*, Sept. 30, 1998. The professor in question is C.J. den Heyer, professor New Testament at the Theologische Universiteit in Kampen, Oudestraat. 



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By J. Louwerse

# Government for our Good!

*For the sake of Jacob my servant, of Israel my chosen,  
I summon you by name (Isaiah 45:4a. Read Isaiah 44:28-45:7).*

What is that ahead on the road? Flashing red lights! Did someone hit a moose or a deer? Or did someone hit the ditch because of the slippery road? Or was someone speeding again? The red lights get brighter as I come closer. As I roll along and look ahead I see not just one set of flashing lights but as many as three sets! As I thought: it is a road block, a police check! But for what? As I come to a gradual stop, a Royal Canadian Mounted Police constable approaches with flashlight and a hand up. He wants me to come to a complete stop. "Good evening, sir! How are you doing this evening?" The flashlight shines in my face! "Have you been drinking tonight?" "No sir!" I answered promptly, as his eyes followed the light of the flashlight through the seats of my vehicle to complete the check. A road block, for my own safety, for my own good! I could go on my way. The road home was opened for me again. As I pressed the button to do up my window, I also pressed the gas pedal and passed by the lights!

It was for my good, that this constable had asked me that question. He was just making sure that I would not be

a menace to myself and to others on the roads! He was a servant of the LORD, serving for my sake, for my good. Is that not what police constables and judges and premiers and prime ministers and kings are for?

Isaiah speaks in the same way about King Cyrus, King of the Medes and the Persians. It is the LORD, through Isaiah the prophet, who says of King Cyrus, the top policeman of his time: "He is my shepherd, and will accomplish all that I please." King Cyrus the greatest ruler of his day, was a servant of the LORD God. As Isaiah also says – He is the LORD'S anointed. It is the LORD God who holds his right hand. King Cyrus is the LORD God's servant for God's chosen people! It is the LORD God who gave him his task, even though Cyrus did not know the LORD God of heaven and earth. And what did King Cyrus do in the service of God's people? God's people had been sent into exile in Babylon for some 70 years because of their sin and disobedience. But just as Isaiah prophesied of this coming exile, he also prophesied about their return from exile.

The prophet Isaiah looked ahead to a time when that exile in Babylon

would be over. That time would come with the arrival of King Cyrus. In the strength of the LORD, King Cyrus subdued nations before him, and loosened the armour of kings! It is by the power of the LORD God that Cyrus had doors opened for him and treasures given to him. And so Cyrus removed the roadblock for God's people. For it this King Cyrus who, after conquering Babylon, gave the decree found in Ezra 1. With this decree, God's people could return to the Land of Promise to rebuild the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem. Cyrus the King did all this, as Isaiah the prophet said, for the sake of Jacob God's servant, for the sake of Israel, God's elect. Even though Cyrus did not know the LORD God as the God who created heaven and earth, God did use him for the good of his people Israel. King Cyrus lifted the roadblock for God's people. So they could leave Babylon and go back to the Promised Land of peace! They could go back to await the coming of the Christ.

It is no different with the Cyruses of today, be they Prime Minister Jean Chretien or President Bill Clinton, or the constable on the highway. Even though our rulers and our police constables may be unbelieving, they remain God's servants for our good. They are there for our good even in such as matters of roadblocks and watching our speed and paying our taxes. These rulers are not a terror to our good works, but to our evil works. How wonderful it is to know of these servants of God as well! They, too, are there for our good. Yes, they are there to protect and punish us! Think about that next time you are driving down the road and you meet those who are in uniform. See them as servants of God, there for our good. As we confess in Article 36 of the Belgic Confession, "We ought to pray for them that God may direct them in all their ways and that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way!"

*Rev. John Louwerse is minister in the Canadian Reformed Church of Houston, B.C.*



## What's inside?

In the editorial, our resident professor of dogmatics, Dr. N. H. Gootjes, addresses the question of whether the Apostle Paul proclaimed any dogmas. As the editor explains, a dogma is a basic doctrinal point. Did Paul teach any "basic doctrinal points?" It seems strange even to address the question. The answer seems obvious. "Of course!" we want to shout. "Of course Paul taught many basic doctrinal points." What seems obvious is, apparently, not so obvious to a (synodical) professor in Kampen who has stated that Paul did not proclaim any dogmas. Dr. Gootjes shows not only the foolishness but also the destructiveness of that position.

In this issue you will find the conclusion of Dr. J. Faber's speech on the confessional history of the Canadian Reformed Churches. He concludes the discussion on what forced the liberation of 1944 and makes a few remarks about the formation of the federation of Canadian Reformed Churches. We hope you will have benefited greatly from the reading of this speech.

The Rev. J. Louwerse of Houston tells us about how he was pulled over by the police. *What!?* Dr. F.G. Oosterhoff contributes several book studies. Rev. J. VanRietschoten tells us some more about the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America. The issue is rounded up with a press review from Dr. J. De Jong and a couple of letters. We hope we have provided you with an interesting and balanced diet of things to read.

GvP

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# The Confessional History of the Canadian Reformed Churches (Part 3 of 3)

By J. Faber

*Third and final part of a speech first delivered at Wellandport, Ontario on May 9, 1998 and subsequently also in a similar evening at Wyoming, Ontario on October 2, 1998. The speaking style has been retained.*

*In part 2, Dr. Faber spoke about the doctrinal issues leading to the ecclesiastical Liberation of 1944, dealing specifically with the topics covenant and election, and covenant and holiness. In this final instalment the remaining issues are dealt with. – Editor*

### 3. Covenant and promise

The following topic, implied in the doctrinal pronouncement of 1942, is that of covenant and promise. For the statement read that “the seed of the covenant, by virtue of the promise of God, must be held to be regenerated and sanctified in Christ until, upon their growing up, the opposite should become apparent.”

The question here is: What is the character and the content of God’s promise? Those who let the doctrine of the covenant be dominated by the doctrine of election make a distinction not only between an external and internal covenant but also between a *conditional* and an *unconditional* promise. There are not only two covenants but also two promises. The *conditional* promise is an *offer* of salvation and the *unconditional* promise is a *prediction* of salvation. In the Synodical construction, the unconditional promise is the real promise and therefore the character of the promise is that of an unconditional prediction of eternal salvation. Where do we find this construction? Well, Synod 1942 stated in its *Elucidation* that we must discern between the offer of salvation which comes to all who hear the Gospel (and with special strength to those who are baptized), and the *unconditional* promise of salvation to the elect, which forms the special content of covenant and sacrament.<sup>21</sup>

So there is on the one hand the offer of salvation to all. This offer of salvation is conditional: Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. But there is on the other hand the unconditional promise of salvation to the elect. This unconditional promise to the elect is called the special content of covenant and sacrament. If we try to verbalize this unconditional promise to the elect it must read like a prediction or prophecy: This person is saved for all eternity.

It was precisely this scholastic distinction between a conditional offer and an unconditional promise that confused Reformed people. What did God say to me in my baptism? Did He pronounce his unconditional promise over me? If I belong to the elect, I received the special content of covenant and baptism. But how do I know that I belong to the elect? In the synodical construction everything became uncertain.

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***“The promise of the gospel is to be proclaimed without discrimination, together with the command to believe.”***

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What a shame! God’s covenant and God’s promise assure us precisely of his faithfulness and call for our response in faith. God’s baptism signifies and seals to us the dependable promise of his covenant and is instituted for the strengthening of our faith. What God in full trustworthiness had instituted for the sake of our weakness was made into a matter of uncertainty.

In their *Position Statement*, the concerned ministers declared that since all the children of believers are covenant children and sanctified in Christ, “therefore the covenant promise of salvation is for all those children (Acts 2:39).” Here is no distinction between elect

children and reprobate children. Here is again spoken of *all* the children of believers. And here is not spoken of a *conditional* offer and an *unconditional* promise, but here is simply and clearly spoken about *the* promise of salvation. It is the one and only promise of God. The Scripture reference in the *Position Statement* is clear. On Pentecost Peter proclaimed: For the promise is to you and to your children . . . (Acts 2:39).

Indeed, it is no prediction or prophecy. It is a *promise*, but God’s promise is a tremendous reality. When God promised to Israel the land of Canaan, in this promise God gave the land. Israel had only to enter by faith.

God’s promise always comes with the command to believe. When God gives the promise “I am your God and the God of your children”, it implies the obligation that we should love and serve Him. God said to Abram: “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless (Gen 17:1). Our form of Baptism rightly says: In all covenants there are two parts, a promise and an obligation. And in the Canons of Dordt we confess:

The promise of the gospel is that whoever believes in Christ crucified shall not perish but have eternal life. This promise ought to be announced and proclaimed universally and without discrimination to all peoples and to all men to whom God in his good pleasure sends the gospel, together with the command to repent and believe (Chapter II, Article 5).

The promise of the gospel is to be proclaimed without discrimination, together with the command to believe. And this promise of the gospel is addressed to us personally within God’s covenant and the promise of the covenant is signed and sealed to us personally in holy baptism and comes to us together with the command to repent and believe.



#### 4. Covenant and baptism

We now come to the fourth topic in our discussion of the doctrinal aspects of the Liberation. It is the topic of covenant and baptism. Although baptism was not specifically mentioned in the doctrinal pronouncements, the words about the promise of the covenant and the expression “regenerated and sanctified in Christ” immediately make us think of baptism as sign and seal of God’s covenant and promise. We saw already that the *Elucidation* immediately following the doctrinal pronouncements in 1942 stated that the unconditional promise of salvation to the elect forms the special content of covenant and sacrament.<sup>22</sup> One may not identify the covenant with the position of all those who are baptized. There are those who only “receive the outward signs.”

In the *Pre-advice* it was stated that the sacraments assume faith, and that God speaks in them to his elect and believers. When Answer 74 of the Heidelberg Catechism says that the redemption from sin and the Holy Spirit, who works faith, are promised to infants no less than to adults, the *Pre-advice* takes this promise as “an assurance of a grace that is presumed to be present at baptism.”<sup>23</sup> In this way baptism became a sign and seal of internal grace that is presumed to be present in the heart of the child. Baptism became a sign and seal of presumed regeneration, precisely in the way Abraham Kuyper had taught it. However, now it was not simply a personal opinion that could be tolerated, but presumed regeneration as the special content and the ground of baptism became binding doctrine of the church.

We already saw that according to the *Pre-advice* the first baptismal question neglects those who are not elect. But it was remarkable and devastating that this synodical document continued by saying: “From this it can be derived that it (our Form of Baptism, J.F.) does not consider their baptism as a baptism in the full sense of the word.”<sup>24</sup> The baptism of non-elect children of believers is, therefore, according to Synod no baptism in the full sense of the word.

While we first saw that Synod by taking its starting point in God’s eternal election drew a wedge within God’s *one* covenant (there is according to Synod a twofold covenant) and continued by drawing a wedge within God’s *one* promise (there is according to Synod a twofold promise, namely a conditional offer and an unconditional



Dr. Klaas Schilder

promise), it ends by speaking about a twofold baptism, a baptism in the full sense for the elect children and a baptism in a less full sense for the non-elect.

There is the *subjective* condition of the children: they are elect or reprobate. There is also the *subjective* reaction: the children become believers or remain unbelievers. Now reasoning from the subjective condition or subjective reaction of the individuals involved, synod undermined and broke asunder the normative validity of God’s institutions.

***“Baptism is a sign and seal of God’s covenant and God’s promise. It is such a sign and seal for all the children of believers.”***

God’s covenant, God’s promise and God’s baptism are institutions of God and as such they have an unbreakable integrity. Synod did not see that there is a difference between *receiving* the sacraments and *using* the sacraments.

Not all those who *receive* the sacraments *use* them in faith. But when they do not use the sacrament in faith – for example, their baptism –, I may not conclude that they never received it or at least that they did not receive a baptism in the full sense of the word.

A final result was the Synodical statement in the case of candidate H.J. Schilder. When candidate Schilder, who was called by a congregation, at his classical examination refused to subscribe to the doctrinal pronouncements of 1942, synodical deputies stated “that the sacraments – if they are true sacraments – seal the faith that is

present.” They seal not possible faith but present faith. Synod added in the report: Not to accept that sacraments seal faith which is present brings one “in conflict with Art. 33 of the Belgic confession.”<sup>25</sup>

Now again, what did the six concerned ministers declare in their *Position Statement*? Well, they emphatically said “that for all those children the administration of baptism is a signing and sealing to them of the covenant of grace or this promise of salvation (Gen 17:11,13-14; Form of Baptism).”

Baptism is a sign and seal of God’s covenant and God’s promise. It is such a sign and seal for *all* the children of believers. Esau was circumcised as well as Jacob but he despised his birth right (Heb 12:16,17). And the apostle Paul writes that after God’s redemptive action in the exodus of our fathers from Egypt all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same supernatural food and all drank the same supernatural drink. . . . Nevertheless with most of them God was not pleased; for they were overthrown in the wilderness” (1 Cor 10:2,3,5).

Let us not fall prey to subjectivism! Instead, let us always honour God’s normative and trustworthy promise of the covenant and the integrity and validity of his sacraments.

The *Position Statement* of the concerned ministers and the stand taken by candidate H.J. Schilder strongly stressed this integrity of God’s sacraments and the validity of the *one* baptism of *all* children of believers.

#### 5. Covenant and responsibility

In my last point – covenant and responsibility – I simply want to show some of the practical implications of the different positions. If one lets the doctrine of election dominate the doctrine of God’s covenant, then the real or proper covenant is only established with the elect. One can then not speak about *breakers* of God’s covenant and one cannot then fully proclaim the threat of eternal damnation for children of the covenant.

If the unconditional promise of eternal salvation is only for the elect, one cannot proclaim that the good news has to meet with faith in the hearers and that the Israelites were unable to enter the promised land because of unbelief and warn for an evil ear of unbelief (Heb 3:12,19ff.).

Over against this practical deadly weakness of the synodical construction, the *Position Statement* ends with the following weighty warnings and they speak again about *all the children of believers*.

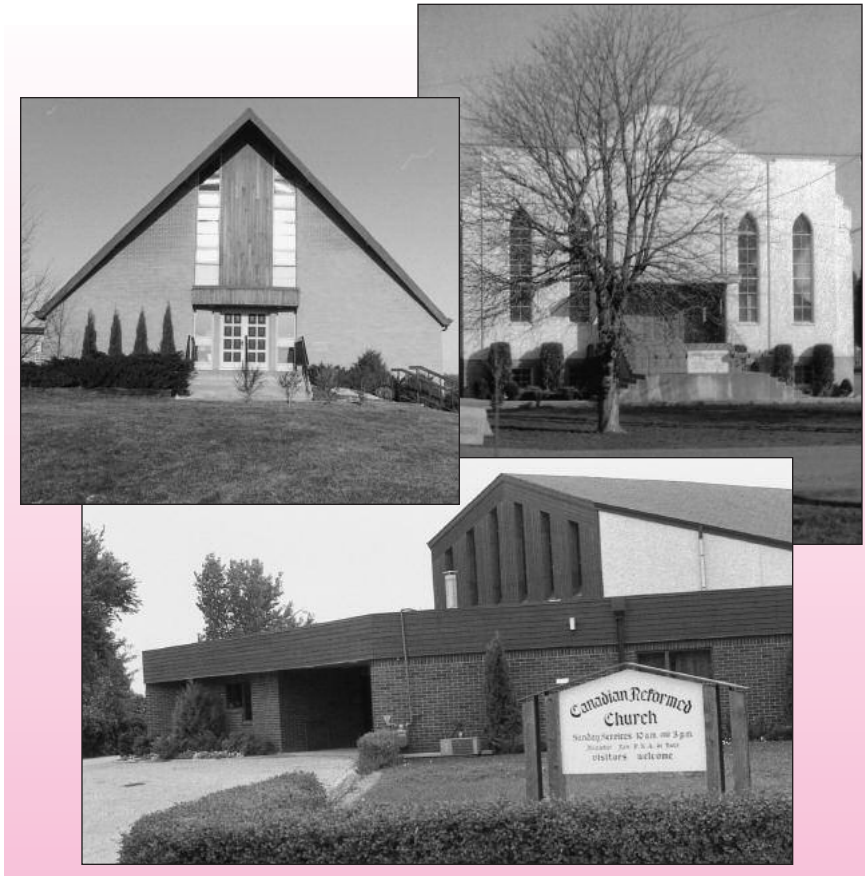
7. that therefore all these children are called very seriously to accept this promise of salvation by true faith (Heb 4:1);
8. that so many of them as accept this promise by true faith do so through the regenerating working of grace by the Holy Spirit, according to God's eternal election (Jer 24:7 and Ezek 11:19; 36:26,27);
9. that children who do not accept this promise with uprightness of heart for this reason will be punished as breakers of the covenant with a more severe punishment (Lev 26:15; cf. also Deut 31:20; Rom 11:28-30; Heb 12:25, cf. also 10:28-31);
10. that always should be kept in mind the admonition: take heed lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God (Heb 3:1,12).

When Synod Utrecht 1943 maintained its binding doctrinal pronouncements and applied unlawful disciplinary actions of suspension and deposition of professors, ministers, and elders, the Liberation had to follow. On the eleventh of August 1944, Dr. Klaas Schilder read to concerned Reformed confessors the Act of Liberation or Return; it was deliberately phrased after the Act of Secession a century ago.

### Conclusion

In the post World War II period of 1948-1952 a surprisingly large 41 percent of Dutch Canadian emigrants were Gereformeerd, while at that time only 19 percent of the Dutch populace belonged to the synodical and liberated Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. They came especially from agrarian provinces as Groningen and Overijssel.<sup>26</sup> Where could the liberated Reformed people find a place to worship? They did not want to be sectarian and to go into isolation.

The Christian Reformed Church of North America had already chosen the side of the synodical churches and disowned the liberated churches as a new denomination. The Protestant Reformed church accepted a binding doctrinal statement concerning the covenant of



grace that was similar to the Dutch synodical pronouncements. The liberated immigrants, therefore, were compelled to establish the Canadian Reformed and American Reformed churches which came together in a first General Synod in Homewood-Carman in 1954.<sup>27</sup>

***“Let us travel together as one company to the final destination of the catholic church: New Jerusalem.”***

They did not forget their Christian Reformed brothers and sisters and addressed them in official appeals in 1963 and 1977. They urged them not to follow the path chosen by the synodical Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and to break off this ecclesiastical contact.<sup>28</sup> They followed with great sympathy the reformational movement that led to the establishing of Orthodox Reformed and United Reformed Churches. In the present Synod of Fergus they will deal with proposals to strengthen the contact with a view to ecclesiastical union as expression of our unity in the true faith.

Brothers and sisters, we are not yet at the last station. Let us implore the

grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, and by that grace, love and fellowship let us travel together as one company to the final destination of the catholic church: New Jerusalem.

<sup>21</sup>Aalders et al., *Toelichting*, p. 21.

<sup>22</sup>Aalders et al., *Toelichting*, p. 21.

<sup>23</sup>*Praeadvies van Commissie I inzake de bezwaarschriften*, p. 12.

<sup>24</sup>*Praeadvies van Commissie I inzake de bezwaarschriften*, p. 24.

<sup>25</sup>See C. Veenhof, *In den chaos, Een woord over de huidige crisis in de Gereformeerde Kerken*, (Utrecht: Wristers, 1945), p. 47; H. J. Schilder, *Op de grens van kerk en secte*, (Rotterdam: Stichting De Vrije Kerk, 1948).

<sup>26</sup>R.P. Swierenga, “Pioneers for Jesus Christ: Dutch Protestant Colonization in North America as an Act of Faith” in G. Harinck and K. Krabbendam, eds., *Sharing the Reformed Tradition: The Dutch-North American Exchange, 1846-1996*, (Amsterdam: VU Uitgeverij, 1996), pp. 39-40.

<sup>27</sup>See W.W.J. Van Oene, *The Canadian Reformed Churches in Historical Perspective*, (Winnipeg: Premier, 1975) and J. De Haas, *And Replenish the Earth* (New Westminster: Covenant Publishing, 1987).

<sup>28</sup>See Th. Plantinga, ed., *Seeking Our Brothers in the Light: A Plea for Reformed Ecumenicity*, (Neerlandia: Inheritance, 1992), pp. 73-93 (The Appeal of 1963), pp. 95-121 (The Appeal of 1977).

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# Open Doors with Brother Andrew

By F.G. Oosterhoff

## Smuggling Bibles

Among the organizations that bring aid to the persecuted church is Open Doors International. It was founded by a Dutchman who has become known as Brother Andrew, and who began his work on behalf of persecuted believers by smuggling Bibles to countries behind the Iron Curtain. That work started in the 1950s but did not become widely known until the publication of his autobiography, entitled *God's Smuggler*, in 1967. Translated into twenty-seven languages and selling more than ten million copies, the book helped make people aware of the needs of Christians living in areas where Christianity is forbidden. Open Doors International now has offices in fifteen countries, operates in more than a hundred, employs 200 full-time workers, and considers the entire world to be its parish.

Royalties of the book, together with the increased financial support the project now receives, allowed for the purchase of office and warehouse space, the printing and buying of Christian literature in various languages, and the purchase and maintenance of vehicles to transport Bibles. The publication of his autobiography also meant, however, that the possibilities for Andrew himself to visit the Soviet bloc countries were severely restricted. That work had to be taken over by fellow-workers, while Andrew concentrated on new territory.

In the middle of the 1950s, however, that expansion still lay in the future. The work began as a one-man project. After a rather wild youth, Andrew experienced a conversion when he was 21, and at that very moment resolved to follow God wherever He would lead him. He was thinking of missionary work and prepared for it by attending a missionary school in Scotland – a stint that was rather demanding because he had only an elementary education. After graduating in 1955, he visited a communist youth rally in Poland and became acquainted with Christians in that country. Realizing their sense of being deserted by their fellow-believers in the free world, he concluded that God's goal for him was to serve the persecuted church worldwide.

## The mandate

Specifically, he would provide what the suffering believers needed and wanted most, namely Bibles in their language. He would do so by personally visiting them, regardless of the dangers to his own safety, for he realized how much the simple presence of a fellow-believer from the free world meant to them in their isolation. To this mandate Brother Andrew has stuck for the almost forty-five years since his first trip to Poland. It continues to be the mandate of Open Doors International.

The beginning years of Andrew's mission are described in his autobiography, a book that deservedly became a best-seller and continues to be very much worth reading. Its chapters are filled with accounts of adventures and dangers, and throughout give witness of the power of faith, which can and did move mountains. In that early period Andrew (and those who in due time came to help him) concentrated on communist-dominated eastern Europe, although trips were made to communist China and Cuba as well. With the collapse of communism in Europe, the centre of attention has shifted more and more to areas outside Europe. They

again include Cuba and China, as well as other communist countries in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. More and more attention is being given to missionary work in the Islamic Middle East as well.

## Worldwide mission

Last year Brother Andrew turned 70. That same year saw the publication of a book that can be considered the sequel to *God's Smuggler*. It is entitled *For the Love of My Brothers*, and describes the work of Brother Andrew and Open Doors International since the year 1967. This book concentrates on the work in Latin America, communist Asia, and the Muslim world, and, like *God's Smuggler*, makes good reading. In addition to descriptions of the actual work, it gives much information about the approach to be followed in penetrating, for example, such a hermetically closed region as the Muslim Middle East. Striking is Andrew's insistence upon the commandment of love for one's enemy, whether that enemy is a communist or a Mohammedan. The book also gives much attention to the declining numbers of Christians in the Muslim world, a result of the fact that, in order to escape the persecutions, many are leaving the area. Brother Andrew wants to counteract this trend and tries to persuade Christians to continue their witness for Christ, even if this means suffering and possibly death.

The two books I have reviewed here are highly recommended. Missionaries and evangelists can learn much from them, and so can Christian believers in general. For as Brother Andrew reminds his readers, God opens doors for Christians to serve him not only in missionary work, but in their everyday lives – in their homes, schools, neighbourhoods, and workplaces. Not in the last place, they are to pray for their suffering fellow-believers and in other ways support the work that is done on behalf of the persecuted church.

*continued on page 129*

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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## The Future of Canadian Reformed Schools

Prof. C. Van Dam addresses a vital concern for our schools – how do we maintain enough qualified Reformed teachers. Our community has a long and vested interest in our Christian schools. In the interests of the great love for Christian education and our Reformed schools, a couple of comments are in order.

The author's first point is "The need of Reformed teachers . . . lies the greatest challenge for the future viability of our schools." Prof. Van Dam uses the word Reformed many times and may have a fetish with the character and qualification of teachers. To me, the character and faith of teachers is determined by the preaching of God's Word, and the faith of our church community.

The second point is his unusual point of view that school boards hire only teachers who have attended our teachers' college (or promise to earn its diploma). This view may be discriminatory and give a bad taste to many. I agree wholeheartedly that the College has done a phenomenal job in the past 17 years, and has done a great service for our community. We can build on this.

I would briefly like to observe the following:

1. Mandatory schooling at the teacher's college, as part of a closed system, may be counter-productive in the long run.
2. Secular university training is unfortunately necessary in our society. Are all professionals tainted by this education?
3. Are school boards doing their utmost to make our schools an attractive workplace? Are they fully supportive of teachers and incorporate their professional requirements? These are major factors in viability.

The availability of qualified Reformed teachers is vital for our Christian education. Yet two questions remain: Why are there currently no students at our college? Which direction

should we take for the training of our teachers? We need a collective effort to address these issues.

Harry Alkema  
Burlington, ON

## Enthusiasm or propaganda?

Re: "The Future of Canadian Reformed Schools" by C. Van Dam (Feb. 5, 1999).

I realize that this editorial was stimulated by an agenda – the promotion of Covenant Teachers' College. As such the reader has to allow for a certain level of unsubstantiated enthusiasm. However, the author has not escaped the danger of all promotion activity i.e. degeneration into propaganda. In contrast to promotion, propaganda is both unsubstantiated and hurtful to other people. This article is demeaning to teachers who have not gone to our college and yet have meant and are meaning a great deal for Reformed Education in Canada.

I have been in the Canadian Reformed system 21 years, both as teacher and as principal, and I have learned that the training of a teacher is of secondary importance to the personality, the motivation, and the professional dedication of a teacher.

I am afraid this editorial will achieve the opposite of what it is intended for.

Henk Van Beelen  
Smithers, B.C.

Please mail, e-mail or fax letters for publication to the editorial address.

They should be 300 words or less. Those published may be edited for style or length.

Please include address and phone number.



Let me conclude this review by quoting from the Open Doors International Vision Statement, as given in an Appendix to *For the Love of My Brothers*. The goals of the organization are:

*To strengthen the body of Christ living under restriction or persecution by providing and delivering Bibles, materials, training and other helps, and encouraging it to become involved in world evangelism.*

*To train and encourage the body of Christ in threatened or unstable areas, to prepare believers to face persecution and suffering, and to equip them to maintain a witness to the gospel of Christ.*

*To motivate, mobilize, and educate the church in the free world to identify with and become more involved in assisting the suffering church, believing that when "one members suffers, all the members suffer with it" (1 Corinthians 12:26, NKJV).*

## BOOKS REVIEWED:

- Brother Andrew, with John and Elizabeth Sherrill, *God's Smuggler*. Penguin Books, 1967.
- Brother Andrew, with Verne Becker, *For the Love of My Brothers*. Bethany House Publishers, 1998. This is a revised and expanded edition of *The Calling*, by the same author and co-author, which was published in 1996.

These books are available at most Christian bookstores, and also from Open Doors offices in Australia, Canada, the United States:

PO Box 53, Seaforth, NSW 2092, Australia	PO Box 597 Streetsville, Ontario L5M 2C1 Canada.	PO Box 27001 Santa Ana, CA 92779 USA
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Dr. Oosterhoff is a retired teacher of history living in Hamilton, Ontario.



# The Light of the Gospel in the Land of the Mayas (first of two articles)

By C. Van Dam

During the first part of last December, I was privileged to be in Mexico again. As previously, the occasion was an invitation to give lectures. This was in a sense a follow-up of my visit in May, 1997 (as reported in *Clarion* in July 1997), but this time I would also visit churches of the Independent Presbyterian Church of Mexico (IPCM) in the Yucatan Peninsula. I was asked to give lectures at the John Knox Bible Institute in Campeche and the Revelation Bible Institute in Tabasco and speak in a congregation or two while visiting this part of Mexico and then give lectures in Mexico City at the John Calvin Seminary.

Besides being asked to give lectures, there was another reason why I was asked to visit the southeast. The IPCM would like to awaken Canadian Reformed interest in this area of Mexico. The 1998 Synod of the IPCM officially endorsed the proposal of Dr. P.Y. De Jong and Dr. J.P. Roberts for mission in Mexico ("An Appeal to Faithful Reformed and Presbyterian Churches: A Vision for Mexico"). In that proposal, it is suggested that the Canadian Reformed Churches join the IPCM in this region by, for example, helping to equip Mexicans as preachers of the gospel. The Synod also accepted as a basic framework that the IPCM would first establish fraternal relations with a faithful church before entering into any cooperative agreement with that church.

Unfortunately the lecture part of the plans for the southeast fell through at the last minute when my expert translator, Dr. J.P. Roberts, was prevented from accompanying me through that portion of my trip due to the serious illness of his mother, Dr. Laureta Roberts. With charter fare airline tickets that could not be changed there was no turning back and so the trip went ahead. However, I was not disappointed with what could be accomplished. Meeting the ministers, elders and deacons and speaking to the members of the churches enabled me



Rev. Gabriel Josue Tah y Noh in front of the Mount Sinai church in Merida.

to gain some valuable first impressions of how these churches fare and function. Also, I was able to speak briefly to congregations with the help of local translators. In this article, I would like to share my findings of what I saw of the work of the Lord in southeast Mexico.

## Merida

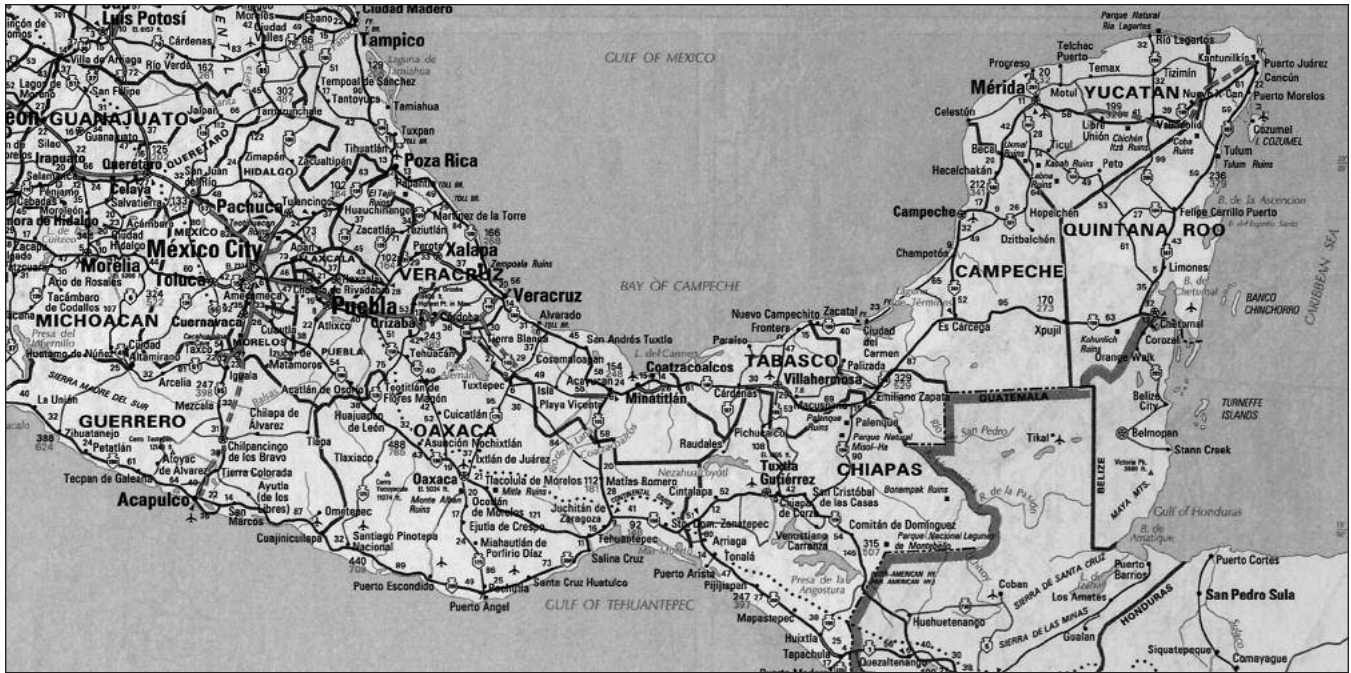
It was late on a warm humid Friday night (Dec 4, 1998) that I arrived in Merida and was enthusiastically greeted at the airport by the Rev. Josué Gabriel Tah y Noh and his wife Christina and two of their three children. It was a great pleasure to enjoy their gracious hospitality for the next few days.

The city of Merida, founded by the Spanish in 1542 on the ruins of a conquered Mayan city, is situated in the northern part of the Yucatan and is a mecca for tourists who seek the sun and the archaeological sights of southeast Mexico. This very Roman Catholic city, which boasts Mexico's oldest cathedral, is also a place where a faithful Presbyterian congregation lives,

works and worships. This is "El Monte Sinai" (the Mount Sinai) IPCM church pastored by Rev. Tah y Noh. It is the only IPCM congregation in the state of Yucatan and so lives in relative isolation from others who are in the same bond of churches.

The city of Merida, as any city, has its well-to-do areas and its poorer districts. The church is located in the latter and as is the case with more churches I visited, the church is added on to or improved as funds allow. The brightly painted facade announces the schedule of activities for the week. (These can be seen on the right of the photograph.) On Sunday, Sunday School commences at 9:00 a.m. and Public Worship is at 10:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. On Monday, the Women's Society meets at 7:00 p.m. and on Wednesday Bible Study is held at the same hour. At 7:30 on Friday evening there is worship and prayer. Saturdays is set aside for social activities. Because we were elsewhere on Sunday, I did not meet this congregation which numbers twenty-two families.





Rev. Tah y Noh is a senior minister in the IPCM who served as president of the last held synod. I presented him with a copy of our *Book of Praise and Yearbook*. Rev. Tah y Noh has also trained as a lawyer and is fluent in the ancient Mayan language. Indeed, he is a full fledged descendant of the ancient Mayas who once had built amazingly sophisticated cities in the Yucatan Peninsula.

### Chichén Itza and the religion of the serpent

We visited the sprawling (four and a half square kilometre) archaeological site of the Mayan-Toltec city of Chichén Itza, a site first inhabited in the third century A.D. The present ruins date from the tenth to eleventh century AD and the site was abandoned in about 1200-1250 AD. Dominating the ceremonial area is the great pyramid of Kukulcán. While much is unknown or disputed about these grand ruins, one thing is certain, on top of the large pyramid (as well as elsewhere on the site) human hearts were regularly sacrificed and needed to be sacrificed. The ancient Mayas lived in constant fear. Unless they propitiated the gods and performed ceremonies to avert disaster, the rains could stop and the sun might not rise again. All ancient Mesoamericans practised human sacrifice and the Mayas were no different. Altars for receiving the still-beating human heart can still be seen as also the “well of sacrifices”, a large pool of water set deep in a limestone formation. This

was seen as the mouth of the netherworld and human sacrifices were thrown into it. The Mayans appear to have comforted themselves with some sort of belief in reincarnation.

One of the bitter ironies in this culture and religion so dominated by death is that the chief god, Quetzalcoatl, is pictured as a feathered serpent. You can see this god slithering as it were down the pyramid. Each side of the main flight of stairs ends on ground level with the open jaws of a ferocious serpent head. As the guide explained it, the (serpent) god comes down from above to bless his people. . . . The pyramid is built in such a way that at the

equinox (March 21 and September 23) the rays of the rising sun hit the nine rounded corners of the pyramid’s edge in such a way that the shadow they cast on the ramp forms the body of snake. The serpent is the Mayan symbol of everything good: healing, learning, hope and life, but it demanded unending sacrifices, especially of living human hearts. Indeed, wars were fought to procure more heart sacrifices. In a sense the Mayas had unwittingly chosen the right creature to represent their deity for it demanded so much death and gave so little in return, only more darkness and bondage to fear.



*The Kukulcán Pyramid at Chichen-Itza*





Part of the congregation in the village of Emiliano Zapata

It was a touching experience to visit this most impressive pagan site with direct descendants of these ancient Mayans and speak about the victory over that evil serpent, the devil, who led mankind astray and who still deceives the world, but who has been conquered by our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Rev 12:9; 20:1-10). What a privilege for Rev. Tah y Noh and others to preach the pure gospel to the Mayas today. Rome never gave that gospel to the Yucatan but merely promoted a mixture of Romish and pagan superstitions which persist to this day in the popular religion and culture of the vast majority of people.

### Campeche

Early Sunday morning, Rev. Tah y Noh and I set off for a two and a half hour drive to the village of Emiliano Zapata in Tenabo in the Campeche hills. It was a picturesque drive through the flat tropical plains of the Yucatan. When we reached the state border and entered Campeche from Yucatan we were stopped at a military checkpoint. They were apparently looking for weapons and drugs and made a thorough search also of our luggage (which we had with us for our overnight stay in Campeche on Sunday evening).

### Emiliano Zapata

The village of Emiliano Zapata is isolated but well known to Rev. Tah y Noh. He served the IPCM's "El Spiritu Sancto" (the Holy Spirit) Church here for twelve years before coming to Merida seven years ago. This church has forty-five families with twelve ordained elders and

appears to be a vibrant fellowship. The pastor is Rev. Serafín Gallegos Caraveo. It is interesting to note that this is the only church in the village. This seems to be due to the fact that this is a fairly new village and like-minded families got together to start it. The present church is their second building (built in 1980). Most of the congregation works in agriculture and one or two are in advanced managerial positions.

When we arrived, adult Sunday school was in progress and the class was dealing with marriage and life style issues. Although I only understood in part, it was clear that the holiness and distinctiveness of Christian marriage was stressed. After this class was over, the children recited their memory work for that week in small groups before the congregation. Here and also elsewhere, I was struck by how neatly everyone was dressed. It was strictly Sunday best! Also, when people see each other in church, they greet each other with a handshake, also the young people among themselves.

The morning worship service started with a responsive reading of Psalm 113. The singing was very boisterous and lively! It was congregational singing! Many children and infants were present in the worship service and let their presence be known! Rev. Tah y Noh preached on Ps 24:1 and 1 Chronicles 29:10-13 ("The earth is the Lord's and everything in it"). After the sermon, I was given an opportunity to address the congregation and say something of Canada. Through Rev. Tah y Noh as interpreter, I spoke briefly of the Canadian Re-

formed Churches, expressed the sense of privilege to be in their midst and wished them the Lord's blessing. They asked me to convey their best wishes to the Canadian Reformed Churches.

One thing that struck me in speaking with the people is that education beyond the middle of high school is very difficult for these people to acquire because one has to leave the village for that and who can afford it?

### The city of Campeche

After enjoying a hot lunch of soup, chicken and tortillas in a Mayan hut of an elder of the church we headed for the city of Campeche which is on the Gulf of Mexico. In late afternoon we here attended the "Jesus el Cordero de Dios" (Jesus, the Lamb of God) Church of Rev. Alfonso Ucán Gonzalez. This church has thirty-three families and their building (the annex) is still under construction. People apparently come quite early to church and love to socialize outside the building prior to the service. We also arrived about an hour prior to the service and shortly afterwards the young people met for their Bible study.

Once again the worship service had all the components of a Reformed worship service and was characterized by much exuberant and joyful singing. There was also good participation by the elders in the liturgy. Several sat on the stage and in turn read passages of Scripture. Rev. Tah y Noh, as guest minister, preached a sermon on Titus 3:4-7. He dealt with the order of salvation and the involvement of the triune God in our redemption. This strong doctrinal sermon included application for the Christian life. Just as in the morning sermon, he referred again to the great struggle in the 16th century Reformation for the purity of doctrine. Let the Word stand! Salvation is in Christ alone! Furthermore, he stressed the significance of being church of Jesus Christ.

In the course of the worship service there was a special musical presentation with electric guitar, drums and cymbals. Such a special presentation apparently occurs once every four or five weeks and is done in part for evangelistic purposes. The electric guitar seems to be a popular musical instrument for accompanying worship services in Mexico. It is inexpensive and portable with enough volume for congregational accompaniment.

Also in this worship service I was asked to address the congregation briefly which I did, speaking on God's



*Some of the young people prior to their meeting in the Jesus, the Lamb of God Church in Campeche. Rev. Tah y Noh is on the extreme left.*

sovereignty and grace in calling us to be his children. They asked me to pass on the greetings to the Canadian Reformed Churches.

The service (which lasted over two hours) was concluded with a short hymn-request session. The IPCM has their own hymnal and they are understandably attached to it. Attempts to introduce the Genevan tunes into the Spanish speaking world have by and large not been successful. There are now 42 Psalms in Spanish set to Genevan tunes which are used in some Reformed churches in Spain. This *Libro de Alabanzas* or *Book of Praise* is published by Fundación Editorial de Literatura Reformada (FELiRe), an organization established by "Spanje Commissie" in the Netherlands but now also with an office in Barcelona. FELiRe hopes to be able to produce a CD of these Psalms in the future to continue to encourage their use in worship in the Spanish-speaking world.

After the service we had the great pleasure of meeting Rev. Gonzalez and his wife Esther (and their three children) over supper. This minister indicated that a high priority for him was Reformed literature in Spanish.

The next day, Monday, Rev. Tah y Noh and I visited the other two churches of the IPCM in the city of Campeche. First we visited Rev. Manuel D. Martín Herrera of the "El Divino Jesus" (Divine Jesus) Church. This is the oldest IPCM congregation in the city and they have a beautiful church building with two floors. The first floor has the church auditorium and the top floor is full of spacious classrooms and well-equipped offices. This is where the classes for the John Knox Institute are held. More about that later.

Rev. Martín is also a senior minister and was the secretary of the last Synod. In our speaking together, Rev. Martín at a

certain point volunteered to tell me what he thought the two most pressing needs of the IPCM were. The first was that there should be more educational opportunities (in general and not just for theology) for the young people. Support is needed for providing educational opportunities so that the church members can more effectively do their duty in society in the service of God. This was precisely the point that I had been contemplating in Emeliano Zapata and here was a city minister saying the same thing. The second need he stressed was the establishing of new churches in the countryside and in the city. Evangelistic work is important because Mexico needs reformation. Although the IPCM Presbytery of the Southeast is small, doors are opening for the preaching of the gospel and the opportunities should be seized. There are many possibilities but our strength is limited. Please help us!

It was striking that our next visit illustrated one of the points that Rev. Martín made about the opportunities that need to be seized. Our next stop was the construction site of the new Philadelphia Church of Rev. Ishmael Caamal Ek. This is a young church of 25 families which has set its sights high. It is a congregation that is aggressive in evangelizing and is therefore building a church which is very large for the present size of the congregation. They hope to have the first floor ready by February and they assured me that the pulpit would be in the centre! The church is beautifully located, high on a hill, which gives it excellent exposure to that part of the city. There is a partial basement with two classrooms. As they put it, they hope and pray that the Lord will use them to guide his elect in this part of the city to the true worship of his name. Presently this church is worshipping on the construction site in a "lean-to". It was very heartening to see so much evangelistic enthusiasm for the Reformed faith!



*Rev. Manuel D. Martín Herrera in front of the Divine Jesus Church in Campeche. Here the classes of the John Knox Bible Institute are held.*



Besides the three churches in the city of Campeche, there are also three IPCM mission posts, each with a missionary. The churches are very upbeat about expansion as there is great interest in the city for the Reformed faith. Indeed, it appears that one of the mission posts can soon be upgraded to a full-fledged congregation.

### The John Knox Bible Institute

The city of Campeche is also the site of the John Knox Bible Institute. The home of this institute is, as mentioned earlier, the church where Rev. Martín is pastor. This Institute is the training for the ministry for the churches in the states of Yucatan (Merida) and Campeche, an area comprising the Presbytery of the Southeast. Just like their John Calvin Seminary in Mexico City, they require High School for admission, but the standards in John Calvin Seminary are higher. The Presbytery of the Southeast requires of theological students a minimum of completing the course of study at John Knox but students can also attend John Calvin Seminary. At the moment there are six students at John Knox.

The teaching is mainly done by the ministers of the full-fledged congregations in the city of Campeche. Rev. Gonzalez teaches homiletics and symbolics; Rev. Manuel D. Martín Herrera teaches dogmatics and Old and New Testament and his wife, Mrs. Martín, teaches sects; and finally, Rev. Nehemias Kantún Canul teaches church history and also serves as director of the Institute.

This school does not pay any of the teachers since they are supported by the churches they serve. They have hopes to invite visiting professors from time to time but there is no money for that as yet.

### Nohakal

Our next stop was a visit to Nohakal in the countryside of Campeche where we visited Rev. Marcelino Vazquez Aké, a 1993 graduate of the John Knox Institute, and saw his church, "Jesus la Luz del Mundo" (Jesus the Light of the World). Because this village is within a reasonable drive of the city of Campeche, this congregation of 95 families has an interesting mix. There is a medical doctor, lawyer, two accountants and a teacher who work in the city of Campeche but live here or are at least here on Saturdays and Sundays. There are also about four or five university students from this village studying in the city of Campeche. This congregation also has many young fami-



*Rev. Isidoro Chán Guillermo in front of the Immanuel church in Triunfo. His son, Erasmo, is on the right.*

lies. The Sunday School has an enrollment of 150 children.

Although the congregation has some unique characteristics which relate it to the city, yet it is still a village congregation. The pastor teaches in both the Mayan language (which is alive and well in many villages) and Spanish. Also, Rev. Aké related with great enthusiasm how next year all the churches of the Presbytery of the Southeast would be invited to his village for the twenty-fifth anniversary celebration of the Presbytery of the Southeast. It would be a big party and four bulls would be slaughtered!

We had a very pleasant visit with Rev. Vazquez Aké. In the course of the discussions, it was noteworthy that even though his village has a number of university students, he mentioned that scholarships for students would be greatly desirable and he even remarked that it would be good to have a scholarship to send a student to Hamilton.

After this visit, we set out for the return trip to Merida through the beautiful Campeche countryside. Due to time pressures, we were not able to visit more congregations and pastors although we passed at least two within a few miles of their respective villages. Most of the IPCM congregations in this presbytery are rural. (This is also the case for the other two presbyteries.)

### Triunfo

Once back in Merida Erasmo, the son of Rev. Isidoro Chán Guillermo of Triunfo, was waiting. Erasmo had come

to accompany me to Triunfo, a large village only about 20 kilometres as the crow flies from the Guatemala border. To do this we took the overnight (first class) bus to Balancan where we arrived at 5 in the morning. It was interesting to come to this small town in the middle of the quiet Tabasco countryside just before daybreak. The first vehicular traffic we saw was a burro pulling a wagon to pick up local passengers from the bus station. Since we still had about fifty kilometres to go, this mode of transport did not quite fit our needs. However, in tropical Mexico, businesses often open at six and we were soon on our way in a taxi.

In Triunfo, we were enthusiastically greeted by Rev. Isidoro Chán Guillermo and his wife Mirna. He pastors the "Emmanuel" IPCM church which has about 20 families and three elders. There appears to be a wide variety of professions represented in this congregation. Two members are teachers in a large regional secondary technical school located just outside Triunfo and one teaches basic computer skills at a regional college in another town.

Rev. Chán and his congregation are part of the Presbytery of the Rivers, so named because of the broad rivers running through this part of Mexico. This presbytery has 8 full-fledged churches (and 32 mission posts) and runs the Revelation Bible Institute which presently has 12 students studying for the ministry. The subjects are taught by different pastors. Because of the generally poor economic situation,



these students can take many years to complete their studies as they balance their desire to finish their studies as soon as possible with the need to have an income.

Rev. Chán had organized a congregational meeting that evening in which he preached on Romans 7. I was then asked to speak to the congregation which I did telling something of the Canadian Reformed Churches and wishing them the Lord's blessings.


### Palenque

The next morning at six, Rev. Chán and I boarded a second class bus to begin our journey to Palenque. It was an interesting experience to mingle with a

cross-section of the population at the beginning of the day. The bus was full with students going to school in Balancán, women who had shopping to do and men who held jobs outside Triunfo. After some stops and a military checkpoint and having passed at least one IPCM mission post, we were let out in what seemed like the middle of nowhere. It was, however, the border with the state of Chiapas. Apparently the bus from the state of Tabasco did not have license to go further. In any case, there was a wide variety of taxis and vans waiting and eager to take on passengers to wherever you wanted to go from there. We headed for Palenque where we met Prof. Misaél Custodio

from John Calvin Seminary in Mexico City. Later that day he would accompany me to Mexico City and Rev. Chán would return to Triunfo.

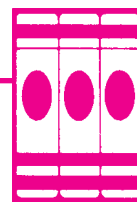
At Palenque we visited the impressive Mayan ruins (dating from 600-800 AD) situated on a mountain plateau in the tropical rainforests on the edge of the Sierra Madre de Chiapas. Also here the need for constant human sacrifices was a fact of Mayan culture and religion. Seeing Palenque reaffirmed again the marvel of the light of true gospel penetrating this beautiful land.

From Palenque, Prof. Custodio and I took a long bus ride to Villahermosa from where we flew to Mexico City. 

## BOOK REVIEW

By F.G. Oosterhoff

# A Critique of Western Civilization



**Michael W. Kelley. *The Impulse of Power: Formative Ideals of Western Civilization*. Minneapolis: Contra Mundum Books (PO Box 32652, Spring Lake Park, MN 55432-0652, USA), 1998; paperback, 309 pages \$ 19 US.**


Dr. Kelley pursues a two-fold goal. He wants to oppose the postmodern rejection of western civilization in favour of multiculturalism. With all its blemishes, our culture, he believes, is "the greatest culture that history so far has known" and is therefore to be treasured "with affection and gratitude." Yet he is convinced that the blemishes are real, and the burden of his book is a critique of the manner in which a Christian civilization has allowed pagan and other non-biblical influences to corrupt the biblical message. In the process he criticizes, *inter alia*, the ideas and influence of Greek poets and philosophers, the monastic system and scholastic learning of the Middle Ages, and the "new paganism" of Renaissance, Enlightenment, and Romanticism.

There is a great deal of truth in the author's critiques, and Christians who want to understand and evaluate their culture can learn from them. Important, for example, is Kelley's stress on

the fact that a covenantal relationship exists between God and man, and that in this relationship it is God who sets the agenda. In his cultural efforts, as indeed in all of life, man therefore must be informed not by human wisdom but by revelation – a point that the author emphasizes throughout. He makes it clear that a "renewal" of our culture by a simple return to the old synthesis between Christianity and humanism cannot work. Christians, he insists, must take seriously the cultural implications of the covenantal relationship.

Although I have no hesitation in recommending the book, I have to raise a number of questions as well. For one thing, I believe that the author fails to contextualize properly, and as a result paints developments too much in black and white. It is true, for example, that Greek and Hellenistic ideas affected early Christianity, but was that really avoidable? Christianity arose in the world of ancient Greece and Rome, and Christian thinkers could not be expected to turn their back on their culture. That in the attempt to integrate classical culture with Christianity errors were made is unquestionable, but, considering the context, can we really point fingers at these early Christians?

I also have problems with the author's dismissal of medieval monasticism as pure pagan gnosticism, and with his concluding remark that, "for the most part, it entailed a piety devoid of practical consequences for what Scripture calls the Kingdom of God." No one who has seriously studied medieval history can affirm this; nor would most Reformed historians (and church historians) any longer agree with this kind of judgment. The great and positive contributions of the Christian Middle Ages (and of medieval monasticism) to western culture are more and more emphasized in our circles, and rightly so. Similarly, I wonder about the accuracy of the statement that the biblical view of man "has rarely been understood, much less declared, by those who claim to be Christians, now or in the past," and that consequently it has not made much of an impact on the formation of our culture. Qualifications here and elsewhere would have greatly enhanced the author's persuasiveness. The book would also have benefitted from careful editing.

Having said this, I repeat that Kelley has provided us with an analysis of western culture that is often helpful, and that deserves our critical attention. 



## A Dutch Synod

A recent edition of *Nederlands Dagblad* reported on the synod of the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken (CGKN), held in the town of Nunspeet last fall. Some important decisions were made which may be of interest to our readers. The CGKN maintain a sister church relationship with the Free Reformed Churches in North America (FRCNA), and this relationship is quite close in the area of calling ministers. The FRCNA do not have their own seminary. The CGKN maintain a seminary in Apeldoorn, Holland.

### Relation to other churches

The most noteworthy decision of the synod was to break off all discussions with the Netherlands Reformed Churches (NGK), formerly the group of churches "outside the federation" (Dutch: "buitenverband") of the Reformed Churches (RCN Lib). According to the report in *Nederlands Dagblad* the central issue leading to the break up of the relationship was the issue of women in the diaconate. Just prior to the synod, the NGK had decided to permit women in the diaconate. The issue of "women in office" as a whole is also in discussion in both church federations. A book dealing with the issue was recently published with contributors from several Reformed churches, including our sister churches.

Meanwhile the tie with the RCN (Lib) was strengthened. The deputies of

the CGKN received the mandate to continue the discussions with the Liberated churches. At the synod, Dr. A. N. Hendriks, fraternal delegate of the RCN (Lib) and chairman of the Deputies for Ecclesiastical Unity, raised the possibility of forming a temporary federative bond between the two church federations. The suggestion for some form of federational connection had been made earlier by a professor of the CGKN, Dr. W. Van 't Spijker. Hendriks' endorsement of the suggestion clearly included a limitation to just the two churches without any additional partners at present. However, it represents a major step forward that the Liberated churches officially declare themselves willing to enter into that form of a relationship.


The suggestion of Hendriks caught the synod by surprise. "Is this not a curse in your own churches?" asked one of the CGKN delegates. Hendriks had formulated the suggestion this way: "Now that we have reached agreements on the appropriation of salvation, on the confessions of the church, on Scriptural authority and our position with regard to the Netherlands Reformed Churches (NGK), how can we move ahead?" Only in this frame of reference was the suggestion made with the added note: "If this is currently not possible let's be creative enough to develop some smaller steps and give them some content."

### Some comments

All this represents a remarkable step forward which has implications for our situation as well. It would be a wonderful gift if we could come to the same understanding with our Free Reformed brothers here in North America regarding the appropriation of salvation as has been reached by the brothers in Holland. And we need to keep thinking about various possibilities open to us and so move ahead with other federations, especially the United Reformed Churches. If the Lord grants agreement on fundamental points, then we need to find ways to make these agreements come to life in concrete proposals of further cooperation and mutual commitment. Let us continue to work and pray for these ends!

### Other developments

The CGKN synod also discussed the point whether some form of psychological testing would not be appropriate for candidates contemplating the entry into the ministry. The reason for the proposal was to be found in the fact that a number of young ministers have ended up in very "difficult circumstances" because they were not mentally prepared for the transition to the pastorate. Currently our Dutch sister churches maintain the psychological test for candidates who plan to become missionaries going overseas.

The Deputies for Ecclesiastical Unity of our Dutch churches, RCN (Lib), suggested that some form of arrangement of formal contact be developed with both the CGKN and the NGK, even if a full union does not look possible. The deputies are pleading for another stage of contact in their relations with these Reformed churches. The deputies feel that even though ecclesiastical discussions are not possible, it is beneficial to retain some form of ecclesiastical contact. Deputies have submitted their proposals to the forthcoming synod of Leusden in 1999. 

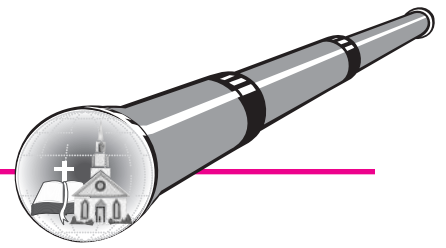


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# Observation Deck

By J. VanRietschoten

## The Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America (continued)

Since the time of writing the previous "Observation Deck," a change has taken place in the fraternal relations of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America (RPCNA) with other Reformed Churches. At their last synod the relation with the Christian Reformed Church was suspended. It seems that the full break will not come about until a majority of the presbyteries have approved the suspension.

Earlier I promised to touch on some distinctives of the RPCNA. One item which sets the RPCNA apart from other Presbyterian bodies is the way they dealt with the *Westminster Confession*. Some Presbyterian bodies have made changes in the confession. The RPCNA has not done so. Rather than adapting the text to the demands of our modern times they have retained the old text of 1648. However, in parallel columns with the *Westminster Confession* the RPCNA has printed their *Testimony* (adopted in 1980). In the *Explanation to the Testimony* (par. 9-10) the RPCNA writes concerning the *Westminster Confession* and the *Testimony*:

- The truth it presents is of inestimable value for contemporary society.
- However, changes in the application of truth are needed because of changing situations in each generation. Some current topics of vital importance for the Christian Church were unknown in the 17th century. Therefore, the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America presents its *Testimony* applying Scripture truth to the contemporary situation.

A distinctive much emphasized in RPCNA writings about worship is the exclusive singing of Psalms without instrumental accompaniment. In *The Directory for the Worship of God* ch. 2 par 1 (adopted 1945) we read:

The singing of praise is an ordinance of worship and is expressed in words set to music. The Psalms of the Bible, by reason of their excellence and their Divine inspiration and appointment are to be sung in the worship of God, to the exclusion of all songs and hymns of human composition. They are to be sung without the accompaniment of instruments, inasmuch as these are not authorized in the New Testament. The metrical versions of the Psalms used in the praise of God shall be such as may be approved from time to time by the church.

It is my understanding that the RPCNA makes this distinctive a must for unity in worship with other Reformed churches. For that reason it is necessary that two items be thoroughly discussed. The minor of the two is the question whether other hymnal parts of the Bible are allowed to be sung in worship, or only the 150 psalms. The major of the two concerns the use of instruments in accompaniment of the singing. This is the major of the two because of the reason the RPCNA gives for excluding instruments. The reason quoted above is "inasmuch as these are not authorized in the New Testament." Since the RPCNA makes such a strong case of forbidding instrumental

support of the singing in worship, this matter should be dealt with in a separate article. Space in this column is limited.

Another item which I promised to touch on is the *National Reform Association*. This organization is not part of the RPCNA proper. The membership and executive in the main are from the RPCNA but contain also members from other Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Strangely, the *Minutes of the Synod* of the RPCNA of 1997 list the NRA on page 240 under *the offices* of the church. The NRA also reported to Synod. This report is printed on page 214 ff. of the *Minutes*. The NRA requested synod to appoint three delegates to attend their annual business meeting. To us who follow the *Church Order of Dordt*, this is a strange procedure. The NRA is a worthwhile Christian political organization which aims at reforming the polity of the state. The business of the NRA is subject to God's Word and the teaching of the church. This does not make the business of the NRA ecclesiastical. It will be interesting to know how this procedure has grown historically within the RPCNA. I called the work of the NRA worthwhile – and it is. Much more could, and should, be written about the NRA. For now, let me pass on that they publish a magazine called *The Christian Statesman*. The NRA recently also published a book, *Explicitly Christian Politics, the Vision of the National Reform Association*. The book is edited by W. O. Einwechter and published in 1997 by the Christian Statesman Press. In the report to the synod of the RPCNA the mission of the NRA is stated as follows:

The mission of the National Reform Association is to maintain and promote in our national life the Christian principles of civil government, which include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Jesus Christ is Lord in all aspects of life, including civil government. Jesus Christ is, therefore, the Ruler of Nations, and should be explicitly confessed as such in any constitutional documents.
2. The civil ruler is to be a servant of God, he derives his authority from God and he is duty-bound to govern according to the expressed will of God.
3. The civil government of our nation, its laws, Institutions, and practices must therefore be conformed to the principles of Biblical law as revealed in the Old and New Testaments.

All in all there is much kinship between the *Canadian Reformed Churches* and the life and practice in and around the *Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America*. The differences that exist are worthy of further study.

Any one interested in source material concerning the RPCNA can order this from *Crown and Covenant Publications* 7408 Penn Ave., Pittsburgh PA 15208. Phone 412-241-1436; Fax 412-731-8861.

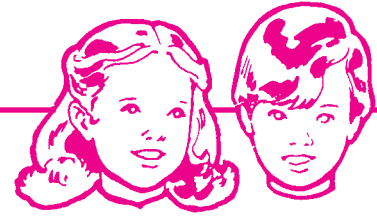
For a donation of \$15.00, US the NRA will send you their quarterly magazine and the aforementioned book. P.O. Box 97086, Pittsburgh, PA 15229-0086





# OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



## Dear Busy Beavers

Easter is once again almost upon us. Do you remember what Easter is about? That's right, Easter reminds us about the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. You know that He died on the cross for our sins. And although many people may not understand that that is what Easter is all about, we know that we are able to celebrate it each year. That is such a happy thought for us, because we have the firm promise that God will always be with us, "to the end of the age." That means that He will live in our hearts for always, never to leave us, unless we reject Him for reasons of our own. Let us pray that that will never happen. We have to follow His Word very closely, then we can really celebrate Easter.

Lots of love,  
Aunt Betty

## UNDER ANOTHER NAME

Which Biblical characters are known, or referred to, by the following descriptions or additional names?

1. The Baptist \_\_\_\_\_
2. The Carpenter's Son \_\_\_\_\_
3. Israel \_\_\_\_\_
4. The Moabitess \_\_\_\_\_
5. Iscariot \_\_\_\_\_
6. The Psalmist \_\_\_\_\_
7. The Friend of God \_\_\_\_\_
8. Cephas, a stone \_\_\_\_\_
9. The Tetrarch \_\_\_\_\_
10. Levi \_\_\_\_\_
11. Belshazzar \_\_\_\_\_
12. Boanerges, the sons of thunder \_\_\_\_\_

## Unscramble the Names

By Busy Beaver Melissa Tuininga

- |              |               |
|--------------|---------------|
| SUSJE _____  | LUSA _____    |
| BALAN _____  | EBEAKRH _____ |
| ELUK _____   | DDVIA _____   |
| LEMUAS _____ | LGABAIL _____ |
| ISACA _____  | AAAHMBR _____ |

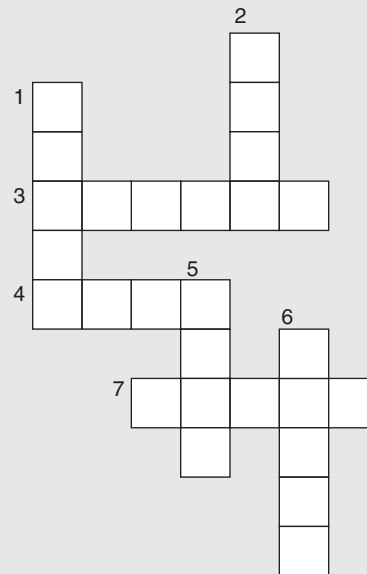
## LOVES

Match the person with the object of his or her love.

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

## CROSSWORD

By Busy Beaver Melissa Tuininga



### Across:

- 3 A servant of God (1 Samuel 1:9-20)
- 4 Who was a wicked king of Israel? (1 Samuel 9:1-2)
- 7 A name for Fool (1 Samuel 25:38)

### Down:

- 1 Who paid for all our sins? (Luke 1:26-38)
- 2 A doctor (Colossians 4:14)
- 5 Who is Jacob's wife? (Genesis 29:23)
- 6 He was anointed by Samuel (1 Samuel 16:1-13)



## FROM THE MAILBOX

Only one letter this time. Thank you, *Melissa Tuininga* for your letter and puzzles. It was wonderful to hear from you again. Congratulations on your new niece. That must have been very exciting, especially now you have a niece and a nephew. And did you have fun with Opa and Oma staying for a few days? Do you enjoy school a lot? Bye for now, Melissa. 