

Clarion

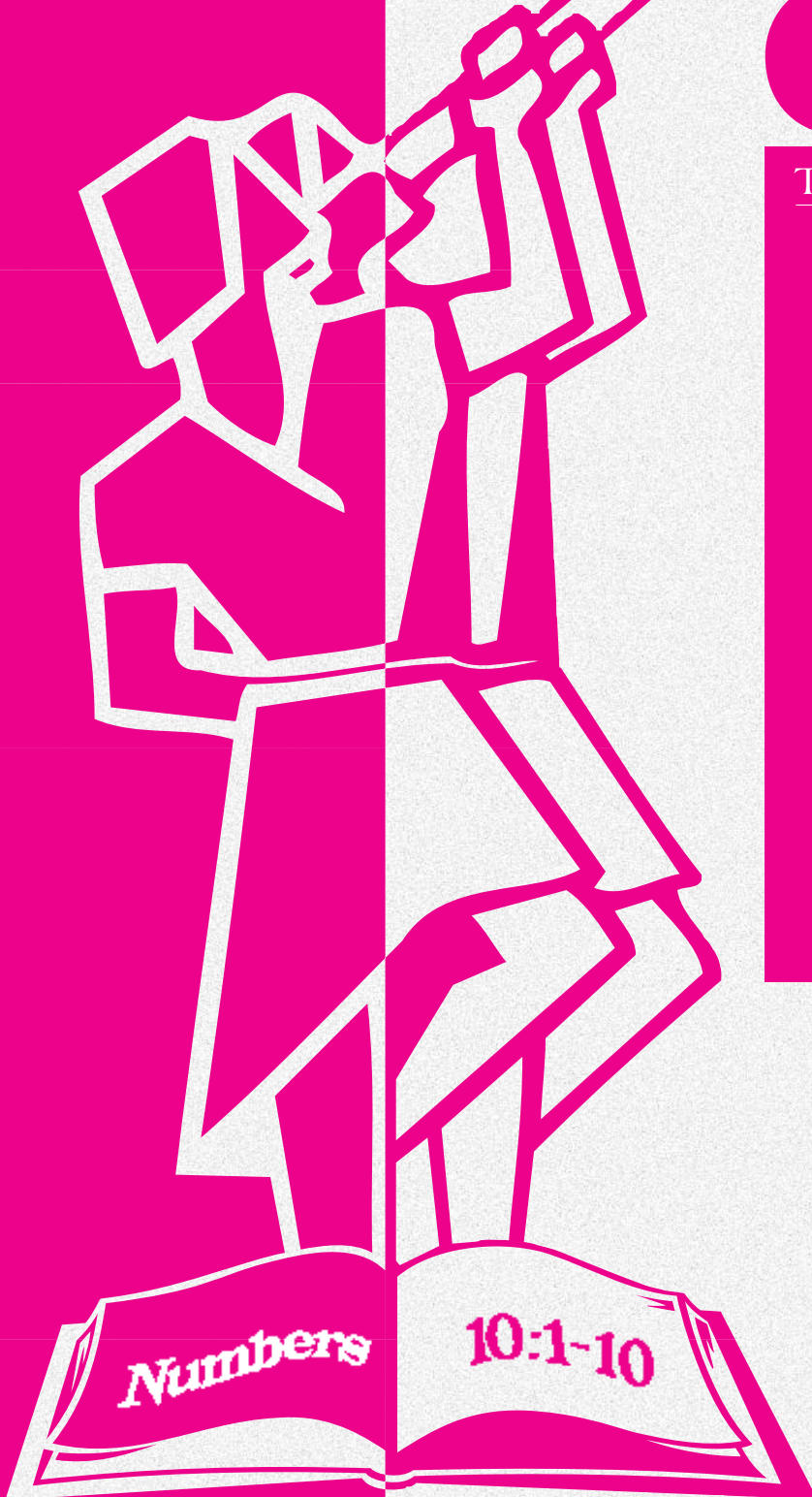
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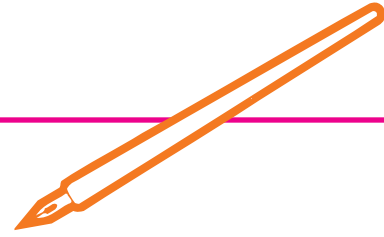


Dr. Abraham Kuyper

*"A theory of knowledge is not
religiously neutral."*



By J. De Jong



A Lone Voice

In our politically correct world, it's not every day that one reads something that really touches the nerve of truth, and states matters as they really are. More often than not, truth is veiled behind platitudes and carefully chosen, palatable expressions. It was then a surprise for me to read a very frank and forthright book by a leading Protestant scholar and author, John Leith, professor emeritus at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, dealing with what he sees as a crisis in the church.¹ For him, of course, this concerns the mainstream Presbyterian Church in the USA which, like its Canadian counterpart, has become thoroughly modernized and secularized. So deep is the malaise in his view that it has become time to sound an alarm. He speaks of a *crisis*. And in what area? The area of theological education.

The author

Perhaps at the outset we should introduce the author of this book more fully. He admits that in the fifties he stood up against the conservative or right wing position in the Presbyterian seminaries of the day. He fought against what he calls "fideistic fundamentalists," by which he means those who stood for a stricter adherence to the Westminster standards, and the approach to Scripture that they embody. He opted for a distinctly Protestant or Calvinistic theology, but one based on the reality that the Enlightenment had happened and that this too had to be worked into the contemporary theological approach to the Bible and the world.

Leith clearly intimates that this battle with the conservatives was won after a brief and in some cases painful struggle. The conservatives went off to more conservative churches; seminaries like Princeton, for example, were marked by its partiality to the new liberalism. And it is precisely these sorts of seminaries that have fallen victim to a spirit of crisis.

For once the battle with the conservatives was won a new battle took shape on the horizon, the battle with the radical left. As far as Leith is concerned the left wing is "more, not less, ruthless in imposing its will on the church." And what is the radical left? It represents the current heyday of all kinds of theological fads and politically correct causes: feminism, liberation theology, ecological theology, environmentalism, and so on. Quoting H. Richard Niebuhr, Leith sums it up well, "Our causes, for which we live, all die."

The crisis

So one gets a feel for the crisis that Leith signals in his tradition. He highlights a total estrangement between the faculty of the seminaries and the local churches of the Presby-

terian tradition. The faculties of the Presbyterian seminaries are for the most part made up of graduates from secular universities. Today, says Leith, there is no sense of loyalty to any form of tradition. And, "[t]he loss of tradition has led to a loss of gratitude. Those who do not remember cannot be thankful for all that is bequeathed to them."

The Presbyterian seminary has turned into a completely academic institution with no relationship to the pastorate. The faculty teaching there have little or no pastoral experience, and in particular, one type of faculty member has disappeared, namely, the one "whose primary identity is that of a Presbyterian minister." In other words, the seminaries have lost focus on what the primary task of the minister is. From being institutions that train ministers to function as preachers and pastors in their congregations, the seminary has become a breeding ground for people activated to a host of cause-related activities.

Leith then describes the growing lack of ecclesiastical commitment and accountability at the seminaries. Even academic freedom, once a treasured gift, is now at stake, since one needs to speak and write in politically correct ways or face isolation and resentment of peers. There's also a crying shortage of men in the ministry. And Leith is convinced: "Gender does affect the work of a minister." You cannot ignore gender differences.

Doctrinally the seminaries have become open playing fields. As Leith sees it, there should at least be a core Christian confession to which everyone teaching at a Presbyterian seminary is bound. But today anything goes, even other religions, and heresy has become an obsolete word. In other words, the liberalism and scepticism of the modern schools in theology have pushed matters too far. There is too much emphasis on "critical reflection" and not enough on simple Bible knowledge, too much emphasis on a critical approach to the Scriptures, but no longer any room for a devotional reading of the Scriptures. Following the line of tradition has become passé. Yet, Leith astutely observes, "Creative theologians are very few in the history of the church."

The critique

Leith does not stop at lamenting the deplorable state of affairs in the leading Presbyterian seminaries in his tradition. He also brings in the knife of critique, and it is at times rather sharp. The bureaucratization of the seminaries has led to poverty in terms of competent teaching staff. Hardly any are present who really teach the students how to do the normal work of a minister. As he puts it, "Every seminary professor needs a reality check: What do students who have

taken seriously the professor's courses accomplish when they go out as pastors? Is the theology of the university preachable so that it can sustain congregations over a period of time?" There are few people teaching at the seminaries who have distinguished themselves in doing what they teach. Faculties today are increasingly removed from the constitutions of the seminaries they serve, as well as the theological and ecclesiastical tradition of these schools. He says: "The new method of choosing professors out of applicants and under the pressures of political correctness has not helped seminary faculties in educating effective pastors."

Faculty members are often appointed through endowments, but many do not live up to the stated intention of the endowments. For example, if chairs of theology have been endowed for the propagation of the Christian faith, these faculty are doing anything but working in the pattern for which the funds were endowed. The result? There is a loss of moral integrity in the field of theological education.

What's inside?

The leading Protestant seminaries in the USA are, largely, held firmly in the grip of the radical left. Theological feminism, liberation theology, ecological theology, environmentalism, and other politically correct causes are the fads current at the seminaries. Any sort of binding to a confession went out fifty years ago. The conservatives were driven out of the seminaries. However, some of those who stood on the liberal side fifty years ago and have seen the tide of total and complete liberalism sweep past them are shocked at the present state of the seminaries. Dr. De Jong writes about this in the editorial.

Does truth exist, and if it does, what must we do to find it? Dr. Oosterhoff continues her series introducing us to authors who reflected on this question. In this issue, she focusses on Dr. Abraham Kuyper, a name well known among us. Kuyper critiqued the modernist (Cartesian) theory of truth. Interestingly, Kuyper has been recently discovered by many American evangelical Christians who have a Reformed bent.

Dr. J. Byl addresses the question of the length of creation days. There has been some discussion about this in *Clarion* of late. Dr. Van Dam will write about the matter in the next issue.

After having scanned the horizons of international church life for several years, Rev. VanRietschoten has passed on his telescope to undersigned. We thank this retired, yet very active, minister for his faithful contributions. My style will be a little different. Whereas Rev. VanRietschoten would typically dedicate a whole article to one piece of news and comment on it, I plan to clip news features from different sources that focus especially on events and movements among Christians and churches throughout the world. From time to time I may add some comment. We hope it will help you keep in tune with what is happening in the world among Christians and churches beyond our circles.

In addition to the above, you will find some reviews and releases.

GvP



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He even points out cases of fiscal irresponsibility and careless attitudes with regard to funds entrusted to a college. In other words, Leith points to a deep moral malaise: seminaries in their current practices are stealing from the forefathers and using funds previously endowed for their own dubious ends.

A welcome voice

This sort of a frank and forthright exposé of what is happening at leading theological seminaries in the Protestant tradition in America is not only revealing, but a welcome voice as well. For it highlights where theological liberalism is going. The end of the road of liberalism represents a bondage to a “prescribed code” much more ruthless and also administered with much more intolerance than Leith ever met in his days as a theological “liberal” in the fifties. The spirit of energized and radicalized – and radically politicized – secularism has fought for and taken control of the once unshakeable bastions of orthodoxy in America. There is corruption in high places in the world of government in North America. But there is also *moral corruption* in high places in the world of theological education and church affairs. Such is Leith’s message, and it comes through loud and clear. Otherwise, why speak of a *crisis*?

To the wind?

Yet the welcome voice is and remains a *lone voice*. And we might wonder whether his words will be heeded, or whether, like those of similar voices before him, they will go to the wind. For ultimately Leith himself lives in an illusory world of the would-be compromise between humanistic principles and conservative theology. His greatest and most often quoted champion is the well known Swiss theologian, Karl Barth. Yet one can argue that no one has done more to advance the cause of secularism in the theological world than Karl Barth. For, notwithstanding all his conservative sounding phrases (theology of the word, and so on), he cut the tie between the norm-giving Word of God and creation. Once that tie has been cut, one ends up promoting either a world totally rejected by God, or a world automatically sanctioned by God. Either way it represents a world in which there is no room for the healing salt of the gospel.

Leith himself is a victim of what so many other so-called conservatives of his generation have experienced. They wanted to open the door to Bible criticism, yet stay within the bounds of their tradition. But history has dis-

proved their position. Once the door to Bible criticism is opened, you unleash a flood gate, and with ever increasing radicalism, the principle of revolution wins the day. Such is the nature of apostasy. It never stands still but propels itself forward with an ever greater momentum to a slavery so ruthless that the climate for careful theological study and work becomes entirely oppressive, and the environment for wholesome teaching is smothered by the new idol of political correctness.

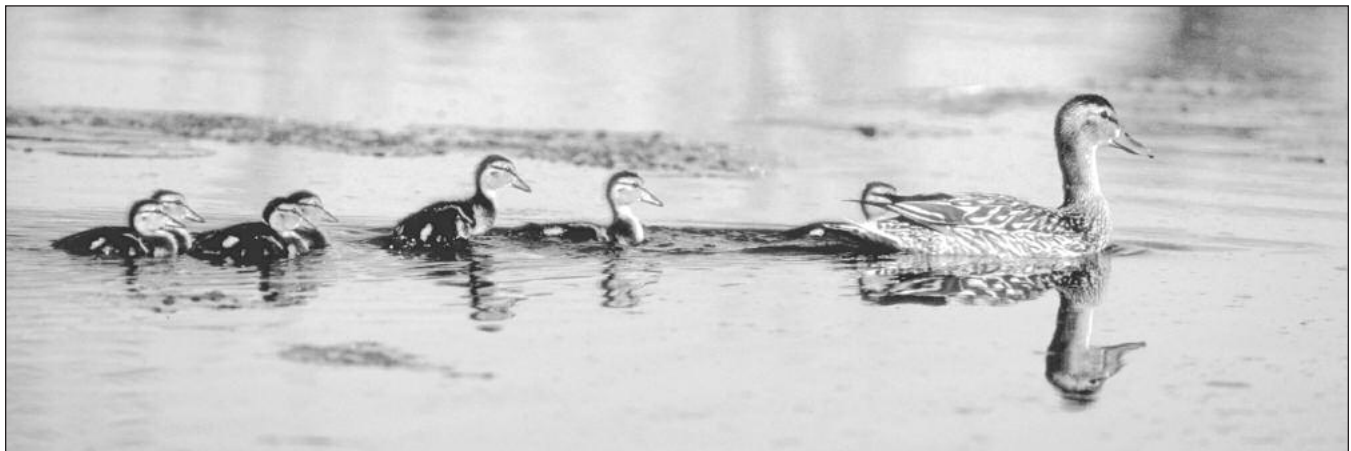
Give thanks!

Remarkably, Leith defends all the things that we seek to maintain, also in the area of theological education. Fundamentally our ministers are trained by those who have served in the ministry, according to 2 Timothy 2:2. Naturally we also defend a sound, scholarly training, aiming at the highest possible academic standards, given our constraints. But our first criteria are and remain: training that is confessionally sound, based on the Scriptures as summarized in our confessions, so maintaining a high view of Scripture.

Leith would probably put us in the camp of the “fideistic fundamentalists” that he shook off some fifty years ago. But he should at some point awaken to the fact that in this area – as in all others – it’s *all or nothing*. One cannot have it both ways: a dash of liberalism with a respect for classical theological traditions. One either gives Scripture the authority that is its due – or opens the door to a ruthless band of ideologues that knows of no relenting.

However, we should not be patting ourselves on the back. We can be thankful for the heritage we have received, also in terms of theological education. But we must continue to strengthen the bond between College and churches, recalling that the College is primarily the *school of the churches*. The College and its struggles should be a *living issue* in the local congregations, and also in congregational prayer. With regard to our library, we can be thankful for the support and involvement of many willing hands! But we need to keep working to plan our future and meet the challenges of the new century! May the Lord grant the churches faithful and godly young men who will be equipped not only to lead God’s flock, but also to preach his Word to the ends of the earth!

¹John H. Leith, *Crisis in the Church. The Plight of Theological Education*, (Westminster, John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1997).



By M. Jagt

Wounds that heal!

Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it (John 20:25).

Honest doubt. Perhaps you have heard of it, maybe even experienced it. It is supposed to be more of a neutral caution than really a doubt. *Honest doubt* simply wonders and calmly raises questions. In today's world, it has become quite respected. Philosophers and peasants alike are encouraged to have it. Thomas however, did not have it. If we would call his doubt anything, it certainly would not be *honest*. It is, in fact, the opposite – defiant and challenging – fed by anger, frustration, and hurt.

Look at the demands he makes. "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it" (John 20:25). These are hardly the simple statements of an *honest doubter*. Thomas will not even be satisfied with seeing the Lord Jesus Christ face to face. He demands to touch Jesus, even to put his hand into the gaping wound in Jesus' side!

Earlier, Thomas had expressed great pessimism and cynicism about the ways of the man who claimed to be the Messiah. "Let us also go, that we may die with [Jesus]," he says bitterly when our Saviour makes it known He will go back to Judea (John 11:16). Since then, the Messiah has died, which only seems to confirm his worst fears. He has hoped in vain, he thinks. It makes his doubt about the resurrection so bitter he thinks he is justified even in putting the Lord to the test and setting the terms and conditions of his own faith! "Unless I see . . ." he mutters, eyebrows knitted together in defiance. He feels justified in questioning everything: the empty tomb, Mary's meeting with the Saviour, the report of the two men from Emmaus, and so much more. This doubt is hardly of the neutral *honest* variety.

Perhaps that is true for us as well. Doubt is rarely, I propose, *honest*. Doubt is not some neutral questioning, an intellectual exercise, that we go through from a safe distance. It goes much deeper than that. We personally question God's character and God's ways. "What is going on in the world around me?" we wonder with a bit of a frown. "Where is God when I need Him?" we mutter with a touch of anger.

That is the kind of thing the serpent led Adam and Eve to do in the Garden of Eden as well: not just to question the Word of God, but to question the very character of God. He convinced them that the LORD God did not really know what He was doing, that He did not have their best interests at heart. Since then we all have been plagued with similar thoughts. We question more than simple facts. We question God's wisdom, power, goodness, and love.

But look at how the Saviour responds to these rather angry doubts of his disciple! He appears to the disciples yet another time and says to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe" (John 20:27).


Isn't the contrast simply amazing? Thomas, the doubting sinner, is defiant and demanding. But the Lord Jesus, the King of the Universe, is gracious and yielding. Thomas does not have the right to make any demands at all. The King of the Universe has the right to make all the demands He wants. Yet, the roles are reversed! The exalted King humbly serves the irreverent servant!

Think of what the Lord Jesus Christ could have done. He could have spoken in a booming voice from the sky that demanded to know why Thomas was being so stubborn. He could have appeared to Thomas in a vision and

rebuked him. But here He stands before him, with flesh and blood, and invites the doubter to do what exactly what he has so rashly demanded. The actions of the Saviour alone speak of incredible love and compassion. However, not just the Lord's actions, but something else does too: those wounds in his body to which the eyes of Thomas turn. Perhaps Thomas had asked to see them to verify that the one who rose really was the one who had died.

But now he sees something else there. He sees the incredible love of a Saviour who was not the victim of a conspiracy, but who laid down his life for the sake of his people. Proud Thomas comes face to face, not just with the simple fact of the cross and resurrection, but with the incredible power and love of the Saviour who has died in his place. His defiant doubts subside immediately. We do not even read whether he did what he had so rashly demanded to do. Instead, he makes the greatest confession yet about the Messiah. "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28). Finally, the doubt sown by the serpent is conquered. Here stands the Saviour who deserves divine worship and praise. Here stands the God who ought never to be doubted or challenged.

You and I lead lives dotted with doubts. But I ask you to take a look. What is at the root of those nagging doubts? Is it whether or not events actually happened? Is it whether or not the Bible is true? Or is it "Does God love me?" "Can He be trusted?" "Does He really care?"

Look at the wounds of the Saviour. Look at the scars He still carries which proclaim his great love and his great power over sin and death. Here is your Saviour in whom you can trust! May those wounds on the body of the risen Saviour heal your doubts as well. 

Postmodernism and the question of truth₃

By F.G. Oosterhoff

In the first two parts of this series we tried to explain the rise of postmodern scepticism. We saw that it was, in part, a reaction to the over-confidence which had characterized the modern era. Modernists believed that with the help of science and technology humanity would be able to overcome whatever obstacles to happiness still existed and in course of time establish a heavenly city upon earth.

We have seen that the disasters of the twentieth century destroyed that dream, and that this development goes a long way in explaining the anger and scepticism of postmodernists. Another factor in the rise of postmodernism, which we noted especially in the case of Nietzsche, is our culture's religious apostasy. Nietzsche predicted that the "death of God" – that is, the triumph of atheism in western thought – implies the death of man as we have known him, and the postmodern era shows that this prediction was correct. Instead of a rational being, made in the image of God, man has become an irrational creature whose actions are motivated not by the search for truth, but by the demand for power and for the satisfaction of instinctual desires.

Attempting to explain these factors – the misplaced confidence of modernism and the process of secularization in modern and postmodern times – we mentioned the important role played by the modern theory of knowledge. In this article and the next one we will again be concentrating on that topic. We will first review the reasons why postmodernism rejects the modern theory and replaces it with one of all-out scepticism. Having done so, we will show that, although postmodernism is correct in declaring the modern theory to be bankrupt, this bankruptcy does not have to lead to the denial of truth. The choice, in other words, is not

between modern belief in scientific objectivism and postmodern scepticism. There is a better way.

The modern theory of knowledge

Theories of knowledge have been around ever since the ancient Greeks. They were developed to provide answers to the questions all thinking humans are concerned with: the questions whether truth exists and, if it does, what we must do to find it.

“Kuyper showed that the scientific method does not and cannot guarantee absolute objectivity.”

In the foregoing we spoke of one such theory, the modernist one, which we owe primarily to René Descartes. We saw that it was based on doubt of all received wisdoms and of all other subjective influences. To gain full objectivity and therefore absolute certainty, every effort had to be made to exclude the personal element in the search for knowledge and proceed in a fully detached manner. As in mathematics, the discipline on which Descartes modelled it, the method would lead to conclusions that were logically necessary and therefore unquestionably true. In this way human fallibility would be overcome. The method's infallibility meant that what science declared was the truth and nothing but the truth, and that whatever could not pass the scien-

tific test was not worthy of consideration. This test was to be applied to all knowledge, including that which is based on faith in revelation.

One reason for the theory's long life was its promise of intellectual certainty. No less important, however, was its scientific efficiency. This explains why, in spite of its rationalism, even many Christians came to accept it as the way to objective truth. I know that on occasion Christian thinkers voiced objections to Cartesianism, but generally speaking Christians, also Protestant Christians, learned to live with the modern theory. It appeared to be so self-evidently true that many did not even think of scrutinizing it. Theories of knowledge are in that respect like world-views; people tend to accept a world-view without knowing that the thing exists, or because (in the words of philosopher Alfred North Whitehead) no alternative has ever occurred to them. This, then, applied to theories of knowledge as well. Many Christians simply assumed that these theories were religiously neutral and that the prevailing one *had* to lead to objective truth. In that respect the opinions of most Christians were no different from those of the population as a whole.

The postmodern reaction

That universal trust in Cartesianism came under attack in the course of the twentieth century. I have already alluded to the reasons. People rejected it because it had so notoriously failed to bring about the promised heavenly city. They realized, moreover, the harmful effects of the faith in scientific infallibility – effects that were evident in the unlimited growth of science and technology, which was now seen as a threat, and also in such disastrous schemes as communism.

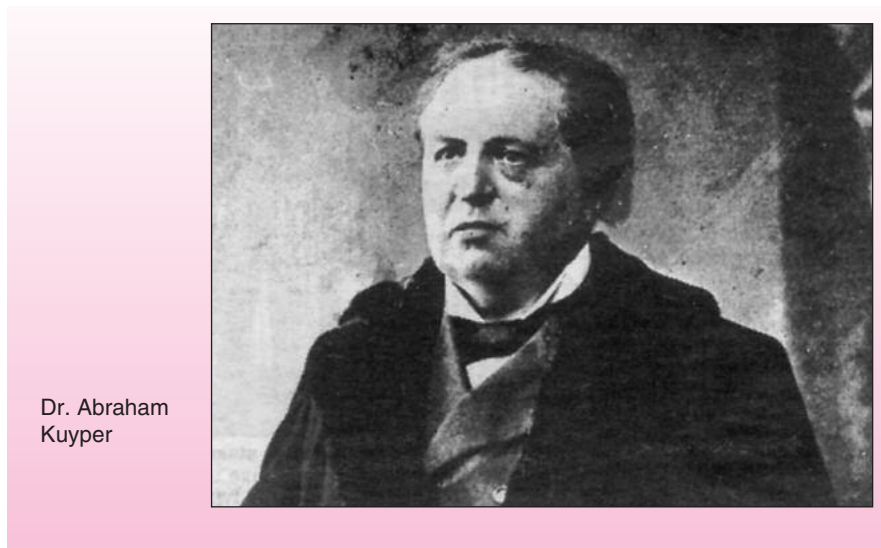
The questioning of the prevailing theory has led to two different responses. Many postmodern thinkers, having come to reject the entire idea of knowledge and truth, want to get rid of theories of knowledge altogether. They turn from theory of knowledge to theories of interpretation, particularly literary interpretation. That is far more subjective. You can do with a book or any other text whatever you want to do with it. As one postmodernist philosopher put it: a literary critic may ask himself the same question about a text that “the engineer or the physicist asks himself about a puzzling physical object: how shall I describe this in order to get it to do what I want?”

This means that a text can have as many meanings as there are readers; that meaning becomes altogether relative. It also means that our entire intellectual and religious heritage can be destroyed, which postmodernists in fact want to do. And it is attractive for many, because it conveys *power* (we can do with a text what we want to do with it), and it has *therapeutic value* (we interpret a text in such a way that it makes us feel good). Our culture since Freud is therapeutic in any event. And let’s not think that we are immune to this approach. We meet it in extreme forms of so-called reader-response theories. We also encounter it when feminists or gays – or we ourselves – pick and choose what we want from a text, including the Bible.

That, then, is one response. Fortunately, it is not the only one. There are also thinkers who, while rejecting the modern theory of knowledge, continue to believe in the possibility of reaching truth. It is this development to which I want to draw your attention, for it is a positive and promising one. It is especially important for Christians. For the modern epistemology has for some centuries placed a stranglehold on faith, and its influence continues in post-modern times. We have all experienced that influence, and our young people are not immune to it either. If modern or postmodern thinkers show us it is fallacious and suggest viable alternatives, we should pay attention.

Kuyper’s critique of scientism

Some of the early critics of the modern theory of knowledge were Reformed theologians and philosophers. Among them were the American theologian Jonathan Edwards (1703-58) and the Dutchman Abraham Kuyper



Dr. Abraham Kuyper

(1837-1920). We will be dealing here with Kuyper’s critique, which involved the following arguments.

Firstly, Kuyper showed, Descartes was wrong: the scientific method does not and cannot guarantee absolute objectivity. One of the reasons why it cannot do so is that we are fallen and finite people, prone to unintended mistakes in observation, in memory, and in the processes of thought. We are also prone to deliberate falsehoods, to a wrong use of the imagination, to bodily and psychological weaknesses, special pleading, and the temptation to pursue our own selfish interests. Kuyper

“A theory of knowledge is not religiously neutral.”

further included what he called the “darkening of our consciousness,” by which he meant our frequent lack of sympathy toward the object of our investigation, which causes us to stand not alongside but over against it. Anticipating a typically postmodern conviction, he concluded that “this *estrangement* from the object of our knowledge is the greatest obstacle in the way to our knowledge of it.”

That was one array of subjective or personal elements – elements which Descartes and his followers had simply overlooked. Another subjective element, Kuyper said, is the role which *faith* plays in knowledge. He was refer-

ring here not first of all to religious faith, but to faith as a mental function, common to all people, and devoid of all religious content. He said that all knowledge is based on faith in this sense, that faith has an essential function in the search for knowledge, and that it is the only way to certainty. It is needed, for example, to convince us that our senses do not deceive us (for that can never be proven; it must be believed), and it also plays an essential role in our reasoning. For reasoning starts from axioms or first principles (such as, for example, that I and other minds exist, that there is a real world out there, that the same thing cannot be true and false at the same time). Again, none of these first principles can be proven; they must be believed, and they *are* believed.

Faith is also essential in drawing up and accepting the universal laws with which scientists work. For we cannot prove that these laws are indeed universal, because we don’t know whether they were valid in the past or will be valid in the future; we simply assume this. That is, we *believe* in such notions as the stability, orderliness, and uniformity of nature.

In short, Kuyper concluded, universal doubt is not the highway to truth; the only way to reach truth, including scientific truth, is the way of faith. Without it, we cannot even begin to think or act. It is therefore nonsense to say, as believers in scientism have done for centuries, that knowledge based on faith is inferior to knowledge based on “scientific proof”; that science establishes truths which are binding on all people and are fully certain, but that faith is a matter of superstition and

uncertainty. For faith as a mental faculty is the foundation of all knowledge, including the scientific kind.

Kuyper gave faith of course also a religious function. Reminding people that believers as well as atheists are moved by *religious* convictions, he showed that a theory of knowledge is not religiously neutral: a person's religious faith commitments influence the way in which he interprets his data. This is the reason, he said, why in many matters believing and unbelieving scientists will come to different conclusions. An obvious example, to which he himself referred, is the theory of evolution.

Kuyper today

Kuyper was a Dutchman, and although some of his work was translated into English and into a number of other languages, it did not become widely known. He did influence believers in his own country, however, and today he is avidly studied by American Christians as well, especially by evangelical Christians of a Reformed bent. These people study Kuyper because, as they

themselves tell us, too many American evangelicals continue to believe, deep-down, in the infallibility of science and in the full objectivity of its method. They have done so from the start of American history, a habit they brought with them from their Puritan and Scottish-Presbyterian backgrounds.

They got a rude shock in the second half of the nineteenth century with the rise of Darwin's evolutionism and the higher biblical criticism. Many of them refused, however, to admit that these approaches were a result of Darwin's and the other scientists' *faith* commitments. They continued to believe that the scientific method, if properly applied, must lead to objective and certain truth, and they concluded that evolutionists and biblical critics had come to their conclusions because they had applied the scientific method wrongly. The Christian answer therefore, they reasoned, was to apply the method more rigorously. The Reformed-evangelical scholars to whom I referred tell us that this abiding belief in Cartesianism is behind the still existing tendency

among evangelicals to promote such beliefs as dispensationalism and scientific creationism, both of which attempt to prove the truth of the Bible in an evidentialist, scientific manner.

We are confronted here with what has been called the anti-modernist *modernism* of much of American evangelicalism. It is *anti-modernist* because it rejects evolutionism and biblical criticism and accepts the Bible as the true and infallible Word of God. But it is *modernist* in that it tries to fight the enemy with the enemy's own weapons, namely the scientism of the Cartesian theory of knowledge. It is this tendency that Kuyper showed to be erroneous and dangerous to the faith, and that he fought throughout his career. As we will see in the concluding article, in his fight against the scientist creed he is receiving support from an increasing number of postmodern thinkers – including men and women who do not share Kuyper's religious faith.

Dr. Oosterhoff is a retired teacher of history living in Hamilton, Ontario. 

News Release

April 18, 2000

Ancaster, Ontario

Public Lecture by Redeemer Author/Professor

For the Christian, every human endeavour should be done to the honour of God. But how does a Christian do that when making political choices? In particular, how do we decide which economic policies deserve our support? What should be done about unemployment, inflation, the poor? What should the role of government be? Should the market be left free to operate on its own? Is there, in fact, a Christian economic system?

In his new book, *Political-Economic Activity to the Honour of God* (Premier Printing, 2000), Redeemer Professor Dr. John Boersema seeks to provide a Christian approach to such questions.

Part of this book's focus is an examination of the basic principles or concepts that must be considered in dealing with these issues from a Christian perspective. Dr. Boersema will expand on these foundational topics at a free public lecture to which everyone is invited:

Monday, May 15, 2000 at 7:30 p.m. in the Main Academic Building, Room 111

This evening is sponsored by Redeemer College and the Canadian Christian Business Federation.

Dr. Boersema is Professor of Business and Economics at Redeemer College. He has also taught at the University of Western Ontario and worked for Shell Canada and the Royal Dutch Shell Group in England. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Pennsylvania.

Further information:

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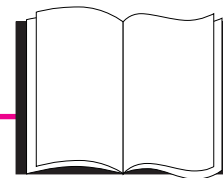
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Creation days and church unity

By J. Byl

The interpretation of Genesis 1 has become an issue in recent discussions of church unity. Both the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS) and the Orthodox Christian Reformed Church (OCRC) insist that the creation days are literal, normal days.

This development has not been received with great enthusiasm by our federation. Dr. De Jong criticizes the RCUS statement that the creation days were normal, 24 hour days. He writes: "While the text (Genesis 1) speaks of a day like the one we experience, it does not insist that the day was exactly 24 hours long."² Dr. De Jong wants to leave open the number of hours in the creation days. He warns against the danger of binding ourselves beyond the requirements of Scripture.^{1,2,3} In his discussion of the OCRC stance he goes one step further and objects to binding beyond the confessions.⁴

Defining the hour

Dr. De Jong's insistence that the creation days, although normal, could be other than 24 hours long seems rather ambivalent.

This is due, at least partly, to undefined terms. What is meant by "hour"? The basic unit of biblical time is the day, which consists of a period of light and a period of darkness. A biblical hour is defined as 1/12th of the period of night or 1/12th the period of daylight (cf. John 11:9 "Jesus answered: 'Are there not twelve hours in the day?'"). A complete biblical day therefore consists of exactly 24 hours. This is still the common usage of "hour" today: even my Webster's New World Dictionary defines "hour" as "one of the 24 parts of a day."

Since the creation days were literal days, consisting of periods of light and darkness, I conclude that they were, by definition, precisely 24 hours long.

Measuring biblical time

The real issue, of course, is not the number of hours in a day but, rather, their length as measured by a clock keeping absolute time. However, the biblical standard by which time is measured is in fact the day. Thus it makes little sense to ask how long a creation day was: a creation day was exactly one day long. One can ask only whether the daily rates of other physical processes were the same during the creation week as now. For example, perhaps the speed of light or rate of radioactive decay were different then. The RCUS statement doesn't ban such speculations.

Again, to argue otherwise requires a justified alternative definition of absolute time.

After the creation of the sun and moon, the day can be compared to other biblical time units, such as the solar year or lunar month. Dr. De Jong suggests that the Fall and the Flood may have changed the relative length of the day. But the Bible gives no indication that the cursing of the ground had any such effect. As to the Flood, since it began on the 17th day of the month, the pre-Flood month consisted of at least 17 days, the detailed chronology of the Flood (Gen 7-8) implying a 30-day month both before and after the Flood. Thus, even if we were to take the lunar month as our standard, the Bible gives no grounds for doubting that the relative length of the day has remained roughly the same since Day 4.

In short, I submit that Dr. De Jong's unwillingness to be bound to 24 hour creation days is unfounded. Yet, since the RCUS "24 hour" qualification, while true, serves mainly to stress that normal days are meant, I suggest the testimony of Scripture is adequately summarized by affirming:

"the creation days were literal days, chronological periods of light and darkness, the last three being normal, solar days."

Unity talks

The RCUS and OCRC are committed to uphold the creation days as normal days against unbiblical views, such as the day-age theory and the framework hypothesis, which treat the creation days as non-literal.

As is well-known, both the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) and United Reformed Church (URC) tolerate non-literal views of Genesis 1. For example, Dr. Meredith Kline, who promoted the framework hypothesis for more than forty years at Westminster Seminary (West), influencing many OPC ministers, is a minister in good standing in the OPC. And two URC leaders – Dr. Robert Godfrey,⁵ also of Westminster Seminary, and Rev. Edward Heerema⁶ – have pleaded for the toleration of non-literal views of the days.

It is essential for church unity that the Bible be mutually embraced as the inerrant, fully authoritative Word of God. But the toleration of non-literal days reflects a toleration of unbiblical hermeneutics and a reduction in biblical authority. Therefore the RCUS and OCRC deem this important enough to be a test for church unity.⁷

Dr. De Jong disagrees. He believes that binding statements like those of the RCUS or OCRC are not needed because the Three Forms of Unity are sufficient.⁴

Does he mean by this that the confessions already demand literal creation days? If so, why does he not reprimand the URC and OPC for not upholding the confessions? Regrettably, Dr. De Jong's concern that the RCUS 24-hour day adds to Scripture is not counterbalanced by an equal concern that the OPC and URC, in allowing non-literal

days, take away from Scripture. He doesn't support the framework hypothesis, but neither does he condemn it.⁴ As far as I am aware, we have never officially cautioned the OPC or URC on this matter.

Presumably, then, Dr. De Jong objects to a binding statement about the creation days because it goes beyond the explicit contents of the confessions. This raises the question: Is the interpretation of Genesis 1 to be left open, particularly with regards to church unity?

Such a notion does justice to neither the importance of the issues involved nor the historical context of the confessions. Biblical chronology was still undisputed when the confessions were adopted. Hence a literal Genesis, while certainly implied by the confessions, was not expressly spelled out. Today, however, attacks on the historicity of Genesis pose a major challenge to biblical authority. We would be remiss if we did not vigorously meet this challenge.

Where do we stand?

The need to clarify our stance on Genesis is pressing, not only because it

affects church unity, but also because of confusion within our own churches. We are by no means unanimous on six-day creation. Indeed, in the Fraser Valley the discussion has already reached the next logical step: questioning the historicity of the rest of Genesis 1-11, including that of Adam and Eve.^{8,9}

This is hardly surprising. Doubt about literal creation days is due primarily to the (erroneous) belief that science has proven the earth to be billions of years old. But naturalistic chronology clashes also with much else of Genesis 1-11. In particular, the biblical Adam cannot easily be reconciled with the alleged origin of man a few million years ago. As the history of other denominations shows, failure to uphold literal creation days, in opposition to naturalistic science, undermines the defense of the rest of Scripture.

When the truth of God's Word is distorted, and believers are led astray, the church is obliged to speak out boldly, unambiguously affirming the clear teaching of Scripture and resolutely rejecting all error. We should therefore applaud, rather than de-

nounce, the strong stand of the RCUS and OCRC.

It is high time that our federation studies the issue and adopts its own official position on Genesis 1, perhaps incorporating it in Article 12 of the *Belgic Confession*. Hopefully some local consistory is sufficiently concerned to direct an overture, through the proper channels, to Synod 2001.

Let us stand firmly on the undiluted truth of God's Word, first setting our own house in order, then calling to task other denominations who tolerate unbiblical views of Genesis.

Dr. J. Byl is Professor of Mathematics at Trinity Western University, Langley, British Columbia.

¹Clarion 49:1 (Jan.7,2000) 12.

²Clarion 49:3 (Feb.4,2000) 64-65.

³Clarion 49:5 (March 5, 2000) 111.

⁴Clarion 49:6 (March 17, 2000) 131-132.

⁵Christian Renewal 16:9 (Jan.6) 5 and 16:14 (April 6, 1998) 3.

⁶Christian Renewal 17:4 (Oct.26, 1998) 3-4.

⁷See my discussion of the RCUS position paper in *Christian Renewal* 18:3 (Oct.11, 1999) 6.

⁸Information 8:3 (Nov.29, 1999).

⁹Information 8:6 (March 19, 2000).



PRESS REVIEW

By J. De Jong

The debate continues . . .

A number of weeks ago this column reported on the debates with the Together-on-the-Way churches with regard to theological education. The decision at the time meant the closure of the synodical Theological University in Kampen. But the resistance proved to be too strong, so the parties went back to the drawing board to recut the pie. The Reformed Ecumenical Council's news bulletin reports on this new stage of the story:

After years of exploring options for the future of theological education, the Dutch churches in the union process, Together-on-the-Way, made what they hope is a final decision in December. They will train future pastors in Leiden, Utrecht and Kampen. This decision follows the breakdown of fusion dis-

cussions between the Theological University of Kampen and the Free University of Amsterdam in September. The trio-synod confirmed the recommendation of its executive to opt for this alternate plan. In so doing the universities in Amsterdam and Groningen will no longer train pastors, although they will continue to teach some theology.

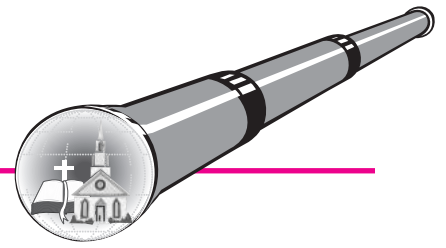
It was a difficult debate. Both Leiden and Kampen had faced a synodical decision a year earlier that their universities would end. Now those who supported work at Amsterdam and Groningen found themselves hurt by the loss. Some delegates pleaded for a reopening of discussions, but a Kampen curator argued that they had to decide now. With the uncertainty about

its future, Kampen was losing students, and if there were no clarity, there would be nothing left to fuse.

Government rules will require Kampen to ally itself with some other university in the Netherlands. The synod proposed that Kampen make such efforts first with Groningen. That decision was a recognition that the regional dispersal of resources, which made Groningen a candidate in the former plan, was still a valid consideration.

Kampen and the Free University, once the greatest of allies in mischief, now are not able to "find" each other. If it concerns your own future and livelihood, it's hard to be quite so agreeable. So the warring sisters are left to cooperate at a distance. But is this really "together on the way"? (See Amos 3:3).





Observation Deck

By G.Ph. van Popta

Putin signs religion law, but doubts linger

Russia's new president has given tens of thousands of churches and ministries a new – but possibly temporary – lease on life.

Vladimir Putin signed a new law on election day, March 26, extending the deadline for religious organizations to register with the government. They now have nine more months, until Dec. 31, to do so.

Many churches and ministries were in danger of being shut down and liquidated for noncompliance with the law. Its purpose is to limit the influence of foreign religious groups, such as evangelistic organizations and denominations from the United States, by banning them unless they had been active in Russia for 15 years. A court later ruled that groups that didn't meet the 15-year rule still could operate in Russia if they had registered under a 1990 law and would re-register, or agreed to come under the auspices of a religious group that is legally registered.

But thousands of the churches and ministries had not yet re-registered, Lauren Homer, a religious-rights advocate and attorney, told *Religion Today*. That is because local governments have made it difficult on them, and there is little legal assistance to wade through the process, she said. It is not clear if they will be able to meet the new deadline.

Local government authorities already had started liquidation proceedings against Christian groups in some regions, but the new law "should help them to defend themselves," Homer said.

Putin signed the bill with little fanfare, suggesting that he wanted to avoid making it a political issue, Homer said. Putin, who professes to be an Orthodox Christian, has said Russia needs a stronger religious foundation for moral and legal stability, and has sought God's blessing for his administration through prayer from Russian Orthodox Patriarch Alexy II.

Religious groups are of two minds about Putin, a former KGB agent. "We can only hope that [signing the registration extension] signals that he will maintain support for religious freedom," Homer said. – *Religion Today*

North Korean refugees in China

Christians in China who harbor refugees from North Korea will be heavily fined, police say. China is expecting a huge influx of people crossing the border to find food after the snows melt in March and April, *Compass Direct News* said. Tens of thousands of people come every year, fleeing the famine that has killed an estimated 2 million in North Korea in the past three years, *Compass* said.

Korean Christians living in China offer shelter and food to the refugees, but Chinese police send them back, *Compass* said. As many as 30,000 were deported from China last year. "We tried to shelter five families last year, but they were all sent back from our small town, and we heard they all died in a labor camp," one family said. The family was warned that they would be fined two years wages if they tried to help any others, *Compass* said. – *Religion Today*

Resurgent pagan mythology in South Korea

South Korean Christians are opposing a modern-day revival of pagan mythology. They are protesting the placement of statues of the ancient mythical king Tangun in hundreds of public places, the *South China Morning Post* said. Thousands of people have been marching in the streets and calling on the government to force the Han Munhwa Movement Federation to remove 369 statues it placed on the grounds of primary schools and public parks.

Followers believe Tangun is a godlike figure who came from heaven in 2,333 B.C. and ruled Korea for 1,500 years. Some believe Tangun returned to his celestial home, while others say he resides in the mountains as a spirit. North Korean officials say they have Tangun's bones and display them in a public tomb, the *Post* said. DNA evidence proves the bones are authentic, they say.

Christians say the tale of Tangun is a myth and that the statues promote paganism. Members of the Christian Council of Korea are sponsoring a rally to remove the statues; police say protesters have beheaded 38 of the statues. – *Religion Today*

Persecution in Indonesia

Islamic troops are waging a war of extermination against Christians in Indonesia's Moluccas Islands, a church leader says. Pastors have been killed, churches burned, and thousands of church members have been forced to flee into the woods or to refugee camps.

White-clad Muslims from outside the region are carrying out the jihad, or holy war, aided by local Muslims and Indonesian military units, survivors say. About 3,000 people, most of them Christians, have died in the past 14 months in religious violence in the Moluccas, a chain of 17 islands about 250 miles west of New Guinea, news reports say. The islands were once mostly Christian, but the Muslim population has increased in recent years with a "radical minority" causing unrest, news reports said.

Seven Pentecostal Church of God pastors were murdered in March . . . by radical Muslims who are sometimes aided by Indonesian military units in the northern Moluccas. In

some cases, wives, children, and grandchildren were killed; at least one pastor died while praying in his church. Many churches have been destroyed, as well as the homes of many Christians. – *Religion Today*

Gideons in West Africa

God's Word is changing schoolchildren, prison inmates, and pagan priests in West Africa. About 200 schoolchildren in Dunkwa, Ghana, professed faith in Christ after workers from Gideons International distributed New Testaments at their school, a teacher said. The students' behavior has improved and they are telling others about Jesus Christ, he said.

. . . A prison inmate in Accra who planned to use the paper from a Gideons New Testament to make cigarettes decided to read the pages instead. He became a Christian, has been released, and has converted his entire family, a worker said. A fetish priest in Sekondi became a Christian after a Gideon worker preached to him, the ministry said. – *Religion Today*

The gospel obstructed in Israel

Christian ministries in Israel fear that their work will be seriously impeded by a proposed government regulation. It would limit to four months the amount of time a foreign volunteer can stay in the country, *Compass Direct News* said. That would be harmful to Christian groups because they rely heavily on volunteers from abroad to minister in the country, *Compass* said.

Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, mainline Protestant, and evangelical leaders held an emergency meeting last month to discuss the proposed regulation and its impact. No action has yet been taken by the churches or the government on the issue. – *Religion Today*

Comment: *We need to continue praying for “. . . the mission among Jews . . . who live without hope and without Thee in the world” (Prayer No. 2, Book of Praise, p. 643).*

By any other name . . .

A group that follows the teachings of Joseph Smith is changing its name to Community of Christ. The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, based in Independence, Mo., changed its name so as not to be confused with the Salt Lake City-based Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, news reports said. The name takes effect for-

mally Jan. 1, 2001, although the church still will be known officially as the RLDS.

RLDS followers, like the Salt Lake City-based Mormons, trace their history to Joseph Smith Jr., who believed he was chosen to restore the true church of Jesus Christ. The movement fragmented after Smith's death in 1844, with some choosing to follow Smith's son and others following Brigham Young to Utah. The group that followed his son became known in the mid-1860s as the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. – *Religion Today*

Comment: *May the Lord grant that no one ever think the Community of Christ is a Christian community!*

Elders and deacons may administer the Lord's Supper in the Netherlands

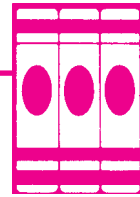
In exceptional circumstances, persons who are not ordained ministers may now administer the Lord's Supper, just as they can now preach. This was the decision reached by the synod of the three churches in the Together-on-the-Way process in the Netherlands. The synod created a new category, the vicariate, to fill this role. According to Jan Willem Doff, the current moderator of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN), this will be done under stringent conditions. It must be under the supervision of an ordained pastor, and only in exceptional circumstances, where no pastor is available to serve. However, he wrote, the principle is established. For the first time in the GKN, someone who is not a pastor may supervise the administration of the Lord's Supper.

The GKN had previously allowed occasional preaching by gifted persons who were not ordained as ministers. Doff argued that Reformed theology does not value the sacraments above preaching, but always treats them on one level. The January decision, he said, is based on the conviction that the ministry of Word and Sacrament must be seen as a whole.

This decision came from practical needs in the Dutch situation. It will help small congregations, some congregations in large cities, and services in nursing homes. Only 22 of the 147 synod delegates opposed the decision. (*Kerkbulletin, Centraal Weekblad*) – *REC News Exchange*

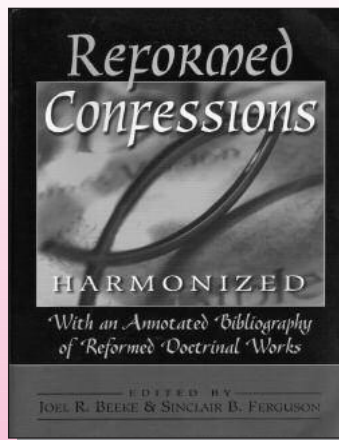
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A new harmony of the confessions

By G. Ph. van Popta



Reformed Confessions Harmonized. Edited by Joel R. Beeke and Sinclair B. Ferguson. Baker Books, Grand Rapids. 271 pages; softcover; US \$19.99.


Here is a book that will be helpful especially to ministers and students of theology. The seven confessions har-

monized in parallel columns are the Belgic Confession of Faith (1561), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), the Second Helvetic Confession (1566), the Canons of Dort (1619), the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), the Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647), and the Westminster Larger Catechism (1648). These are the most well-known documents of the Swiss, Scottish-English, and Dutch-German families of confessions.

The different articles of the several confessional documents have been brought under the traditional six heads of dogmatics: Theology, Anthropology, Christology, Soteriology, Ecclesiology, and Eschatology. On the whole, this system works quite well, although it is, at times, a little forced. For example, the Questions and Answers of the Heidelberg Catechism dealing with the law and prayer are placed under Soteriology (the doctrine of salvation). Considering they fall under the third part of the Heidelberg Catechism (our Thank-

fulness), rather than the second part (our Salvation), this placement seems a little odd. Undoubtedly, this is because of the completely different styles various confessions have of presenting summaries of the basic truths of Scripture.

Besides the harmony, there are two other features: Sinclair B. Ferguson wrote brief historical introductions to each of the seven Reformed confessions contained in the harmony. The other feature is an extensive annotated bibliography, citing English sources, following the pattern of the Belgic Confession of Faith. Under the heading of each of the 37 articles, Joel R. Beeke provides many helpful resources. This bibliography will be very useful to students of theology and to anyone interested into researching a specific aspect of the confession.

In the opinion of this reviewer, the annotated bibliography is the most useful aspect of the book, although all three parts make it a worthy addition to any library. 

Jesus, My Redeemer, Lives

Jesus, my Redeemer, lives,
Christ, my trust, is dead no more!
In the strength this knowledge gives,
Shall not all my fears be o'er;
Calm, though death's long night be fraught
Still with many an anxious thought?

Jesus, my Redeemer, lives,
And his life I soon shall see;
Bright the hope this promise gives,
Where he is, I too shall be.
Shall I fear then? Can the Head
Rise and leave the members dead?

Close to him my soul is bound,
In the bonds of hope enclasped;
Faith's strong hand this hold hath found,
And the Rock hath firmly grasped.
Death shall ne'er my soul remove
From her refuge in thy love.

I shall see him with these eyes,
Him whom I shall surely know;
Not another shall I rise;
With his love my heart shall glow;
Only there shall disappear
Weakness in and round me here.

Ye who suffer, sigh, and moan,
Fresh and glorious there shall reign;
Earthly here the seed is sown,
Heavenly it shall rise again;
Natural here the death we die,
Spiritual our life on high.

Body, be thou of good cheer,
In thy Saviour's care rejoice;
Give not place to gloom and fear,
Dead, thou yet shalt know his voice,
When the final trump is heard,
And the deaf, cold grave is stirred.

Laugh to scorn, then, death and hell,
Fear no more the gloomy grave;
Caught into the air to dwell
With the Lord who comes to save,
We shall trample on our foes,
Mortal weakness, fear and woes.

Only see ye that your heart
Rise betimes from earthly lust;
Would ye there with him have part,
Here obey your Lord and trust.
Fix your hearts beyond the skies,
Whither ye yourselves would rise!

*Louisa Henrietta,
Electress of Brandenburg, 1653.
Translated by Catherine Winkworth, 1855*

Louisa Henrietta, Electress of Brandenburg, daughter of Frederic Henry, Prince of Orange, was born at The Hague, Nov. 16, 1627 and died June 18, 1667. She was married to Frederic William, Elector of Brandenburg, in 1646. This hymn was written on the death of her first-born. Her third child was afterwards Frederic I, King of Prussia.



Press Release, Classis Pacific East, March 30th, 31st, 2000

On behalf of the convening church of Vernon, the Rev. D. Moes opened the meeting. He asked the delegates to sing Hymn 38. He then read Eph 1:15-23 and led in prayer and thanksgiving. He welcomed all delegates and also the various guests from the church at Vernon, including the young people from Trinity Christian School. Significant events among the churches of the classis area were remembered. The credentials were examined by the delegates of the church of Lynden and were found to be in good order. Classis was constituted. Moderamen were: Rev. W. Wielenga (chairman), Rev. R. Schouten (vice-chairman) and Rev. M. VanLuik (clerk). Since the Form of Subscription for classis had not been available at the previous classis, it was now signed by the Rev. P. H. Holtvluwer.

A number of appeals were received concerning the manner of celebrating the Lord's Supper. In addition, an appeal was received regarding a sermon. Committees were formed to draft responses to the appellants. Upon discussion in plenary session and after revision by the committees, recommendations were adopted in response to the appellants.

The church at Aldergrove requested classis to overture Regional Synod West Dec. 7th, 2000 to overture General Synod to recognize as valid a certain policy regarding the admission to the Lord's Table of guests who are not members of an officially recognized sister church. Classis considered that it is not the task of a classis to give an interpretation of the Church Order and therefore classis decided not to accede to the request of Aldergrove.

A report was received from the Classis Treasurer. In addition, the church at Vernon reported that it had examined and found to be in good order the books of the Classis Treasurer. A report was also received from the Treasurer of the Committee for Needy Churches. A report from the church for the inspection of the classis Archives will be ready for the following classis.

Question Period (Article 44, Church Order) was held. The church

of Yarrow was appointed as convening church for the next classis (June 8th, 2000 or, alternately, Oct, 12th, 2000). The suggested executive for the next classis are: D. Moes (chairman), M. Van Luik (vice chairman), P.H. Holtvluwer (clerk). General Question Period was held. Censure as per Article 34 of the Church Order was deemed unnecessary. The chairman thanked the convening church for hosting classis and thanked the delegates for their good cooperation in completing the agenda. Members of classis were requested to sing Hymn 40 after which the vice-chairman led in thanksgiving and prayer. Classis was closed.

For classis,
R. Schouten, Vice-chairman



Press Release of the Final Classis AB MB Convened in Calgary on April 11, 2000.

Opening

Rev. G. Snip, on behalf of the convening church (Edmonton Immanuel) opened the assembly in the Christian manner. Rev. Snip noted that since the last classis, the church of Winnipeg Redeemer has received Rev. T. van Raalte as minister, and that this congregation was also able to worship in its new building last Sunday. Coaldale was congratulated on its 50th anniversary. Carman West, it was noted, was still without its own minister. The chairman passed on greetings from the Free Church of Scotland congregation in Edmonton.

After welcoming the delegates with appropriate words, he examined the credentials. All churches were lawfully represented by two delegates. Rev. Snip declared that classis was constituted. The assembly appointed Rev. G. Snip as Chairman, Rev. J. L. van Popta as Vice Chairman and Rev. Th. Lodder as Clerk. The provisional agenda was adopted with some additions.

Rev. T. van Raalte had been examined in Oct 1999, but the Classis Subscription Book was not available. Min-

ister elect van Raalte agreed at that time to sign the form at the next classis. The chairman asked the now Rev. van Raalte to add his signature to the form. Rev. van Raalte did this after the form was read aloud.

Reports

Classis then dealt with a number of reports. The first report came from a committee appointed by the previous classis, which was to look into the division of the churches into two classes. After extensive discussion, classis adopted the following recommendations.

- A. that subsequent to this classis, the classical region be divided in two, named Classis Alberta (comprised of the 7 churches in Alberta) and Classis Manitoba (comprised of the 4 churches in Manitoba and the church of Denver);
- B. that this classis appoint a convening church, date and venue for the convening of both a Classis Alberta and a Classis Manitoba. Both classes will appoint moderamen, adopt regulations, and make new appointments for treasurer, church visitors, deputies for examinations, archive church, etc. at their first classis meeting;
- C. that the present classical funds be evenly divided as of the date of the first meeting.
- D. 1. that notice of this division of Classis AB/MB be made to the Classis Pacific West and Classis Pacific East with regard to Article 47 of the Church Order;
2. that official documentation of this division of Classis AB/MB be made to the respective governments of the provinces via their governing authorities.
- E. that any unfinished matters from this or previous classes be assigned to the region involved with that matter.

The chairman noted that this was a historic moment in life of the churches. It was many years ago that Classis West divided into Classis AB/MB and Classis Pacific. Since then, the Lord has blessed the churches with continued growth. Though there is sadness that we will not meet as churches in Classis AB/MB any longer, it was

recognized that the churches would benefit from smaller assemblies.

The Treasurer presented a report on the finances of classis. The present funds will be divided in half with the proceeds to go to the two new classes. Providence church submitted a report concerning the inspection of the books of the Treasurer. They were found in good order. Immanuel church submitted a report concerning the inspection of the Classis Archives. They were found in good order. The committee for financial Aid to Theological Students reported on its finances. It noted that there were no new requests for assistance. Revs. Tiggelaar and Jonker give oral reports of their contacts with the provincial governments. Church visitation reports were submitted concerning visits made to several churches: Carman East, Carman West, Denver, and Winnipeg Redeemer. Classis received all these many reports with thankfulness to the Lord that he continues to watch over all the activities of the churches and blesses the congregations.

Other matters

Two churches came with instructions. Coaldale invited classis to send a representative to its 50th anniversary celebrations. Classis appointed Rev. Th. Lodder to speak to the congregation. The church of Taber requested that classis appoint a committee to secure an advance tax ruling concerning *book allowances* for the ministers. Classis decided not to do so.

The chairman asked the delegates the questions found in Church Order, Article 44. The churches all acknowledged that the offices continue and that they honour the decisions of the major assemblies. No consistory asked for the judgment or help of classis for the proper government of their church.

The church at Carman West addressed classis with a letter of disapproval about the action of a previous classis. This letter was received for information without comment.

Providence church submitted a request on behalf of the archivist to purchase fireproof cabinets for the archives. Classis agreed that it is important to preserve the integrity of the archives. Classis granted this request.

An appeal

Br. E. Tams submitted an appeal against a decision of the Council of the

Church of Coaldale. In his appeal he addressed a series of decisions, beginning in July 1999, relating to a proposal he made to Coaldale's council in which he serves as elder. His proposal had been adopted but later was rescinded on the basis that to implement this proposal would contravene Article 30 of the Church Order as well as Articles 7 and 30 of the Belgic Confession. Br. Tams had proposed that council discuss articles published in *Diakonia* "Serving One Another." He had made it clear to council, however, that these articles addressed matters that would assist him and the other office bearers in their work.

Br. Tams asked that classis judge that the matter he proposed be correctly considered an ecclesiastical matter and therefore a matter that may be dealt with at a council meeting. Br. Tams also asked classis to judge that Coaldale's council incorrectly applied Article 30 of the Church Order and Articles 7 and 30 of the Belgic Confession.

Classis judged that discussing articles at a council meeting that concern the way in which office bearers should carry out their task is not contrary to Article 7 and 30 of the Belgic Confession. Neither is it against Article 30 of the Church Order. Classis granted the appeal of Br. Tams. Coaldale's delegates abstained from voting (re. Church Order 32).

Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)

Communications were received from the Presbytery of the Dakotas (POD) of the OPC informing classis that they were terminating further ecumenical contact. Because matters outside our control have precipitated this break, classis responded to the POD by drafting a letter expressing regret that our relations had come to such a sad state. Classis also decided to pass on these communications to the Synod Committee for Contact with the OPC.

Final matters

Classis appointed Edmonton Providence as the convening and hosting church for the first Classis Alberta (June 13 or Oct 3, 2000) and Carman East as convening and hosting church for the first Classis Manitoba (June 13 or Oct 3, 2000).

During personal question period one of the delegates informed classis that lost archives of the disbanded congregation of Rocky Mountain House



Due to a recent postal change, effective immediately our new address is:

Elora Canadian Reformed Church
RR 1, Elora, Ontario
NOB 1S0

* * *

Called to Carman West, Manitoba

Rev. A.J. Pol

of Guelph, Ontario.

* * *

Called to Smithers, British Columbia

Rev. P. Aasman

of Grand Valley, Ontario.

Called to the church at Houston,
British Columbia

Rev. R.J. Eikelboom

of Calgary, Alberta.

* * *

Classis Alberta-Manitoba met April 11 and adopted the following recommendation:

that subsequent to the April 11 Classis, the classical region be divided into two, named Classis Alberta (comprised of the seven churches in Alberta) and Classis Manitoba (comprised of the four churches in Manitoba and the church of Denver).

were discovered in his late father's personal effects. Classis agrees that these historic documents should be submitted to the classis archives.

One of the brothers also expressed gratitude that over the years the bond between the churches in Alberta and Manitoba and Denver has grown stronger and that we part ways with regret.

The chairman judge that brotherly censure was not needed. This final assembly of the churches in Classis AB/MB was conducted in a brotherly spirit.

The *Acts* were adopted and the "Press Release" was approved.

The vice-chairman led the assembly in prayer. The chairman adjourned this historic meeting.

J.L. van Popta
vice chairman at the time

