

# Clarion

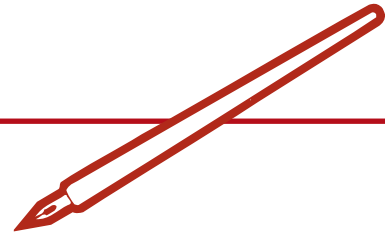
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*Erasmus  
vs. Luther  
on education*

INSIDE!





By Cl. Stam



## Polemics and integrity

### Polemics and integrity

The Webster's Dictionary defines "polemic" as "an aggressive attack on or refutation of the opinions and principles of another." Note the word "aggressive." Whenever a magazine has in its very banner the word "polemics" you can be sure what its purpose is: to expose and refute. This is done in the sincere conviction that the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ and his church is thereby promoted. This is also done because it is strongly felt that the churches are in a very real and present danger.

I have no problem with polemics as such. In fact, through the years I have engaged in it myself. If there is no polemic going on, there's probably not much life existent. A proper polemic helps everyone to discern better and understand more clearly what the issues are and how they should be resolved in the light of Scripture and our confessions.

The problem is not with polemics, but with *polemicists*, who conduct the actual polemic. Everyone is prone to think that he alone is right. Sometimes in a certain debate the reader can be left with an unsatisfied feeling. Who is right? "The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him" (Prov 18:17). It is very hard in any form of polemics to leave the integrity of the opponent intact.

*A proper polemic helps everyone to discern better and understand more clearly what the issues are and how they should be resolved in the light of Scripture and our confessions.*

### Little sidenotes

Perhaps some of the most damage is done to another's integrity in little side notes that are given apropos to the discussion itself. Let me give you two concrete examples. Recently *Reformed Polemics* (Vol 8 No 4, December 2001) published without comment a letter to the editor responding to an editorial written in an earlier issue of *Clarion*. My

purpose is not to react to the general content of the letter, but to show how little side bars discredit others.

*Clarion* is introduced by the letter writer as follows, "On the front cover of *Clarion*, a biweekly, which bills itself as The Canadian Reformed Magazine, even though it is a private undertaking, there are two trumpet blowers and a reference to Numbers 10:1-10."

*Should we not strive to leave the integrity of the other intact? Otherwise polemics degenerates into a smear-campaign.*

Note the words "even though it is a private undertaking." Why were these words added? Does *Clarion* presume to be the official, ecclesiastical voice of the Canadian Reformed Churches? Does the writer not know the history behind the name "The Canadian Reformed Magazine" (CRM)? The words "The Canadian Reformed Magazine" are not meant at all to claim exclusive rights, but simply to show that *Clarion* is the continuation of an earlier magazine called *Canadian Reformed Magazine* (CRM). It's good to recognize the work that was done by others long before *Clarion* was published. We should not forget our history nor the context in which a name should properly be understood.

This little accessory note about *Clarion* being a private undertaking does not in any way contribute to the arguments in the letter against what was written by one of *Clarion's* editors. Instead it functions to cast a shadow of suspicion on the intentions and efforts of the publisher. The verb chosen, "it bills itself," suggests that the magazine is a theatrical or circus production. When one takes into account the fact that the publisher through the years has given much time, effort, and funding for the publishing of a magazine with quality in form and content, this side note is offensive. The management and staff at Premier Printing deserve better treatment.

I am a little surprised that the magazine, *Reformed Polemics*, to which the letter was sent and in which it was published, did not "catch" this aggressive element. I also wonder why the letter was not sent to *Clarion* in the first place, the very magazine which published the editorial?!

Or has *Reformed Polemics*, also a private undertaking, become in the mind of the correspondent the official voice of the loyal opposition in the Canadian Reformed Churches? I'd love to read a clear answer to this question.

### Big mistakes

The second item which I want to highlight concerns what the letter writer states about the wicked editorialist in *Clarion*. He writes this: "Apparently Campfire is high on the list of Rev. Stam's priorities." What does this letter writer really know about the true priorities of the minister in question? But that's not yet the item that is of most concern. We then read: "He (Rev. Stam) went out of his way to visit consistories to persuade them to support Campfire."

This suggests, in the least, that this minister was involved in influence-peddling, and went far beyond his jurisdiction, sowing discord and causing dissension. If it were true, the man should be duly called to account, and perhaps be suspended from his office because he is lording it over the churches.

### What's inside?

Campfire! is a camp opportunity for inner city children which is supported by many Canadian Reformed congregations in Ontario. It is an evangelistic endeavour in which young people of our churches are involved. Past issues of *Clarion* have shown that there is some difference of opinion regarding the suitability of this camp, particularly the involvement of children from our churches with inner city children. Rev. Cl. Stam's editorial and several letters to the editor deal with this issue. The reader is entitled to draw his or her own conclusions. However, the hope is that by listening to one another and learning from one another, such efforts to evangelize may be carried out in the best way possible.

We have the final installment of Dr. F.G. Oosterhoff's articles on "Faith and Science in the Reformed Tradition." Some might regard Dr. Oosterhoff's articles as "heavier" than most. We may appreciate that we are challenged to think more deeply about important matters. To think and reflect deeply is to enrich one's mind.

In Rev. R. Schouten's meditation, Christ's victory through death and resurrection is seen as our victory as well. It is a timeless message, but we are reminded of it again at the time of Easter. There is no greater news than to learn that in Jesus Christ we have a restored relationship with God, and there is now nothing that can separate us from his love.

We have a special tribute to a minister who has served faithfully as secretary in the ICRC: Rev. M. van Beveren. Thankfully, even though Rev. van Beveren has retired from the ICRC, he still enjoys good health and remains active in church life.

In the column, *Education Matters*, Keith Sikkema reports on an address of Dr. R. Faber at a Teachers' Convention. The address deals with education in the time of the Reformation. We hope to include the full text of this address in a future issue of *Clarion*.

RA



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The sad thing is, however, that this statement of the letter writer is totally false. *Rev. Stam visited one consistory and did so only upon the specific request of that consistory.* Is it not a gross injustice in a side note to ascribe to someone in public and in a demeaning manner what he has never done? I mention this only because the average reader of *Reformed Polemics* cannot know whether the minister in question really did what is alleged.

One more quote may complete the picture: "He (Rev. Stam) seems quite prepared to blur the antithesis, for the cause of Campfire which he equates with evangelism, setting pragmatism above principle." The writer is kind. Rev. Stam only *seems* to blur the antithesis, but what is meant, of course, is that in fact he does blur it extensively. Three major allegations are made in one short sentence. Hence the conclusion: an unclear and indistinct sound that is confusing to his (God's) people.

Is this *Reformed* polemics? Is the matter of camp evangelism properly discussed in the light of the facts, as it well deserves, or is this a vicious patchwork of unfounded insinuations and personalistic allegations? How can one defend himself against this kind of aggression? Where does one begin with setting things straight? Does this kind of letter foster an edifying discussion? Should we not strive to leave the integrity of the other intact? Otherwise polemics degenerates into a smear-campaign.

### Honouring integrity

I also looked up the meaning of the word integrity. It means "a firm adherence to a code of (moral or artistic) values." Honouring someone's integrity means simply that you may perhaps not agree with his opinions but you do not

question his motives or misrepresent his convictions. There should be some respect for one another. An editor should be able to write about important issues without the fear of being branded as someone who sells out the confessions and churches. If that would be true, something far more serious is at stake.

As mentioned, I have no problem with polemics. In fact, I welcome a few good rounds of sparring. I hope to engage in more polemics in the future. *Reformed polemics*, to be sure, because one magazine does not have a monopoly on this. There are some matters that simply need to be addressed because of their importance for church life. Please understand, however, that I support no specific cause, liberal or conservative, evangelical or Reformed, whichever or whatever. I am trying only to state things as I see them in the light of Scripture and the confessions. Don't fence me in or shut me out.

As churches we are heading into a time of relations and contacts with others that will of necessity involve much intense discussion among us as well. Difference of opinion will emerge also among one another. Sometimes we will feel the need aggressively to attack the position of others. But we do not convince an opponent by crushing him.

Let's try to keep one another's integrity intact.

<sup>1</sup>Mr. Helder sent this letter earlier to *Clarion* but it was returned seeing that his concerns had already been addressed. Now that *Reformed Polemics* has published this letter, it is necessary to interact with it. *Editors.*



*Rev. Cl. Stam is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Hamilton, Ontario.*



By R. Schouten

## Liberated from the fear of death

*“Since the children have flesh and blood, He too shared in their humanity so that by his death He might destroy him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”*

Hebrews 2:14-15

In Genesis 1, we learn that human beings were created to exercise dominion over the earth. It was our human calling to care for and develop the rich potential of God’s good creation. The same thought is conveyed in Psalm 8, a passage quoted in an earlier section of Hebrews 2. In this Psalm, we read about human beings that God set them over all the works of his hands.

As we read Genesis 1 and Psalm 8, the original freedom and royal dignity of humanity impresses us. Adam was a creature-King and Eve a creature-Queen, both of them reflecting the glory and dominion of God. As Psalm 8 says, God crowned man and woman with glory and honour!

It’s so terribly ironic, then, to *now* see humanity, created to rule, in bondage. When former rulers show up wearing chains, we know this is a tragedy. Kings and Queens have become slaves, paralyzed by fear. Sin has led to death and death brings humanity into the grip of the Lord of death. Not much is left of the creational gift of glory and honour!

The knowledge of inevitable death mocks even our greatest human accomplishments. Whatever we accomplish as human beings seems meaningless because of the shadow of death looming over us. Why care for the earth, why develop our talents and gifts, why develop a civilization if, in the end, all your accomplishments fall into the black hole of death? Isn’t human culture inescapably a culture of death?

Today we go to work. We try to achieve something worthwhile in the world. But tomorrow we get sick. Perhaps we undergo an operation that leaves us weak. We hear bad news from a doctor. We visit our loved ones in hospitals. We attend funerals and read obituaries. Despite our diligent striving for wellness, in the back of our minds lurks the controlling knowledge that we shall die.

The text quoted above proclaims to us the glad tidings of Christ’s victory over death. By dying, He destroyed the one who holds the power of death, that is, the devil. By making his human life an atoning sacrifice for sin, our Lord Jesus has broken the controlling hold of death. He carried our guilt and so took away the curse of death that lay upon us. In Christ, the fear of death fades away and is replaced by the growing joy of living.

As we read Hebrews 2, we’re reminded that God’s liberating action is never an end in itself. When God set his people free from Pharaoh it was in order that they might *serve* Him (e.g. Ex 8:1). Why then did Christ share in our humanity? Why did He suffer and die? Why did He rise again? The answer is that He did so in order to restore people to *service* – in accordance with the mandate given in Genesis and celebrated in Psalm 8.

Psalm 8 is currently fulfilled in the rule of our Lord Jesus Christ over all creation. As the last Adam, our Lord exercises dominion over all creation. It’s important for us to realize

that the present glory of Jesus displays to us the future glory of our own human vocation. The glory of Christ’s rule is a glory in which we who believe will share.

Nor is our participation in Christ’s rule *wholly* future. Already in this life, we are restored to office as creature-Kings and creature-Queens. By faith, we share in Christ’s royal office. Our victorious Lord sets us free from the fear of death so that we may become faithful cultural workers. Also in our lives, Psalm 8 is being fulfilled!

As long as the fear of death rules us, we’re paralyzed. The fruit of our work seems to be no more than fuel for the fire. When, however, the joy of life in Christ drives out the fear of death, then we can begin to use our talents and gifts for God. We learn to be Christian cultural workers, Christian thinkers and planners, believing tradesmen and artisans, Christian housekeepers, Christian family builders, Christian business people, Christian educators, Christian farmers and Christian politicians and law-makers.

Have you caught the excitement of Christ’s victory? Then get to work. Work energetically. Work faithfully. Work joyfully. In Christ, your work is not in vain.



*Rev. R.A. Schouten is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Abbotsford, British Columbia.*



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# Faith and Science in the Reformed Tradition (5)

By F.G. Oosterhoff

## Worldview and education

Most children in our churches are able to attend a Reformed school; in many cases a secondary as well as an elementary one. At these schools they are given answers to questions about the relationship between faith and knowledge that are in agreement with the instruction received at home and in church. Later, however, many attend secular colleges and universities. Here they are confronted with ideas that are the opposite of what they were taught in their Christian environment. And even if they don't go on to college, they will still meet these ideas, for with today's pervasive printed and electronic media, anti-Christian influences reach us wherever we are. Indeed, they reach many of our youngsters well before they conclude even their elementary schooling.

Sooner or later, then, Christian students enter hostile territory, and one of the tasks of Reformed education is to help prepare them for that event. Our schools try to fulfill this mandate by reinforcing the instruction given in church and at home in biblical knowledge and related fields. If all is well, they do it also (and here we come to the task of especially the secondary school) by making students aware of the role the prevailing worldview plays in all knowledge. An essential element in that worldview, we have seen, is that only that which can be verified in a "scientific" manner deserves to be called truly objective knowledge; that all the rest, including faith in the truth of divine revelation, is mere subjective opinion.

As part of the ruling worldview, this belief is widely held to be true in our culture. For that reason the school's job is not finished if it deals only with the

application of the modern theory of knowledge in biology and geology – for example by marshalling scientific counter-evidence to evolutionary theories. Where possible this should be done, and as I suggested earlier, the work of scientific creationism can be of much help here. But we should not think that this type of approach is all that is needed.

*To accept the modern scientist view is to assume that we can know as God knows, and so to fall back into the sin of paradise. It is not human reason as such, but the assumption that human reason can climb up to heaven, that Christians must reject.*

This is so, firstly, because scientific creationism does not by any means have answers to all the questions evolutionary hypotheses raise in the sciences. (In that sense it is in a position similar to that of the evolutionists, who are themselves left with many unsolved and unsolvable problems.) Secondly, and more importantly, the secular view of knowledge plays havoc not only with the belief in special creation but opposes biblical truth in every field of knowledge. Previous articles have shown that it challenges, for example, the uniqueness of Christianity; that it portrays religion and the moral law as having developed from "primitive" and perhaps even legendary beginnings; that it denies the reality of the invisible

and of the spiritual; and that in the end, by its materialistic starting point, it destroys the humanity of man himself. Showing simply that there are gaps and errors in theories of biological and geological evolution, although certainly helpful, does not meet all the challenges posed by the secular view of knowledge either in the sciences or in other fields.

And in any event, as stated more than once, we should refrain from fighting the enemy on his own turf and with his own defective weapons. It can be counterproductive, and indeed dangerous, to concentrate in our Christian teaching on scientific counter-evidence to evolutionism if we do not at the same time show the role which subjective factors play in human knowing. If we fail to do that, we will, whether we intend to or not, simply reinforce the scientist notion that theories of knowledge are essentially neutral, and that science and its method indeed have the last word in the search for truth and certainty. We will then also be of little help to Christians who at the university or elsewhere are confronted with theories that they cannot refute with scientific counter-evidence.

## To the foundations

It was this insight that inspired men like Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck and their followers to give attention not only to the *application* of the modern theory of knowledge, but also to that theory itself – that is, to its nature and the presuppositions on which it is based.

Their work in this area has been described earlier in the series. We noted there that they did not make it their primary concern to attack secular conclusions in a piecemeal fashion –

although they certainly did not avoid engaging in such attacks when the opportunity arose. But the primary goal of their work was to investigate the *foundations* of the belief in full scientific objectivity. Their conclusion, bolstered by a wealth of argument, was that this belief is unfounded; that subjective elements, such as the scientists' own beliefs and presuppositions as well as those of their society, influence the outcome of scientific research and may even determine it.

By following this approach, these Reformed thinkers removed the stranglehold that the cult of objectivism – not only in science but also in other fields of knowledge – had for centuries placed on religious faith. Revealing the faulty basis of an imperialistic scientism, they made it possible for believers to relativize its dictates, and to do so without rejecting the validity of scientific and other scholarly investigation as such.

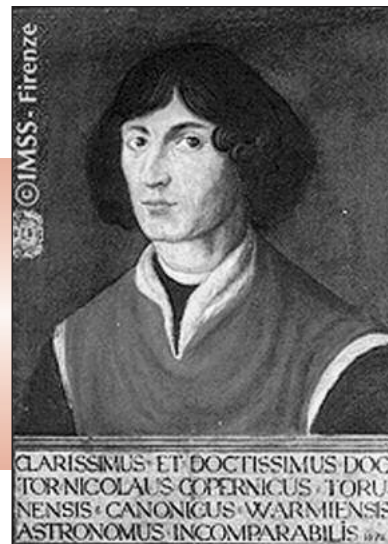
*Creation is much richer than we often imagine.*

It is important to keep that last point in mind, for many people, including Christians, believe that the denial of the scientist claim inevitably leads to skepticism and relativism. If we cannot even believe that science yields indubitable truth, they argue, then we may as well discard the hope that any truth at all can be found. Such a conclusion, however, does not follow from the position taken by Kuyper and Bavinck. Neither of them denied that reason and science are among God's excellent gifts to mankind; gifts that can, and very often do, yield true, reliable, useful knowledge. Science itself testifies to this. But they distinguished between absolute, unlimited knowledge on the one hand, and limited but reliable knowledge on the other, showing that the former belongs to God alone. By doing so they made clear that to accept the modern scientist view is to assume that we can know as God knows, and so to fall back into the sin of paradise. In short, it is not human reason as such, but the assumption that human reason can climb up to heaven, that Christians must reject.

### **Relative, yet reliable**

But how is it possible, some may ask, to insist with these theologians

Copernicus



that scientific (and other) knowing can be both relative and reliable? This apparent paradox constitutes a stumbling block to many people when faced with the scientist claim. It causes them either to turn to all-out skepticism, or to reaffirm their belief in the absolute objectivity of scientific knowledge. Neither conclusion, however, is necessary. There is no true paradox here, and the choice is not really between skepticism and scientism. The solution to the apparent problem lies in the fact that creation is much richer than we often imagine.

This is an important point, one that should be kept in mind. People used to think that a specific set of data could support only one theory, and that that theory must therefore be accepted as absolutely true. But in fact, we have many examples where different theories, even competing ones, are capable of "saving the appearances" – that is, of accounting for the relevant data. Perhaps the best-known case is that of an earth-centred versus a sun-centred model of the solar system. Both of them save many of the appearances, and although the latter is the more efficient one, the former cannot therefore be called "wrong." Like the sun-centred model, it is based on a good deal of observation and mathematics, and for more than two millennia it has been successfully used to predict eclipses. I am told that sailors still like to follow that system in their navigation, rather than the sun-centred one.

In the choice between competing theories the "facts" indeed play a role,

but so do subjective considerations. Copernicus' hypothesis, for example, was conceived and accepted as true well before it was supported by any empirical evidence. The society wherein Copernicus lived had long been dreaming of an infinite universe and of an earth that was not located at the centre and bottom of the system but that revolved around its sun, together with the other "noble stars." That dream greatly hastened the triumph of Copernicanism.<sup>1</sup> And there are many similar instances in the history of science. The triumph of Darwinism is one of them.

*In a scientific and materialistic age it is difficult not to subscribe to the creed that "seeing is believing."*

Indeed, the fact of the multiplicity of theories (that is, theories which, although different and perhaps even competing, are nevertheless all of them supported by empirical evidence) is now commonly recognized in scientific circles. It should teach us, as C.S. Lewis already suggested many years ago, "to regard all Models [or theories] in the right way, respecting each and idolizing none."<sup>2</sup> As far as I can ascertain, neither Kuyper nor Bavinck referred to this phenomenon of multiple theories, but its recognition would have removed some of the problems they left unresolved.

## The invisible

While Kuyper and Bavinck insisted upon the need to let go of the modern view of knowledge, they also acknowledged the difficulty of doing so. The problem, they knew, was not only the fear of collapsing into skepticism. There was also the fact that for two or three centuries westerners had been told to accept as real only that which can be seen and weighed and measured. The influence of that materialistic view did not pass the Christian by. It led to an increasing agnosticism regarding the existence of the invisible and the supernatural. Even when belief in the spiritual did not disappear, it was under constant attack. In a scientific and materialistic age like the modern one it is difficult not to subscribe to the creed that “seeing is believing.”

We have seen that Kuyper gave attention to the dangerous implications of this belief, warning of its destructive effects both on religious faith and on the view of man as a spiritual being – that is, as someone made in God’s image and therefore much more than an animal, a machine, or a chance combination of atoms. In his critique of scientism Bavinck, too, spoke of the reality of the invisible and the spiritual. He did so, as we saw earlier, in connection with biological evolutionism. Evolutionists, he observed, concentrated

*That which is unseen is manifest in what is seen, and man’s consciousness is such that he cannot even continue to deny the existence of the invisible.*

*This is evident in the turn to occultism, mysticism, pagan religions, and so on.*

mainly on the visible, material similarities between man and animal. They ignored man’s spiritual nature, which distinguishes him from the animal and cannot be explained with reference to matter. Although invisible, Bavinck said, the world of the spirit – that is, the world of faith, hope, and love, of the imagination and the passions, of learning and language, the world also of God and divine revelation and divine providence – is by no means less real and

less influential than the visible world. That which is unseen is manifest in what is seen, and man’s consciousness is such that he cannot even continue to deny the existence of the invisible. This was evident already in Bavinck’s own days, which witnessed a turn from a materialistic empiricism to occultism, mysticism, pagan religions, speculative philosophy, and so on – all of them means of escape from the prevailing materialism.<sup>3</sup> In short, human nature and human consciousness themselves testify to the reality of the spiritual.

The materialistic worldview, Bavinck showed, accounted for the attitude of reductionism – that is, the modern habit of explaining things and organisms in terms of their elementary constituents, and of explaining actions and attitudes in terms of the most basic mechanisms underlying them. In this scheme, the part determines the whole. Life is reduced to nothing more than physics and chemistry; thought is seen as simply a secretion of the brain, just as gall is a secretion of the liver and urine of the kidney; religion and piety are fully explicable in terms of psychology; and the human being is nothing but an animal or a machine or an assemblage of material particles. Analyzing these reductionist claims, Bavinck agreed that they contain elements of truth. A mechanistic description of man – to use only this one example – makes sense, for many of our organs do operate in a machine-like fashion. But such a description remains very much a partial one. Man is not only a machine, he is also a living and thinking, a feeling and believing and reasoning being. He is, moreover, God’s creature, and received from God himself the breath of life. The whole is so much more than the parts.<sup>4</sup>

## Conclusion

As the foregoing has made clear, most of the answers Kuyper and Bavinck gave to the questions raised by scientism are common-sense answers. Once you hear and consider them, you cannot but agree that they are correct. Why, then, do people, and even Christians, so easily succumb to the temptations of a materialist and scientist theory of knowledge? Or, more urgently, how can the Christian escape its influence?

Bavinck believed that if one is to overcome its allurements, an acquaintance with the presuppositions on which the theory is based is essential. He himself had chosen to be educated



**CHURCH NEWS**

Called to the church at Grand Rapids, Michigan:

**Rev. J. Ludwig**  
of London, Ontario.

at a secular university in order to learn at first hand about the modern worldview and so to find the means to analyze it and challenge its claims. This goal he kept pursuing throughout his life, both in his lectures and his publications. It is indeed unfortunate, as one of Bavinck’s biographers observes, that his efforts in this and other areas have been largely discontinued after his death – perhaps, as he suggests, because of the critical developments in the Reformed churches since 1920, and also because of the challenge of Barthianism.<sup>5</sup> For the work that Bavinck and Kuyper began is as essential today as it was a hundred years ago. Its relevance is confirmed by the fact that, as stated in the introduction to this series, many present-day theorists of knowledge reach conclusions similar to those taught by these scholars of the Reformed tradition.

Although he was convinced that a critical engagement with modern philosophy, including the modern theory of knowledge, is necessary, Bavinck did not base his religious certainty on the outcome of such an engagement. While vitally interested in all areas of human thought and knowledge, his life manifested at the same time a “strict concentration on that one truth, which is offered only in Christ and in Holy Scripture, and in comparison with which all the rest remains but searching and groping and failure.”<sup>6</sup> It was in God’s light that he sought to see light. And so he insisted that religious certainty is not first of all a matter of intellectual arguments and proofs, but of the will, of the new life, of listening to and obeying the revealed Word.<sup>7</sup>

This conviction, however, did not mean that the value and necessity of analysis and argumentation were to be denied. Intellectual arguments by themselves could not bring about faith, but they could and should be used to



support believers who were confronted by the scientist claims. They should also be used to challenge and, if possible, to convince an unbelieving world. Analyzing the prevailing worldview and attempting to provide a biblical alternative were aspects of the Christian's involvement with his culture – of his mandate, his office of trusteeship. They enabled him to make manifest that grace indeed restores nature. And that cultural task, Bavinck and Kuyper have taught us, should continue to have the Christian's attention.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>On this point see my *Ideas Have a History*, ch. 5. For a similar background to the rise of Darwinism, see the same work, ch. 11.

<sup>2</sup>It is tempting to quote more of Lewis's conclusion. Referring to both the astronomical and evolutionist aspects of the

present model of the universe, and suggesting that both are temporary, he states that change is most likely to come not with a revolutionary discovery of new facts, but "when, and because, far-reaching changes in the mental temper of our descendants demand that it should. The new Model will not be set up without evidence, but the evidence will turn up when the inner need for it becomes sufficiently great. It will be true evidence. But nature gives most of her evidence in answer to the questions we ask her. Here, as in the courts, the character of the evidence depends on the shape of the examination, and a good cross-examiner can do wonders. He will not indeed elicit falsehoods from an honest witness. But, in relation to the total truth in the witness's mind, the structure of the examination is like a stencil. It determines how much of that total truth will appear and what pat-

tern it will suggest." C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967 [1964]), pp. 222f.

<sup>3</sup>Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, II, 30; *Christelijke Wetenschap* (Kampen: Kok, 1904), pp. 39-43, 53; *Wijsbegeerte der Openbaring*, pp. 25f, 174.

<sup>4</sup>Bavinck, *Christelijke Wereldbeschouwing* (Kampen: Kok, 1929 [1904]), pp. 46-51.

<sup>5</sup>Bremmer, *Bavinck als dogmaticus*, p. 143.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 140f. (Bremmer quotes here a remark made, upon Bavinck's death, by the modernist theologian K. H. Roessingh.)

<sup>7</sup>Bavinck, *GD*, I, 411; *Godsdienst en Godgeleerdheid* (Wageningen: Vada, 1902), pp. 45f.



*Dr. F.G. Oosterhoff is a retired principal of Guido de Brès Christian High School in Hamilton, Ontario.*

## A Special Tribute: Nearly Twenty Years of Faithful Service!

*By C. Van Spronsen*

In a previous issue of *Clarion*, Dr. J. DeJong, quoting from a report by Rev. Robert Grossman on the last meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) already drew attention to the fact that the faithful labours of Rev. M. van Beveren as secretary of the ICRC are noteworthy and deserve to be mentioned in our paper.

Now he has asked to be released of this task, and with the support of the Interim Committee, has requested me to take over as his alternate. It is fitting to pay special attention to this faithful and efficient service our brother has provided to all the member churches of the ICRC as well as many other interested churches and parties.

Ever since the Constituent Assembly of October 26 – November 4, 1982, Rev. van Beveren has served as secretary of this worldwide organization. Nearly twenty years! Having been part of it ever since its birth, and being very punctual and or-



*Rev. M. van Beveren*



ganized he has done a terrific job and did so with all his heart and much dedication. However, having reached the age of eighty years, he felt it was time to pass on the torch while still enjoying good health.

A public expression of gratitude certainly seems in place: Thank you very much brother for all the work you have done and continued to do even during your retirement years!

It was with some trepidation that I accepted to take his place, knowing that it will be difficult to replace him, but he has been most helpful in grooming me for and introducing me to this new task. May the ICRC continue to be a means for the Reformed Churches throughout the world to assist each other in remaining faithful to their Head, the Lord Jesus Christ.



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# Middle East Reformed Fellowship

## NEWS from MERF-Canada

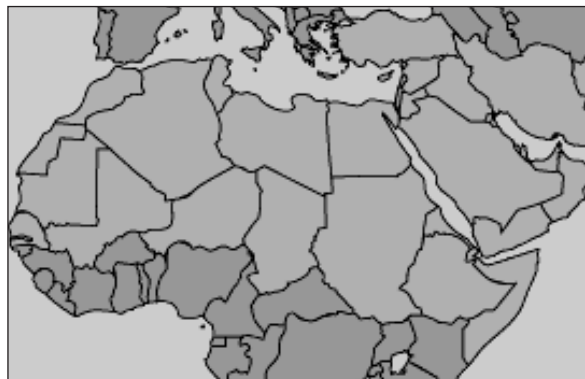
### September 11 Events: An Occasion for Special Gospel Broadcasts for Special Times

The shocking and devastating events of September 11 have ironically done much to shake loose a growing number of Muslims from their blind religious loyalties. From Indonesia to Morocco, the spiritual battle is raging over the minds and hearts of embarrassed and disenchanted people. A few days after September 11, a Tunisian journalist expressed this well in a radio interview:

Nothing can be longer taken for granted. I can no longer passively accept the beliefs and assumptions that our parents would have died for, are worth dying or killing for; the very loud claims of the ignorant and presumptuous religionists should not be allowed to influence our children or grandchildren. We are duty bound to defend them against the intellectual and moral destruction of blind obedience to religion. We must do this for them even if we ourselves might become victims of the violence of hateful religious fanatics. Protecting the next generations from the dark side of religion is worth dying for.

One of MERF's weekly Arabic broadcasts is designed to provide an open forum for the contrasting Christian world and life view. Dr. Ikram Lamie, the new Moderator of the Evangelical Synod of the Nile, is a frequent contributing guest of these weekly interviews. He says: "What MERF is doing through these broadcasts of well-prepared and focussed interviews represents a daring, yet necessary and significant effort, to provide the Gospel alternative to oppressive religion. These are special times of uncertainty and questioning." MERF's biblical missions outreach to Muslim people now seizes an unprecedented opportunity for "casting down

*MERF is working in over fifteen countries.*



arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor 10:5). The time is now for the church to make a difference and engage in the real battle, the spiritual one. We are called upon to provide Muslims disturbed by the embarrassing events of September 11 with the comfort that Christ alone can give.

### MERF's International Council (IC)

The annual meeting of the IC was held from October 29-31, 2001 at the headquarters in Larnaca, Cyprus. Present were representatives of MERF's Field and Support Committees, broadcast partners and members of the Board of Directors. Rev. J. DeGelder attended the meeting on our behalf.

The IC issued the following statement:

The International Council gives thanks to Almighty God for a year of continued favour and blessing toward the work of the Middle East Reformed Fellowship as it seeks to fulfill its charter to declare the whole counsel of God throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

In the light of the present world crisis, the International Council rejoices for opportunities to expand in

the ministries of evangelism, church extension, Biblical training and diaconal aid made possible by increases in financial and practical support throughout 2000 and 2001. Outreach through the radio ministry has increased to the point where daily broadcasts in Arabic and regular Farsi programs are touching many lives, which could not otherwise be reached. Biblical training for evangelists, pastors and church leaders at the John Calvin Center in Larnaca and in the field continues to build up and strengthen local congregations. The program for 2002 sees an additional emphasis on ministries to women and children's work.

MERF's Field Committees throughout the region continue to report blessings in the midst of continuing difficulties and hardships through the ministry of diaconal aid in the name of Christ particularly among displaced people of Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine and Sudan.

The International Council also gives thanks to God for the Board of Directors under the leadership of Mr. Lee DeYoung and General Director Rev. Victor Atallah and for the efforts of International Council Chairman Rev. Soliman Sadek. The



International Council humbly prays that God will continue to revive His work in these troubled times so that lands that once received the Word with gladness will again lift up their hearts and voices in united praise to the Lord Jesus Christ, who alone can bring true peace and reconciliation.

### **Persecution of Christians in the Middle East**

A lot of focus has been put on the persecution of Christians in Muslim lands. Our Lord taught that the world hated Him and therefore would hate those who faithfully follow Him. That is expressed differently in various parts of the world. Generally believers from a Christian cultural background are accepted as part of Middle Eastern society, although they do face some prejudice. For example, they may have to go to school or work on Sunday or have to put up with some rude treatment without complaint.

*We are called upon to provide Muslims disturbed by the embarrassing events of September 11 with the comfort that Christ alone can give.*

But those who convert to Christ from a Muslim background are not accepted in society and often face serious threats. If they can carry out their faith quietly, thus not drawing too much attention to themselves which would bring shame on their family (e.g., if they live in a big city where people don't really keep close track of each other's activities) there is less likely to be persecution than when others are very conscious of their activities such as in smaller communities. Converts who are wise, however, after initial threats often gradually gain the respect of their close friends and families. The radio outreach of the gospel is very important in the Muslim world because people who have no other opportunity to hear about Christ can listen privately without stirring up opposition.

### **The growing church in South Sudan – scenes of joy and sorrow!**

By God's grace, a MERF delegation visited into the very heart of South Sudan to meet with God's people there. Official permission from authorities in

both northern Kenya and South Sudan were secured and a small plane chartered. The plane filled with eight passengers and diaconal aid supplies landed on makeshift dirt runways in three different communities in the central provinces of South Sudan – Waat, Thornyor and Nyal.

In each locality, the delegation was met by multitudes of Sudanese believers. Looking down from the plane one saw the deep, dark hue of assembled people, very black and too many to count. In front of the welcoming crowd were cheering bands carrying drums and other local musical instruments. At the head of the band were the local pastors, evangelists, elders and tribal chiefs. Some carried poles with big red or white flags emblazoned with crosses, proclaiming a Christian identity. All ages were out to welcome the little plane of guests. Young and old alike were exceedingly thin and undernourished. Yet, their faces were glowing. There were many smiles and a great deal of excitement. Some had walked with their pastors or elders for several hours from outlying areas. They came to greet their Church's new Moderator accompanied by "MERF people." As soon as the plane landed the rhythm band began to play, leading the singing of the crowds. Passionate voices thundered louder than the drums. The music burst out of joyful, hopeful hearts. A vast choir of people, young and old, sang in magnificent harmony. The community leaders then moved to the opening door of the aircraft to greet Peter Makuac Nyak, their beloved Moderator, MERF Chairman Lee DeYoung, General Director Victor Atallah, David Maulding (MERF-USA), Matthew Deng and James Ninrew (MERF South Sudan). The guests were greeted and welcomed with happy faces and open arms.

The time together was short, but the corporate worship was uplifting and the fellowship sweet. There is much for which to rejoice. These scenes confirmed the report of the growth of the Evangelical/Reformed community throughout Sudan. Growth has been especially seen in the southern half of the country. Yet, long years of war have left the people in heartbreaking conditions. Children and the elderly are dying for lack of nutrition and medical care. Two generations of young people have been deprived of education. Thus the vast majority remains illiterate and the growing church suffers immensely from the lack of trained spiritual leaders. Most congregations are served by untrained lay pastors and elders. The very

few trained pastors serve large parishes of ten to twenty congregations. There is a desperate need for trained elders to help them shepherd so many people. These tremendous needs are overwhelming. Over the next few years, MERF plans to actively work towards:

*The vast majority remains illiterate and the growing church suffers immensely from the lack of trained spiritual leaders.*

- training and supporting several hundred more Sudanese pastors, evangelists, elders and deacons
- training and supporting several hundred Sudanese primary school teachers
- training and equipping dozens of first aid workers in elementary nursing care
- establishing and furnishing medical clinics in different regions of South Sudan
- expanding the South Sudanese gospel radio broadcasts to more tribal languages in addition to the Nuer and Dinka programs already on the air, to provide spiritual nourishment to remote areas.

Building a MERF ministry centre at Sudan's southern border at the secure location of Lokichoggio is a very essential part of MERF's growing commitment to meet the spiritual and diaconal needs of the Christians in South Sudan. It will serve as a training centre for pastors, evangelists, church-planters, elders, deacons, Sunday School teachers, as well as elementary school teachers and medical aid workers. MERF's delegation visited the Loki site and joined the church leaders in a groundbreaking ceremony. Also three members of the Loki construction committee travelled from the US to the site. Construction is scheduled to begin in January 2002.

### **Rev. J. DeGelder attends International Council Meeting for MERF-Canada**

We are very happy and thankful that Rev. J. DeGelder (a member of our committee and pastor of the Flamborough Canadian Reformed Church) was found willing and able to attend the meeting of the IC on our behalf. Attendance at such a meeting gives the Support Committees a greater understanding of the work being done and provides a valuable and necessary opportunity for

direct interaction between the Support Committees and the Board of Directors as well as the Field Committees.

### **Rev. V. Atallah installed as minister of Orland Park OPC**

During 2000 the working relationship between the Committee of Foreign Missions (COFM) of the OPC and Rev. V. Atallah was ended. The COFM then proceeded to file charges against Rev. Atallah – charges which were later dismissed by the Presbytery. We are very thankful to report that at the General Assembly of the OPC held in June 2001 any misunderstandings between the COFM and Rev. Atallah have been cleared up and there has been full

reconciliation. Rev. Atallah has been installed as a minister of the Orland Park OPC under whose supervision he now does his work as missionary. Rev. Atallah and also we as MERF-Canada are very happy with this development.

### **Thank You!**

Thank you so much for your faithful support! At this time in world history, after the events of September 11, MERF has a unique opportunity. As delegates from the Muslim countries at the IC meetings in October said: “There is much fear and uncertainty among Muslims today, and the only answer is the message of salvation in

Jesus Christ.” May many Muslims find that only answer!


Please continue to remember the work of MERF with your gifts, but above all, with your prayers. May the Lord bless all those who seek to bring the light of the gospel to those who live in darkness.

If you would like to make a personal donation, please make your cheque payable to MERF-Canada and send it to:

### **MERF-Canada**

1225 Dundas Street, RR 1  
Burlington, ON L7R 3X4

Yours in his service,

*Rev. J. Mulder, chairman*  
*Mrs. J. Van Dam, secretary* 

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# Church Expansion and Growth

*By J. VanRietschoten*

Our churches have gone from a small number in the early nineteen fifties to over fifty congregations by the year 2002. What a great blessing to see all these congregations, and in many instances schools, functioning well in spite of high financial outlay. Most of the towns in which our churches are located are of modest size. This probably is due to the fact that the high cost of schooling is somewhat offset by the lower cost of housing in smaller and rural communities. Smaller congregations in more rural settings have definite advantages. The members are in closer communion. You do not get lost in the crowd. For some small congregations it has taken a long time to grow into a fair sized congregation. An example of this is the congregation at Calgary, Alberta.

Examples of recent efforts of church establishment are Saskatoon, Saskatchewan and Trenton, Ontario. According to the brothers of the house congregation in Saskatoon, there were good opportunities for jobs in their area. Very little support was received and the effort may come to a sad end. The house congregation near Trenton is continuing with approximately thirty attending the services. In summer time this jumps to 140.

The small congregation at Denver Colorado in the United States is soon to be vacant and struggles to maintain sufficient membership in church and school. Through the years several families would have moved to Denver from Canada but were prevented by the low Canadian dollar.

The smaller congregations among us are often located in productive and also scenic areas. Denver is a bustling city near the beautiful Rocky Mountains. Graduates from the American Reformed parental school find college and university education close to home.


The house congregation at Trenton is located near several industrial centres. The area is the scenic Bay of Quinte with lots of opportunity for recreation. The house congregation receives excellent support from the Church at Toronto. This church bimonthly sends a serving elder. In addition to this the churches in Classis Ontario currently send a minister to administer the Lord's Supper.

It is surprising to see how young people in more distant congregations find ways and means to be in contact with the youth in other congregations.

In the past our churches have mostly expanded in heavier populated areas. Recently churches in Southern Ontario

that grew too large have instituted new congregations. This leaves us with a need for more ministers. Our prayer must be that the Lord would lead more men to the conviction that they should prepare for the ministry of the Gospel.

We need not only ministers for larger established congregations. We need ministers to labour in small congregations and house congregations. Call these mission posts if you must. The number of churches the Canadian Reformed Churches have should enable us to make such effort financially possible.

Members and families reading this may be encouraged to investigate, and consider joining small congregations. Consistory members and ministers of all our churches reading this may become convinced that church expansion should not only be through “splitting” of larger congregations but also through planting of new churches. Brothers who read this may, the Lord willing, become convinced that they are being called to serve in the ministry of the Gospel. 

*Rev. John VanRietschoten signs off this short article with the words: With a warm heart for seedling congregations I sign off, minister retired but not tired of it.*





## The Rebirth of Learning and the Reformation: Erasmus vs. Luther on Education

By K. Sikkema

It is well for parents and teachers to reflect on the philosophical foundations of Christian schools and Reformed approaches to teaching children. Teachers did just that at the Fall 2000 CRTA-East Convention in Fergus, Ontario, where they pondered and discussed Dr. Riemer Faber's address on education in the time of the Reformation. He effectively contrasted the views of Erasmus (1466-1536) and Luther (1483-1546) on the purpose for Christian schools and pedagogy. The speech also illustrated that what we think of the nature of man (anthropology) is related to what we believe about God (theology).

*“Erasmus laid the egg that Luther hatched.”*

A Teachers' Convention is a time to reflect on the teaching practice: what makes our teaching, our methods, our manners, and our style distinctly Reformed? It is well to consider the contributions of the early Reformation when pondering these questions. The sixteenth century started with poor-quality schools dominated by the Roman Catholic Church, and an emerging economy in which people were encouraged to learn a trade and make money. Many parents withdrew their children from the schools to pursue a trade. Both Erasmus (the famous “Christian humanist” of Rotterdam) and Luther (the Reformer from Wittenberg) deplored this development, and set out to answer fundamental questions about proper education. Dr. Faber then explored the answers Erasmus and Luther gave to these questions:

1. What is the proper definition of Christian Education?

2. What is the necessity of Christian Education?
3. What is the biblical view of teacher and student?
4. What are the best methods to employ?
5. What are the goals of Christian education?

### Erasmus

1. “Erasmus laid the egg that Luther hatched” in that his thinking anticipated that of the Reformers. Centuries of custom had obscured the Bible and the faith of the individual believer. Erasmus therefore advocated a return to the sources: the Bible to learn a holy life, and the Greek and Roman Classics for culture. To Erasmus, the Bible and the Classics were two sides of the same coin, and he thus strove for a combination of Christianity and humanism. This is reflected in Erasmus' definition of education, in which the forming of an upright moral character was first, and humanistic goals (responsibility, career and life skills) followed:

The task of fashioning the young is made up of many parts, the first and consequently the most important part of which consists of implanting the seeds of piety in the tender heart; the second in instilling a love for, and thorough knowledge of, the liberal arts; the third in giving instructions in the duties of life; the fourth in training in good manners right from the very earliest years.<sup>1</sup>

2. To Erasmus, education was necessary, lest barbarism replace civilization:

Remember that a man without education has no humanity at all; that man's life is a fleeting thing; that youth is an easy prey to sin; that adulthood is afflicted with numerous cares; and that old age, which few are permitted to reach, is barren and sterile. [. . .] you will not allow your child [. . .] to waste any portion of his existence during which he may gather resources that will greatly benefit his entire life and keep it from evil.

To Erasmus, education nurtures our very being and sets us apart from other creatures: people act from reason, and animals from instinct. Therefore, reason must be developed by education. Also, learning is expected to overcome the hardship of life. Erasmus preferred to focus on the value learning has to this earthly life, and not to eternal life.

3. While Luther took his starting point in the depravity of man, Erasmus started with the goodness of the teacher and the student. Erasmus believed that a child's mind must be instructed *before* it gets corrupted. The child's mind is receptive, pliable, and capable to take on any form, even (if well-fashioned by proper education) a god-like nature. To Erasmus, the seeds for life were implanted in us “by nature,” and teachers only need to put in a good effort to make it sprout and grow:

Every living creature learns very easily how to carry out its own functions; so also every human being can be taught virtue without any great hardship. The seeds that nature has implanted in us to attain this goal are bursting with life; the only thing that is required, in addition to this natural inclination, is the effort of a dedicated teacher.

*Luther took his starting point in the depravity of man, Erasmus started with the goodness of the teacher and the student.*

Erasmus believed that teachers were more important than school systems, as the Bible also speaks more about teachers than about a school system. With a reference to Matthew 17:5, Erasmus posed Jesus as the best model for all teachers, in whom they should see the example of patience, gentleness, and encouragement. Erasmus made the teachings of Christ the objective of all learning, and even infants must be

taught the gospel. Yet, Erasmus did not stress Christ's atonement for our sins.

4. To Erasmus, classical antiquity showed the best *method* for teaching. He believed that old Greek and Roman intellectual and cultural ideals could be integrated with Christian ideals. "There is no branch of knowledge, whether military, agricultural, musical, or architectural, which is not useful for those who have undertaken an exposition of the ancient poets or orators," he said about the value of humanistic education. A careful selection of pagan writings can even help to live a holy life: "I would not want you to imbibe pagan morals together with pagan writings. On the other hand, you will find many things there which are conducive to a holy life, and the good precepts of a pagan author should not be rejected . . ." Luther would differ here,

*Luther emphasized the need for teachers to have a curriculum and to use textbooks, like the catechism.*

but Erasmus saw Christianity as the best culmination of Greek and Roman accomplishments. In fact, he believed that antiquity should help in the interpretation of the Bible.

5. Regarding the *goal of Christian education*, Erasmus wanted to pursue learned piety. He was influenced by the renaissance in his belief that the Christian faith could not be understood without appropriating the culture and philosophy of antiquity. To him, piety comes from both civilization and the Bible. True happiness comes from studying achieve-

ments of the present and the past, with the Bible as the most important achievement, but the others are not at all excluded.

**Luther**

1. To Luther, there was a link between Reform in the schools and in the church. After his own struggle about justification, Luther recognized that it is through Christ that people regain their full humanity: "I am afraid, however, that he [Erasmus] does not advance the cause of Christ and the grace of God sufficiently . . . Human things weight more with him than the divine." In contrast to Erasmus' humanistic focus with man at the centre of interest, Luther placed God at the centre (theocentric), and identified the gospel and the grace of God as fundamental to education.

As Luther had a different assumption about man than Erasmus, he also came to a different definition of education. Starting with God, he did not want to confuse divine and human learning. What God teaches is about justification, focusing on the inner man, and arriving through the preaching; it is for the spiritual realm. Human instruction is for the temporal realm, separate from and subordinate to divine teaching. Yet, stressing the spiritual estate of all believers, Luther recognized that what happens on earth is of importance for eternal life. Midway between the earthly and the heavenly realm, the *task of Christian education* is to provide Christian instruction based on the Bible, to prepare for service of God in the earthly and the heavenly realm.

2. Luther had three arguments for the *necessity of Christian education*. First, it had to protect the children from the devil's attempts to take them away from God; second, if God allowed education to take

place, we should not reject it; third – and most importantly – it is a command of God: see Psalm 78. While for Erasmus the necessity of education lay within humanity, for Luther it lay in God's commands:

recall the command of God, who through Moses urges and enjoins parents so often to instruct their children that Psalm 78 says, "how earnestly He commanded our fathers to teach their children and to instruct their children's children" (Ps 78:5-6). This is also evident in God's fourth commandment.

*"A city's best and greatest welfare, safety, and strength consists rather in its having many able, learned, wise, honorable, and well-educated citizens."*

3. As far as Erasmus was concerned, *human intellect* separated people from animals, but for Luther it was their being *created in the image of God*, and their task on earth. As, through the fall into sin, man has become depraved, the capabilities of the human natural will are virtually nil. Luther countered Erasmus on this, saying, "Although the works of man always seem attractive and good, they are nevertheless likely to be mortal sins . . . Free will after the fall exists in name only, and as long as it does what it is able to do it commits a mortal sin . . . The person who believes that he can obtain grace by doing what is in him adds sin to sin." Luther directs us to the counsel of God: people (including children) are fallen and depraved, and yet redeemed by God's

Erasmus' view	Topic	Luther's view
positive	view of natural man	negative
man-centred	foundational focus	God- and Christ-centred
joined to faith	humanistic/classical learning	subordinated to faith
personal piety	goal of education	reform of the community
in harmony with Scripture	Greek and Roman classics	to be read in view of Scripture
teacher	focus of delivery of education	system
benefits for the individual	objective of education	education for service to God
earthly	fruits of learning	spiritual and earthly



grace. Teachers who ignore this, ignore the gospel. The task of the teacher is both spiritual and secular. There is a union between teaching faith and the task on this earth: as Christ has only one body, education refers to this realm as well. Education must consider how this child must be prepared for the task in this life.

- Regarding the *methods* to be employed, Luther was original in building from the Bible for curriculum: the gospel only shows people as depraved, and nothing else can show how this depravity can be removed. For that reason, instruction in the Bible makes the school a Christian school, and it must be a subject in itself as well as permeate all other subjects. Luther also had a new, original emphasis on the parental obligation in education. Together with Melancthon he devised a school order which helped

bring about the first public school. He emphasized the need for teachers to have a curriculum and to use textbooks, like the catechism. To Luther, the writers of antiquity were only useful as a means to an end, rather than an end in themselves (as with Erasmus). The ancient world must be seen and studied in the historical context of salvation, as it led to conditions in which the gospel could be preached: "I realize there has never been a great revelation of God's word unless God has first prepared the way by the rise and flourishing of languages and learning, as though these were forerunners, a sort of [John] the Baptist."

- For Luther, the goal of education was to fight the devil, and, in line with 2 Timothy 3:15, to know the Bible itself: "Let this, then, my dear sirs and friends, be the first consideration to influence you, namely, that herein we are fighting against

the devil as the most dangerous and subtle enemy of all." Through instruction in the Bible children learn to bring glory and praise to God. By providing for public education, the temporal government has a task to promote the spiritual realm, while not neglecting its temporal responsibilities: "A city's best and greatest welfare, safety, and strength consists rather in its having many able, learned, wise, honorable, and well-educated citizens."

In conclusion, Dr. Faber summarized key points of his paper in a chart, encouraging each teacher present to consider on each point what our own conscious or subconscious assumptions are.

'Quotes are taken directly from Luther's writings (translated by R. Faber). **C**

*Mr. Keith Sikkema is a grade 8 teacher at John Calvin School in Smithville, Ontario.*

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Dear editor:

The recent article by Rev. J. Ludwig about Campfire caught my attention and disappointment. His claim that the London consistory did not pronounce "participation in Campfire" as "wrong" but rather simply "expressed its hesitancy to *officially* support this organization through congregational prayer etc." implies that these activities were not in line with Scripture or confessions.

He writes "council has difficulty with the fact that a camp is run in which Canadian Reformed children are integrated with the children of unbelievers. The mingling and camaraderie which takes place in a camp setting is contrary to what is confessed in Lord's Day 27, namely, that children of believers are distinguished (set apart) from the children of unbelievers." How do you carry out the mandate of Matthew 28 if "distinguished from" means that "mingling and camaraderie in a camp setting" is not permitted? How could Vacation Bible Schools function under this interpretation of Lord's Day 27?

"Friendship with the world . . ." (James 4:4) is entirely different from "mingling and camaraderie . . . in a

camp setting" under the direction of counselors who, for the most part, are confessing members of the Canadian Reformed Church, for the purpose of "reaching out to children . . . within the various inner city communities."

Campfire! organizers state they serve a purpose in also "reaching out to children . . . within the Canadian Reformed community." Rev. J. Ludwig and his council should not be surprised, much less alarmed that the benefits of mission work are two sided. The hearers of the message are enriched and those who share also receive a measure of blessing. This does not mean that Campfire! has taken on "the task of parents, the minister and the elders" to now also "evangelize covenant children?" It simply acknowledges that spiritual benefits accrue to kids when they share their faith with others.

Rev. Ludwig finds, after reviewing "only one sample," that the Campfire materials are suspect and concludes the program "contains an individualistic thrust . . . emphasis on personal commitment to Jesus without an eye for the covenant . . . its style is more in the mold of Billy Graham." Such sweeping

criticism and name-dropping, even with the disclaimer suggesting "that does not mean there are no good elements in this program," leaves very little to celebrate. Why not share with the readers of *Clarion* "those good elements" and so encourage young people?

Canadian Reformed people are often criticized for appearing to present themselves as "exclusive." Rev. Ludwig's position that "mingling and camaraderie which takes place in a camp setting . . . is contrary to what is confessed in Lord's Day 27" strengthens the exclusivist perception and does not do credit to what it means to be a (Canadian) Reformed Christian seeking to extend the hand of fellowship in other Reformed communities. That I find to be deeply troubling.

*Ed Vanderboom  
Langley, British Columbia*

### Dear Editor:

I recently received the January 4, 2002 issue of *Clarion* (Volume 51, No. 1) and was surprised and pleased to see the balanced and well researched article by Rev. J. Ludwig of London,

Ontario printed in *Clarion*. Your readers will remember that this was in response to the editorial by Rev. Cl. Stam, which we had read in the October 26, 2001 issue of *Clarion* entitled "Distinction and/or Separation." Rev. Stam had intimated that we, who do not share his enthusiasm and do not endorse "Campfire," are in danger of sectarian Anabaptist isolationism.

I was disappointed that Rev. Stam did not take Rev. Ludwig's response seriously and reacted in such a sarcastic manner. Especially, when Rev Ludwig was so clear and measured in his response to the serious allegations and gave some clear direction on how evangelism ought to be done. Why are "schoolyard bully" tactics used by the co-editor of *Clarion*? And why does he take such offense at Campfire's style being likened to that used by Billy Graham, when we hear supporters of Campfire praise Billy Graham's methods?

The churches are not well served by such sarcasm.

Ed Helder  
Wellandport, Ontario

#### Dear Ed:

You also wrote an extensive letter to the magazine *Reformed Polemics*, which was published there. Evidently you want to cover all the bases. Good for you. I'm a bit of a base runner myself.

In this issue's editorial I respond to some of the allegations made in the letter to *Reformed Polemics*. In response to the present letter, I make the following remarks for now.

You give no evidence to support your claims about "intimations" I may have made. What is an "intimation?" A false accusation, neatly camouflaged? The terminology about not sharing my "enthusiasm" is also sarcastic.

What do you really know about my enthusiasm, Ed? It certainly does not start and end with Campfire, although I do appreciate the endeavour and support the concept of Campfire.

My warning against sectarian Anabaptist isolationism should be taken seriously, because we are not above or beyond this fallacy. It is only a warning, based on a solid ground, namely the false dilemma made between "distinguished" and "separated." Ed, I have not read a well- documented and balanced response to this crucial aspect.

What "schoolyard bully tactics" did I employ? Again, no evidence is given. You've got to be specific, Ed; otherwise it is hard to reply. It is a serious charge without substance. Read Lord's Day

43. I think you have to clean up your act, Ed, in order to be credible and effective, and this is not written in sarcasm but with sincerity.

The response to my concern about "dropping names" like Billy Graham is answered by you, Ed, with pure hearsay: "We hear supporters of Campfire praise Billy Graham's methods." I have personally never heard this praise. Maybe you have better and bigger ears than I have. Anyway, in the future I hope D.V. to take a closer look at Billy Graham's "methods." We will consider both the positive and the negative factors and try to do justice to the man's work.

I agree that the churches are not served by sarcasm, although a little dash of naughtiness adds some spice and flavour to articles/editorials. But neither are the churches served by knee-jerk reactions that discredit the integrity of brothers without delving into the issues.

I did take Rev. Ludwig's response seriously, Ed. And I take your letters seriously, too. That is why we are not yet finished with these matters. Thanks for bringing them to my attention.

Cl. Stam

#### Dear Editor,

For the last two summers, I have spent a total of three weeks as a cook at Campfire! The cooks were given the opportunity to partake in several activities, devotions, and to observe a lot of formal and informal interaction among counsellors and campers.

Reading Rev. J. Ludwig's article (*Clarion*, Jan. 4, 2002) makes me wonder if we are talking about the same Campfire! Let me explain. Under "Abiding principle," Rev. Ludwig writes: "Whoever. . . wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Campfire! encourages our children to do exactly that."

Wanting to be a friend of the world would imply to willingly live with ungodly motives, to be interested in, accepting of, and indulging in godless practices with unbelievers. Wanting to be a friend of the world couldn't possibly mean studying the Lord's Word together, learning from a wiser adult, and training in Christian virtues via group activities designed for that purpose. That's what I saw happening at Campfire!

Under "The Main Issue," Rev. Ludwig quotes from Pilgrim's bulletin: ". . . that the children of believers are distinguished (set apart) from the children of unbelievers, many of which. . . come from families where there is

much pain and misery caused by abuse, alcoholism, etc."

Were there children there from broken homes, "where there is much pain and misery caused by abuse, alcoholism, etc.?" Yes, there were. And they came from homes of Canadian Reformed families as well as from homes of non-Canadian Reformed people, possibly unbelievers. I'm not sure what the implication is in this quote from Pilgrim's bulletin. What I saw were attempts at developing the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22), and that with prayer and Scripture reading.

The reason why I originally applied for a position at Campfire! was because I had heard *only* positive things about it, time and again. This I had to see!! And the half was not told me!

At Campfire, the campers and counsellors are daily steeped in hours of Bible study, prayer, and singing praises. Christian fellowship is evident at meal times, during arts and crafts activities, and leisure hours. Campers learn to identify their talents, develop them, and praise their Maker for them. The counsellors strive for and exhibit Christ-like behaviour of high calibre. Discipline is administered in a biblical manner. At the end of the week, most of the shy, doubtful and apprehensive children speak out openly of their desire to study God's Word. Others express their intentions of doing daily devotions, or of practicing more kindness in their family settings.

There is no evidence at all of compromising with the world. Under "Forming Friendships?", Rev. Ludwig writes, "As living members of Christ open the Scriptures with unbelieving neighbours." Well, that is exactly what is being done at Campfire!

Rev. Ludwig also writes: "Both we and our children, therefore, instead of socializing with them ought to evangelize them." Evangelizing is being done at Campfire! But how can it be done without socializing to some extent? Surely a prerequisite statement of faith is not required? I suppose missionaries are also hospitable, kind, and sociable as they evangelize.

It was deeply gratifying to be a part of Campfire!'s Christian community for a few weeks. (I highly recommend it to everyone!) I was thrilled to see so many young people committed to sharing with others the gospel which they hold so dear. And they constantly give our Lord the praise for it! That is Kingdom work! And that is the Campfire! I experienced.

Ann Wierenga  
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