

# Clarion

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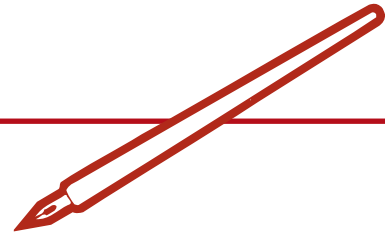
*Numbers*

*10:1-10*

*Mass Band –  
March 23, 2002*

INSIDE!





By Cl. Stam



## The Evaluation of Divergences (1)

The General Synod of Neerlandia 2001 decided to enter into a sister-church relationship with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC). This decision did not come suddenly or unexpectedly, because the Canadian Reformed Churches had been engaged in contacts with the OPC since 1965 and had formally recognized the OPC in 1977. Subsequent Synods consistently maintained this recognition until the entering into a sister-church relationship in 2001.

It is true that there were still some matters in which the two churches did not yet fully agree. But it was felt that these matters could continue to be discussed within the relationship as sister churches. The decision of Synod Neerlandia took into account that the confessional and church-political divergences had been sufficiently discussed and that these did not form any hindrance to *enter* into this new relationship.

*The General Synod of Neerlandia 2001 decided to enter into a sister-church relationship with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.*

### A serious allegation

I mention this because I sometimes receive the impression that some of our members think that Synod 2001 in deciding to enter into a sister-church relationship with the OPC simply ignored the divergences and bartered away important biblical truths and a good portion of our confessional Reformed heritage.

In *Reformed Polemics* (March 10, 2002, Volume 6, No. 7) Pete deBoer agrees that the Lord calls us to unity with all believers. Then he adds, "But when we cannot get that done in the time frame we set for ourselves, we are not permitted to compromise the truth and/or ignore significant differences. As an unhappy consequence to the hurry to establish unity many have changed their understanding of what the Church is." This statement suggests that the following has taken place:

1) our churches have hastily placed practice before principle; while

- 2) in the process the truth (about the church) has been compromised; and
- 3) many have changed their understanding of what the church is.

*Where Christ leads in his church-gathering work, we must obediently follow Him.*

We read also that many Reformed Christians have been "led to abandon the Scriptural norms they have adhered to and defended in the past." This is a serious allegation.

It need not surprise us, then, that Pete deBoer calls for "a return, a reforming of our actions and thought patterns." We are reminded of the 7000 faithful in Israel who had not bowed their knees to Baal. Bringing all this together, I am led to the conclusion that entering into a sister church relationship with the OPC was an act of idolatry, bowing to the spirit of the age and not to the Spirit of the Scriptures. *Quod erat demonstrandum?*

I want to take this allegation very seriously. If it is true, we have to heed the call to reformation. If it is not true, the allegation should be withdrawn, or at least put in a proper perspective.

### "Church-gathering work"

Pete deBoer writes in the same article that part of the life of obedience is "to become and remain members of his [*Christ's*] church-gathering work." (italics mine, Cl.S). I do not recognize this expression from our confessions. We do

*I now feel that the work of the brothers who made this detailed evaluation of the divergences in 1986 was not properly utilized.*

confess that we must join the "holy assembly and congregation" and "maintain the unity of the church" (Article 28, Belgic Confession). This church is very concrete and visible so that it can and must be joined. But to speak of joining

Christ's church-gathering work is rather strange. When I join the true church, I also am enjoined in Christ's church gathering work.

This is not a minor issue or a splitting of hairs. Jesus Christ gathers his church in the unity of the true faith (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 21, Q&A 54). We do not confess to be and remain living members of Christ's church-gathering work, but of his church. The two are not identical. The usage of this expression should be clarified.

For it could very well be that by *not* entering into a sister-church relationship with the OPC we compromise our confession and hinder Christ's church-gathering work. Instead of seeking and maintaining unity, we would then deny it or break it. Where Christ leads in his church-gathering work, we must obediently follow Him. It seems to me that this was rather the conviction of the brothers at Synod

### What's inside?

Synod Neerlandia 2001 offered ecclesiastical fellowship to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. This offer was accepted by the OPC. Those who read the Acts of Synod Neerlandia regarding the decision about the OPC will take note of "the divergences." This is something which has generated some interesting discussions in our circles. In his editorial, Rev. Cl. Stam examines this matter and places it in the historical perspective with which he is well acquainted.

Dr. R. Faber concludes his two part article on the ninety-five theses of Martin Luther. He focuses particularly on the matter of indulgences. Luther's condemnation of this matter could have cost him his life. But his fight was for the glory of God and the salvation of sinners. Dr. Faber brings this home for us today by coming to the pinpointed question: "Are we humbled by our sins, and is repentance a daily undertaking visible in our lives? These questions were posed in the theses, and they are relevant today."

In his press release, Dr. J. De Jong passes on some key points of speeches by Dr. W.G. de Vries of Zwolle, Holland, which were delivered in Australia. This is a two part press release. It gives some good insights into the theological developments in the Netherlands which led up to the liberation in 1944.

It has been a while since Rev. J. de Gelder submitted a *Hiliter* column. Thankfully we have one in this issue. Rev. de Gelder highlights some of the interesting and important things going on in our churches.

We have in this issue our regular *Treasures, New and Old* column, a brief introduction to the Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers' College in Hamilton, a press release from ILPB, as well as a letter to the editor. Last but not least, we have a report on a Mass Band Concert in Alberta, comprised of bands from our schools in Alberta, British Columbia and Manitoba. This was a monumental undertaking with truly amazing results.

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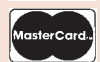
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Neerlandia. This conviction did not come overnight, nor was it hastily done, but had grown through many years (1965-2001) of discussing and evaluating divergences that existed and some that continue to exist.

### Report received

General Synod Burlington 1986 was presented with a report commissioned by a previous Synod in which the divergences with the OPC were evaluated. I leave out of discussion now the peculiar background and history of that report, for I am more concerned with its contents. But we must take note of the function of this report.

Synod 1986 only "received" this report. It was not at that time "adopted." As far as I can remember, Synod 1986 did not want to accept this report as the final doctrinal statement about the matters under discussion. There was fear that an adopted report could come to lead a life of its own as a fourth Form of Unity or another "declaration of principles." Therefore Synod carefully chose the word "received." At the time, I agreed with that choice.

Synod Lincoln 1992 specifically dealt with the word "received," and noted that this word was used in 1986 because the evaluation of the divergences was not "adopted as final." The same Synod admitted that this report containing the evaluation of the divergences was "neither refuted nor rejected." In other words, this report on the evaluation of the differences between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the OPC was not to be seen as final and irrevocable, but it did have some standing, for it was never thrown out.

It is kind of strange, is it not? Here we have a commissioned report which in great detail evaluates the divergences between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the OPC, and which is "received" but not adopted, never accepted and yet never rejected. Thinking about this later, I concluded that we made a faux pas.

Synod Abbotsford 1995 also touched on the status of this report and it was again observed that no one had ever at any Synod challenged the conclusions of this report. Finally, Synod Neerlandia 2001 referred to the report on the evaluation of divergences when it said, "In light of the fact that several of our Synods have explained that the various divergences cannot be obstacles to ecclesiastical fellowship . . . it is appropriate to come to ecclesiastical fellowship" (*Acts*, page 49).

A crucial report and detailed evaluation, presented in 1986, never refuted, was finally applied in full measure, fifteen years after its inception, in 2001.

### No hurry at all

I must conclude from the above-mentioned facts that our churches were never in a hurry to establish unity with the OPC. At least, the suggestion of a hasty decision is disproved by the length of time we took to come to a proper relationship. I must also conclude that on the way to this unity, there was no unbiblical change of thinking about the church among us. The 1986 report guided us clearly in the right biblical and confessional direction! I hope to come back to this point in a later article. Perhaps this report can be reprinted in *Clarion* or made available in separate format.

I readily admit that during all these years of study, reflection, and discussion, I have come to understand some things differently. For one, I now feel that the work of the brothers who made this detailed evaluation of the divergences in 1986 was not properly utilized. I should have interacted more with the contents of this report. Therefore I want to devote some editorials to this report, the Lord willing.

*Semper reformanda.*



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



By C.J. VanderVelde

## Trust in the LORD Always

*“Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.”*

Proverbs 3:5, 6

By nature we are inclined to trust in ourselves and to lean on our own understanding. We want to be the master of our own lives, without regard for God. That was precisely the sin of Adam and Eve, our first parents in paradise, who were led to believe by the devil that they could rely on their own understanding and live independently of God. Ever since that time, the call has gone out to trust in the LORD and acknowledge Him in everything that we do.

Of course, the text does not mean that we may not use our understanding since God gives us the gift of understanding for use in his service. The Book of Proverbs shows clearly that man should use his understanding to develop skills and get ahead in life. The text says that we may not *lean* on our own understanding and *rely* on it as if we ourselves can chart the course of our lives. Someone who leans on a cane to get around depends on that cane; it is his support. The LORD, however, does not want us to depend on our own insight, but instead He wants us to depend on Him.

Notice that the text speaks about trusting in *the LORD*, thereby using God’s covenant name. We are told to trust in Him who has made an eternal covenant of grace with us and has promised to provide us with all good and avert all evil or turn it to our benefit. Throughout the history of redemption, the LORD has been faithful to his covenant promises. At the full-

ness of time, the Father sent the promised Saviour and thus the foundation was laid for covenant fellowship. Christ is our wisdom from God, that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption (1 Cor 1:30). The wisdom of God pertains to that which no human mind could conceive, namely, salvation through Jesus Christ! Therefore, in every other aspect of life too, we should not rely on our own understanding.

Our faithful covenant God asks for the response of faith from us! This involves a radical demand: “Trust in the LORD with *all* your heart. . . ; in *all* your ways acknowledge Him. . . .” The LORD is telling us that He wants our undivided hearts. Yet, it is a daily struggle for us to place all our trust in God because we so easily fall into the trap of relying first on ourselves and on God for only a few areas of our lives. Sometimes we think and act as if God is for the soul and the rest is our business. This is far from the truth! Rather than being removed from daily affairs, God is so involved that He even knows the number of the hairs on our head (Matt 10:30). God wants us to recognize that He has an absolute claim on our lives and that we must acknowledge Him in everything that we undertake. Just as it is insulting to someone when we ignore that person and do not acknowledge his presence, so it is insulting to God when we ignore Him and do not acknowledge his presence in our lives. The

LORD wants us to ask what is right and pleasing according to Him, thereby acknowledging that we are dependent on his help in everything that we do.

Sometimes we look at people who live without God, and we think that they are managing just fine. Perhaps it even looks attractive to live like they do, without regard for God and without any apparent limitations. But the Book of Proverbs points out that living without God is self-destructive ultimately since “The LORD’s curse is on the house of the wicked, but He blesses the home of the righteous” (Prov 3:33).

When we trust in the LORD and acknowledge Him in all our ways, we will be rewarded because the LORD will make our paths straight. This does not mean that life will be free of problems. In fact, sometimes life seems as if it is full of zigzags and detours brought about by various adversities. Yet, through it all, the LORD is working out his plan of salvation for our lives. As the Apostle Paul says, “. . . in all things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Rom 8:28; cf. Heidelberg Catechism Lord’s Day 1). We will arrive at the goal for our lives: blessed fellowship with God in glory!



*Rev. C.J. VanderVelde is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Yarrow, British Columbia.*



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# Luther's Ninety-Five Theses and the Beginning of the Reformation (Part 2)

By R. Faber

In the first part of this article we considered what caused Luther to write the ninety-five theses. Luther's motivation was a new insight into the gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith in the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. The misunderstanding of this doctrine of justification resulted in the formation of the sacrament of penance, according to which the sinful believer could purchase the remission of sin. In Theses One through Twenty-five Luther argued that penance is not a sacrament, but a conversion of the heart that leads to a permanent change in behaviour. He also questioned the foundation of purgatory and the extent of the pope's authority. In this second installment we shall summarize the remaining theses, and consider also the immediate consequences which their publication had for Luther and the church. We shall see that the publication of the theses signalled the start of the Protestant Reformation. Lastly, we shall note that the substance of the theses remains relevant for the church of today.

## Good works

In response to Luther's criticism of the sale of indulgences in the first twenty-five theses, the question may arise, why were indulgences so attractive? In Theses Twenty-six through Twenty-nine Luther answers by stating that the sale of indulgences is based upon human greed, and not on the proper desire to perform good works. The church was abusing the practice only for its own financial benefit. There is no biblical basis for this "sacrament," and Thesis Twenty-seven states that *they preach only human doctrines who say that as soon as the money clinks into the money chest, the soul flies out of purgatory.*

In Theses Thirty-one through Forty-seven, Luther argues that people erroneously believe that indulgences are to be preferred over deeds of charity; but the purchase of indulgences cannot be compared to works of mercy, and it is better to give to the poor than buy letters of remission. *Christians are to be taught that he who gives to the poor or lends to the needy does a better deed than he who buys indulgences (43).* Here Luther points back to the first thesis, in which we learn that repentance implies a complete lifetime of regret for sins and working for the glory of God. Here for the first time Luther asks the question, what constitutes a good work?

*Luther argues that people erroneously believe that indulgences are to be preferred over deeds of charity.*

Or, what is the relationship between being saved and performing such works? We see again that while the immediate point is a comparison of buying indulgences and lending to the poor, the larger implication is that good works are performed only from faith which God in his grace grants to us. The later impact – by faith alone – would deal a serious blow to the church's teachings of good works.

## The gospel

Another issue in the Reformation that is broached in the theses is the importance of the preaching of the gospel, something which the Romanist church had obscured. In Theses Fifty-three to Fifty-five Luther complains that the

proclamation of the gospel was being hindered by the preaching of indulgences. *They are enemies of Christ and the pope who forbid altogether the preaching of the Word of God in some churches in order that indulgences may be preached in others (53). Injury is done the Word of God, when, in the same sermon, an equal or larger amount of time is devoted to indulgences than to the Word. (54)* These two theses, and several others, respond to the stipulation in Albert's instructions that sermons were not to be held in a town while the indulgences were being preached there. Of course, the aim was to prevent any competition from hindering the sales. Yet Luther knew that *the true treasure of the church is the most holy gospel of the glory and grace of God (62).* During the middle ages the notion had developed that the work of Jesus Christ and of some saints was so effective that acts of goodness had been stored up by the church in a kind of treasure-house. From this bank, if you will, one could purchase good works in the form of indulgence letters. Luther responds to this teaching with the assertion that the most valuable possession of the church is the Word of God. The proclamation of the gospel of grace is the true treasure of the church, and it cannot be replaced by the bank of indulgences. In the remaining theses Luther addresses the abuses in the preaching of indulgences (67-80) and recounts the critical reaction to the trafficking of them (81-95).

## Consequences:

As we consider the consequences of posting the theses, we note first that the impact which they had was much greater than their contents suggest. Luther himself was surprised at their

effect, for he had not conceived them as an attack against the church or the pope. Luther's letter to the archbishop and his own later reflections reveal that he wished to correct the misunderstanding of the indulgences.

Regardless of Luther's intention, the theses had considerable impact. In part this was due to the recently invented printing press, which served to spread the theses in German translation quickly among people who already were disenchanted with the church. More importantly, those who read the theses, both common people and the clergy, saw that there was a lot more to them than appeared at first sight. They realized that the logical conclusions to many theses directly opposed the teaching of the church about the sacraments, purgatory, the power of the pope, forgiveness of sins, righteousness, and satisfaction.

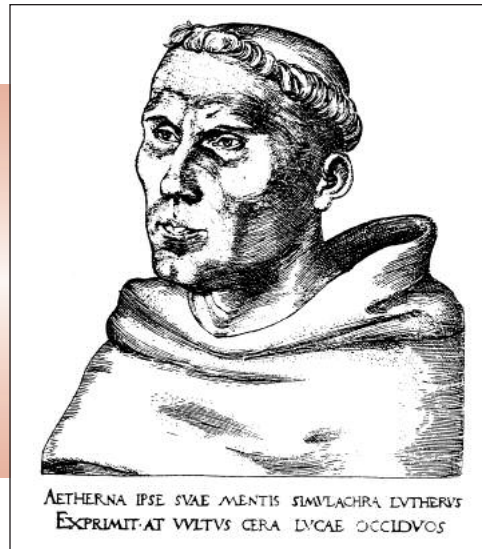
*He was assured that the righteousness of Christ is not acquired by our own works, but imputed through faith worked in the heart by the preaching of the gospel.*

Also Luther's own thinking progressed between 1517 and 1518. Luther was reading Hebrews at the time, and as you know, this book speaks especially of the doctrine of Christ and his redemption. He was assured that the righteousness of Christ is not acquired by our own works, but imputed through faith worked in the heart by the preaching of the gospel. Luther's understanding increased from a reaction to the good works of indulgence to a realization that all satisfaction is obtained only by the great high-priest. A sermon entitled *On Indulgences and Grace*, published in 1517, shows how Luther's thinking was developing, for in one sentence he removes the links between contrition, confession, and satisfaction. God punishes sin, the sermon concluded, and no human has the power or right to remit it.

### **The Heidelberg Disputation (1518)**

As a member of the Augustinian order of monks, Luther had to answer to his fellow priests and superiors, and in April 1518 he was called to defend his teaching. When his supportive su-

*Martin Luther*



perior, Johann von Staupitz, called the meeting, he advised Luther to tread softly by focussing on the doctrines of sin, grace and free will. At the time people did not realize that by questioning the efficacy of penance, the *Ninety-Five Theses* had anticipated also a criticism of the church's teaching of these important doctrines. So we may say that yet another consequence of publishing the theses was that Luther himself was forced to take the next logical steps in applying Scripture to other teachings of the church. He prepared another twenty-eight theses for the disputation at Heidelberg. And in them Luther develops the teaching that sinful man is incapable of performing good works. To give only one example, the third thesis posits that "although the works of man always seem attractive and good, they are nevertheless likely to be mortal sins." Papal indulgences do not effect reconciliation with God. To support this thesis with Scripture, Luther quotes Psalm 143:2, "Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for no man living is righteous before thee." Luther argues that since the works of man are mortal sins, salvation can come only by the grace of God, which is revealed in Christ. He argues further that God reveals Himself to man through the passion and the cross of Christ; it is only by faith that this act of atonement can become part of the life of the believer. We see that in this debate the impact of the theses is being felt, for now the consequences of their conclusions were expressed.

This debate was important also for the influence the *Ninety-Five Theses* had upon others, for many of the younger Augustinian monks and those

partial to the evangelical cause were convinced of the truth of Luther's arguments. Most notably affected was Martin Bucer, the reformer of Strasbourg and later acquaintance of Calvin. He was impressed by the biblical evidence Luther adduced, by his courtesy and willingness to listen, and his courage. The influence of the theses was spreading.

*By January 1521 the pope excommunicated Luther from the church, an act which forced the secular governor, emperor Charles V, to consider burning Luther at the stake.*

### **The Hearing at Augsburg (1518)**

It is not surprising to learn that Pope Leo X reacted differently to the *Ninety-Five Theses*. In October 1518 the Roman Council began an official trial when it sent cardinal Cajetan, the papal legate, to examine Luther at Augsburg. Luther went there knowing that those who are declared heretics face burning at the stake. Briefly put, at Augsburg Cajetan ordered Luther to recant his errors and to recognize papal authority. The interrogation was fruitless; Luther left before decisions were made about him, and quit the city before he could be arrested. Thus within a year of the publication of the theses, a rift developed between the pious monk Luther and his superiors in the church.



The Diet of Worms 1521

The conflict between Wittenberg and Rome escalated, and in the following year, 1519, Luther debated with the Romanist theologian, John Eck in Leipzig. Now Luther had the boldness to develop what was already implied in the theses, namely that the authority of the pope was limited to being a human institution without divine right. He also declared that the councils of the church had erred in the past and would do so again. Thus, like the authority of the pope, the power of the church is subject to the Bible. By the end of the year Luther also explained that penance was a non-biblical sacrament. In short, the impact of the theses was that Luther now drew the logical conclusions to many of them, and championed *sola Scriptura*.

In response to Luther's daring development of the theses, the Romanist church quickened the process against him. In June 1520, Pope Leo X issues an official decree stating that he will excommunicate Luther unless he recants within sixty days. He also orders the burning of all Luther's writings, to which the reformer responded by burning copies of the canon laws and the papal decree, thereby making the break with the pope and the Roman Catholic church. By January 1521 the pope excommunicated Luther from the church, an act which forced the secular governor, emperor Charles V, to consider burning Luther at the stake. He ordered Luther to appear before him for a final hearing in April of 1521, at the city of Worms.

### The Diet of Worms (1521)

The Diet of Worms in 1521 may be seen as the climax of events started by

the publication of the theses, and it demonstrates the impact which they had. At this meeting, emperor Charles V asked Luther two simple questions: 1. Are you the author of the works which led the pope to excommunicate you? 2. Are you prepared to withdraw anything in them, and so to recant your teaching? Luther's books had been piled on the table, and Luther's assistant requested that their titles be read aloud. Luther responded that the books on the table and as read off were indeed his, and that he had possibly written a few more. After reflecting for a day upon the second question, Luther said that since the matter concerns his own faith, the salvation of his soul, and the Word of God, he could not recant. To quote Luther, "unless I am convinced by the testimony of the holy Scriptures or by evident rational grounds, for I do not trust the pope or the Council alone (since it is well-known that they often erred and contradicted themselves), I will be bound by the scriptural passages I have quoted. My conscience is captive to the Word of God, and I cannot and do not want to recant anything because it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand. May God help me. Amen." While Charles V consulted about the penalty for Luther, the reformer received a special escort from Worms to a safe place where his life would not be threatened. The emperor proceeded with his edict, declared Luther a heretic, and made him an outlaw. However, Frederik the Wise, being a powerful ruler in the empire, did not act on the edict, and Luther – who had been taken to the safety of the Wartburg castle, could continue to promote the reform of

the church. While there would be many more developments, we may say that the edict of Worms represents the final break between the Wittenberg reformers and the Roman church.

### Conclusion

What, we may ask, does it benefit us to know and remember what happened on October 31? Or, what is the relevance of the theses and their impact for reformed people today? The main point of Luther's theses was that indulgences may not be considered a sacrament of total forgiveness; while modern Protestants have little difficulty in appreciating this, they may be inclined to think that outward actions have some efficacy or arise from one's own motivation. In other words, are we not inclined to create rules and requirements which, when we keep them, give us the feeling that we have satisfied God? It was not for nothing that the first thesis read "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, 'repent,' he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance." Are we humbled by our sins, and is repentance a daily undertaking visible in our lives? These questions were posed in the theses, and they are relevant today.

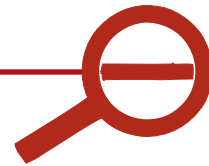
*Are we humbled by our sins, and is repentance a daily undertaking visible in our lives?*

On the other hand, do we adore God sufficiently for the grace that He has shown in sending his only Son? Do we acknowledge our inability to do any good, and realize the necessity of Christ's intercession? To put it differently, do we have true faith, the firm conviction and knowledge that Christ has died not only for others but also for me? It will be clear, I think, that when we commemorate the Reformation we should not merely recall what God performed in history, but see the importance of his deeds for us as individuals and as a church today. As reformed believers, therefore, let us continue to reform our lives according to God's will.

<sup>1</sup>H.J. Grimm, ed., *Luther's Works* (Philadelphia, 1957), Vol. 31, p. 39.

*Dr. R. Faber is professor and chair of Classical Studies at University of Waterloo.*





## 100 Years of Church and Theology (Part 1)

The Free Reformed Study Centre in Armadale, Australia invited Dr. W.G. de Vries of Zwolle, Holland, to give a number of guest lectures for their society. These lectures found their way into the Australian magazine *Una Sancta*, and we gladly pass on the text of the speeches for the benefit of our Canadian and American readers.<sup>1</sup> The first speech covers in a overview the last hundred years of theological development on the continent, and also offers Dr. De Vries' perspective on the developments of church life among our sister churches in Holland:

1. We live at the beginning of the Twenty-first Century. Behind us lies a century in which there was more change than in all the centuries before. Whereas the Nineteenth Century began with the invention of the steam engine, in the Twentieth Century breathtaking inventions were made and applied. Think of the development of the motor car, aircraft and the computer. Micro-technology is spectacular and continually offers new possibilities. Bear in mind that God placed all these possibilities into our world at its creation, but it took thousands of years for people to discover and employ them. And still the end has not yet come. Have we come to the end of the ages in this century? ( 1 Cor 10:11 ).

We also ask ourselves this question when we consider the progress and the development of theology, the study or doctrine of God. Doctrine invariably influences life, also church life. In this area, too, there have been, so to speak, spiritual landslides. Whereas in the Nineteenth Century most Dutch people were baptized, that has drastically changed during the Twentieth. It could even be argued that the Netherlands should now be regarded as a mission field. Whole generations have no notion what-

ever of God and his Word, a situation to which modern theology has made a major contribution.

2. These spiritual rapids are connected with the influence exerted on man by the modern media. Everything enters our living rooms via radio and television. Modern theology plays an important role in this, at any rate on those who are still receptive to this type of information, for the masses are only interested in bread and games, that is, in entertainment.

*All manner of old heresies were served up during the Twentieth Century as new and fresh, but in fact they were old and stifled – hence, not modern.*

Now it is remarkable that the developments in theology are not really as new and renewing as they have been made out to be. All manner of old heresies were served up during the Twentieth Century as new and fresh, but in fact they were old and stale. So, not modern.

### Not modern

The roots of this theology go back to the Seventeenth, Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries. Unlimited confidence was placed in human reason and so those parts of the Bible that could not be grasped by so-called common sense were scrapped. Especially at the beginning and during the course of the Nineteenth Century the contents of the Bible were subjected to critical scrutiny from a historical and literary angle. Thus the contents of the Old Testament were explained in terms of the Eastern environment in the time when it was written. German scholars, especially,

did their utmost to demonstrate how the Old Testament was derived from heathen myths and customs. So arose, for example, the "Babel-Bible" controversy which hinged on the theory that the old Babylonian legends exerted an enormous influence on the Bible.

Then it was claimed that the story of Israel's journey through the desert did not tally at all. For example, the critics gloatingly pointed to the building of the tabernacle, in which much use was made of copper. They claimed that the Israelites could not possibly have got hold of that copper, and that, even if there had been copper in those days, they would have been unable to use it because of the exceptionally high temperatures required to melt it. Innumerable people in the Nineteenth Century were completely taken in by this sort of criticism. Fortunately, our ancestors at the time of the Secession were not! But at the beginning of the previous century copper mines from the time of the ancient Egyptians were discovered in the area through which the Israelites passed. And in the sand remnants were found of furnaces containing numerous air holes through which the desert wind could blow, thus fanning the fires to extremely high temperatures. Of course, on this point the reliability of the Bible story was quickly re-accepted. The point of this example is to show that Bible criticism is not "modern" at all. In fact, it is already centuries old.

### Neither modern nor theology

We cannot actually speak of theology here either, for theology is literally "the doctrine of or about God." It is our conviction that this branch of study, to be worthy of the name, may make God the object of its investigation only if it respectfully recognizes

that it deals with God who has *revealed himself and insofar* as He has revealed himself. But that is just what modern theology generally refuses to accept. According to modern theology the Bible does not contain any divine revelation, but is the result of human experience. It is a matter of men according meaning to God. And the meaning accorded to Jesus by the New Testament is merely the product of the first Christian communities. So the Bible contains human, historical and religious writings that need to be examined critically.

Hence in the state universities theology is part of *religious studies*. The world religions are studied, and Judaism and Christianity are given a place among them. The term theology is therefore incorrect. Anthropology – the study of (the writings of) religious people in a variety of cultures – would be a more accurate description of this type of study. It is apparent then that the term “modern theology” describes something that is neither modern nor theology.

But modern theology did have enormous impact on its surroundings. That is the reason why the Theological College was established in Kampen in 1854. Its primary aim was to counter the aggressive influence of an all-destructive Bible criticism.

In connection with this it is of more than just anecdotal interest to mention the fact that on the occasion of the establishment of the Theological College a telegram was received from Professor J.J. van Oosterzee of the state university of Utrecht, quoting Exodus 3:2 “the (bramble) bush was not consumed.” But what does one of the spiritual offspring of the founders of the same Theological College write about this very same bramble bush one and a half centuries later? “*What* it was objectively that Moses saw we don’t know. We don’t even know *if* there was anything apart from what Moses *thought* he saw.” Thus wrote one of the compilers of the report *God met ons* (God with us) which the Synodical Reformed Church grafted on to Bible criticism, thus reducing God’s revelation to the subjective experience of Moses.

### Disintegration

- Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck were two of the chief opponents of Biblical criticism at the beginning of the Twentieth Century. They defended the reliability of God’s Word. In America, too, where biblical criticism had great influence these men gave all sorts of lectures demonstrating the reliability of God’s Word. This led to the development of “Bible-believing churches,” which however disintegrated into all sorts of denominations, without confessions and church orders. Everyone could choose the group or church they felt most comfortable with provided it was “Bible-believing.” This subjective attitude to life spread to the Netherlands, especially through the agency of the evangelical radio and television broadcaster “*Evangelische Omroep*.” Church expelling the reformative unity is replaced by oneness of heart. We will return to this point later.

*According to modern theology the Bible does not contain any divine revelation, but is the result of human experience.*

### Three trends

- In outlining the developments in the Reformed Churches in the first half of the Twentieth Century we can distinguish three trends.

Kuyper and Bavinck had offered strong opposition against Bible criticism and had written powerful theological works. But their followers threatened to become fossilized in dogmatic subtleties. They particularly ran the risk of canonizing Kuyper’s one-sidedness concerning common grace, the church, the covenant and baptism.

In opposition to this conservative trend the so-called “critical youth” movement arose. They wanted to break open the shutters of the church which separated it from the outside and were nurtured by largely unreformed doctrines. They wished, for example, to assess the contents of the Bible in the light of current opinions and scholarship. In this way the scholarship of the day began to prevail over the Bible. To

this movement belonged Dr. J.G. Geelkerken who was deposed for deviating from Scripture by the Synod of Assen in 1926.

Beside this modern trend a third trend emerged which enthusiastically snatched the Word of God and the relevance of the Confessions from the clutches of fossilization. This movement produced, for example, the *Korte Verklaring* – the well-known Dutch Bible Commentary series – and also promoted the study of Calvin and other reformers, and a preaching which takes into account the history of redemption. A refreshing wind began to blow through the churches.

However, many theologians, especially those at the Free University of Amsterdam disapproved strongly of deviations from accepted current opinion regarding Abraham Kuyper. Most vocal in their opposition were the Professors H.H. Kuyper and V. Hepp. They were responsible for lodging complaints at the Synod of Amsterdam in 1936. Hepp wrote four articles with the alarming title “Looming Deformation” and H.H. Kuyper alleged that the just-mentioned third trend promoted more serious heresies than those condemned by the Synod Assen 1926. This led to a proposal to appoint deputies to examine and assess deviations from current opinions.

To cut a long story short: as a result of all this the Synod of Utrecht 1942 made a series of doctrinal statements which led to a split in the churches and so to the origin of the Liberated churches.

In short, it all amounted to the right wing and the left wings of the Reformed Church expelling the reformative wing. As a result of this the left wing gained great influence and began to overshadow the conservatives. That became very clear after the Second World War with the growing and continuing Bible criticism in the former Reformed churches.

<sup>1</sup>Here and there I made a few stylistic changes in view of our North American context.



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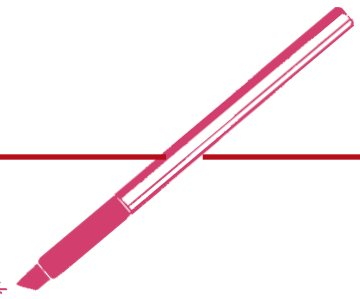


# THE HI-LITER

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## News from Here and There

By J. de Gelder



### Rockingham (W. Australia)

In some churches it is practice that before the worship service the serving elder leads the consistory in prayer. My own experience is that in the Netherlands this is done in most of the churches, whereas I found that in Canada only a few churches maintain this practice. I don't know how this is in Australia, but in Rockingham this was obviously not done. But that has changed, at least somewhat:

It is requested that the duty elder lead the consistory in prayer before a worship service where there is a disciplinary announcement to be made. By doing this we will place our concerns before the Lord and seek strength for the minister to make the appropriate announcement. It is agreed that this will be a practice which will commence immediately. Such a prayer will also take place under special circumstances such as a death within the congregation, or other tragic event. Not a bad idea, although I think that with a rule like this you may run into the problem to determine when special circumstances are special enough to warrant this special prayer. Not a nice thing to discuss three minutes before your worship service starts.

### Burlington Ebenezer

The Foundation for Superannuation is set up to support the churches in providing for their retired ministers. Sometimes questions are being raised as to whether the present structure of this Foundation provides the best way to do this, also when the number of retired ministers will increase. In Burlington Ebenezer a small committee was appointed "to investigate other options for the Superannuation Fund to assist the churches." We are curious to see what the result of this study will be.

### Orangeville

A new initiative in Orangeville: A proposal was tabled to give a one-year subscription to *Clarion* as a wedding gift to all newly married couples who will be members of

our congregation after their marriage. This proposal was adopted. I assume that this gift is not going to replace the traditional wedding Bible, but that it is an addition. As such I think it is an excellent idea to stimulate the reading of this kind of material among our young members. By the way, why is this privilege only for the couples that stay in Orangeville? Or is it perhaps a creative way to make them stay?

### Grand Valley

In Grand Valley's bulletin Rev. P. Aasman wrote about a peremptory examination Classis had to deal with:

The examination will continue till beyond mid-afternoon. It will include the delivery of a sermon proposal, and then examinations in Old Testament and New Testament exegesis (interpretation of the Bible), church doctrine, and six other areas. You are encouraged to come. You will not be alone, as there will be others too. It is a sort of celebration of all the things that we as churches find important.

That's an interesting way of putting it. I am not so sure if the candidate who had to undergo this pretty rigorous and exhausting exam has experienced it as a "celebration." Perhaps the examiners did!

### Grassie and Glanbrook

Things are moving along in the Niagara Peninsula. Less than a year ago two new churches were instituted in that area, and one has already a minister, while the other is busy with building plans, after purchasing a property in Grassie. Praise God for his many blessings.

### Ancaster

The Church at Ancaster has great facilities and is now ready to beautify the outside of its building:

The proposal of the Administration Committee to install a decorative cross to the exterior of the north-west wall of the church building was adopted. An alternate proposal from a member of the congregation to install the familiar fish symbol to the exterior of the church building was also given consideration. The consistory agreed that the fish is as

fitting a Christian symbol as the cross. One of the practical aspects noted was that the shape of the exterior wall lends itself better to the cross symbol than the fish symbol.

Something designers of future Canadian Reformed church buildings should keep in mind, I guess. What do you want: a fish or a cross, or perhaps something else?

### Lincoln

Interesting food for thought was provided by the consistory in Lincoln:

In last week's bulletin there was an announcement giving some more information concerning the Education Tax Credit. This announcement also advocated joining the Provincial PC Party in order to vote in their upcoming leadership election. Keeping in line with Art.30 of the church order ("Ecclesiastical Matters"), the consistory does not endorse certain politicians over others.

Therefore, as such, this announcement should not have been printed. First of all, it's good to realize that Article 30 of the Church Order does not speak in general about "ecclesiastical matters." It does not even define what "ecclesiastical matters" are. It only says that *Ecclesiastical assemblies shall deal with no other than ecclesiastical matters and that in an ecclesiastical manner*. I think that it means that the consistory is not supposed to make it an official consistory decision to promote a particular politician or political party. But I am pretty sure that the Lincoln consistory did not do that. It was only a private announcement in the bulletin.

That leads to the next question: does every (requested) bulletin announcement have to be an "ecclesiastical matter" as meant in Article 30 CO? The reality is that I come across many announcements in our bulletins that are not dealing with ecclesiastical matters in that sense at all: choir concerts, potluck dinners, car rallies, volleyball tournaments, craft sales, and you name it.

You could still call these things "ecclesiastical matters," mind you, but not in the sense of Art 30 CO. More as an indication that these things are of general interest for the members of the church. In this way you can still make

a distinction between, let's say a Canadian Reformed car rally, and a Rock concert in town.

Now, politics is probably a more sensitive topic than all the other things, but that was not the reason given why the announcement should not have been printed. That reason was "it is not an ecclesiastical matter," and thus it was not in line with Art 30 CO. But Art 30 CO does not speak about the bulletin. Is not our problem here that we can make "ecclesiastical matters" as wide or as narrow as it suits us?

And so, the question is actually: is it wrong to endorse in the church bulletins certain politicians or political parties over others? Since we tend to disagree vehemently on political issues and preferences it may not be a wise thing to do if you want to keep the peace in your congregation, but it is wrong? I would not know why.

If you think about it, even a consistory could get directly involved in political matters. Imagine that a brother or sister, perhaps not through the bulletin, but in private conversations, was actively recruiting members for a communist party or nazi party – would a consistory do something and take a stand, or ignore it on the ground that endorsing certain politicians over others is not an ecclesiastical matter?

There is in the Acts of the General Synod of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands of 1936 an interesting article (art 272) where the Synod deals with the membership of Nazi organizations (and similar groups). The conclusion is that members of the Reformed Churches should not participate in those organizations. If they do, they should be admonished, and – if they refuse to change – be put under discipline. Now that is an ecclesiastical matter in the full Art 30 sense of the word!

You could even go a step further, and wonder whether a consistory should not be more proactive sometimes in dealing with what people call "political issues." I think that the dividing line is not always that clear. Political issues are often also ethical issues, or have at least ethical implications that should be judged and responded to in the light of Scripture. No one denies that, but who should do it?

Recently we see some renewed efforts to rekindle interest in political matters by reviving the ARPAs. That is great, especially to get more people involved in political activities. But why can a consistory not speak out in public to make the biblical position of the church known on particular developments in

our society? It can only back up the brothers and sisters that get their hands on experience in an ARPA.

I realize that these contemplations have led us far from Lincoln's bulletin notice. Sorry, brothers, but that's how it goes. Food for thought and one thought leads to another.

### **Kerwood**

Since we are in phase 2 in our relationship with the United Reformed Churches, many churches are actively seeking ways to implement the possibilities of growing toward greater unity. Some churches are farther ahead than others, but even for a powerless church there is hope. Read what Rev. Slaa wrote a while ago about what happened in Kerwood, when on a Sunday morning it was discovered that the church was without power:

Further, the consistory saw fit to encourage the membership to worship at the United Reformed Church nearest them. Most of the families took up this suggestion. It was a blessing to be hosted by our brothers and sisters in the Lord. We are thankful that this opportunity was given to us by the Lord, and may it, too, serve in our efforts to work toward unity.

Without power we may be ready for unity even before the originally suggested target year 2004!

### **Surrey - Maranatha**

A few interesting points gleaned from council meetings in Surrey:

The "repeated" signing of the Subscription Form is brought into discussion. The rationale behind this is the parallel situation of the parental vows that are made at Baptism, for each and every child born to parents. The Form for Infant Baptism asks each and every time, whether or not the parents will "instruct the child in these things. . .". It is concluded that the Subscription Form should therefore continue to be signed each and every time, as it is a safeguard against any change in attitude of office bearers in this broken creation.

Although the similarity with the parental vows at infant baptism is not quite clear to me, the last sentence says it all. Indeed, as long as we don't have elders for life, signing after every ordination is the proper way.

Here is something else:

The corresponding clerk was instructed to write to the Board of Governors of the Theological College in

Hamilton with the request they move the College evening in September 2002 to a Fraser Valley location.

That would be an interesting development. Who is next? Australia? One final thing:

A question is raised about how our Church address list appears to have been passed on to a local Deli. It is noted that neither Council or Consistory has ever condoned this practice and it is hoped that however this happened, that it will not be repeated.

The church should at least have received a percentage of the profit this Deli-owner made by using the church's address list.

### **Langley**

One can unearth interesting things when you dig into matters of liturgy and worship. Rev. Visscher from Langley wrote:


Recently, and especially during the feast days, we did something that happened earlier in the days of our late beloved pastor, the Rev. D. VanderBoom. What did we do? We did some modified antiphonal singing in that not everyone sang at the same time.

From the reactions received that while many of you appreciated this, some of you did have your questions. Is it right to do this? Is it not biblical to have the entire congregation sing every song together all of the time?

All of this drove me back to the books and I have to say that I came back more convinced than ever that real antiphonal singing is biblical and desirable. Take a close look at the Psalms 15, 24, 118, 134 and others. You will soon see that they are meant to be sung antiphonally. It is even to be regretted that we have somehow strayed from this practice, as well as some of the other musical practices of the ancient church.

So where does that leave us? Surely it leaves us with a need to read, reflect and discuss these matters. Study the Psalms, the books of Kings and Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah. Also pick up a copy of a book written by Dr. K. Deddens called *Where everything points to Him* and read especially chapter 12 called "Antiphonal Singing in Worship."

Definitely something that will get you thinking, and so I leave you with this advice.

Till the next time. 

*Rev. J. de Gelder is minister of the Flamborough Canadian Reformed Church in Ontario.*



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# Mass Band – March 23, 2002

By Liz DeWit

Sometimes we receive the opportunity to experience a foreshadowing of the praise that will resound in heaven and on earth in the day of our Lord.

On March 23, at the Ellerslie Baptist Church in Edmonton, dreams became reality as all the instruments of Psalm 150, in the hands of more than 200 students from the school bands of Western Canada, united in praising God. Present were: Credo Christian High School Band from Langley, B.C., directed by Heres Snijder, Instruments of Christ from Neerlandia directed by Mrs. Davida Tuininga, Parkland Immanuel Christian School Senior and Junior Bands from Edmonton directed by Kent Dykstra, Tyndale Christian School Band from Calgary directed by Otto Bouwman, Coaldale Christian School Band directed by Mrs. Elsie Eelhart, Immanuel Christian School Band from Winnipeg directed by Mrs. Grietje Gortemaker, and Dufferin Christian School Band from Carman directed by Andy Huisman. All these bands have put in enormous effort and extensive planning in order to be able to participate in this event.

Our thanks go to Grace VanDasse-laar, Davida Tuininga, and Sonja VanLeeuwen and their husbands and to Kent Dykstra for their excellent organization of this event.

The idea of a Mass Band Concert originated at Mass Choir 2000. Subsequently band directors engaged the support of parents and began the fund raising required to achieve the goal.

The Friday practice took place in Parkland Immanuel Christian School. Those who have attended a symphony concert would have recognized the pre-concert pattern. Students sauntered in, picked up their instruments, put reeds into their mouths, and turning to a specific part of some arrangement where they felt insecure, played through a sheet of music. Slowly a cacophony of sound

and rhythm built as each student worked on a different section or piece. Sudden silence fell as the director entered and raised his baton.

The concert was held at Ellerslie Baptist Church, almost filled to its 1000 seat capacity. Kent Dykstra opened the concert with thanks to God, a theme that was at once enlarged by audience and band as together they opened with Psalm 100:1, 4 proclaiming the faithfulness of the Lord, a faithfulness displayed before us as we saw our young people, gathered from across the west, sitting together in the front with their instruments.

Grietje Gortemaker led the Mass Band in its opening piece "Rudimental Regiment," featuring drums and brass followed by Mrs. Elsie Eelhart with "Hang on Sloopy," a student favourite. "Spring Fever" conducted by Heres Snijder, used drumming, a shaker and cymbals to convey to us the restlessness and pent up energy of people in spring.

Alberta bands combined to present "Trumpet Voluntary," a piece that set our fingers tapping. "Entrance of

the Tall Ships" played by Edmonton and Neerlandia, conjured images of majestic ships approaching and entering a safe haven. "Ave Verum Corpus" from Neerlandia, "Rockin' Rondeau" and "A Choral Prelude" from Edmonton were played by junior bands which began practicing this school year, some in a regular band class, some as an extra-curricular activity. Their progress was amazing.

Winnipeg's band presented a medley of psalms and hymns followed by "Anasazi," reminiscent of a North American tribe. The selections ended on a light note with "Old MacDonald's Band." Carman utilized contrast with its energetic "Dy-no Rock" and its lyrical "River Grove Reflections" where the flutes led us to the river and showed us the beauty of creation in the reflections on the water. Following "Sousa! Sousa! Sousa!" a rousing piece, the Winnipeg and Carman bands played "Dorchester," a concert march and "Rustic Overture."

British Columbia's band started with "Instant Concert," a medley of twenty-five familiar tunes, and "Ballet






Music from Faust” which highlighted different sections of the Credo Christian Band. This section followed with “Resounding Praise,” a rendition of Psalm 150 played by the band, sung by the audience and envisioned by Credo art classes. “When You Believe” combined band and singing talent against a backdrop of student and computer generated art. The band ended with “Father’s Footsteps,” reminiscent of the war and oppression, relating also to the grief, hope and trust expressed by Habakkuk. The audience joined with this band in the singing of Hymn 10.

The freewill offering of \$2000 was designated for the Canadian Reformed World Relief Fund.

The final portion of the program consisted of Mass Band pieces. “Liberty Overture” conducted by Andy Huisman built from a slow, peaceful opening to a joyous expression of freedom interwoven with a second theme stimulating us to be active. Beethoven’s “Joyful, Joyful” conducted by Kent Dykstra built to a majestic climax of joy. Two pieces remained, “O Canada” and Hymn 65. Words cannot describe the strength, the conviction and the celebration of this “O Canada.” It was glorious. For all this we thanked our God with the playing

and singing of Hymn 65. Andy Huisman led us in thanksgiving prayer.

Now it is past. That wee bit of apprehension has been replaced with the glow of accomplishment and of new friendships. Names of people in other bands have become faces, personalities, fellow players, friends. “Great” and “awesome” were the words spontaneously springing up again and again. Communion of saints has become a much larger concept.

It was indeed a privilege to be there and, already, we are looking forward to future performances. Some day we will play, sing and listen with even greater glory, on the day of our Lord. 


## PRESS RELEASE



### **Press Release of the meeting of the Board of Directors of the InterLeague Publication Board with the Administration Committee held on April 12, 2002**

Brother E. Vanderlaan opened the meeting with the reading of 2 Timothy 3. The agenda was adopted. We are contemplating moving the Administration Committee out of London to another location where there might be a

bigger pool of volunteers to serve on this committee. Next on the list for printing is: *Believe and Confess* Vol. 1, an outline on the Belgic Confession by Rev. C.G. Bos, 1 & 2 *Timothy*, a work book by Rev. D.G.J. Agema, *The Bride’s Treasure* and *To the Praise of His Glory*, an outline on the Canons of Dort by Dr. J. Faber, and *The Lord and Giver of Life*, an outline on the work of the Holy Spirit by A.N. Hendriks. Sales are up ap-

proximately \$6000 from last fiscal year. Marketing is still done by sending reports to local church representatives. ILPB has expanded their advertising to include various Reformed publications. Our budget was presented and approved. Our book inventory is currently valued at approximately \$57,000. The Policy Manual will be updated. The Press Release was approved, and brother J. Schouten closed in prayer. 



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# The Teachers' College Seen Through Western Eyes

*By Jane deGlint*

No matter where we live, sooner or later our spot on the map turns into the centre of the world. Our place of residence folds around us like a comfortable coat. We live in it. We get used to it. It determines how we view the rest of the world and what we notice in it. We become interwoven with our geographical location and its views.

The Canadian and American Reformed churches are spread out over a very large terrain. They are so far apart geographically, that there is lots of room for the formation of more than one centre of the world. However, these churches are often conveniently grouped into "East" and "West," with the assumed boundary located on the border between Manitoba and Ontario, and roughly down south from there. (This order reveals my western focus. Easterners would call this same imaginary line the border between Ontario and Manitoba.)

The church members in the West make their home in the youngest part of the country. Their towns and cities are only about a hundred years old, if not younger. They never see impressive cathedrals or stately brick farmhouses. They do not miss them either. They are happy in their own setting of vast ruggedness and relative simplicity.

They also show the fierce independence that characterizes youth. Like the East, they come together to study topics of vital importance to congregational living; yet they are not as likely to contact a professor of the Theological College to see whether he is willing to share some of his insights for an evening. Since it takes a fair bit of planning to have a professor

speak out west, Westerners draw from sources closer to home. When teachers (principals) in the West encounter unusual situations or complicated problems, they are more likely to find solutions on their own, while schools which are closer to "where the sun rises" might conceivably seek feedback from Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers' College. This contact occurs somewhat naturally through the personal and professional ties that connect the college to the "local" schools.

To me fell the privilege of discovering the world of Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers' College as a representative from the West. Walking into the college building I entered a territory which I knew existed, but which I had never felt around me like a coat.


As I learned my way around, I made several discoveries indeed. This was a veritable college, with very capable instructors, highly motivated students, a well-organized board, an extensive resource centre, and a stunningly efficient secretary.

However, through the discovery of these practical components the veil was lifted from a much loftier truth. As faculty and students apply themselves to the daily task, they uncover the rich treasure trove of the Reformed faith. They study the Bible, they learn the dogmas, they test the spirits, they submit to the Word. But they do more. They find the connections between their belief and the different practical components of their studies. As a result they learn to apply the Reformed faith to their lives. Of course, this happens

in varying degrees in different people. But as the students learn the beauty of the Reformed faith, they integrate their convictions into their lives. They become Reformed teachers.

As I write this down, my Western coat starts tugging at me. It gently and inoffensively reminds me that I know many Reformed teachers who only have a distant acquaintance with Reformed teachers' training. In truth, it is beyond doubt that there are more ways than one to learn how to teach Reformedly. Conversely, all those who graduate from "Covenant" may not in fact become Reformed teachers. The most important qualification for truly Reformed teachers is their willingness and ability to apply their faith as they teach the youth of the covenant.

And, of course, in the West we are used to making things work. It is our way of life. But this fierce independence should not close our eyes for better ways out. Our independence may be fierce, but so is the battle of the spirits. The deceiver is constantly trying to attack the church. What better way to do so than subtly misleading the teachers of the youth. In order to stand united on the spiritual battle line, teachers from the East and from the West can draw from and contribute to the work at the Reformed Teachers' College.

It is our challenge to give this shape. And when I say "our," I mean both centres of our North American world, and conceivably beyond that. As we share our riches, the treasure will multiply. 

# LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Please mail, e-mail or fax letters for publication to the editorial address. They should be 300 words or less. Those published may be edited for style or length. Please include address and phone number.

## To the editor:

It is with great interest that I saw the response of Margaret and John Helder to the series of articles by Dr. Oosterhoff on Reformed approaches to faith and science issues. The creation-evolution debate has been a longstanding interest of mine, and I teach a course at Dordt College that examines in detail both the theological and scientific aspects of this debate.

I applaud the efforts of the Helders to point out that Christian scientists have done their work to see God's wisdom and glory revealed in the things He has made. Further, I appreciate their criticism of the rules of secular science, which allows only naturalistic explanations of the world. Thus by a secular definition of science, any supernatural explanation of creation is dismissed as being unscientific. Christians, on the other hand, confess that God has worked in supernatural ways in creation, and they see the evidence of design in creation.

However, the Helders seem to have missed the point of Dr. Oosterhoff's articles. Her articles were not a criticism of creationism *per se*, i.e., that supernatural events were used by God in the creation of this world and that natural processes are insufficient to account for the complexity and diversity of living organisms. Dr. Oosterhoff's criticisms were directed to the particular brand of creationism espoused by many in the North American (not European) Reformed tradition, including the Helders, namely Creation Science. The Helder article frames the debate as Creation Science versus naturalistic evolution, with no other options. The Helders appear not to have taken to heart Dr. Oosterhoff's comment, "As a result, the impression is left that scientific creationism is the most appropriate and indeed the only means to fight an anti-Christian evolutionism." By leaving exactly that impression, the Helders imply that Dr. Oosterhoff supports evo-

lution. This is not true, as Dr. Oosterhoff clearly indicates in her articles, and it is disingenuous to imply such a thing.

Further, the Helders claim that, "Dr. Oosterhoff . . . implies that Christians should not derive any conclusions from nature, either based on biblical evidence or not." Again, this appears to be based on a misreading of Dr. Oosterhoff's articles, where she writes, ". . . Bavinck acknowledged the limitations of human knowing, confessing that not only in science but in all fields of learning, including theology, we know only in part. He did so, however, without lapsing into an attitude of skepticism or relativism. The fact that human knowledge is not exhaustive did not mean for Bavinck that it cannot be true, reliable, and sufficient." (third article). Thus the Helders' claim that Dr. Oosterhoff suggests that ". . . we should ignore much of the natural world" is mistaken.

On the contrary, a Reformed approach to science clearly expects to derive some truths from observations of the world. The Helders correctly quote Psalm 19 and other Bible passages which indicate that God's wisdom and power are evident in the world around us. We also confess in the second article of the Belgic Confession, that God makes Himself known to us by the creation, preservation and government of the universe. This is why it is utterly confusing and self-contradictory when the Helders state that, ". . . both evolution and creation views were metaphysical or matters of belief." Further, they refer several times to the "creation model," implying that scientific data can be interpreted either by a creation model or an evolution model. This is made more explicit in the second article, in which the Helders give their explanation of "how science works." In this article, they discuss the use of paradigms in science. The concept of a scientific paradigm was popularized by Thomas Kuhn in his essay "The Structure of Scientific Revolu-

tions" (University of Chicago Press, 1962). As the Helders explain, a scientific paradigm is a comprehensive way of understanding the natural world. One might define a paradigm as being a scientific worldview. A paradigm need not be completely correct, and Kuhn shows that scientific revolutions have involved the rejection of one paradigm for another, which better explains the data. The Helders call evolutionism a scientific paradigm, and I would agree. Most scientists operate under the presumption that evolution is a fact, and it is very difficult for them to understand that their foundational assumption may be incorrect.

While there is value in thinking in terms of paradigms, there is also a danger in taking this too far. Since a paradigm is just a model or a framework for understanding, it doesn't necessarily represent reality. However, Christian scientists operate under the knowledge that what they are observing is real, because God is revealing his power and wisdom in what he has made. The Helders claim that since Creation scientists operate under a different paradigm (a Creation one), they can interpret the data differently from an evolutionist. This implies that one's philosophical position makes *all* the difference in how one interprets the data! The Helders quote Dr. John Byl (with approval), who says that one can always construct a model which is consistent with one's own paradigm. In a sense that's true, but often these explanations are rather contrived. For example it is still possible to explain our solar system mathematically by the Ptolemaic (earth-centred) system. But that clearly is not the simplest or most likely explanation.

But wait a minute! Does this mean that the data mean nothing, because the only thing that's important is one's starting presuppositions? Of course not! The heavens declare the glory of God to unbelievers as well as believers, but the unbelievers wilfully refuse to



acknowledge it (Rom 1:21). Similarly, scientific research gives us truths, but we may not always acknowledge them. For the Helders to claim that scientific data can be equally explained by two different paradigms is relativistic thinking and inconsistent with Psalm 19 and Romans 1. Either one or the other conclusion is consistent with the data, or else there are insufficient data to resolve the issue. The problem with Creation Science is that it simply ignores conflicting data and acknowledges only the data that is consistent with their position. Is that good science? Scientists must be able to admit that their paradigm and hence their interpretation of data are still tentative, something the Creation Science movement seems unwilling to do. Thus while wrongly accusing Dr. Oosterhoff of denying the ability to draw conclusions from nature, the Helders do that very thing!

In this vein, it is interesting that the Helders quote Paul Nelson and John Mark Reynolds (with approval) in their definition of the recent creation position. In the same article (in *Three Views on Creation and Evolution*), Nelson and Reynolds, while defending their recent creation position, candidly admit that, "Natural science at the moment seems to overwhelmingly point to an old cosmos" (page 49). Thus, according to Nelson and Reynolds, the weight of the scientific evidence is against the recent creation position. By this admission, Nelson and Reynolds freely admit that their science and their theology are in apparent conflict. Can we accept such a situation? Can God's two books contradict each other? To deal with these apparent conflicts, the Helders suggest that, "Those [scientific theories] which do not meet traditional Christian criteria, must be rejected." This sounds God-honouring, but the Helders make one important but unacknowledged assumption. They are assuming that their "traditional" interpretation is above scrutiny. The Helders correctly state (in the context of observing nature) that, "All we can do is make tentative conclusions based on the evidence we have." Not only should conclusions be made using all the scientific evidence, but such tentativeness is also called for in biblical interpretation.

It would be good for *Clarion* readers to understand that the Creation Science movement is not based on Reformed theology, as Dr. Oosterhoff has clearly

shown. On the contrary, it derives from the Seventh Day Adventist theology of Ellen White and the fundamentalist component of American evangelicalism. Neither of these approaches does justice to the richness and original meaning of Scripture, particularly the first chapter of Genesis. This is not to say that the Creation Science people are not valuable allies in the fight against evolutionary naturalism. In recent years they have made a concerted effort to clean up the shoddy science which plagued the movement in the past. Scientists with legitimate credentials work for organizations like Answers in Genesis and the Institute for Creation Research. However, their approach to Scripture and their method of doing science are not in line with Reformed thinking and thus Creation Science should be viewed with caution by Reformed believers.

*Dr. Tony Jelsma  
Sioux Center, Iowa*

### Reply to Dr. Jelsma

Dr. Jelsma summarizes the most important difference between himself and creation advocates: "Not only should conclusions be made using all scientific evidence, but such tentativeness is also called for in Biblical interpretation." (last sentence of second to last paragraph). Really? Does he really mean that we must be prepared to revise our understanding of Scripture? . . . on the basis of what? Many Christians of liberal views advocate revising our understanding of Scripture on the basis of our current views of science. Dr. Howard van Til, Professor Emeritus of Calvin College, is a case in point here.

We ask Dr. Jelsma. Were living organisms separately created in their kinds within the space of six normal days? We say yes. Were Adam and Eve

real people with no ancestors, who lived only a few thousand years ago? We say yes. Was there a real worldwide flood? We say yes. These are not issues of "Reformed" or not Reformed, they are what the Bible teaches. If other groups come to similar conclusions, that is O.K. We will not discard our position on that irrelevant account. Based on a literal reading of Genesis, we interpret the data from nature.

Concerning less significant issues, Dr. Jelsma concludes that we suggest the evolution and creation models are equally valid. What nonsense. We do not imply that the creation model and evolution model are equally valid, only that, when God's work is not recognized, secular scientists have no choice but to interpret nature in terms of matter and process alone. This is clearly different from the creation based approach.

Dr. Jelsma also insists that Creation Science ignores data. This is exactly the opposite of our approach and intent. Later he says that we assume the "traditional" approach to be above scrutiny. Indeed, indeed. Our criteria for interpreting origins issues is firstly Scripture and secondly, the data. One would hope that all Bible believing Christians would support this position.

Dr. Jelsma says that "the Helders imply that Dr. Oosterhoff supports evolution." We imply no such thing. In our responses we merely defend creation science and focus on the fact that creation science opposes naturalistic evolution. In addition, Dr. Jelsma appears to ignore that we view the "Reformed" scholars, Kuyper and Bavinck, having much in common with creation science of today.

*Margaret Helder,  
John Helder*



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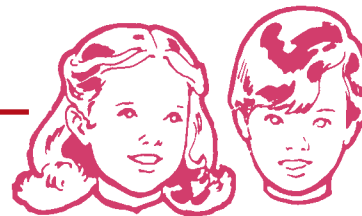
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By Aunt Betty



## Dear Busy Beavers

Do you enjoy looking after people? Do you enjoy talking to people, even if they are sick? How about people who are in a wheelchair? Do you like to talk to them or do things for them? My grandfather used to use a wheelchair when he was older, and he did some amazing things, even though he had limited use of his legs.

After all, people who are sick, people who are in a wheelchair, people who are old, are still people and still need looking after, just like you and me. How would you feel if you got sick and nobody, not a single person, came to look after you, to cook you a meal, to make sure you were okay? You would be very, very lonely, wouldn't you.

That is why it is very important that we use what is known as the "communion of saints" in the Church, isn't it? That way, people who are sick are always in another person's mind and they will always have somebody around, particularly when they really need someone to be with them.

It is also the old people in the church, whose children have left home and may be far away, who need your help. Don't be shy. Go to them and talk to them. They will always be happy for you to speak with them and to tell them about your day. My grandparents loved it when we would pop in every day after school (we lived next door to them), just to say hi.

Next time you see someone walking away from church, looking very lonely, or if you know that someone is sick, you ask your Mom if you are allowed to visit them. I am sure that your Mom won't mind, and I am also sure that the sick person will love to see you, even if it is just to talk to them.

Try it and tell me how you went, okay?

Lots of love, Aunt Betty

## Penpal Wanted

Melissa is 10 years old. She would like to have a pen pal to share letters with. Her favourite animal is a moose. Her favourite food is her mom's homemade pizza (yummy). If you would like to write to her, please do so to:

**Melissa Ligtenberg**

134 Limridge Road East, Hamilton, ON L9A 2S3

## Elephant Jokes

What do you give an elephant that's going to be sick?

*Plenty of space.*

What do you call an elephant in a telephone box?

*Stuck.*

What do you get if you cross an elephant with a spider?

*I don't know, but if it crawled over your ceiling, the house would collapse.*

What do you get if you cross an elephant with a sparrow?

*Broken telephone lines!*

Why did the elephant stand on the marshmallow?

*So he wouldn't fall into the hot chocolate.*

June Birthdays			
2	Albert Buikema	5	Kailey Swaving
17	Melanie Spanninga	22	Jocelyn Schoon

## Puzzles

### Soldiers

Soldiers are mentioned frequently in the Bible. Match the soldier with the correct event.

- |  |                                      |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Centurion of an Italian cohort                            | a. Jehoshaphat, 2 Chronicles 18:1,30 |
| 2. Had eyes put out by the Philistines                       | b. Hezekiah, 2 Chronicles 32:20-21   |
| 3. Had an army of a million men                              | c. Joab, 1 Chronicles 19:14          |
| 4. Had bodyguards who could throw and shoot with either hand | d. Absalom, 2 Samuel 18:9-10         |
| 5. Waged war with Ahab against Syria                         | e. Samson, Judges 16:20-21           |
| 6. The Syrians fled before him                               | f. Julius, Acts 27:1                 |
| 7. Prayed and an angel destroyed the Assyrian army           | g. Zedekiah, Jeremiah 39:5           |
| 8. Caught his head on a tree                                 | h. Zerah, 2 Chronicles 14:9          |
| 9. Was defeated by the Chaldeans                             | i. Cornelius, Acts 10:1              |
| 10. Centurion assigned to guard Paul                         | j. David, 1 Chronicles 11:1-2        |

## FROM THE MAILBOX



Thank you to *Julia VanLaar* for your letter and puzzle. It was great to hear from you again. Are your cat and dog back to being friends again, Julia? Did you have a fun spring break, even though you didn't go anywhere? At home holidays can still be fun, though, because there are so many things you can still do at home. Can you tell me when your birthday is, Julia. I seem to have lost your date of birth. Bye, till next time.

Hello and welcome to the Busy Beaver club, *Melissa Ligtenberg*. It was great to hear from you, too. You must have quite a big block where you live to be able to ride your scooter around it. Your favourite animal is a moose. What happens when you have two of them – do they become mooses or mice? I guess they are a little bigger than mice, so they must be mooses. That's a trick question for you. Bye for now.