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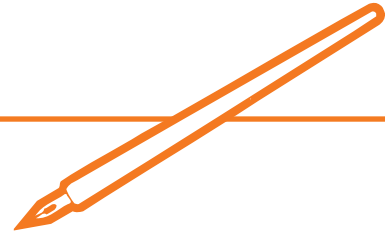
RCUS Synod Eureka 2003

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By N.H. Gootjes



Original Sin and Feminism

It is understandable that the doctrine of original sin is not exactly popular. In this doctrine, the church has confessed that all people who live on earth are sinful from the very beginning of their existence. To give an example from our own theological background, the Heidelberg Catechism teaches us about this. In Lord's Day 3, the question is asked regarding the origin of the depraved nature which everyone has. The answer is clear: from the fall and disobedience of our first parents, Adam and Eve in paradise, for there our nature became so corrupt that we are all conceived and born in sin. This is also mentioned as the background for infant baptism in our Form for the Baptism of Infants. It teaches us that we and our children are conceived and born in sin. There you have original sin. And the form continues by spelling out the result: we are by nature children of wrath, so that we cannot enter into God's kingdom unless we are regenerated.

It may very well be that all people feel an internal resistance to admit they and their children are basically sinful from the very beginning.

Over the centuries, this teaching has not had a lack of opponents. A new voice has recently spoken up against this from the perspective of feminism. A leading feminist theologian in Germany, Elisabeth Moltmann Wendel, has raised her voice against it.¹ The language of original sin is "legalistic German." According to her, it is a reason why people would not go to church: "If we are always bombarded with these ideas, which are rejected by most people, then it is small wonder that many people would no longer go to church." Her feminism shows in her remark that the idea of original sin is "discrimination of the body of mothers and women in general."

It is not surprising that attacks are launched on the doctrine of original sin. Objections have been raised for a long time: in Augustine's time, in the Reformation period of the sixteenth century, and it still continues today. It is a doctrine that is not easily accepted. It raises our hackles, and we feel very uncomfortable with it. It may very well be that all people feel an internal resistance to admit they and their children are basically sinful from the very beginning. But that very fact, that we have an inner resistance to this, should make us suspicious. Are we perhaps trying to cover something up? We are, in general, very good at ignoring what we

do not want to hear. This doctrine cannot be removed on the basis of an allergic reaction to "legalese!"

Original sin discrimination of the mother?

It is surprising to hear someone state that the doctrine of original sin is discrimination of the mother, and by implication, of all women. The general question whether children become tainted with original sin through their father or through their mother has not been determined, to the best of my knowledge. Actually, before that question can be answered, another issue needs to be resolved first: How do children get infected with this sin? Is original sin inherited at all?

This question has been discussed extensively through many centuries of theology. There are, in general, two theories about how original sin is transmitted. The one is that original sin is in some way inherited by the children. Just as children inherit physical characteristics from their parents, so they also inherit original sin from their parents. Note the fact that this is attributed to the parents. It is not limited to the mother, as if the mother would be the sole source of this stain or sin. Actually, the Bible gives more prominence to Adam. In 1 Corinthians 15:22, Paul wrote that in Adam all die. Here, the important position of Adam is emphasized as the reason for the fact that we must all undergo the punishment of death.

At the same time, the Bible does not whitewash Eve. It states clearly that Eve was the first to take from the forbidden fruit. She began to question whether God's word was really true, and she was the first to commit a sin. Paul mentions that in 1 Timothy 2:14: Adam was not the first one deceived, it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. The Bible blames – if we want to use that word – both Adam and Eve in their unique place and responsibility, for the first sin and its consequences.

Original sin as such has nothing to do with depreciation of the female body.

The contemporary movement of feminism is drawn into the discussion without any good reason. Original sin as such has nothing to do with depreciation of the female body. In my opinion, the real issue is a refusal to accept the fact that we are conceived and born in sin. It is the human theologian Elisabeth Moltmann who finds that fact hard to accept. Feminism is for her no more than a tool used in an attempt to remove the doctrine of original sin.

Original sin a reality

The fact of original sin is confirmed by the Bible. A quick survey of some texts will confirm that. The beginning of sin is presented in Genesis 3. Eve sins by eating the forbidden fruit. But that leads directly to involving others in sin: she convinces Adam to eat as well. Right away their sins continue, for when God comes to question them, they do not answer in a straightforward way, but they use their words to deceive God.

The end of the first world, before the flood, comes when God looks at the earth, and finds that the inclination of the thoughts of the hearts of people were only evil all the time (Gen 6:5). Noah was different, and God saved him and his family. But even after the flood, sin continued to exist (Gen 9:20ff). This is only an example of what God had already observed (Gen 8:21). David, in one of his psalms, recognized that we are born in sin: "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me" (Ps 51:9).

This is continued in the New Testament. The apostle Paul wrote a very impressive passage about this in his letter to the Romans. The whole of Romans 5:12-19 is important, but only the most important sentence need to be mentioned: "Just as sin entered the world through one man, and

What's inside?

Original sin is hardly a fashionable doctrine. That was true for many centuries, but today it is much maligned. Some feminist theologians have even accused this doctrine of being condescending to women. In the editorial of Dr. N.H. Gootjes he not only shows that this is nonsense, but to deny the doctrine of original sin leaves the world confused about the nature of man and without ground for placing one's hope in God alone.

Another scriptural doctrine that is much maligned in our day and age is the account of creation in Genesis. It is accused of being simplistic and unscientific. Moreover, it is often said that the author of Genesis derived his material from pagan sources. Dr. F.G. Oosterhoff starts a three-part series of articles on Genesis 1 which not only takes Scripture as a factual account of what actually happened, but what it meant for both Israel in the Old Testament and for us today. As she writes, quoting Calvin, "the account of creation is written in a manner comprehensible to people of all times and cultures and educational levels."

We have a heart-warming account by Sarah Vandergugten of a Chinese girl by the name of Maple who was guided by the Lord to become a Christian. Through meeting Rev. Frank Dong, she made profession of faith in the Church at Cloverdale in British Columbia.

Rev. K. Jonker presents us with a report regarding contact with the RCUS. He also includes his address to the Synod of the RCUS. You will find this report most informative.

We have our regular meditation column, a very short Classis press release and a book review.

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death through sin, and in this way death came to all men because all sinned." In the sin of Adam, we all became sinners. We can have a thorough discussion about what and how, but the fact cannot be disputed: We are all born sinners!

It is better to approach the world and its people with well founded realism. It teaches us to see the world as it is and to put our hope on God alone.

People who do not believe this will constantly be disappointed in their fellow humans. They trust them, but they are deceived time and again. People who think they live in an ideal world will certainly be in for a rude awakening. The Christian message is not exactly pleasing. We all hate this negative view, and we would like to reason it away, just as Dr. Elisabeth Moltmann does. Her rejection of original sin is one more variant of the age old rejection of our sinfulness, only the feminist way in which she rejects it, is mod-

ern. But that does not change the reality. It is better to approach the world and its people with well founded realism. It teaches us to see the world as it is and to put our hope on God alone.

It may very well be that all people feel an internal resistance to admit they and their children are basically sinful from the very beginning.

Original sin as such has nothing to do with depreciation of the female body.

It is better to approach the world and its people with well founded realism. It teaches us to see the world as it is and to put our hope on God alone.

'I read about this in a letter with information on the Confessional Movement in Germany (Bekennnisbewegung "Kein anderes Evangelium") of June 2003.



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By J.D. Louwse

Offerings

"If the offering is a burnt offering. . ." Leviticus 1:3a

A burnt offering! Should we be bringing such an offering to the Lord God? In today's selfish world, the whole idea of offering oneself in the service of someone else is considered silly. Instead they say, you've got to look out for yourself! In today's world of "me, myself, and I," offering oneself for the service of someone else is definitely out!

And yet that is what God required of his people in the past. And that is what He requires of us today. As you open the Scriptures to the first seven chapters of Leviticus, you will read about five kinds of offerings which God required of his people: burnt offerings, cereal offerings, peace offerings, sin offerings, and guilt offerings. Indeed the holy God of Israel required that his people be holy as He is holy. And part of being holy, was bringing offerings to the Lord God! The first offering mentioned in the book of Leviticus was the burnt offering.

This offering was to be made on the bronze altar. There were two altars in the holy place of the tabernacles. There was a small altar, the golden altar of incense, but then also a large altar, the bronze altar. It was on the latter that God's people were to bring the burnt offering.

So we can read in the opening verse of chapter 1: "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'When any of you brings an offering to the LORD, bring as your offering an animal from either the herd or the flock.'" It was clear: God's people were to have a thorough knowledge of his revelation; knowledge of the different offerings; knowledge on how to make these offerings. Bringing these offerings was very much a part of the life of God's people.

As we read in Leviticus 1:3 and following, God's people had a choice as to what to offer up as a burnt offering. They could choose a bull from

the herd, but also a sheep or goat from the flock or a bird. A choice had to be made by each of God's people: what do I bring to the Lord?

Certain burnt offerings were required of the people by the Lord God. For example the burnt offerings, brought each morning and evening in the tabernacle, were required. Also the burnt offerings brought on the Sabbath and on the other feasts days were required. But the burnt offering mentioned here in Leviticus 1:3 was an offering, which the people could give of their own accord. It was a voluntary burnt offering.

And so they came with their choice of animal. And taking this animal, they went to the tent of meeting. They would lay their hand on this animal and it would be accepted as atonement for their sins. But there is more to this burnt offering than the aspect of atonement! In fact, atonement is not the central aspect of the burnt offering.

For with a burnt offering everything literally went up in smoke! A more accurate translation of "burnt" would be "it goes up!" And that was so with this offering: it would all go up in fire and smoke! It would go up to the Lord God. Indeed after laying their hand on the animal, the entire animal was to go up in fire and smoke on the bronze altar of the Lord. This was the only one of the five offerings where the Lord God required that the whole offering go up to Him.


Think of the burnt offering Abraham was about to bring to the Lord. He was about to offer up his son, his only son Isaac, on the altar. Abraham was ready to offer him wholly and completely to the Lord God. And it was the Lord God who himself gave his Son as the burnt offering. His Son was wholly and completely offered up for our sake. At the cost of his life, He was wholly offered up for us. And so it

was required in Israel that the whole or burnt offering cost the one bringing it.

So there was choice as mentioned earlier: of a bull or sheep or a goat or a bird. It depended on your financial position at the time! Yet this offering was expected to be a real sacrifice, according to the measure of God's blessing. They gave of their best in accordance with what God had given them. It was to be a denial of oneself! As King David would later say to Arahah: "I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing" (2 Sam 24:24).

So the burnt offering a child of God brought had to cost him or her. It was to be a sacrifice. So it cost our Saviour his life. He sacrificed his life! And believing in Him, are we ready to offer ourselves wholly to the Lord God? As the apostle Paul writes in Romans 12:1, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship."

How is this to be done? Through the power of our Lord Jesus Christ. As the apostle Peter writes in his first letter: "like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

So let us offer ourselves to the Lord God. The sacrifice that God expects of us is our undivided hearts. Our hearts are to be wholly devoted to Him. And so may our lives, that is our thoughts, words, and actions, be wholly devoted to our Lord. May our entire being be directed heavenward to our God. May we by his grace be a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to our Lord and God. 

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Genesis 1 in Context (Part 1)

By F. G. Oosterhoff

There is more than one way of reading the first chapter of the Bible. One can look at it with a view to the claims of modern science and with the intent of clarifying the relationship between “faith and reason” in this particular case. This is a valid approach, but it is also a limited one, which tells us little about the theological meaning of Genesis 1. The theological meaning, however, is paramount. It has often been said but it bears repeating that the Bible, and therefore also its prologue, Genesis 1, does not offer us a scientific treatise. It presents itself as history, namely as the history of God’s dealings with his people and with the world, and it must be read first of all from that perspective.

One way of doing so is to place the chapter within its original context. This is the way we will try to follow in the present series. It means that we will consider the apparent intent of the author, the times in which he wrote, and the manner in which his primary audience will have received the message. By stressing original context I do not of course suggest that there is no message for present-day readers. On the contrary. We read the Bible to learn not only what God told the Israelites, but also and especially what He tells us in our time and situation. But as I hope will become clear, we gain a fuller understanding of the text if we begin by trying to get as close as possible to the sense it had for its first hearers and readers.

Before I proceed, three preliminary remarks. Firstly, Genesis 1 does not offer us allegory but gives a factual, historical account. It is true that creation took place at the absolute beginning of time, before man had made his appearance. The account was therefore not the result (as is normally the case when we talk of history) of independent

human research. We are dealing with events that occurred when God alone was present, and which He subsequently revealed to us. It is by faith that “we understand that the world was created by the word of God” (Heb 11:3). But our faith in the historical truth of creation is well founded. The Bible makes it clear, in Genesis 1 and elsewhere, that the creation account speaks of events which took place in time and space – more specifically, “in the time and space of our common experience” (K. Schilder).

Genesis 1 presents itself not as a scientific treatise but as history, namely as the history of God’s dealings with the world, and it must be read first of all from that perspective.

At the same time – and this in the second place – we must realize that Genesis 1 gives us *concentrated* history. The description of creation is far from providing us with every possible detail we might like to have. This applies not only to the *how* of creation, but also to the *what*. Not nearly every kind of celestial body, plant, or animal, for example, is mentioned. As Reformed theologians used to say, the account is in that sense “inadequate.” There are unexplained aspects and mysteries in Genesis 1, as in all God’s revelation.¹ For that very reason the faith of Hebrews 11 remains necessary if we wish to understand.

And lastly, it must be kept in mind that the descriptions given us in Genesis 1 are not theoretical but *phenomenal*, which means that they describe the world as it appears to the senses, and not as scientists explain it. The phe-

nominal approach here is of course a good thing, for scientific theories are not only hard to understand, they are also constantly being replaced. The way people see things, however, remains largely the same. And therefore we do not need to explain the biblical description of, for example, the sky as a “dome” or a “tent” as evidence of Israel’s “primitive world picture,” nor do we have to use that explanation in the case of Joshua 10 (where Joshua asked the sun and not the earth to stand still). For again, it was not the author’s intent to give scientific information. The Bible, and therefore also Genesis 1, is (as John Calvin already taught us) written in a manner comprehensible to people of all times and cultures and levels of education.²

Author and audience

Believing Jews and Christians have traditionally held that the primary human author of Genesis and of the entire Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible), was Moses, who probably died just before 1400 B.C.³ In what follows we will adhere to this Mosaic tradition, while admitting the presence of later editorial work.⁴ We are not told how Moses got his information, but it was probably both by direct revelation and by means of oral and written accounts. Like the oral records, the written ones also can have been quite ancient, for the art of writing had been invented long before the time of the exodus. Abraham already came from a literate society, and so did Moses himself, who was brought up in Pharaoh’s household and was, we read in Acts 7:22, “instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians.” We may assume that he was well acquainted with the religions of Egypt, Babylonia, and other Near-Eastern nations and that, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he made use of this knowledge in writing his books.

The original recipients of Moses' message were the people of Israel. This young nation had just been led out of Egyptian slavery and was preparing to enter the land of Canaan, a land that Yahweh, their covenant God, had promised to their ancestors. The Pentateuch was written in the first instance to make Yahweh known to the people of Israel. The books of Moses reminded the Israelites that God had chosen them, they taught them how they were to live as God's covenant people, and so they prepared them for their task with respect to the rest of the world. For Israel had been made the custodian of God's revelation not just for its own sake, but for the sake of all humanity: the promise to Abraham was that in him all the nations of the world would be blessed. This work of instructing and preparing Israel begins with the account of creation, and that is what one would expect. As the introduction to the entire Bible, Genesis 1 is connected with all that follows: with mankind's sojourn in paradise, its fall into sin, the flood, the calling of Abraham and Israel, and then at last the coming of the promised Messiah, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the preaching of the Gospel to all the earth.

The gods of the nations

Genesis 1 proclaims that Israel's God and Redeemer, the One who delivered his people from Egypt, is also the all-powerful Creator of the universe. That message is given right at the beginning. The very first verse of the Bible reveals God as the omnipotent maker of heaven and earth, thereby teaching his people to trust in Him alone and to ignore the gods of the surrounding nations. These gods are in focus, however. As will become apparent, there is a strong, although indirect, polemical element in Genesis 1. And that is not surprising. The cultures of Egypt and Babylonia were older and higher than that of Israel and had always affected the Israelites. In addition there would now be the direct influence of the Canaanites, also the possessors of an advanced culture. These various peoples, all of them believers in polytheism, had creator-gods of their own. Proclaiming Yahweh as the one and only, transcendent, and all-powerful Creator, Genesis 1 warned the Israelites not to turn to the gods of the surrounding peoples. It showed them at the same time the foolishness of serving

these gods, since they could not compare with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The polemical element in Genesis 1 does not leap to the eye, at least not if we read the account without reference to its cultural and historical background. Its presence becomes clear, however, if we give attention to the world in which the Israelites lived and to the religious traditions of the nations that surrounded them. Of special importance in the present context are the myths of these nations that refer to the world's beginnings. Best known among these is the Babylonian one, the so-called *Enuma elish*. The narrative as we now have it is of a later date than Moses and the exodus, but the story incorporates much older traditions, which can be traced to a period well before 2000 B.C. Some of the traditions had been inherited from the Sumerians, the first civilized inhabitants of Mesopotamia, whose culture had influenced Babylonia, its northern neighbour Assyria, and other nations in the region, including Canaan.

As John Calvin already taught us, the account of creation is written in a manner comprehensible to people of all times and cultures and educational levels.

How does the Babylonian myth explain the origins of the universe? And how does it compare with the account of Genesis 1? For one thing, the myth, unlike the Bible, does not speak of an absolute beginning but assumes an eternally existing material from which not only the world and men, but also the gods were made. This material consisted of sweet and salt water, called Apsu and Tiamat respectively. Apsu was the male element and Tiamat, who personified the oceans and was often portrayed as an immense dragon, the female. From the union of this couple the first generation of gods came into being. In course of time, Apsu was killed by his offspring, and Tiamat, with the help of an array of gruesome monsters that she had produced for the purpose, set out to revenge him. In the ensuing battle the young god Marduk, a fourth- or fifth-generation deity, was



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Declined the call to London, Ontario:

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of Aldergrove, British Columbia.

The Theological College, including the library, will be closed for a summer break from July 21st until August 11th. The College will reopen again on August 12th from 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Declined the call to Rockway, Ontario:

Rev. R.E. Pot
of Orangeville, Ontario.

victorious. Having defeated and killed Tiamat, he dismembered and divided her body, using one half of it to make the firmament, and probably forming the earth from the other half, although the myth does not make that altogether clear. The concern of the Babylonian myth was not so much with the earth and man as with the establishment of the firmament with its heavenly bodies. In Babylonia these luminaries – stars, sun, and moon – were seen as gods. As we learn also from the Bible, astral worship, astronomy and astrology enjoyed great popularity among the Babylonians.

The Babylonian story, then, is about the origin of the gods, the rise of Marduk as Babylonia's chief deity, and the establishment of an orderly world. As the personification of the wild, dark, and inaccessible oceans, Tiamat with her monstrous companions represented the forces of chaos, and Marduk's great accomplishment was to replace chaos with cosmos or order. That, however,

was the extent of his achievements. Rather than truly creating the earth, he fashioned it, as we saw, from pre-existing material. Moreover, his work was impermanent. The religion of Babylonia was a pantheistic nature religion, and Marduk's act of creation depicted not only his struggle against a primeval chaos, it was also modelled on the progression of the seasons. As such it celebrated Marduk's victory over the storms and floods and darkness of winter and his inauguration of spring and summer. Because of its cyclical nature, this work needed to be constantly repeated. Order was always threatened by chaos, and each spring Marduk had to take up the battle again.

Genesis 1 proclaims that Israel's God and Redeemer, the One who delivered His people from Egypt, is also the all-powerful Creator of the universe.

The same applied to the creator-gods of the other pantheistic nature religions of the ancient East. The *Enuma elish* is one of many stories about the origins of the world, and it departs from other myths in a number of respects. It has been shown, for example, that the Babylonian account of a titanic struggle at the time of creation is not found in several other versions, some of which are more ancient than the Babylonian one.⁵ But whether or not the creator-god was forced to wage a battle with hostile powers at the very beginning, he and his fellow-deities had to contend with these powers throughout the world's subsequent history. And as in Babylonia, the forces of chaos were almost everywhere presented as storms and darkness, hostile waters and aquatic monsters.

The waters of the deep

The creation account of Genesis 1 contradicts the Babylonian epic on practically every count. It begins by stating, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."⁶ In Genesis 1 God's existence is not explained, it is taken for granted. God was simply there, He existed before all else; He, and He alone, was eternal. And He created, as the Genesis account clearly implies, out of nothing and effortlessly, simply by the power of His word.

Rather than being part and product of nature, as the pantheistic religions of paganism portrayed their deities, God is shown to be the origin of the natural world and to transcend that world. When He created the heavens and the earth there was no pre-existing matter, nor were there hostile powers which He had to defeat in battle before He could establish an ordered universe.

This last point is underlined in verse 2, which states that when first created, the earth was "without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters." It is true, when we look at the first part of this description, we note similarities with the Babylonian myth. Nor, I should add here, have critical scholars ignored these parallels. When the *Enuma elish* was first discovered in the later nineteenth century, biblical critics used it to support the theory that the creation account of Genesis 1 – and indeed the entire Old Testament religion – was derived from Babylonian traditions. The authors of Genesis 1, they theorized, had taken the Babylonian account and rewritten it in such a way that not Marduk but Yahweh emerged as the most powerful god. They had forgotten, however, to remove the reference to the original darkness and the primeval waters. Or perhaps they had been so convinced of the reality of Tiamat and her monsters that they had not even thought of leaving it out. In any event, Genesis 1:2 suggested to them that for Yahweh also it had been necessary to confront and defeat the forces of chaos before he could establish cosmos.

What are we to think of such a theory? Accepting Genesis 1 as God's revelation of a historical event, we reject the idea that it was based on pagan traditions. This is not to deny that similarities exist. But considering the fact that all humanity had its origin in one family, the presence of similarities is not surprising. As Aalders writes, "It must be assumed that from the beginning God gave man a basic revelation about the origin of the world. The memory of this original revelation, in spite of the astounding distortions which obviously corrupted it, was preserved to some extent among all peoples."⁷ In short, we can expect to find some "elements of truth" in the pagan myths of origin, just as we can find some "elements of truth" in pagan religions in general.⁸

The omnipresence of the primeval waters (or of a primeval watery mass) finds echoes not only in Genesis 1 but also in other places of Scripture,⁹ and the reference to formlessness, emptiness, and darkness in verse 2 suggests that also according to the Bible the earth upon its first appearance was inhospitable, even terrifying. There is much biblical evidence that Israel continued to consider the waters of rivers, seas, and oceans as hostile and threatening. The Israelites knew that the first world had been destroyed by the waters of the flood. When leaving Egypt and entering Canaan, they faced the obstacle of the Red Sea and the Jordan respectively and needed God's special intervention to help them cross these waters. Later psalmists and prophets would recall these events and speak of the waters as forces which God had subdued for the sake of Israel's redemption. Often, like the Babylonians, they referred to the waters as dragons and other monsters, although at times hostile nations were described in similar terms. To repeat what I wrote on a previous occasion:

One of the messages we receive in Genesis is that God's establishment of order was permanent. God finished his work of creation in six days and rested on the seventh "from all his work which he had done."

In Isaiah 51:9-10 we read how God cut Rahab to pieces, pierced the dragon, dried up the sea, and made "the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over." Since Rahab and the dragon can represent seas and oceans (and their monstrous inhabitants) as well as a hostile nation like Egypt, the "cutting up of Rahab" in Isaiah 51 no doubt refers to the Exodus events of both the dividing of the waters of the Red Sea and the destruction of Pharaoh's army. In various other places we read of God's crushing of the power of Rahab, of the Leviathan, the serpent, and "the dragon that is in the sea" on behalf of his people. (See, e.g., Ps 74:13-15, Ps 89:9-10, Isa 27:1, Ezek 29:1-6 and 32:1-8.)¹⁰

The belief that control over the turbulent waters required divine power is evident also in the New Testament, particularly in the account of Jesus' authority over storms and seas. In few instances were the disciples more impressed by Jesus' might than when He walked on the water, stilled the storm, and calmed the raging waves. As Luke tells us (and the accounts in Matthew and Mark are similar) the disciples were afraid and marvelled, and said to each other, "Who then is this, that he commands even winds and water, and they obey him?" (Luke 8:25). The memory of the threatening aspect of seas and oceans is also reflected in the description of the new heaven and the new earth in the Book of Revelation, a description which contains the statement that "the sea was no more" (Rev 21:1). The frightening elements of the old creation will not be present in the new.

If seas and oceans filled the Hebrew mind with terror, so did darkness. We can think of the ninth plague visited on the Egyptians, of the three hours of darkness when Christ suffered on the cross, and of the general message conveyed by both the Old and the New Testament that darkness means chaos and death and God-forsakenness. Like the fear of the waters, that of the darkness also is reflected in the last book of the Bible, namely in the statement that there will be no night in the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:25). The story of Tiamat, then, symbolized this ancient horror of stormy waters and darkness, not only for the Babylonians but also for the Hebrews, who, after all, sprang from the ancient Semitic-Asiatic world. They could not help being influenced by the traditions of their neighbours, traditions that were so similar to their own.

God's control of the deep

For this very reason, however, they had to learn that the waters and the darkness did not exist as independent powers but were subject to Yahweh. The creation account does precisely that. The first verses of Genesis 1 tell Israel that everything, including the primordial waters, was God's creation and therefore under his control. And verse 2 does not stop with the statement that in the beginning all was flood and darkness, but adds that God Himself was present there and showed his care for the newly created world: His Spirit moved (or hovered) over the face of

the water. God's control is again confirmed in verses 3-5, which state that on the first day of creation He made the light, assigning to the darkness its limited but also its necessary and indeed benevolent place; and in verses 6-10, which speak of God's setting boundaries to the waters above and below the expanse and to those below the sky, so that dry land could appear. The message that God rules clouds and seas and oceans is repeated throughout the Bible. It is God who gives and withholds rain. It was God who cut Rahab to pieces, pierced the dragon, and dried up the sea. And in the New Testament it was Jesus, the incarnate Son of God, who rebuked and stilled the stormy waters.

Another message we receive in Genesis is that the establishment of order was permanent. God finished his work of creation in six days and rested on the seventh "from all his work which he had done" (Gen 2:2). Here again the Genesis account goes against the pagan nature myths with their message of eternal recurrence, of an everlasting rotation of the wheel of time. In the words of one commentator: ". . . The cyclical and repetitious nature of creation mythology is contradicted by the placing of the creation accounts of Gen. 1-3 at the beginning of a linear history with a non-repeatable period of creative time that closed with the seventh day."¹¹ One of the reasons why Genesis 1 places so much stress on the six days, I believe, is to make clear that creation was indeed a once-for-all affair; that unlike Marduk, God completed what his hands had begun. I will return to this point in the next article.

NOTES

¹G. Ch. Aalders, *De Goddelijke openbaring in the eerste drie hoofdstukken van Genesis* (Kampen: Kok, 1932), pp. 163-8;

W. H. Gispen, *Schepping en paradijs* (Kampen: Kok, 1966), p. 12; K. Schilder, *Heidelbergsche Catechismus* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre), 1947, pp. 190f.

²Aalders, pp. 163-68, 171-200; Gispen, p. 11; Bernard Ramm, *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), pp. 65-80, 96-102, and *passim*. For some of John Calvin's remarks on the topic, see my "Klaas Schilder on Creation and Flood," 1, *Clarion*, March 14, 2003, pp. 139, 140.

³Assuming that the widely accepted dates for the exodus (c. 1446-c.1406 B.C.) are correct. For the calculation of these dates, see the Introduction to Genesis, "Author and Date of Writing," *NIV Study Bible*.

⁴See on this point again the Introduction to Genesis in the *NIV Study Bible*. A broader treatment can be found in G. Ch. Aalders' well-known *Bible Student's Commentary*, Genesis, I (Zondervan/Paideia, 1981), "Introduction to the Pentateuch," pp. 1-41.

⁵Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), pp. 30-33 and *passim*.

⁶Unless otherwise indicated, biblical quotations are from the *Revised Standard Version*.

⁷Aalders, *Bible Student's Commentary*, p. 77.

⁸See my article "Herman Bavinck on Old Testament Criticism," 2, *Clarion*, September 27, 2002, pp. 475f.

⁹See, e.g., Psalm 24:2, Psalm 104:6, Psalm 136:6, 2 Peter 3:5.

¹⁰"Herman Bavinck on Old Testament Criticism," 2, p. 475.

¹¹Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Polemic Nature of the Genesis Cosmology," *The Evangelical Quarterly*, April/May 1974, p. 102, note 130. See on this topic also p. 84 of the same article.



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A Cross-cultural Fundraiser – Help for a Chinese Maple

By Sarah Vandergugten

May 31, 6:30 p.m.: the doors to the Langley church opened, and dinner guests poured into the brightly decorated fellowship hall. In keeping with the Chinese theme, the dominant colors were red and yellow. Before too long, everyone had found a place, either in the hall or the foyer. Casey Van Vliet, MC for the evening, and Peter Vandergugten, began their chopstick demonstration. They promised that the chopstick police would be scouting around all evening, checking that dinner guests were actually using these culturally correct utensils. A winner would be declared at the dinner's close.

Little meatballs and chop-chopped vegetables

But let's back track a bit. Hours of menu planning, budgeting, shopping and preparing had preceded the start of this fund raiser. Do you know how long it takes to make bite sized meatballs from eighty pounds of ground pork? Ask the ten Cloverdale ladies whose quick hands made light work of this job. Do you know how many vegetables need to be chopped to serve sweet and sour to two hundred hungry dinner guests? Ask the dozen Langley ladies who came to the church kitchen the night before the dinner, cutting boards and sharp knives in hand. Special mention should go to the Chinese chefs who worked diligently all Saturday, stir frying, stir frying, stir frying. They brought their own commercial propane burners and restaurant sized woks!

All this hard work was for a good cause. In March of this year, the Urban Mission Board appointed a sub-committee, the International Students Assistance Fund, whose stated goal is to raise funds for international students – con-

tacts of Rev. Dong through the Chinese Christian Fellowship – who want/need to have further theological education in the Reformed faith. (Students who come to Canada on a student visa are not permitted to earn income. If they do, they can be immediately deported to their homeland.) The first of these students is Maple Zeng, who has been accepted into the two-year theological diploma program at our Theological College in Hamilton.

Maple's story

At the dinner, Maple told her story. Maple was born in Jiangxi province in China, one of three girls. Her family values higher education immensely. Maple studied at Xiamen University, majoring in biotechnology engineering. She hoped to one day help patients who really need help. Her own grandmother died due to a shortage of proper medical expertise in diagnosis and treatment. Maple excelled at

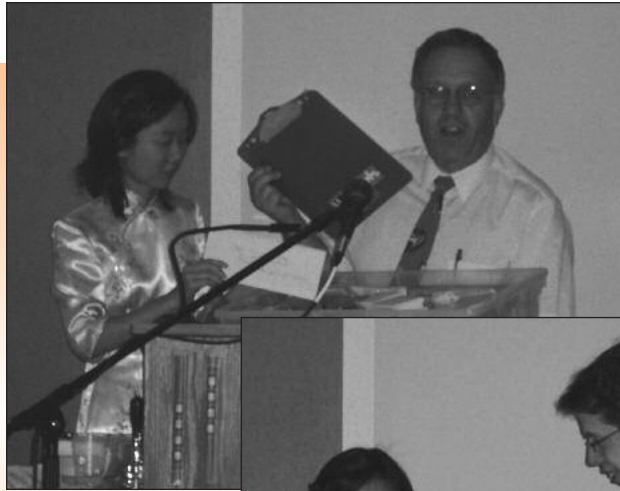
University, and received the opportunity to study in Canada at Trinity Western University, in Langley, B.C. She came to Vancouver in July 2001, fully intent on becoming a talented biomedical researcher.

However, as Maple stated, "God had already prepared for me the way where I should go, even before I came to Canada. God said: I will call them 'my people' who are not my people and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one." Even so, the road was not without difficulty. Once in Canada, Maple learned Trinity Western only accepted a minimal number (17) of her university credits. This would mean several extra years of study and expensive tuition. Maple wanted to honour her family's expectations, and not cause them any worry, but she felt "helpless and hopeless in a foreign country."

The family she stayed with encouraged her to ask God for help in deciding



Preparations in the Kitchen.
(L to R) Rev. Frank Dong, Jian-Hui Dong, Joey Zhang, Julie Li, Lily Wang



Maple and MC Casey VanVliet checking out the supplies.



Maple Zeng receiving a gift of school supplies from Doug Schouten

to stay in Canada. Maple prayed, "God, if I should stay here, please make the university accept me as a junior, at least. If you are the God, please listen to me. . . . If you answer my prayer, I will regard you as my God for ever." Maple noted wryly that when she opened her eyes nothing had changed. "No angel came, no magic happened." However, two weeks later a high school friend called from the U.S. He helped her prepare everything required to transfer credits. By the end of August, her credits stood at 70 instead of 17. "Then I knew God is God. But I wasn't a Christian yet."

God paved the way

During that first summer, Maple often went to church with the family she boarded with, more for something to do than out of any real interest. She was intent on keeping her own culture, and her Buddhist beliefs. But God had paved the way. One of her mother's co-workers in China, Joy, had come to Canada fifteen years earlier. She contacted the Zeng family shortly before Maple was to come to Canada. What was really significant was that Joy was born into a Christian family in China. She had the same background as Maple. This made their conversations about Christianity ring true in a way

that had not happened with others. Maple came to realize the vacuum in her life. She could no longer "refuse the fact that God is real, that He is alive and that He created the world." The Lord drew Maple to himself, and it was as if a heavy burden had been lifted. "But now I found my home and my heavenly Father."

Maple said, "[Jesus'] wonderful love changed me from an atheist to a Christian. Through the Scripture, Jesus Christ made me see that my dreams

could not offer the poor and the needy what they really are in need of. Only through Him, can man be saved, not only his body, but also his soul." This desire has brought a change in Maple's study plans. Through her contact with Rev. Frank Dong, she has become convinced of the Reformed faith, and made profession of faith in Cloverdale Canadian Reformed Church in April of this year. Her heart's desire is to continue her studies at the Theological College in Hamilton, so that in some way she can assist in bringing God's Word to her people. (She has already helped Rev. Dong by translating a simplified version of the Heidelberg Catechism into Chinese.) Her decision troubles Maple's family greatly. This in turn is causing Maple much anguish, yet she is convinced that she should trust God and follow his call.

Fundraiser a success

The Chinese dinner was the initial venture into fundraising for the ISAF, and for Maple in particular. (Her decision to study theology instead of pursuing a further degree in biotechnology engineering has led her family to withdraw all financial support.) In total, the dinner raised \$5,100.00. Businesses and individuals have also been contacted, and are offering their generous support for Maple's studies, and for future international students. Our treasurer is always ready to receive further donations. Tax receipts will be issued through Cloverdale Canadian Reformed Church. Ann Bysterveld, ISAF Treasurer, 1821 – 165A St., Surrey, BC, V3S 9N3. C



The Chinese chefs at work preparing the feast!

Partial CCCA Report to Synod Chatham 2004 Regarding our Contact with the Reformed Church in the United States

By K. Jonker

Introduction

General Synod Neerlandia 2001 appointed the Committee for Contact with Churches in the Americas (CCCA). Members of this synodical committee are J. DeGelder, P. Feenstra, W. Gortemaker, K. Jonker, L. Knegt, J. Moesker, W. Oostdyk, A. Poppe and G. Van Woudenberg. At its first meeting, the CCCA was divided into a subcommittee East and a subcommittee West. The members from Manitoba formed Subcommittee West, which was responsible for the contacts with the RCUS, the IPCM (Mexico), and the IRB (Brazil). The members from Ontario formed Subcommittee East, which was responsible for the contacts with the OPC, the ERQ (the Reformed Church at Quebec), and the KPC (the Korean Kosin Church in North America). The mandate regarding NAPARC became a joint responsibility. What follows is a partial and summarized report about our contact with the RCUS from 2001 to 2003. A more detailed report will be sent to the churches.

Mandate regarding the RCUS

Synod Neerlandia 2001 mandated the CCCA regarding the contact with the RCUS:

First: "to continue the discussion on the issues noted in the Considerations of Acts

- Art 59 4.2 – Lord's Day observance
 - 4.4 – Lord's Supper to shut-ins
 - 4.5 – speaking about the Church in the language of the Three Forms of Unity"
- Second: "to instruct the CCCA to communicate this decision (Art. 59, 5.1-5.11) and its implications to the RCUS."

At the closing date of Synod Neerlandia, 2001, the committee already started to carry out its mandate. On that same day we (K. Jonker and J. Moesker) arrived in Menno, SD, where the RCUS was holding its 255th Synod from May 14-17, 2001. We once again introduced our churches, brought forward the issues we have been mandated to discuss, and passed on the rules under which we maintain ecclesiastical fellowship (the rules of Lincoln 1992). At this RCUS Synod Rev. G. Syms (their delegate to our Synod Neerlandia 2001) also gave an extensive oral report about our Synod's decision regarding the RCUS. So, 2001 Synod's decisions concerning the RCUS were thoroughly communicated to this Church.

The Flat Rock Meeting

At the RCUS Synod 2002 (attended by W. Gortemaker) their committee reported that the issues of Neerlandia

would soon be discussed by the committees. This discussion took place at a meeting at Flat Rock, North Carolina on Nov. 11, 2002. We had prepared a memo pertaining to Synod's mandate and our own thoughts about the issues. This memo was used as a guideline for our discussion. A report of this meeting was published in *Clarion*, Vol 52, No 14, July 2003. The Flat Rock report clearly shows that Synod's instruction has been thoroughly discussed with the RCUS.

RCUS Synod 2003

At Synod Eureka 2003, the brothers W. Gortemaker and Rev. K. Jonker represented our churches. The chairman of the Dutch interchurch relations committee (BBK), Br. K. Wezeman, was present as fraternal delegate from our sister churches in the Netherlands (GKV). The fraternal delegate from the OPC was Rev. W.V. Picknally. Rev. Ralph Pontier was observer on behalf



Rev. P. Treick, Rev. R. Grossmann, Rev. V. Pollema, officers of Synod, 2003

Rev. Vernon Pollema,
Synod's president



In his address the OPC fraternal delegate spoke about the good contact between their churches. He commended the RCUS for their position papers such as the one on Women in The Military. He informed Synod that at the moment the OPC is studying that topic as well. Upon recommendation of the IRC and the Ecumenical committee Synod Eureka also decided to ratify the reception of the ERQ into NAPARC.

Other agenda items at RCUS Synod Eureka 2003 were: Publications and Christian Education providing good biblical Sunday School materials; the publication of a new Hymn book; Mission: church planting in nine locations and foreign mission in Congo and Kenya; Training for the Ministry; Ministerial Aid Fund organizational matters like the official RCUS Website; the RCUS church paper *The Herald*; the President's report and the report of the Stated Clerk. An overture at this Synod proposed to have Synods once every two years. A committee was appointed to study this matter. This Synod rejected the teachings of Harold Camping regarding the church. Synod also established a committee to study the issue of justification and works. The decision regarding this study committee was prompted by an overture from South Central Classis to declare the teaching of Norman Shepherd regarding the doctrine of justification by faith as heretical.

A report on Covenant Education was also adopted. This is a laudable effort in verbalizing the need for covenant education. How the RCUS will give practical form to this report remains to be seen.

of the United Reformed Churches in North America.

The recommendation to establish a committee to study the observance of the Lord's Day created a lively debate on the floor of Synod. This discussion showed that there was no unanimous mind-set among the RCUS brothers regarding this issue.

As fraternal delegates we took part in the debate and emphasized that in our time and age a study regarding the application of the fourth commandment would be very beneficial for Christ's Church. A great number of members of Synod were of the same opinion, however the recommendation was defeated.

The other recommendations were accepted. Those recommendations were, that the RCUS encourage the local churches to have more active contact with the Canadian Reformed Churches and that their IRC (Interchurch Relations committee) revise the Church Unity paper by using the language of the Three Forms of Unity.

Noteworthy regarding RCUS interchurch relations is the contact with the United Reformed Churches in North America. The IRC reported to Synod 2003 that they had a meeting with UR-CNA representatives, Rev. Todd Joling and Rev. Ralph Pontier.

The following items were discussed:

- a. the RCUS view and place of the Holy Scriptures;
- b. creeds and confessions;

- c. formula of subscription on confessions;
 - d. significant factors in the two federations' history, theology and ecclesiology;
 - e. church order and polity;
 - f. liturgy and liturgical forms;
 - g. preaching, sacraments, and discipline;
 - h. theological education for ministers.
- In his address the URC delegate informed Synod that their committee would propose to formally recognize the RCUS as true churches of the Lord and to enter into fraternal relations with them. Rev. Pontier emphasized the need of organizational unity between their churches. We need one another since "iron sharpens iron!"



(l to r) Rev. K. Jonker, br. W. Gortemaker, br. K. Wezeman,
Rev. W.V. Picknally, Rev. R. Pontier



Rev. K. Sorensen, Rev. G. Baloy, Rev. M. McGee – new pastors in the RCUS.

Much time was spent by listening to visitors from educational institutions such as Dordt College and various Theological seminaries. This could change if the RCUS had a church seminary. At the moment a special committee is examining “the feasibility, procedures, and criteria necessary to the establishment of an RCUS seminary.”

At the 257th Synod, the report of the Special Committee to Study Nominations of Officers evoked an interesting discussion in which we participated as fraternal delegates. According to the RCUS constitution, new office bearers are nominated by the consistory. However, according to Article 48 the congregation also may nominate one additional person at the congregational meeting. When it was pointed out that the church is not a democracy but a Christocracy, one of the writers of the report said: . . . nor is the church an aristocracy! All the members have the Holy Spirit; and our history proves that consistories are not infallible. The report provided ample references from Scripture, Confession and their Constitution in regard to the legitimacy of having nominations from the floor at congregational meetings.

This matter of nomination shows the difference in church polity between the RCUS and the Canadian Reformed Churches. In RCUS church polity there are five ecclesiastical assemblies: the Congregational Meeting, the Consistory (elders and deacons), Spiritual council (elders only), Classis and Synod. They do not all have ecclesiastical jurisdiction, yet they are considered ruling assemblies. This is also a reason why women are not permitted to vote in the RCUS. A congregational meeting can make decisions regarding general organizational matters such as

property issues and making one nomination for new office bearers as we learned from the above-mentioned discussion. This discussion confirmed our observation in earlier years that the RCUS church polity is a hybrid of the Church Order of Dort and Presbyterian Form of Church Government.

The RCUS conducted two worship services during the time of their 257th Synod, one at the opening of Synod on the Monday evening and the other on Wednesday evening. Every Synod day at 10:00 devotions were held. The messages of sermons and meditations centred on the theme of being people and servants of the living Word (1 Cor 3, 2 Cor 4, Deut 29:29, 2 Kings 13, 1 Cor 9:27).

Evaluation of our contact with the RCUS

In our contact with the IRC and our participation in the discussion at the RCUS Synods the issues of our mandate have received ample attention. We were happy to hear that regarding the matter of the Lord’s Supper, the RCUS is very much aware of the danger of sacramentalism. We consider the manner in which they administer the Lord’s Supper to shut-ins as acceptable. This issue may also warrant some consideration among Canadian Reformed churches.


It is, of course, regrettable that the RCUS could not see its way clear in establishing a study committee regarding the Lord’s Day issue. However, we regard the discussion we had with the brothers as very valuable. It has raised the awareness that the proclamation of the living Word must be central on the Day of the Lord, and that the rest of the Lord’s Day must be used to God’s honour and glory.

The RCUS desires to observe the Lord’s Day from a scriptural basis. How this is best put into practice is a matter of discussion and agreement of what God requires of us in his Word. Differences in practice exist. Yet, we need to hold out to each other the holiness of the Lord’s Day. Therefore, uniformity of practice would be most desirable. If our churches deem it necessary to continue discussing Lord’s Day observance with the RCUS, then Synod Chatham should give clear direction by listing specific issues which still need to be addressed.

We are thankful for RCUS’ decision to officially mandate the IRC to revise RCUS Church Unity paper in the language of the Three Forms of Unity. Finally, we are convinced that the RCUS is and remains a church of the Lord Jesus Christ in which his Spirit actively works for the mutual edification of Christ’s people.

Recommendations

The CCCA will recommend to Synod 2004,

- That Synod:
1. express gratitude to the Lord for the positive development of our ecclesiastical fellowship with the RCUS.
 2. take note of the extensive discussions with the RCUS re the Lord’s Day observance, and if Synod deems it necessary provide the CCCA with specific issues re the Lord’s Day observance which still must be addressed.
 3. take note of the practice of the RCUS to administer Lord’s Supper to shut-ins.
 4. take note that the IRC of the RCUS is mandated to revise their Church Unity paper, bringing the language of this paper more in line with the language of the Three Forms of Unity.
 5. encourage our Classes to take up/keep contact with the Classis of the RCUS bordering their area as proposed by the CCCA on December 2001.
 6. recommend to the churches the desirability of actively pursuing our ecclesiastical fellowship with the RCUS via pulpit exchange, visiting RCUS churches, and invitations to youth camps/conferences held by the various churches. 

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Address to the 257th RCUS Synod

By K. Jonker

Esteemed brothers, gathered at this 257th Synod of the Reformed Church in the United States.

Introduction

On behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches, we bring our Christian greetings to you with the prayer that the Head of the Church may richly bless the work of this Synod.

This time I do not have to introduce our churches. That was, I think, amply done at the previous RCUS Synods. I trust that several of you have visited our churches and assemblies. Hopefully you have kept yourselves somewhat updated by visiting our Canadian Reformed Website and reading our papers. You have also sent fraternal delegates to our Classes and our Classes have been represented at your ecclesiastical assemblies.

You now (must) know who we are through the increased contacts between our churches. However, the fact that we know one another and that we have found one another in ecclesiastical fellowship is not enough. In this address I would like to make a plea for much more cooperation, taking the biblical teaching about true love and faithfulness to one another seriously. I do so with fear and trembling at this RCUS Synod at Eureka.

Eureka!

In preparation for this visit, I found some interesting information about Eureka. I could not find the exact reason which prompted the name Eureka (which means: I have found it). However, I assume that this name must express the feeling of a settler who thought he had found the promised land in this area.

At the moment I am reading *Dutch Immigrant Memoirs and Related Writings*, selected and arranged by Henry Lucas, published by Eerdmans in 1997. This selection contains two entries pertaining to Dutch settlement in



Campbell County. Poor Dutch pioneers from Minnesota and Iowa came to this area in 1885. They found the soil promising and believed that there would be no snow in Dakota. However, in October 1886 they were surprised by a howling blizzard. The snow remained till next year April. I quote an interesting comment, "We used to say 'it storms six days in the week and we break a Sabbath to get hay for the cattle from the stacks.'"

The Seceders (as they were called because of the 1834 Secession from the Dutch State church; they were people who had followed A.C VanRaalte and H.P. Scholte to America) were living close to the Lord. In their new country their first priorities were building churches and schools with support from the eastern churches in Iowa and Minnesota. The accounts tell about fear of the Indians, crop failures, calamities like storms and prairie fires.

It is very tempting to quote more from these accounts. I will limit myself to the following two: "Eureka is, I believe, the largest market place in

Dakota for goods transported by wagons.... In Europe we say, "All roads lead to Rome," but here all roads lead to Eureka." The other quote is: ". . . our religious services are pretty faithfully attended, especially when some flying dragon in the shape of a minister or some student during his vacation leads us." The churches apparently were often vacant.

These historical documents show that the area around Eureka has experienced the influence of Dutch Seceder settlers who lived in dependence on the Lord.

Brothers, your own historical documents also show a strong Dutch connection and influence. Your commemorative book *You Shall Be My People* speaks very positively about this ecclesiastical connection. On page nine we read: "The Dutch, if nothing else, were insistent upon orthodoxy!"

Our calling towards one another

Well, here we are in 2003 as Reformed Churches in the Americas, meeting in Eureka. We have many

things in common, love for the truth of God's Word, the same Reformed Confessions, a strong Dutch influence at the inception of our churches, the desire to remain faithful, the commitment of having our priorities right. That's why we have and maintain ecclesiastical fellowship with one another.

The last phrase "one another" is extremely important. For as God's people and churches, we do not concentrate first and foremost on our own well-being and prosperity. (That is our original sin though – being after our own interest in self-love. And in human pride we like to blow our own horn.) Scripture tells us that a life of pride and self-love will remain empty and dead. Our Lord Jesus Christ has redeemed us from an individualistic life and restored us to covenantal life. That's why the apostle says: "Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count *others* more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Phil 2:3,4).

In Colossians Paul also tells us how we must do this. We must put on the love of Christ. His love makes us willing and ready to give everything and if necessary to drop everything in the service of the Lord. It is the true love "which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and ad-

monishing *one another* in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God (Col3:14ff.)."

The important New Testament keyword *one another* is again used.

Through Christ by his Spirit God turns our eyes away from ourselves. We have something else to do. We must teach and admonish one another and worship Him together, giving thanks for the great mercy of our salvation. That makes us busy for one another's salvation.

I believe that this is the meaning of the well-known text from Philippians 2:12: work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. "Your own" must be taken as reflexive just as we find this work explained in Colossians 3:16, emphasizing that the action of our true confession is directed to the other.

The positive application

What is our calling? We live in honour and praise to our holy God, walking with Him in covenant love and faithfulness. This walk also comes with the obligation to work at *one another's* salvation with fear and trembling.

What I am doing at this moment is teaching you and admonishing you: continue to have an eye for one another, including us, the Canadian Reformed Churches. You can and should do much more. Don't blow your own horn but seek to listen and to strengthen one another, and again include us

working at our salvation. Your work is far from perfect and complete.

I give this teaching and admonition to you in Eureka "with fear and trembling." I do so not because I am scared of Indians or of a prairie fire. But I tremble because I know my own weakness and sins, and the shortcomings of the Canadian Reformed Churches. I know that you have to return the ball and teach and admonish us in the same manner. You need to tell us not to blow our own horn but seek to listen and to strengthen one another, including the RCUS Church, working at your salvation. You need to tell us that our work too is far from perfect and complete.

Therefore, in this manner we meet each other this week: not in the mood of "eureka" – I have found it, but in the attitude of "eurekamen allelou palin;" this Greek phrase means: *we have again found one another!* Our ways don't lead to "eureka" but to one another!

We are people with the same Reformed background, having the same love for the truth and the Reformed confessions. The Head of the Church has placed us on one another's way. Therefore, let's be committed to work at one another's salvation and let us do so with the mind of Christ Jesus.

May He give you the experience of his great mercy during your work at this Synod.

Thank you.



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PRESS RELEASE



Press Release of Classis Pacific West (Contracta) of June 25, 2003 in Cloverdale, B.C.

Classis Pacific West was convened in "Contracta" mode by the Church at Cloverdale British Columbia on June 25, in order to grant a release to the Rev. J. Huijgen

of Cloverdale who accepted a call to the Church at Burlington-Waterdown, Ontario.

Delegates present were from Cloverdale and the two neighbouring churches, Langley and Surrey (Maranatha). The required documentation was presented and

found to be in good order. Classis Contracta decided to most honourably release the Rev. Huijgen from his duties as minister in the region of Classis Pacific West as of July 31, 2003 midnight.

For Classis,
Rev. C. Van Spronsen, clerk e.t.



By W.L. Bredenhof

***The Peacemaker (Second Edition):
A Biblical Guide to Resolving
Personal Conflict***

**Ken Sande, Baker Book House,
1997, paperback, \$14.99 US.**

In a fallen world, conflict is inevitable. Whether we like it or not, there will be conflict, even among those who refer to each other as brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus. Sometimes conflict in the church can even be more intense than that found in the world. Christians can be so cruel and evil to one another. For that reason, *The Peacemaker* needs to be found on your bookshelf. It needs to be found in our church libraries and in our consistory rooms.

Ken Sande is an American attorney who, as president of Peacemaker Ministries, is regularly involved with conciliating all kinds of disputes. As an attorney and conciliator, he brings a treasure chest of experience to his readers. Clear examples and engaging anecdotes are found everywhere. Furthermore, his commitment to the truth of the Scriptures is evident throughout this book. While Sande does not appear to be Reformed, he does seem to be Calvinistic (i.e. he holds to the doctrines of grace).

Sometimes, it is true, his use of Scripture is exemplaristic. Sometimes, Reformed readers will raise their eyebrows – for instance, when Sande writes of going to lunch after church (p.134) or a Roman Catholic priest leading someone to accept Christ as Saviour (p.233). We may certainly question Sande's interpretation of 1 Corinthians 6, where he argues that certain crimes should be dealt with in the church, rather than in the criminal court system (pp. 259-260). So much grief has been caused by this understanding of 1 Corinthians 6 (a passage which does not deal with criminal acts), especially when the crime is sexual abuse. I wish that Sande would have been more nuanced and careful.

Despite the foregoing, there is a lot of scriptural teaching and wisdom in this book. Let me give you a taste: "...when your life is filled with unresolved conflict, you will have little success in sharing the Good News about Jesus Christ." (p.40). "The best way to ruin a confession is to use words that shift the blame to others or that appear to minimize or excuse your guilt." (p.110). Sande explains in a beautiful way the biblical teaching about forgiveness and reconciliation. He gives solid practical help in confronting others about their sins and

dealing with your own sins against others: "If you learn that someone has something against you, God wants you to take the initiative in seeking peace – even if you do not believe that you have done anything wrong." (p.133). Naturally, there is an extended treatment of Matthew 18. Every chapter concludes with a summary and the book has an appendix with a checklist of all the important points covered throughout. This book can be referred to repeatedly. I wish that I'd read it a long time ago!

