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# Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE



*Remembrance Day*

## INSIDE:

- *Liberation and Reformation*
- *Reading Genesis One*





By Cl. Stam



## The Evaluation of Divergences (Conclusion)<sup>1</sup>

### Church-polity

The deputies who reported to general Synod 1986 about the divergences with the OPC also touched on the church-political differences, i.e., the difference in church government between the Reformed and Presbyterian churches. This is not the place to comment at length on these differences.

Let me pass on to the readers what our deputies concluded in general, “. . . truly Presbyterian churches acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as the only Head of the Church and accept His Word as the only rule for faith and order. . . .” Those familiar with our creed will recognize that here the language is used about the true church, as confessed in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession.

### Points of difference?

Our deputies did acknowledge, of course, that there are differences which merit further consideration and discussion. Some of the points mentioned might surprise us.

*In the end, one can have an excellent church order or exquisite form of government, but it all comes down to whether the churches are willing to live in the harmony of faith and in submission to the Word of God.*

The main difference seems to be the place and function of the Presbytery. The Presbytery is a body like our Classis, yet it has all the rights and tasks of a local consistory or council. The danger here is that a church is ruled from the outside by an assembly not locally chosen. We are on the alert here for *hierarchy*. But our deputies were satisfied that the liberties of their local churches were not really threatened.

In the end, one can have an excellent church order or exquisite form of government, but it all comes down to whether the churches are willing to live in the harmony of faith and in submission to the Word of God. Since that is the case in the OPC, Synod Neerlandia felt guided to recognize the OPC as sister churches in the Lord.

The deputies did not deal with certain issues that came up later than 1977. After all, it was their mandate to provide support only for the 1977 decision to recognize the OPC, and our deputies wisely stuck to this.

I mention this because some, myself included, felt in 1986 that our deputies did not delve *deeply* enough into the political divergences. But let's be fair: the deputies did as they were mandated. It was given to the Committee for Contact with the OPC to deal with *other* matters that had come up in the meantime, e.g., confessional membership and the fencing of the Lord's table.

### Accepting certain differences

When churches recognize another federation of churches as sister-churches and enter into a fraternal relationship with them, this does not mean that thereby all differences are negated and one takes over the viewpoints/practices of the other. It simply means that these things are not of enough weight to hinder recognition as such. These matters certainly may be discussed within the bond the sister-churches have. Discussion and persuasion are an ongoing process which is at one time more intense than at other times.

The Canadian Reformed Churches did not in 2001 become Orthodox Presbyterian churches. Neither did the OPC become Canadian Reformed. We recognized one another in Christ and we resolved to continue discussion on those points on which we still feel there is considerable difference. A family cannot live together, however, unless the members give one another some room and space.

*What is striking through all these years of contact with the OPC is that that our churches and the OPC were always willing to listen to one another in submission to God's Word.*

### End of series

I have come to the end of my discussion of the 1986 report of our deputies. I first read this report and had to deal with it almost twenty years ago. The passage of time does sometimes help to adjust one's vision. Whether this is for better or worse, I'll leave up to the readers to decide. It is before our own Master that we stand or fall.

What is striking through all these years of contact with the OPC is that that our churches and the OPC were always willing to listen to one another in submission to God's Word.

We are all anchored in our own long-standing and cherished tradition. Having fairly presented our insights and concerns, we have not compromised the Word of God or our Reformed confessions.

We should continue to make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification (Rom 14:19). That's why we have deputies, then and now.

<sup>1</sup> The previous editorial of Rev. Cl. Stam is in issue 18.



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## What's inside?

Dr. C. Van Dam responds to articles by Dr. F.G. Oosterhoff on Genesis 1 in issues 16 and 17 of *Clarion*. We have also given space to Dr. Oosterhoff to respond to Dr. Van Dam. No doubt the reader will deeply appreciate this exchange and the clarification it brings. Dr. Oosterhoff concludes: "We continue to differ on various points, but we recognize each other as Christian believers who want to submit to Scripture as the infallible Word of God and therefore the only rule of faith. Within this context, I believe, differences of opinion are possible, permissible, and often even profitable."

How do two church federations who regard each other as true churches of Jesus Christ seek and practise church unity? Some would leave it at such recognition of such reality and practise a loose type of unity or cooperation in certain areas such as evangelization and education. Rev. John Ludwig, in the second part of a speech delivered at a Reformation rally, makes a powerful and scriptural case for seeking and practising unity in the fullest sense.

Rev. Cl. Stam concludes his series of editorials dealing with our relations with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. He has been evaluating what are known as "the divergences." This time he deals with the place and function of the Presbytery. His conclusions are positive.

We have our columns *Treasures New and Old* and *Ray of Sunshine*. The former is a meditation by Rev. W. den Hollander where he takes into account Remembrance Day. We also have a book review by Rev. W. Bredenhof, and four classical press releases. In one of the press releases we read about the upcoming retirement of Rev. C. VanSpronsen. Rev. VanSpronsen used to compile the column known as *Hiliter*. We thank our brother for his faithful service to the churches and wish him and his wife the Lord's blessings in the forthcoming retirement.

RA



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## IN THIS ISSUE

Editorial – The Evaluation of Divergences (Conclusion)	
— Cl. Stam .....	530
Treasures New and Old – Liberation and Reformation	
— W. den Hollander .....	532
The Unity of the Church (2) — J. Ludwig .....	533
Ray of Sunshine — C. Gelms and E. Nordeman .....	536
Reading Genesis One — C. Van Dam .....	537
Book Note — reviewed by W.L. Bredenhof .....	539
Response to Dr. C. Van Dam — F.G. Oosterhoff .....	540
Press Releases: Classis Central Ontario, Classis Manitoba, Classis Northern Ontario, Classis Pacific West .....	541

By William den Hollander

## Liberation and Reformation

*“... the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.” Romans 8:21*

In this special Remembrance Day issue we call to mind those who gave their lives for the freedom of their fellow men. In our particular situation we remember the sacrifices that were made in the World Wars of the twentieth century and in other wars that took place in the more or less recent history. Most of our readers commemorate the restoration of freedom to their native lands! Our Canadian soldiers have a reputation as liberators, as men and women who restore freedom and peace wherever they are called upon to do so! We remember them thankfully, and we enjoy our freedom gratefully!


The freedom that we enjoy seems so natural, so normal to us. It's as natural and normal almost as our breath, as the air in our lungs. This breath, however, also is a gift of the living God, of whom the apostle Paul says in Acts 17:25, “because He Himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.” It's a good thing, therefore, that we reflect on those things that seem natural, normal, to us. For, how free is our freedom actually? What freedom are we speaking about? Whose? Where? On Remembrance Day we may be looking back at the atrocities of the German occupation, the Japanese invasions, or the Korean War. Yet, we know that in the Balkans the weapon of revenge cannot be silenced. Of all things, people who fought together courageously against Hitler's hordes sixty years before, have been engaged since in an ethnic cleansing in a manner just as horrible! Or what do we say of the tribal tensions in Africa, of the continued conflicts between India and Pakistan, between Israel and the Palestinians, of the nuclear threat from North Korea or Iran? What of terrorist threats from Islamic extremists against the free Western world? Freedom? Whose? In China there is freedom, but what is freedom in the sight of oppression, government controlled family-planning, abortion; what is freedom in the emptiness of a bankrupt society seeking to link up with Western capitalism? In other words, the daily reports

and impressions of constraint, of slavery, of violence are more common than those of freedom!

On Remembrance Day we take the time to commemorate and to celebrate our freedom. That's good, as long as we realize that we belong to the happy few in this world. We celebrate freedom, but we should do so in the humble awareness that the price was high and that its possession is precious and fragile! Still, there should be joy, for who would not rejoice when watching the films showing the dancing crowds, the beaming faces, the decorated tanks, buildings, and houses? Free! Who would not rejoice? A celebration of liberation is very much a well-known feature in the Bible as well. Just remember the dancing and singing of Miriam and the girls at the Red Sea. God had set them free from Egypt, liberating them from pursuing soldiers over a dry path in the midst of walls of water. “Our God is a God who saves,” says David in Psalm 68:20, “from the Sovereign LORD comes escape from death.” He is the God who made it for the returning captives as if they were dreaming (Ps 126). The Holy Spirit describes the thrill of liberation very vividly in Psalm 124: “We have escaped like a bird out of the fowler's snare; the snare has been broken, and we have escaped.” Free!

How come there is this tension: on the one hand our uncertainty due to all want of freedom, constraint, and slavery in this world, and on the other hand the exuberant joy for liberation? Well, if freedom belongs to life as breath belongs to lungs, we can only understand the want of freedom in the light of the “present suffering” of which the apostle Paul speaks in Romans 8. Due to man's fall into sin, the natural freedom turned into the slavery to futility and mortality. In this context the apostle Paul speaks about the groaning of creation, which was subjected to its present condition by God. However, He did so not without hope! Today's situation of fragile freedom and clouded celebration, also, is

not without hope! What hope? Well, concerning this groaning creation God says in his Word, “the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay.” This liberation of creation, however, is attached to the liberation of the children of God: “and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.” The children of God are those, who have in Jesus Christ the liberation from the power of the evil one. They are the new people, who by faith live again in communion with the living God. If, therefore, we wait with eager longing for this freedom, this completion of our liberation, it's no wonder we sense the tension today between the daily impressions of slavery and death and our celebration of freedom!

The suffering in this present time reminds us of the burden of our guilt, which Christ had to remove. The limitations of the true freedom enjoyed today are evident in the abuses of freedom, the inflation of liberties. However, when we know of the hope for this world, of the hope for creation, of the hope for mankind in Jesus Christ, we enjoy the present freedom more gratefully! When we believe in Christ's victory over death and Satan, who is the beast behind all of history's atrocities, then we celebrate our liberation more deeply! Then our freedom gives us a foretaste of the great liberation unto the glorious liberty in Jesus Christ! For that celebration, however, we need the salvation of our life through Jesus Christ, the renewal of the Holy Spirit! True *liberation*, therefore, cannot be without the reformation of our life! When our nation would see such a *reformation* in the return to the Word of God, and to the faith in Jesus Christ, we would show our gratitude to God and our appreciation for the freedom we enjoy by using this freedom in the joy of faith in Jesus Christ! 

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# The Unity of the Church<sup>1</sup> (Part 2)

By John Ludwig

## The basis for unity

In what, then, does the unity of the church consist? In the truth. The whole truth. Not just the sections that appeal to our reasoning, or those that we consider important. *Tota Scriptura* was as much as principle of the Reformation as *sola Scriptura*. Christ gathers a church “in the unity of the true faith” (Lord’s Day 21). And true faith is defined in the Heidelberg Catechism as “a sure knowledge whereby I accept as true all that God has revealed to us in his Word.” This means faithful adherence to the teaching of the prophets and apostles. We may not join a church for any other reason. We may not seek unity on the basis of a common culture, or because we find the members of a particular church more warm and welcoming than another. It is not people or culture or feelings that are determinative, but the Word of God alone, that Word as summarized in the Reformed confessions.

It is with that reality in mind that our forefathers put The Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort into one package and entitled it, “The Three Forms of Unity.” We may point to them and say, “This is what unites us. We all believe and practise what is faithfully summarized in them.” Notice that I said, believe and practise. It will not do to say, “We have the same confessions therefore we are, by virtue of that fact, spiritually one.” We must “discern diligently and very carefully” (Art 29 of BC) whether these confessions are being upheld. The true faith is a living one. It has to be visible in the life and conduct of the members, individually and communally. All too often, as we have seen from our respective histories, it happens that we let the confessions become dead, dry documents. We treat them like artifacts in a

museum, admired and stared at, but not used!

The confessions do not merely contain the belief of God’s people living in the 1500s. What is written in them is embraced by the church of all ages and places. The faithful during the Reformation were prepared to die for them rather than deny any part of them. Many, in fact, were burnt at the stake or hung on the gallows for that reason. The same confessions are pertinent, actual and binding today because they summarize the abiding truth of God’s Word.

*The true faith is a living one. It has to be visible in the life and conduct of the members, individually and communally.*

Paul, as you know, urged the congregation in Philippi to be united. What he says there, can, by extension be applied to churches within a federation and between different federations. There was division, conceit, and self-seeking within that congregation, to the point that Paul tells them, (2:3) “Complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being of full accord and of one mind.” He continues by directing them to the example of Christ. How did your Lord and Saviour show his love, humility and selflessness? By being *obedient* unto death. It is that obedience that Paul wants the church to strive after. He says that even in verse 12, “Therefore, my beloved, as you have always *obeyed*, so now, not only as in my presence, but much more in my absence. . . .” What had they always obeyed? The apostolic teaching. The Word of God. In the six-

teenth verse of that chapter he exhorts them to “hold fast the Word of life.” Clearly then, unity in the congregation is rooted in, finds its source and power and meaning in the obedience of the congregation to the Word of God. That is the only path to true unity. And then we may not say, “Oh, that’s how he thinks, and that brother over there has a different view on that issue. We all have our different opinions and views.” Instead we need to bring each other constantly back to the one foundation: the truth as made known in Scripture and summarized in the confessions.

## The form of unity

That leads us to the question, “To what extent or in what form must this unity, so clearly commanded in the Scriptures, be manifested?” Some have answered that question as follows, “As long as we are confessionally united, we may be ecclesiastically divided.” To put it another way, “The unity of the faith does not have to result in the unity of the church.” Is that really the case? Do the confessions of our faith allow us to be “united as Christians but divided as churches?” On the contrary, confessional or spiritual unity must lead to ecclesiastical unity. Article 28 says that “all and everyone are obliged to join the church and unite with it, maintaining the unity of the church.” All and everyone! Indeed, the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace must be practised and maintained, first and foremost, in the local congregation of which you are a member.

But there are more believers in this country than just those in your own congregation. We give recognition to that in that each of us belongs to a federation of churches – churches that are planted throughout Canada and the United States. We have also established ecclesiastical fellowship with Reformed



churches in other countries of this wide world. If we will go to such lengths, based on the Scriptural call to unite and on the principle of the communion of saints, then we should certainly be busy seeking unity with Reformed churches in this city. At least here we do not have to overcome obstacles of language or distance.

***Our unity as churches must be as close, intimate and profound as that between the Father and the Son.***

I spoke just a few weeks ago with my next-door neighbours on Viscount Road. They're Muslims. As we chatted about the differences between Islam and Christianity, the lady of the house very quickly pointed out, "You know, the problem with you, Christians, is that you are so divided. You all form separate little clusters with your own distinctives. Sure, you serve the same God, but you lack a united front." I had to agree with her, admitting to her that it shouldn't be that way. That it was due to nothing else but our sins and our sinful nature that we were not all one – not to the point where the fullness of unity is made *visible* in our dwelling together in the same house, in celebrating the holy supper together, in membership transfers and pulpit exchanges.

In his high priestly prayer, our Saviour prays that all those who believe in Him may be one just as He and the Father are one. But that petition for unity doesn't stop there. It continues, "so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:21). Imagine this scenario. Your secular neighbour, who sees you leave your house every Sunday all dressed up, asks, "What church do you attend, anyway?" You reply, "The Free Reformed Church." "Oh, is that the same as the Canadian Reformed Church – the one down the street from my parents? Gauging from the similarity in name you probably are closely affiliated with them or not?" "No. We're different. They're another denomination. Same historical roots though." End of discussion.

With such a presentation of the church how will the world believe that God has sent his Son? Our unity as churches must be as close, intimate

and profound as that between the Father and the Son. Of course, Jesus is not referring to the eternal and natural union that He has with the Father, a union in being and substance. Christ has a relationship to the Father that we do not have. That difference permeates his ministry. In chapter 20 of the Gospel According to John He says to Mary Magdalene, who had been weeping beside the empty tomb, "I am ascending to *my* Father and *your* Father." He does not say, "*our* Father." Here in John 17 Christ means the trusting and loving relationship that He has with the Father. The Father pours out all his love upon him. He holds nothing back. His Word, his glory, his wisdom, his power, He gives it all to his Son. We also have to show loving solidarity and oneness so that the unbelieving world can see in the expression of our unity that Christ has been sent by the Father.

***Perhaps you still are wrestling with the question, "Is such unity required? Can we not be satisfied with a solution whereby we acknowledge one another as true churches but then continue on our separate ecclesiastical paths?"***

The glory of our communion must be visible to all, a communion that we have "as members of Christ" (Lord's Day 21, Q/A 55). It should be obvious to them that what we enjoy and taste is not from this world. It is "otherworldly." A miracle of divine grace. A gift from heaven – from the God and Father of Jesus Christ! For unity is, first of all, a gift.<sup>2</sup> We know that from Psalm 133 where David describes the unity of God's church with the images of dew and oil. And both of them have this characteristic: they come from above. The oil *descends* upon the beard of Aaron. The dew *descends* on the mountains of Zion.

At the same time these two images reveal how precious this unity is! The oil used to consecrate Aaron was mixed with a very special blend of expensive spices. It was not for common use. Dew also was so inestimable that

it became in Scripture a symbol for blessing. In Hosea 14, that is, in the context of the coming Messianic restoration, the Lord says about Himself, "I will be as the dew to Israel." We may not brush unity aside as something useful but optional, as a worthwhile cause, but not something mandatory. That does not fit with either John 17 or Psalm 133.

### **Pluriformity?**

Perhaps you still are wrestling with the question, "Is such unity required? Can we not be satisfied with a solution whereby we acknowledge one another as true churches but then continue on our separate ecclesiastical paths? We could still cooperate in other areas, put our shoulders together for Reformed education, Reformed evangelism, Reformed politics."

One theologian that helped promote that way of thinking more than anyone else was Dr. Abraham Kuyper. This is not said in a spirit of condemnation. Dr. Kuyper was an instrument in the Lord's hand for the reformation of 1886 (the *Doleantie*) and the subsequent union in 1892. There is more that binds us to him than separates us from him. And yet when it came to the doctrine of the church he espoused a theory that was not scriptural. He taught that the wisdom of God was so wide and broad, that each individual church possessed and confessed only a part of this wisdom. He called this the "pluriformity of the church" – many forms of ecclesiastical institutions. There was a pragmatic bend to this. It enabled Dr. Kuyper to garnish support for the Anti-revolutionary Party from all the different churches in The Netherlands.

***The unity of the church, my dear listeners, begins with you and me. What are we doing in that regard?***

And yet this theory does not stand the test of Scripture. The wisdom of God is not filtered through some kind of prism of human understanding so that every church receives a different colour. In John 17 Christ very clearly says, "Sanctify them in the truth. Thy Word is truth." Because the Lord is one, his Word is one. And to the truth of that Word belongs the reality of the

church as the body of Christ, an assembly with distinct marks: the pure preaching of the gospel, the diligent exercise of discipline, and the faithful administration of the sacraments.<sup>3</sup>

There is a great danger in working together in all kinds of Christian activities while remaining divided as churches. Interdenominational schools, political parties, outreach programs can accomplish much good, no one will deny that. But they do not begin where they have to begin: with the church! Let's take interdenominational evangelism as an example. Let's say an organization is set up by the three churches that are represented here this evening.<sup>4</sup> The gospel is brought via pamphlets or radio broadcast. Someone responds to the gospel, is brought to faith in Christ. Being truly converted he asks, "Where is the address of the church? Where is the place that I can do the will of my Father? Is there a visible church that I must join?" If this person asks questions like that he will not get a straight answer. The one member of the board will say, "You should join the United Reformed Church;" another member will say, "No, you should join the Canadian Reformed Church," and the other component of this multi-church organization will say, "Personally, I think it's best if you join the Free Reformed Church."

The intent of the Evangelism Committee was good: spread the good news of Jesus Christ. But you see that you run stuck, if you do not address the question of the church. As we saw, the Scriptures will not let us shrug this off with, "Even though we haven't brought him to church, we have brought him to Christ." There is indeed a certain order in evangelism. The people receiving the gospel must first embrace Jesus Christ as their only Saviour. But after that the church enters the picture. It has to. For where else does this new convert continue to hear the preaching of the holy gospel except in the church? We may not separate Christ from the church? Head and body belong together.

### The second commandment

To be content with inter-church cooperation without first obeying the command for unity in the true faith is sin against the second commandment. That commandment tells us how we must worship God – not according to our human imaginations and fancies but "in no other manner than he has

commanded in his Word" (Lord's Day 36, Q/A 96). We are commemorating the Reformation. And it is always good on an occasion like this to be reminded that deformation began back then with the breaking of the second commandment, not the first. That is usually the way it goes in the history of the church. God remains the object of our worship. We don't substitute Him for another god. Very subtly and gradually we make changes to *the manner* in which we serve Him. And that God takes this very serious is clear from the fact that He expressly attached a sanction to the second commandment: "For I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments." God is jealous. He wants us to serve Him as He has commanded and also with respect to the command, "maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Obedience is better than sacrifices.

Yes, we confess that we have only a small beginning of the obedience that God demands. Let that not prevent us from seeking one another in the unity of the true faith. For we also confess in Lord's Day 44 that with "earnest purpose" we begin to live not only according to some, but according to *all* the commandments of God.

### Conclusion

The unity of the church, my dear listeners, begins with you and me. What are we doing in that regard? How fervently and frequently do we bring this matter before the throne of grace? Yes, our wills are stubborn, our understanding dull, and our love towards God, whom we haven't seen, and towards our brother, whom we do see, is often lukewarm and intermittent. But we have the Word and the Spirit. Through them we can work with



General Synod will be convened by the church of Chatham, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, February 10, 2004. All material for Synod must be received by the convening church in 22 copies, no later than 6 weeks prior to the convocation date.

\* \* \*

Called by the Free Reformed Church of Albany, Australia:

**Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer**

of Aldergrove, British Columbia.

\* \* \*

Called by the church of Neerlandia, Alberta:

**Rev. R.E. Pot**

of Orangeville, Ontario.

earnest purpose at doing what our Saviour prayed for, "That they may all be one." The unity of the church is part of "the yoke of Jesus Christ." Let us bend our necks under it for his yoke is easy and his burden is light (Matt 11:30).

<sup>1</sup> This is a copy of a Reformation Day Speech held on October 31, 2000

<sup>2</sup> See the speech of Dr.C.VanDam "When Brothers Dwell in Unity in *The Challenge of Church Union*."

<sup>3</sup> W.G.De Vries, *Kerkelijk verdeeld en christelijk samen?*, p.7-8.

<sup>4</sup> Example taken from W.Jelsma, "Gereformeerd en missionair" in *Reformanda XXII*, no.31 (May 2000), 258. The author draws on a pamphlet by K. Drost, "God's Huis - Open Huis; van harte Gereformeerd en missionair."



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By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

*"Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbour, for we are all members of one body."  
Ephesians 4:25*

## Dear Brothers and Sisters:

"You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour." We are coming close to the end of the Ten Commandments. In the ninth commandment we are commanded by Christ not to give false testimony against our neighbour. We know that we all belong together as members of Christ's church. Yet so easily our mouths are opened to say something negative about someone else. Sometimes even without thinking we have sinned against this commandment.

Although this commandment speaks about telling the truth in court, it also teaches us how to live holy before the Lord in our daily walk of life. The Heidelberg Catechism speaks about sin against this commandment as the devil's own works. Nowhere else in the Ten Commandments is the devil mentioned. It shows us how powerful this sin can be in our lives. Already in paradise Satan spoke falsely against God. There he twisted God's Word and slandered our God. Through this sin there is now enmity between God and man. Lying or speaking wrongly of others is such a terrible sin that we can become instruments of the devil, "the father of lies." Satan loves nothing more than to tear the church apart. When church members who say they love the Lord, but do their best to ruin someone's name, then Satan is happy.

We must love the truth at all times even if the blame will be on us. We have to defend and promote our neighbour's good in sincere love and truth. What flows out of our mouth should come from what lives in our hearts. The love of Christ should be in our hearts and his Holy Spirit who guides our lives. We cannot rejoice when a neighbour has been falsely accused. The truth about our neighbour should also be said in court because we swear an oath to God that we are telling the truth. To lie about what someone did or did not do is a great sin. We cannot belong to God if we chose to live falsely with our neighbour.

All lying and deceit is the devil's own work. As the body of Christ we must always build up each other in faith. Certain things might be true about a certain person, but to tell people about it and to gossip about it makes it evil and malicious. Nobody benefits from destroying someone's reputation, except the devil.

By controlling our tongue we control our body. When we have control over our tongue we learn to speak positively about each other and the church will be strengthened. Instead of the endless chatter of ruining our brothers and sisters' reputation, our hearts must be set on what God wants us to do. We will then speak of the awesome riches we have in Christ. He gives us faith so we can love Him. Eternal life and forgiveness of sins are promised

to those who love Him. By reading God's Word every day and asking God to help us obey also this commandment, we will again have peace with Him.

Our God let his only Son be falsely accused on the cross. During his trial He could have said much against his accusers, but He kept silent. He was falsely accused and later died on the cross. He died for us so we could have forgiveness of sins and eternal life. In his great love for us He did not falsely accuse us, as we deserved, but carried the eternal wrath that we deserved. What an awesome Saviour we have! We as God's covenant children have to remain strong and faithful in this world that is so full of lies and deception. The devil is out there prowling to devour all those who live in deceit. He loves nothing more than members of Christ's church living against God's commands.

We will not fear, for God has given us the truth for all times; his Word! His Word never changes and his promises are sure! Praise be to Him alone!

*Come, children, hear my voice;  
You I will teach to fear the LORD.  
Who is the man desiring life,  
Its pleasures and rewards?  
Keep then your tongue from wrong  
And let your lips no falsehood speak.  
Depart from evil and do good;  
True peace and concord seek.*

*Psalm 34:5*

## Birthdays in December:

**1: MARTEN JANSEN will be 14**

98 Morgandale Crescent, Orangeville, ON L9W 3C7

**10: JAMES KAMMINGA will turn 19**

Box 1125, Carman, MB R0G 0J0

**16: JULIE KAMMINGA will turn 15**

Box 1125, Carman, MB R0G 0J0

Congratulations to all of you on your birthday. A special welcome goes out to James and Julie Kamminga who are new to the *Ray of Sunshine*. May our heavenly Father continue to be with you in this new year, and grant you much health and happiness. Till next month,

Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman  
Mailing correspondence:  
548 Kemp Road East  
RR 2, Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2  
1-905-563-0380



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# Reading Genesis One

By C. Van Dam

Creation and questions related to faith and science have been featured the last while in *Clarion* by Dr. F.G. Oosterhoff.<sup>1</sup> She has stimulated the thinking of readers of *Clarion* by giving a historical overview of different approaches used in dealing with science and Scripture. In her most recent series, "Genesis 1 in Context," she has rightly stressed the importance of coming to grips with the context of Scripture in trying to understand its meaning. I would, however, like to take this opportunity to respond to this most recent series. A number of issues are raised that deserve to be discussed, be it of necessity, briefly. In this response, page numbers given in brackets refer to Oosterhoff's articles on Genesis 1 as published in the August 2003 issues of *Clarion*.

Oosterhoff sets the tone for her most recent series by stating that the theological meaning of Genesis 1 is paramount and 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" (378). Further on, she explains that "it was not the author's intent to give scientific information" (378).

Now it is of course a truism that the Bible is not a scientific textbook. I am not aware of anyone who calls the Bible such. The underlying question is however of what historical and scientific value are the statements that the Bible makes. Does, for example, the fact that the Bible is not a scientific textbook mean that the Bible gives only religious facts, such as "God's dealings with his people" and that therefore science does not have to reckon with the data given in Scripture? What is the value of what Scripture relates? What kind of history does Scripture, and now especially Genesis 1, give?

## Does Genesis 1 relate history?

Oosterhoff states very clearly that "Genesis 1 gives a factual, historical account," be it in the form of a concentrated history and from the perspective of a human being and his senses (378). However, this clear statement of the factuality of Genesis 1 is somewhat compromised by her subsequent assertion that "it was not the author's intent to give us scientific information" (378). It is immediately granted that the Bible does not, for example, give any scientific chemical formulas on the process of creation. However, is the historical reality of a six day creation not a scientific fact of utmost importance? Is this not a fact that science has to reckon with when, for example, dealing with the problem of dating the present world?

*Now it is of course a truism that the Bible is not a scientific textbook.*

By stressing only the theological message of Genesis 1 and saying that this is of paramount importance (378), Oosterhoff introduces a false dilemma. She implies that the plain and obvious meaning of the creation account in 6 days is not really that important (cf. p. 401). Genesis 1 gives predominantly theological facts. In this one-sided emphasis, the historicity of this chapter is in danger of being compromised. For example, we are told that the number 7, as in 7 days of creation, has symbolic value. Oosterhoff writes: "It can hardly have seemed accidental to Israel that the creation account incorporates the number of perfection and completeness" (402). But putting the matter this way raises an important question. Was the number 7 in Genesis 1 simply used to give the idea of completeness and

perfection to Israel or did the creation of heaven and earth really did take place in 7 days?

That speaking of incorporating the number seven into the creation account puts into question its historicity is also evident when Oosterhoff refers to Umberto Cassuto's ideas with apparent approval. She writes: "Cassuto mentions various other places where the number seven occurs in the creation account and shows that the number is not only fundamental to the account's main theme but that it serves to *determine* many of its details as well" (my emphasis, 403, n. 2). If the number serves to determine many of the details of the creation account, then obviously historical accuracy has not determined their usage but a need to include the number 7. I do agree that the number 7 is an important one in the Bible. Its importance however derives from the fact that creation actually took place in the space of a week. *For that reason* the number seven subsequently became the number of perfection and completeness.

The historicity of Genesis 1 can also be put into question by an undue emphasis on how the Genesis creation account meets certain human needs, specifically those of Israel leaving Egypt. For example, to say that Genesis 1 mentions water and darkness as being subject to the Lord in order to allay Israel's fear of water and darkness (both of which figured prominently in the Exodus) does little to enhance the historicity of this chapter. After speaking of Israel's fear of water and darkness Oosterhoff writes:

*For this very reason*, however, they [the Israelites] 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. . . . (381, my emphasis)

*The attempt to make Genesis 1 somehow fit current scientific theories has largely been given up by mainstream critical scholars.*

But surely, the water, the darkness, and God's presence are mentioned in Genesis 1, not in the first place to allay Israel's fears, but because they are the result of God's creating the world and all that is in it. The creation account included these details because this is what actually happened. Now each generation, including our own, can take all manner of comfort and encouragement from Genesis 1. But we can do that because we know that this is what happened according to the Word which God himself gave us.

By her great emphasis on what appears to be a tailor-made account for Israel fresh out of Egypt, Oosterhoff seems to suppose that prior to this time there was no knowledge of creation. But, the creation event took place as described before any Israelite existed and we may assume that God's people such as Enoch and Abraham knew of this great act of God. The knowledge of this historical event predated Israel and later the liberated descendants of Jacob received this revelation from God as we now have it. There is no reason to believe that previous generations of believers did not know that the Lord had made heaven and earth in six days. After all, the Sabbath as a creation ordinance of rest had been given to Israel *before* Israel received the fourth commandment at the Sinai (cf. Exod 16:23-30; cf. 20:8). To know the fourth commandment and its rationale was to know of creation in six days followed by a day of rest. That commandment, as well as the others, was clearly not new for Israel (cf. Gen 26:5). What happened at the Sinai was a covenant renewal. The Lord graciously reaffirmed the Abrahamic covenant of old and claimed Abraham's seed as his special and holy nation (Exod 19:6).

### The historicity of Genesis 1

We need to maintain the historical character of Genesis 1 in its plain and obvious meaning. Otherwise, there is no basis for theological truth relating to this chapter. Oosterhoff has made good use of the work of the late Gerhard F. Hasel in bringing out some of the theological importance of what we find in Genesis 1.<sup>2</sup> But Hasel also understood very clearly that it was essential to maintain the historicity of the events narrated in their obvious and plain sense. He therefore prepared an excellent study entitled "The 'Days' of Creation in Genesis 1: Literal 'Days' or Figurative 'Periods/EPOCHS' of Time?" which was published in *Origins*.<sup>3</sup> After considering all the arguments, his conclusion is as follows:

*But surely, the water, the darkness, and God's presence are mentioned in Genesis 1, not in the first place to allay Israel's fears, but because they are the result of God's creating the world and all that is in it.*

The cumulative evidence, based on comparative, literary, linguistic and other considerations, converges on every level, leading to the singular conclusion that the designation *yôm*, "day," in Genesis 1 means consistently a literal 24-hour day.

The author of Genesis 1 could not have produced more comprehensive and all-inclusive ways to express the idea of a literal "day" than the ones that were chosen. There is a complete lack of indicators from prepositions, qualifying expressions, construct phrases, semantic-syntactical connections, and so on, on the basis of which the designation "day" in the creation week could be taken to be anything different than a regular 24-hour day. The combinations of the factors of articular usage, singular gender, semantic-syntactical constructions, time boundaries, and so on, corroborated by the divine promulgations in such Pentateuchal passages as Exodus 20:8-11 and Exodus 31:12-17, suggest uniquely and consistently that the creation "day"

is meant to be literal, sequential, and chronological in nature.<sup>4</sup>

This conclusion is not unusual in Old Testament scholarship. The attempt to make Genesis 1 somehow fit current scientific theories has largely been given up by mainstream critical scholars. They generally admit that the text of Genesis 1 clearly intends to inform the reader that the world was formed in six time periods we know as days. Critical scholars may relegate this account to myth and not history but the message given is unmistakable.<sup>5</sup> It is often conservative scholars wishing to harmonize Genesis 1 with current science who will try to find room in the days of Genesis 1 for large periods of time in one form or another. This tendency is also evident in our own Dutch tradition and Oosterhoff has listed several "big" names that went in this direction.<sup>6</sup> However, exegesis of Scripture must be determinative, and as Hasel's work makes clear, there is no exegetical basis for making the days of Genesis 1 refer to anything but what we understand by "day." This is also how the days of Genesis 1 would have been understood by ancient Israel. This meaning of "day" is *part of its original context* (cf. 401) which Oosterhoff seeks to recover.

In summary, a careful comparing of Scripture with Scripture has to determine the meaning of the biblical text, taking all relevant factors into consideration, and not an outside agenda such as science or the desire to "make things fit" with current scientific theory.<sup>7</sup>

*The creation account is not only part of that history but is even its opening chapter.*

### One history

There is a larger concern that lies behind this response to the three articles on Genesis 1. It is this. We need to maintain the unity of history as revealed in Scripture. In scholarship that does not take seriously the Bible as God's infallible Word, a distinction is often made between history which is affirmed by faith (called *Geschichte*) and real, verifiable history (called *Historie*). In the former, the theological meaning is paramount, but the latter is all we really have to worry about in taking

seriously the historical data of Scripture. We should make every effort to avoid falling into this false dilemma. It is a dilemma introduced by modern critical scholarship. History has shown that it is a very small step from making artificial distinctions such as the theological and historical (or scientific) significance of a passage to dismissing the historical all together.

Of course, Scripture's chief focus is the account of how the Lord our God had mercy on a fallen creation and brought about salvation in Christ. But in revealing this to us, the Lord also relates true and real history that can and should be reckoned with, also in scientific endeavours. The creation account is not only part of that history but is even its opening chapter. There is only one history and not two. Just as the great redemptive acts of God, including the salvation in Christ, are only great and redemptive because they truly happened, so also the awesome creation acts of God are great and important for us because they truly happened as God has related this to us.

One final point of clarification. By writing the above, I do not say that Dr. Oosterhoff adheres to this dualism brought on by critical scholarship. In discussing the matter with her, I know that she rejects it out of hand. I fully

accept her statement that she considers Genesis 1 to give factual history and do not call into question her integrity as a Reformed scholar. But, as I have tried to show, her subsequent writing in these articles compromises her positive assertion. This probably happened unwittingly and in all innocence. But, let us be careful not to create an implicit contrast between the theological meaning of Genesis 1 which is to be considered paramount (378) and the history that is actually recounted there. There would be no worthwhile theology if it was not rooted in actual history.

<sup>1</sup>F.G. Oosterhoff, "Faith and Science in the Reformed Tradition" *Clarion* 51 (2002) 62-64, 84-87, 105-108, 134-137; "Klaas Schilder on Creation and Flood," *Clarion* 52 (2003) 137-140, 161-164; and "Genesis 1 in Context" 52 (2003) 378-381, 401-403, 422-424.

<sup>2</sup>Namely his article "The Polemic Nature of the Genesis Cosmology," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 46 (1974) 81-102.

<sup>3</sup>*Origins* 21:1 (1994) 5-38; see also n. 77 on p. 36.

<sup>4</sup>G.F. Hasel, "The 'Days' of Creation in Genesis 1", *Origins* 21:1 (1994) 30-31.

<sup>5</sup>See, e.g., J. Skinner, *Genesis* (ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1930), 4-5, 20-21 and G. von Rad, *Genesis* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 63. Also see

the discussion in James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (London: SCM, 1977) 40-42.

"See her "Klaas Schilder on Creation and the Flood" *Clarion* 52 (2003) 137-140, 161-164. She acknowledges her debt to the work of Max Rogland, "Ad litteram: Some Dutch Reformed Theologians on the Creation Days," *Westminster Theological Journal* 63 (2001) 211-233. On the other hand, there are conservative scholars today who are "mainstream" and maintain the obvious reading of the text. See, e.g., G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (WBC; Waco, Texas: Word, 1987) 19, 39-40.

<sup>7</sup>See also on this point my articles: "The First Verse," *Clarion* 37 (1988) 486-487; "Is There a Time Gap Between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2?" *Clarion* 37 (1988) 516-517, 38 (1989) 4-5; "Bible and Science: Some Basic Factors," *Clarion* 38 (1989) 54-55; "The First Day," *Clarion* 38 (1989) 74-75; "What Did the Days of the 'Creation Week' Consist of?" *Clarion* 38 (1989) 94-95; "Science, Scripture and the Age of the Earth," *Clarion* 38 (1989) 146-147. Also see my "Creation and Confession," *Clarion* 49 (2000) 218-220.



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## BOOK NOTE

By W.L. Bredenhof

***Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations*, Walter C. Kaiser Jr., Baker, 2000, softcover, 99 pages, \$9.99 US.**

Every now and then, it's good to read a book which gives us an overview of Scripture. This book does that, but from a unique perspective. Walter C. Kaiser Jr., professor of Old Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, offers this brief book as a guide to *Mission in the Old Testament*.

Though I am not entirely comfortable with his thesis that God's people in the Old Testament were collectively called to an active missionary ministry,

this is a helpful guide as to how God's plans for salvation have always been broad. Predictably, Kaiser covers the well-known passages: Melchizedek, Jethro, Rahab, Naaman, and Jonah. But he also uncovers the missional significance of lesser-known Scriptures including several of the Psalms and the so-called Servant Songs of Isaiah. Kaiser concludes with an engaging chapter which argues "God's Call to the Missionary Paul Based on the Old Testament." He shows how Paul conceived of his ministry to the Gentiles as consistent with Old Testament prophecy.

A book like this helps us to understand that it is no exaggeration to say

that the story of the Bible is the story of mission. It is the story of God bringing reconciliation between Himself and a sinful world of men. Further, as we read a book such as this, we come to appreciate that mission is not a New Testament novelty. Between Old and New Testament, God did not change, nor did his purposes for salvation. *Mission in the Old Testament* helps in valuing those truths!



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# Response to Dr. C. Van Dam

By F.C. Oosterhoff

I am grateful to Dr. C. Van Dam for responding to my articles and for providing information that is of interest to me and, no doubt, to our readers. I also appreciate the fact that the editor has allowed me to come with a reply. Because I have been told to be as brief as possible, I will stick to what I believe are the main points.

## Genesis 1 and science

I agree with Dr. Van Dam that scriptural data are of relevance to scientists. To restrict ourselves to Genesis 1, scientists must learn here that God created, that He did so at the beginning of time, that He declared his work to be good, and so on (see my articles, and especially the conclusion of the final one). I also agree that the question of the days is important, and I think that Dr. Van Dam is absolutely right in underlining this point. On at least two occasions I myself wrote that the discussion on that issue is valid and unavoidable. But I wrote further that by single-mindedly concentrating on that topic (and who can deny that this happens all too often among us?) we may miss something in the first chapter of the Bible that is of paramount or overriding importance – the fact, namely,

*I am convinced that Genesis 1 gives a factual, historical account and made that clear at the beginning.*

that Genesis 1 gives us *the history of redemption*. That was my focus, and in order to avoid all confusion, I consciously ignored the question of the days. Wrongly so? Perhaps, but I had to limit myself.

Under the present heading I must also comment briefly on Dr. Van Dam's

statement that the days must be interpreted in their "obvious and plain sense," namely as 24-hour days. I know that this is his opinion and I respect it, but he must not ask of me to deal with this complex issue within the context of my specific study. I am not even sure that I can cast a deciding vote here under any circumstances. Various Reformed theologians of standing have questioned this interpretation, or at least argued that there are other exegetically-permissible ones. Names like Kuyper, Bavinck, Schilder, and several of their colleagues and of their present-day disciples come to mind; I have written about some of them before. On the other hand, there are those who take Dr. Van Dam's position. How shall I decide between these different views? All I can say is that the Bible is infallible, but our Reformed exegesis obviously is not. (Nor has Reformed theology ever said that it is.)

A minor point: I realize that no one *calls* the Bible a scientific treatise. My concern is that we are perhaps tempted to *treat* it as one.

## Genesis 1 relates history

I am convinced that Genesis 1 gives a factual, historical account and made that clear at the beginning. I do not believe that, as Dr. Van Dam suggests, my subsequent articles cast doubt on this statement, but if there is any danger of leaving such an impression, I am more than willing to make corrections. If, for example, my quotation from Umberto Cassuto's work about the role of the number seven in the creation account causes confusion, I am quite prepared to withdraw it. But drawing attention to the importance of the number seven as such does not at all, as far as I can see, jeopardize my confession of the historicity of Genesis 1. (Dr. Van Dam's statement that the value of the number seven derives first of all from the seven-day creation message I found interesting and enlightening.)

Dr. Van Dam goes on to suggest that by showing how the creation account met the needs of the ancient Israelites I am once again in danger of casting doubt on the chapter's historicity. But I fail to see the connection. Reformed exegesis has always given attention to original context (*internal*, but also *external* context – i.e., cultural-historical environment), and that was what I was doing. It does not at all imply that the message is non-historical. Nor does it imply that it has no relevance for later readers; quite the contrary. I make that point more than once; see especially the introduction and the conclusion of the series.

*Why should relevance for Israel and for us imply non-historicity?*

I agree with Dr. Van Dam that knowledge of creation existed before the Exodus; that men like Enoch and Abraham and others will have known that the Lord Yahweh created the heavens and the earth. It did not become part of the written Word, the canonical Scriptures, however, until Moses' days. The ancient Israelites were the first readers of the account as it appeared in Scripture. I have no trouble believing that, guided by the Holy Spirit, Moses recounted the events in such a way that they were clearly seen as relevant – that they even seemed "tailor-made" – for the Israelites in their specific situation (and *thereby* also for us in our specific situation). The fact that I bring out this relevance does not at all imply a low view of the historicity of Genesis 1. Why should relevance for Israel and for us imply non-historicity?

Two other points. 1. Dr. Van Dam quotes me as saying (on p.378) that "it was not the author's intent to give scientific information." The context makes

clear that I am referring here to exact-theoretical scientific information (the quotation occurs in my statement that Genesis 1 describes the world *as it appears to the senses*). 2. He also states that I imply (on p. 401) that “the plain and obvious meaning of the creation account in 6 days is not really that important.” Here again, the context should be kept in mind. The statement occurs in the section wherein I object to the intrusion of *modern-scientific issues* into our reading of Genesis 1, since (I argue) such intrusions tend to confuse the issue.

### Critical scholarship and I

I concentrated on the salvation-historical (or redemptive-historical) message of Genesis 1, and called that the “theological meaning.” The term “salvation-historical” should make clear that the term “theological” (which is used as a synonym!) does not imply “non-historical” in the modern-critical

sense. I know of the distinction that is made between theological but non-historical *Geschichte* and historical-factual *Historie*, and for that reason I hesitated for a while to use the word theological, but in the end I concluded that the abuse of a term does not abolish its proper use. Even so, it is good that Dr. Van Dam draws attention to possible misunderstandings. Let me make clear, then, once and for all: my usage of the term “theological meaning” must not be interpreted to mean that I am captive to the views of Bible-critical scholars. At no time (I know I am repeating myself) did I in the least question the infallibility of the Bible or the historicity of Genesis 1. To Dr. Van Dam’s concluding statement that “There would be no worthwhile theology if it was not rooted in actual history,” I respond with a heartfelt “Amen!” But at no point did I attack or deny this truth, either explicitly or implicitly.

### Conclusion

Dr. Van Dam and I have discussed our differing views on matters that are dealt with in this exchange on more than one occasion. We have done so again before I sent this reply to the editor. We continue to differ on various points, but we recognize each other as Christian believers who want to submit to Scripture as the infallible Word of God and therefore the only rule of faith. Within this context, I believe, differences of opinion are possible, permissible, and often even profitable. Iron sharpens iron. It is our wish that our readers may benefit from the discussion and that the exchange contributes to a yet clearer understanding of Genesis 1.



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## PRESS RELEASE



### Press Release of Classis Central Ontario held September 19, 2003

On behalf of the convening church of Ottawa, Rev. M. Jagt called the meeting to order. He requested the singing of Psalm 147:1, 3, 6. After prayer, he read 2 Samuel 17:27-29 and Psalm 23 and gave a brief meditation on the goodness and mercy of our God which have “pursued us” in Jesus Christ. (Ps 23:6) He welcomed the delegates and br. S.C. Van Dam who was present to be examined with a view to be eligible for call.

The church of Flamborough examined the credentials. The churches were properly represented. There were no additional instructions. Rev. M. Jagt declared classis constituted. The following officers took their place: chairman: Rev. J. de Gelder; vice-chairman: Rev. M. Jagt; clerk: Rev. G. Nederveen.

Rev. J. de Gelder thanked the church of Ottawa for its work in convening classis.

He noted the early retirement of Rev. C. Bosch and wished the church

of Burlington Fellowship the LORD’S blessings in finding a new minister of the word. He welcomed Rev. J. Huijgen and congratulated the church of Burlington-Waterdown with their new minister. He also gave thanks that the church of Toronto could appoint an additional mission worker, br. W. VanderHeide, for work in Papua New Guinea.

The second provisional agenda was adopted.

The Form of Subscription for Ministers of the Word was read to Rev. J. Huijgen and the chairman requested his agreement. After the chairman gave some words about the purpose of the form, Rev. Huijgen signed the form and the chairman wished him the LORD’S blessing in his ministry to Burlington-Waterdown.

Classis proceeded to the preparatory examination of br. S.C. Van Dam. The necessary documents were presented to Classis: a declaration from the Theological College of his Master of Divinity, and attestations from the

churches where the brother has been a member during the last three years.

Br. Van Dam delivered his sermon proposal on the parable of the wise and foolish virgins, Mathew 25:1-13. After discussion in closed session, classis decided to proceed with the examination and br. Van Dam was informed of this. Br. Van Dam was then examined in Old Testament exegesis, 1 Samuel 8, in New Testament exegesis, Luke 15, and in doctrine and creeds, the doctrine of God and the person and work of the Holy Spirit.

After further discussion in closed session, classis decided to declare br. S.C. Van Dam eligible for call within the Canadian Reformed Churches for a period of one year. The chairman congratulated the brother and asked for br. Van Dam’s assent to the Form for Subscription which he had signed after receiving preaching consent. He presented br. Van Dam with a declaration from Classis. Then he requested we sing from Hymn 50:1, 7 and Rev. G. Nederveen led in a prayer of thanksgiving and blessing.

Classis adjourned for a delicious lunch.

Various reports were received. The church of Burlington Fellowship found the classical archives in good order, except that the material from the last Classis had not yet been filed. Classis received the report of the treasurer. The treasurer recommended an assessment of \$2.00 per communicate member. This was adopted.

The church of Burlington-Waterdown did not have a report on the books of the treasurer. They are to submit this and two other audits to the next classis.

The church at Flamborough reported on the fund for financial aid to students for the ministry. Since there have not been any requests for support, and a substantial amount has been received, it was recommended to halt the assessment. Classis agreed.

The Committee for Needy Churches submitted its report. Classis agreed to support Ottawa as recommended and to the proposed assessment of \$25.00 per communicant member. The chairman thanked the churches for their work.

In accordance with Art 44 CO, the churches reported that the ministry of the office-bearers is being continued and the decisions of the major assemblies are being honoured. The churches did not need any advice.

The church of Burlington Fellowship requested monthly pulpit supply. Classis granted this request for a year and a schedule was drawn up. Burlington Fellowship also requested Rev. G. Nederveen be appointed counselor in accordance with Art 45 CO. Classis agreed.

The Church of Toronto was appointed to convene the next classis to be held on December 12 in the Burlington Ebenezer church building, at 9:00 a.m. The following officers were suggested: chairman: Rev. W. den Hollander; vice-chairman: Rev. G. Nederveen; clerk: Rev. J. de Gelder.

Rev. J. Huijgen was appointed to take the place of Rev. C. Bosch in the committee of examiners. He was also appointed to be a church visitor, along with Rev. J. de Gelder, Rev. W den Hollander, and Rev. G. Nederveen. Mr. F. Lodder was reappointed to the Committee for Needy Churches. All other appointments remained the same.

In closed session, classis dealt with an appeal.

Classis delegated the Revs. J. de Gelder and G. Nederveen, and as al-

ternates W. den Hollander and J. Huijgen to Regional Synod East of November 12, along with brs. F. Kampen and H. Vanderwel, and as alternates brs. R. Nordeman and W. Horsman.

There were no questions. The chairman asked whether censure was necessary. It was not required. The Acts were read and adopted. The Press Release was approved for publication. The chairman thanked the brothers for their good co-operation. After the singing of Psalm 33:1, 6, he closed the meeting with prayer.

*For Classis,  
M. Jagt, vice-chairman, e.t.*

### **Press Release of Classis Manitoba September 22, 2003**

On behalf of the convening church, Grace Canadian Reformed Church, br. Frank Baker opened the meeting by reading Psalm 90, led in prayer and requested the delegates to sing Psalm 95:1, 2. The credentials were found to be in order and Classis was declared constituted.

Rev. Edward Huntington was seated as fraternal delegate from the Presbytery of the Dakotas of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (POD of the OPC).

#### **Needy churches**

The Committee for Aid to Needy Churches had recommended aid to the Emmanuel American Reformed Church of Denver. This was approved. All the churches were thanked for punctually providing these funds. Later in the meeting the delegates of Denver thanked the churches of Classis for the financial help that was approved and requested prayers to God for their growth in faith and in numbers.

#### **Church visitation**

In closed session Classis received the church visitation report to the Emmanuel American Reformed Church in Denver. This report was received with thankfulness and br. Len Lodder led in prayer for the church at Denver.

#### **Presbytery of the Dakotas of the OPC**

The report of the observer to the Presbytery of the Dakotas of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church who had been mandated by Classis MB Sept. 23/02 and who visited the POD on April 1-2, 2003 was received and put into discussion. Fruitful discussions followed regarding the nature of the church, church membership, table fellowship, and the role of church disci-

pline, together with the fraternal delegate from the POD. Further discussion took place regarding transfer of ministers out of the OPC, as well as mission works and the financial support of such mission works when little growth is seen.

Later Rev. Edward Huntington, fraternal delegate from the POD of the OPC, addressed Classis. He expressed deep appreciation for preaching in Carman West on Sunday and for interacting with the brothers at Classis. He strongly encouraged the churches to remain faithful to the Lord in all circumstances. Rev. T.G. Van Raalte responded with thanks for Rev. Huntington's visit and then led in prayer for the Rev. Huntington, the POD, the OPC in general, and the relationship of the OPC to the Canadian Reformed Churches.

#### **Classis treasurer**

A report was received from the church responsible for inspecting the books of the Classis Treasurer. The books had been examined and were found to be in good order. For clarification a decision was made that Classis will compensate lost wages to a maximum of \$150/day for delegates to Regional Synod if these are not compensated for by Regional Synod. This ensures that no elders will be prevented from attending Regional Synod for reasons of lost wages.

#### **Article 44, Church Order**

The chairman asked the churches whether the ministry of the office bearers is being continued, whether the decisions of the major assemblies are being honoured, and whether any of the churches needed the judgment or help of Classis for the proper government of the church. One of the churches requested advice and this was dealt with in closed session.

#### **Appointments**

The next Classis will be, D.V., on Dec. 01/03, or if there is insufficient material, on Mar. 22/04, to be hosted by Winnipeg Redeemer in their building, beginning at 9:00 a.m. Suggested officers are: president Rev. K. Jonker, vice-president Rev. D.M. Boersma, and clerk, Rev. T.G. Van Raalte. The Classis Treasurer, various churches for their specific tasks such as the archives and inspections, standing committees, and church visitors, were reappointed. Elected as primi delegates to Regional Synod West Nov. 18/03 in Yarrow, BC, were ministers A.J. Pol and T.G. Van



Raalte, K. Jonker and D.M. Boersma were elected secundi minister delegates, in that order. Elected as primi elder delegates to Regional Synod West Nov. 18 were J. Kuik and P. Veenendaal, while B. Veldman and F. Baker were elected secundi elder delegates, in that order. Rev. T. G. Van Raalte was appointed to visit the POD of the OPC in Spring 2004. A letter of greeting will be sent to the POD by the Classis clerk which will meet on Oct. 7-8 in Carson, ND. Rev. A.J. Pol was appointed contact person with the Northern Plains Classis of the Reformed Church of the United States. He will try to visit their Classis. More direct contact with the Western Canada Classis of the United Reformed Churches or their Southwestern Classis awaits a proposal from one of the churches.

### Conclusion

Personal question period was held. The chairman considered that censure art. 34 CO was not necessary and he thanked the brothers for a fruitful meeting. The Acts were adopted and the Press Release was approved. Rev. D.M. Boersma led the meeting in closing prayer, and Classis was completed.

*For Classis, T.G. Van Raalte,  
vice-chairman of that Classis*

### Press Release of Classis Northern Ontario, September 26, 2003, in Elora, Ontario

On behalf of the convening church, Rev. C. Vermeulen opened the meeting of the delegates. After the delegates sang from Psalm 111:1, 4, 5, Rev. Vermeulen read from 1Kings 3:4-15, spoke some fitting words in connection with this passage, and led in prayer.

Rev. Vermeulen welcomed the delegates, and spoke words of special welcome to Rev. C. Heiberg who came as an observer from Classis Southern Ontario of the United Reformed Churches.

With the credentials found to be in good order, Classis was declared constituted. The moderamen took their positions: Rev. P. Aasman as chairman; Rev. C. Vermeulen as clerk; Rev. J. Van Woudenberg as vice-chairman.

The chairman mentioned the following as items of memorabilia: the Lord continues to permit the churches in the classical region to live in freedom in our country; a new season of catechetical instruction could begin in September; Rev. J. Louwse declined calls from Grassie and Neerlandia; Rev. R. Pot received calls from Rockway

(declined) and Carman East (still being deliberated); Br. and sr. Wayne and Cheronne Vanderheide have been appointed by the sending Church of Toronto to work as mission workers with Rev. 't Hart in Papua New Guinea. The chairman also expressed thanks to the Church of Elora for convening and hosting this classis.

Church Visitation reports to Guelph, Elora, Brampton, and Grand Valley, were read and received with gratitude.

Reports were received from the classical treasurer, and from the church of Owen Sound which audited the books of the classical treasurer. The books were in good order.

Reports and audits were received with respect to the fund for needy churches and fund for needy students. The funds are in good order. Currently no funds are required by any needy churches or needy students, and thus no assessments required. A good report of inspection of the classical archives was also received.

Rev. C. Vermeulen reported on a visit to a Classis Southern Ontario of the United Reformed Churches on behalf of the churches in our classical region. He highlighted various aspects of that Classis for the benefit of Classis.

In accordance with article 44 of the church order, the chairman asked the churches if the ministry of the office bearers is being continued, whether the decisions of the major assemblies are being honoured, and whether there is any matter in which the consistories need the judgment and help of Classis for the proper government of their churches. Each of the churches answered the first two questions in the affirmative, and the last one in the negative.

In closed session Classis began to deal with a number of appeals until lunch time. After lunch the members of classis sang Psalm 41:1, after which Rev. C. Heiberg addressed Classis on behalf of Classis Southern Ontario of the United Reformed Churches. He conveyed the greetings of his Classis, wished Classis Northern Ontario the Lord's blessings in its work, and expressed the desire for increasing interaction for our mutual benefit. The chairman responded with words of thanks.

Classis again went into closed session to deal with appeals. After supper, and after the singing of Psalm 49:1,2 classis completed dealing with the appeals in closed session.

In open session classis made the following appointments:

1. Committee of examiners: Rev. J. Louwse and Rev. J. VanWoudenberg
  - a. Exegesis Old Testament: Rev. P. Aasman
  - b. Exegesis New Testament: Rev. R. Pot
  - c. Knowledge of Scripture: Rev. C. Vermeulen
  - d. Doctrine and Creeds: Rev. P. Feenstra
  - e. Church History: Rev. B. Berends
  - f. Ethics: Rev. J. Louwse
  - g. Church Polity: Rev. B. Berends
  - h. Diaconiology: Rev. P. Feenstra
2. Church Visitors: Rev. P. Aasman, Rev. B. Berends; Rev. P. Feenstra (convener); Rev. J. VanWoudenberg.
3. Church for taking care of the archives: Owen Sound.
4. Church to inspect the archives: Orangeville.
5. Treasurer: F. Hoekstra, with H. Bosscher as co signer.
6. Church for auditing the books of the treasurer: Owen Sound.
7. Church for financial aid to students for the ministry: Guelph.
8. Church for auditing the books of the Fund for financial Aid to Students for the Ministry: Fergus.
9. Committee for Needy churches: Classis decided to ask the committee to make a recommendation for an appointment to the next Classis.
10. Church for auditing the books of the Fund for Needy Churches: Fergus.
11. Each church was assigned neighbouring church.

The following were chosen as delegates to the upcoming Regional Synod Nov 12, 2003:

- as primi ministers: Rev. P. Feenstra; Rev. J. Louwse
- as alternates (in this order): Rev. R. Pot; Rev. J. VanWoudenberg
- as primi elders: elder K. Hutchinson; elder K. Sikkema.
- as alternates (in this order): elder P. Schoon; elder J.D. Bouwman.

The following appointments were made with respect to next Classis:

- Convening church for next Classis: Fergus.
- Date of next Classis: Dec 19, 2003.
- Suggested officers for next Classis: chairman: Rev. B. Berends; Vice-chairman: Rev. C. Vermeulen; clerk: Rev. P. Aasman.

The convening church of next Classis was instructed to invite Classis Southern Ontario of the United Reformed Churches to send an observer

to our next Classis. It was also appointed to send observers to attend the next classis Southern Ontario of the United Reformed Churches if an invitation is received.

The chairman ruled that there was no need to exercise Christian Censure (CO 34). The Acts were adopted and the moderamen were appointed to approve a press release. The chairman requested the singing of Hymn 64:1, 2, led in prayer, and declared Classis closed.

*Rev. J. VanWoudenberg  
(vice chairman e.t.).*

## Press Release of Classis Pacific West, September 30, 2003

### 1. Opening

On behalf of the convening Church of Cloverdale br. P. Schouten opened the meeting. He asked those present to sing Psalm 145:1, 2 after which he read this Psalm. It was commemorated that the meeting is to be chaired by Rev. J.M. Van Spronsen for the first time, and at his side as vice-chairman was Rev. C. Van Spronsen. They were congratulated with receiving twin children and grandchildren respectively. The vacancy of Cloverdale is remembered and the decline of a call to Rev. R. Aasman. With gratitude the progress in the urban mission of Rev. F. Dong is reported in the development of the Chinese Christian Fellowship towards the Chinese Reformed Church. All were welcomed by br. P. Schouten and the presence of the deputies of Regional Synod West was acknowledged.

After this a report was received on the credentials. They were found to be in good order. All *primi* delegates are present. Classis was constituted and as officers were appointed:

Rev. J. M. Van Spronsen - chairman  
Rev. C. Van Spronsen - vice-chairman  
Rev. D. Poppe - clerk

The proposed agenda was revised and adopted. For the convenience of the delegates of Regional Synod the matter of the retirement of Rev. C. Van Spronsen is advanced on the agenda.

### 2. Retirement Rev. C. Van Spronsen

Documents provided are

- a request for concurring advice from Classis for the retirement of Rev. Van Spronsen.
- A request from Rev. Van Spronsen to be retired according to Art 13 CO since he reaches the age of 65 in February 2004.

c. Council's response granting this request as of April 30, 2004.

d. Letter stating the provisions made. Classis grants its concurring advice which is supported by the deputies of Regional Synod, the Revs. R. Aasman and Rev. R.A. Schouten. Appropriate words are spoken by the chairman. A certificate of Honourable Release from classical duties effective as of April 30, 2004 will be granted.

### 3. Appeal re: decision of the Church of Cloverdale

A brother appeals a decision of the Council of the Church at Cloverdale re: changing the regulations for the voting procedures for the calling of a minister. The appeal was declared admissible. Based on the documents and information provided Classis decides not to sustain the appeal of this brother.

### 4. Appeal re: decision of the Church at Houston

A brother appeals a decision of the Consistory in a matter of supervision. The appeal was declared admissible. The meeting went into closed session. The appeal was not sustained.

### 5. Support Needy Churches

Classis Pacific East of Sept. 18, 2003 approached this meeting concerning the support of needy churches. The request to extend the period of support by Classis Pacific West has been withdrawn. This information is received with thankfulness as well as the fact that further assistance is no longer required.

### 6. Delegation other churches

Classis Pacific East of Sept. 18, 2003 proposes the following re: contact with other churches with whom we have a relationship: Classis Pacific East will continue to maintain contact with the RCU and requests Classis West to maintain the contact with the Western Classis of the URCNA. Since this is in line with a previous decision already taken by Classis Pacific West in October 2002 this is accepted. It is decided that a deputy for contact will be appointed.

### 7. Report

- Report from the Committee for Financial Aid to Needy Students: No requests were received.
- Committee for Financial Aid to Needy Churches: No requests were received from any churches. 2003 is the last year of agreement with the Committee of Classis East.
- Church Visitation Reports: Reports were given of visits to the Churches

of Smithers, Houston, Cloverdale and Langley. With thankfulness it could be reported that these churches were found to be faithful and being blessed by the Lord. The Church of Surrey (Maranatha) was also visited but no report was yet available.

### 8. Question Period according to Article 44 CO

The delegates reported that the ministry of the Word in their churches is being continued and that the decisions of the major assemblies are being honoured. No churches needed the judgment and help of Classis.

### 9. Appointments

- Next Classis: Convening church – Church of Houston. Suggested officers: Chairman – Rev. C. Van Spronsen; Vice-Chairman - Rev. D. Poppe Clerk - Rev. J. Visscher. Date: January 6, 2004 alternate date: March 30, 2004. Location to be decided.
- Delegates Regional Synod: For the Regional Synod, being convened for Nov. 18 in Yarrow, the following delegates are appointed: The elders: H. Moes and J. Vanderstoep; alternates: C. Baarda and R. Mulder. Ministers – the Revs. C. Van Spronsen and J. Visscher. Alternates: the Revs. E. Kampen and D. Poppe.
- Representative retirement C. Van Spronsen: Rev. J. Visscher.
- Contact person for inviting and receiving invitations from other churches in Western Canada: Rev. E. Kampen.

### 10. Personal Question Period

Not made use of.

### 11. Censure ad art 34 CO

This was not necessary.

### 12. Acts and Press Release

Acts are read and adopted. Press Release is read and approved.

### 13. Closing

Rev. J. M. Van Spronsen read Isaiah 12 and spoke a few closing words. He requested the delegates to sing Psalm 108:1, 2, he led in thanksgiving prayer and closed the meeting.

*For Classis Pacific West,  
C. Van Spronsen, Vice-Chairman e.t.*