

*Mistaking
the Bible
for Babble*

*Who are to
come to the
Table of the
Lord?*

*What is
a vow?*





Cl. Stam

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VOWS

Nowadays marriage is all too easily seen as an arrangement between two persons.

Vows

Over the past number of years I have witnessed what I call a disturbing development, and it pertains to our vows, particularly those made in wedding ceremonies. The trend is that we are beginning to see and use the vows as a promise to each other and not to God.

Let me explain what I mean. During a wedding ceremony, when it comes to the exchange of vows, the bridal couple turns to each other and says the vows, either answering on the minister's cue or repeating the vows.

We need to understand that we have made a vow before God and in that light we keep our promises.

I do not have a problem, as such, with the fact that some couples like to say the vow themselves. If they repeat the vow as agreed in our *Marriage Form*, this is not an issue for me. I have noticed, however, that now and then the phrasing is subtly changed. One bride left out the words "be subject" and used the words, "I will follow your good example," or something like it. Nobody noticed this, except me (I think), but still it is an unacceptable change of words. The vows in our form are based squarely on the Word of God, and no one has the right to change the wording to suit personal taste.

Therefore I have determined to follow the old way. The minister reads the vow and asks the bride and groom to answer. This may seem to some as a step back, but it is necessary to prevent wrong ideas from creeping into the church. I've tried to be accommodating; now it's time to get serious.

What is a vow?

Of greater importance is the answer to the question: what is a vow? It is, as noted above, not a promise to each other, but a promise to God. We promise the Lord that we will be faithful to each other. Of course, in doing so, we also commit ourselves to one another. But a vow is first and foremost an oath before God.

Let me give you some clear biblical evidence. In Psalm 116:14 we find: "I will fulfill my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people." Notice that the vow is connected with the LORD.

There are all kinds of vows. We make them when a child is baptized, when we enter into an office, or when we are married. But these vows are not made to the child, the church or the groom or bride! This vow is made to the Lord God. The congregation is a witness to this vow which has the quality of an oath. We promise God that we will do what is required. The vow is also therefore a prayer: so help me God. We cannot keep these vows in our own strength, but we need the help and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

If a bridal couple wishes to look anywhere, they should look upwards, to heaven, where Christ is. For He alone has made the vow possible and will enable us to keep it.

Is this an important matter?

Someone might think: this is not really an important matter. Why bother splitting hairs? *But the matter is extremely important.* The strength of the vow is precisely that it is a commitment made to God. Therefore it may not be broken. If we do break the vow, we have sinned against God. If we keep the vow, it is for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Nowadays marriage is all too easily seen as an arrangement between two persons. We make our promises to each other, but since we are limited, sinful human beings, we can hardly be expected to keep these promises. Then it

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is not so hard to break a promise made at a specific occasion. After all, nobody's perfect. Modern thinking is: if the arrangement does not work out or becomes a burden, it is best to terminate it. Why should we stay in an unhappy relationship?

Then it is crucial to be reminded of the fact that we made a vow to God. We have to keep the marriage together and functioning for the sake of the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our lasting love to Him supersedes our failing love for each other.

Inside . . .

We are coming close to the season where many marriages will be taking place in our churches. An important part of the marriage ceremony is the vows a couple take before the Lord. Sometimes the traditional wording of the vows is changed. Is this proper? Are we improving on matters? Rev. Cl. Stam has something to say about that in his editorial.

Rev. Stam also presents us with the second and concluding part to his article on admission of guests to the Lord's Supper. He pleads for sticking to article 61 of our Church Order, while leaving a certain amount of freedom to the local consistory.

Some changes have been taking place at our Theological College in Hamilton. The principal, Dr. C. Van Dam gives us an update. There is also a press release from the last Board of Governors' meeting.

This issue continues with the series of evangelism courses. It has the regular columns, *Children's Catechism* and *Treasures, New and Old*. It also has two press releases, two letters to the editor and two book reviews by Rev. J. Geertsema.

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I have counselled couples in some difficult situations to keep their marriage alive and together for the sake of the Name of the Lord. Did we not *begin* our marriage in his name with the stated goal to *complete* it to his glory? We must keep in mind that our marriage is not just a matter between two people but a key matter between the Lord and a couple. When



a marriage is broken or dissolved, it is the name of the Lord that is compromised. This is the spiritual level on which we must see our marriage vows, and all the other vows we might make in the varying circumstances of life.

I would like to ask: on what basis can we properly counsel and help those with difficult marriages than on their vows to God? When all else fails, He does not fail. He asks of us repentance and forgiveness, and gives us the ability to continue in persevering hope. A marriage only has a future when the parties involved realize that they in faith have made a vow to the Lord. Otherwise all counselling falls short of the mark.

The sanctity of our vows

It is not so hard to make a promise. Promises are broken on a daily basis. That is a sad reality which we see around us, among us, and in our own lives. This explains the emergence of organizations like *Promise Keepers*. I applaud the effort of every good organization, but in this case I must note that the starting point is all wrong. We need to understand that we have made a vow before God and in that light we keep our promises. Our vow is a *sacred* oath.

We live in an age in which everything is being personalized and made superficial. Marriage is a crumbling institution. Same-sex marriages are being advocated as legal. The divorce rate in our country is staggering. Children are being aborted or abused. Promises are broken every day.

But we must *keep our vows* prayerfully and humbly because they have been made to the Lord. Let us in all these important matters of life begin and end with God. Otherwise we will not stand. The old Marriage Form is not to fall into disrepute but is to be esteemed as a fine and important biblical document. Also when it comes to the vows, it should not be replaced with alternative formulations.



J.G. Slaa

Mistaking the Bible for Babble

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MATTHEW 13:52

“Some of them asked, ‘What is this babbler trying to say?’ . . . They said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.”

Acts 17:18

From its glory days in the fifth century before Christ, to the time of the apostle’s visit when it was incorporated into the Roman Empire, the Greek city of Athens remained a great intellectual metropolis. It maintained a leading university. It had a reputation for its art, literature and philosophy. It was a centre of human wisdom, achievement and greatness.

When Paul came to Athens he was not a curious tourist going about visiting all the sights, monuments and artifacts. Rather, he took note of the Athenians’ spiritual blindness. He observed that the city was full of false gods. Inwardly, he burned with indignation against this worldliness. He was “greatly distressed” (Acts 17:16). It provoked him to action. He preached in the synagogues to Athenian Jews. He also preached in the marketplaces, the centres of the city, where people came to buy food and merchandise, and where the court buildings and political offices were housed. Here the philosophers gathered to give or listen to lectures. He met Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, professors from the university, and students from all over the world. Paul proclaimed the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. He preached “the good news about Jesus and the resurrection” (18).

Many of those who listened to Paul began to dispute his claims. They insulted Paul, “What is this babbler trying to say?” The word in the original means “seed picker” referring to a bird picking up seeds here and there – a scavenger. Next, the term was applied to human beings, in particular beggars, who lived off of the scraps of others – garbage-pickers. Finally, the word was used to describe teachers

who had no original ideas in their heads. Such people plagiarized from others, picking up scraps of knowledge here or there, so that they ended up with a ragbag of other people’s ideas or sayings. The studied Athenians mocked Paul as if he were an intellectual parrot. They held up their wisdom against his. They said he was presenting, “strange ideas” (20).

These humanists invited Paul to come and speak to a meeting of the Areopagus. Before this council, Paul once again was given the opportunity to proclaim the gospel. He spoke about the one and only God, who is Creator, Sustainer, Ruler, Father and Judge. He exposed the Athenian gods as false. He pointed to God’s appointed Son. Essentially, Paul taught that we achieve eternal happiness – the resurrection of soul and body – through faith in Christ’s death and resurrection. Paul’s teaching directly contrasted the philosophy of the Greeks.

Almost all who heard Paul’s message of the resurrection rejected it. “When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, they sneered” (32). They scoffed at him. Paul was a babbler. He had strange ideas. In a word, his preaching was foolish. Paul addresses this kind of reaction when he writes to the Corinthians: “Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those

whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength” (1 Cor 1:20-25).

One might say Paul’s missionary activity in Athens was a failure. He was unable to penetrate the intellectual world of the Athenian philosophers with Christ’s gospel. But his labours were not in vain! Some did want to hear more. The Holy Spirit awakened several of the Athenians from their spiritual unconsciousness. The Spirit worked faith through the preaching of the gospel, a gospel of which Paul was not ashamed. Luke mentions two in particular, most likely because they were of high authority and renown: Dionysius (a member of the Areopagus) and Damaris. There were also a number of others.

As we see the idolatry around us in our contemporary situation, may we be provoked to action. As we bring the message of salvation to those around us, may we not wither before those who charge us with speaking “foolishness,” or who consider the message “trivial,” or who mistake the Bible for babble. The gospel requires that we completely humble ourselves, giving no merit to our own wisdom or achievement. Instead, we give God all the glory, for the work of Jesus Christ. We are not babblers, seed pickers, picking up little scraps of nothing! Rather, we are Biblers! We sow the seed of the Word of God, the Word of Life! We bring the Bible to the nations, unashamedly. May the Lord bless our efforts to spread the gospel of Christ’s death and resurrection.

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Who are to come to the Table of the Lord? (Part 2)

What should we do when it comes to guests who have not professed the Reformed faith and perhaps even espouse doctrines that run against the Reformed confession?

In the first article on this question, I introduced the readers to the articles of Rev. K. de Vries in *De Reformatie*, November, 2003. De Vries writes that he at first defended the closed table communion, perhaps against some better personal judgment, and now feels the need to set the record straight. He asks whether we should go to a more *open* manner of celebration.

De Vries fully understands and maintains that the Lord's Supper is the meal which Christ has instituted for his *own* [people]. He refers to Acts 2: 41, 42 and to the writings of the church fathers to show that the Lord's Supper is not simply open for everyone, but only for baptized and sanctified believers. He also notes that it is remarkable that the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 10 does not ask us to examine *others* but to examine *ourselves*. Proper self-examination is the real prerequisite for attending the Lord's Supper. When it comes to examining and excluding others, these are members of the congregation of whom it is known that they live in sin (1 Cor 5:1-13).

Criteria

In the course of his second article on this matter, de Vries lists the *criteria* which ought to be applied when answering the question: for whom is the Lord's Supper? He lists the following. The Lord's Supper is for those who:

1. believe in Christ, have been instructed in the faith, have confessed this faith, and are baptized;
2. have conducted a proper self-examination regarding their life with the Lord and their brothers and sisters in Christ;
3. have been warned not to partake with an unbelieving heart or to partake in an unworthy manner;
4. do not live in a serious (public) sin.

We might sum that up as follows: according to Rev. K. de Vries, the Lord's Supper is open to all who believe in the

Lord, have publicly confessed the faith, are properly prepared (self-examined) and lead a holy life. De Vries sees the same elements in our confessions. Only those who openly live in unbelief and ungodliness are to be excluded from the celebration.

I do have a question at this point. In Article 61 of the Church Order it is stipulated that those shall be admitted who have made public profession of the *Reformed* faith and lead a godly life. What should we do when it comes to guests who have not professed the Reformed faith and perhaps even espouse doctrines that run against the Reformed confession? I think concretely of those who reject the biblical doctrines of election and infant baptism, as many "evangelical" Christians do. Can we say in this regard that we have with such believers the unity of the true faith? Or do we simply leave these important matters untouched?

Are these criteria too general and will they not lead in practice to admitting everyone, even those who actively oppose the Reformed faith? The "(more) open" celebration would then become a *free-for-all*, and that is certainly not the intention of my colleague.

Testimony and signature

De Vries realizes that certain safeguards must be in place. Hence he proposes that a guest from a non-sister church first make a testimony before the consistory and also sign a "declaration." This declaration is to be given ahead of time to all guests who wish to celebrate the Lord's Supper with the members of the congregation.

In this declaration also the following question is included: "I confess that the doctrine of the Old and New Testament, which is summarized in the Apostolic Confession, taught here in this Christian church, and summarized in the three Reformed confessions, is the true and complete doctrine of salvation."

I think that this answers my question about the requirement to confess the Reformed faith. In this way also the stipulation of Article 61 of the Church Order would be met. I do wonder, however, if there is enough time before the service to attend to all these important matters. Will it not easily become a matter of mere formality to scan the declaration and sign it?

DeVries is aware of this problem. He writes that the impression can be created that the guests are quickly required to confess their faith over again. Such a “mini-confession” might even devalue the *public* profession of faith that we are required to make before God’s church. Besides, can a short conversation with the elders before the service really go into the required depth? DeVries admits that a “marginal testing in a conversation by elders creates the impression that a consistory formally meets its responsibilities while in fact it doesn’t with respect to a guest.” He suggests that it may be better to dispense altogether with complex and formal procedures before the service. The consistory should not give the impression of taking on more responsibility than it can really handle.

A more open church?

At the conclusion of his articles, de Vries pleads for a *more open church*. He sees this “openness” in the following:

1. a verbal declaration from the pulpit which explains who may come or should not come is sufficient to cover the responsibility of the consistory and the congregation;
2. the responsibility for the decision whether or not to participate in a celebration should in principle be left with the guest;
3. if possible, guests should present themselves beforehand so that the congregation can be informed who will attend as guest;
4. when it is possible, a consistory or congregation can afterwards seek contact with people who attend *regularly* as guests;

5. if someone attends who is living in public sin, the consistory must address this guest on the matter and if needed exclude such a person from the Lord’s Supper until repentance is shown.

DeVries suggests that we also must be more “open” for each other within the church and be willing to discuss these matters in an atmosphere of trust and understanding. Charity begins at home. After proper discussion in the churches the matter can perhaps be presented at the major assemblies for a possible “change of course.” DeVries writes that he is motivated by the longing “finally to be a church which, on the one hand, follows a clear line but on the other hand is also welcoming to guests in the worship services.”

I would plead that in our circumstances Article 61 of the Church Order be fully maintained among us.

We must certainly be principled. DeVries says that he has no problems with principles. But we must also be generous and hospitable. It would be a blessing to demonstrate and experience such hospitality and generosity.

Canadian Reformed scene

We should remember that deVries writes in a federation where divergent practices are already apparent. There is great division, and he is seeking to *unify*. I commend my colleague for his effort. It is much easier to divide than to unify.

Thankfully, in our own federation of churches there is not the same divergence as in our Dutch sister churches. Nevertheless, we know about the problems that lie here, also from our discussions with the OPC, where the “verbal warning” from the pulpit is generally deemed sufficient. Our churches have rightly taken their stand against this procedure. This does not necessarily disqualify the OPC as church

of Christ, but it does address this church on an important point on which we humbly have better insight.

I would plead that in our circumstances Article 61 of the Church Order be fully maintained among us. Guests from sister-churches should provide a proper attestation duly signed by a responsible consistory. I do not think that a personal testimony should function as a lawful attestation. I agree with the editorialist who stated that a *personal* testimony is not sufficient, required evidence of a godly confession and conduct. Testimonies should as a rule not replace attestations.

Yet here, too, we must note that the final decision lies with the consistory. Sometimes a “guest” does not have an attestation or does not belong to a sister-church. Then a consistory must use wisdom in each case to determine what should be done. While the rule is maintained, a consistory knows that there are exceptions which confirm the rule. And here is where Rev. de Vries’ commendable desire to show generosity and hospitality comes into the picture.

The local consistory is responsible also for the guests admitted. Hence a simple verbal warning from the pulpit will not suffice. The elders must exercise the duties of their office. The consistory will have to consider each request to participate as guest on its own merits. Whenever a guest is welcomed, this should be done heartily and joyfully. When a sincere request to participate in the Lord’s Supper as guest is responsibly examined and positively received, a person may be welcomed. Rev. W.W.J. van Oene writes on this point, “It certainly does not violate the provision made in Art. 61” (*With Common Consent*, page 280).

I do not think that we need go in the direction of Rev. K. de Vries. We need not change Article 61. It’s a good article that has an important function. What we must learn is to apply it wisely. It’s easy to change or scrap articles; it’s harder to use the wisdom of love.

J. Wiskerke van Dooren

Lord's Day 9

Mrs. J. Wiskerke van Dooren published a Children's Catechism in Dutch. This has been translated with her permission.



This Lord's Day is about the God the Father. He is the first of the three: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Why is He called Father? If someone asks you: "Does every father have a child?" you say: "Of course. How else could he be a father?" God the Father, too, has his own Son, who is also called the Lord Jesus. Because God has a Son, we call him Father.

God the Father is the Creator of heaven and earth. He has made everything. You can find that in the first pages of the Bible: He made the trees, the flowers, the animals, the fish, the stars, you name it.

There are people who do believe that God has created everything. But they do not believe that He daily looks after the things he made, so that everything comes about as He wants them to be. "Do you really believe that God is involved in

everything?" they ask. And they add: "God is too great to keep himself busy with all those little things."

How do they think the world was made? I will try to explain. Do you have a set of dominoes? You can do a trick with them. You line up all those dominoes, the one after the other. Then you push over the first, it topples the second, and from there the whole row of dominoes falls over. Some people think God's creation happened in that way. God gave the first push. And after that everything happens by itself. God started it off, but now the world runs by itself.

Well, these people are wrong. God is always busy with all the things He has made. He makes sure things happen as he planned. And He is working at you, too. He knows you inside out. He is with you when you sleep, and when you are awake. When you are sad, and when you are glad. The creator of heaven and earth is also your Father.

Now you can believe that it will go well with you. God knows what is best for us. And when sad things happen, God makes them work for our good. You can trust God for that!

Remember Jonah, who was disobedient? That was wrong. But we can also learn from him. He dared to say to the sailors in the storm that he believed in the God who made the sea and the land. He believed that God is the creator of heaven and earth. He said what he believed.

You should do that too. That may be hard, when you talk with unbelieving friends.

What answer do you give when your friend says: "Do you believe there is a God who made everything? That is ridiculous. Don't you know that we have descended from monkeys?" What can you say? That is not easy. But don't say nothing. Speak up, and the Lord will help you.

Think again about Jonah. He believed that God is the creator of heaven and earth. And he said that to those unbelieving sailors. He was a sinner, but he also confessed God as the maker of heaven and earth. We can learn something from him.



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reformedevangelism.com

Part 1: What Christians Believe – The Life and Ministry of Jesus

In lesson one, we looked at why we believe in God; in lesson two, we saw that we need God but are separated from Him. In lessons three and four, we will look at how God draws us back into a relationship with Him through Jesus Christ. Lesson three focuses on the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

The gospel of Luke

The *Emmaus* Nurture Course has chosen the gospel of Luke to introduce the participants to the life of Jesus because Luke was written for Christians of Gentile origin. In addition, Luke contains a good balance of Jesus' actions and teachings. Lesson three is built around Jesus' own question: "But who do you say that I am?" (Luke 9:20). In answering this question, it focuses on four passages: (1) Jesus' birth (Luke 1:26-38); Jesus' ministry (Luke 4:16-30, 38-44); Jesus and the forgiveness of sins (Luke 7:36-50); and "Who do you say that I am?" (Luke 9:12-26).

Begin the lesson by briefly explaining why knowing about Jesus Christ is central to the Christian faith. Jesus is the incarnation of God. He shows us who God is and what He is like. He died on a cross for sinners. In other words, if you want to know something about the Christian faith, you have to get to know Jesus Christ.

At this point, have the groups discuss among themselves some of the questions

on the handout: (1) What attracts you about Jesus of Nazareth? (2) What questions do you have about Him? (3) Has your impression of Jesus changed as you have grown older? The purpose of this activity is to find out how much the participants know about Jesus Christ and what mental picture they have of Him.

Jesus' birth

After the groups have shared some of their thoughts, concentrate on the first teaching segment: Jesus' birth. In teaching about Jesus' birth, the facilitator should give some background information from the Old Testament. He could focus on God calling Abraham from the land of Ur and the formation of the people of Israel. He could focus on their longings for a king who would give them security, freedom, peace, and justice. Jesus addresses these longings when He speaks about the coming of the kingdom of God. Point out that the message of salvation has at its heart the good news that people are promised forgiveness of their sins, reconciliation with God and eternal life. However, be sure to add that it is also about the reordering of society and of creation through the establishing of the values of the kingdom of God in every generation and finally completely when Jesus returns. It may be helpful to show how the announcement of Jesus' birth supports the church's belief that He is fully God and fully human.

Jesus' ministry

After having focused on Jesus' birth, focus on his ministry. Place Jesus' teaching and miracles in the context of the coming of the kingdom of God. Point out that not only was Jesus' message difficult, it was also divisive. Some wanted to kill Him, others flocked to hear Him preach and witness his miracles.

Any questions the participants have about Jesus' miracles of healing and the relationship with sickness, suffering and miracles today, should be dealt with at this point. Likewise any questions they have with regard to demons and deliverance. Deal with these questions in the context of the universal longing for health and the freedom from different kinds of oppression that people have today. This gives the facilitator the opportunity to deal with these questions in the wider context of what was said in lesson two about people's hearts being restless until they find rest in God.

Jesus and the forgiveness of sins

Now focus on Jesus and the forgiveness of sins as is recorded in Luke 7:36-50. This segment also gives the facilitator an opportunity to refer back to what was said in lesson two about walls we build between ourselves and God. He should illustrate how our past sinful actions separate us from

God and how Jesus promises us a new beginning. The passage speaks about a debt being cancelled. This is a good metaphor to illustrate what forgiveness of sins is about.

Who do you say that I am?

Round off the teaching session with the question "Who do you say I am?" (Luke 9:12-26). The facilitator should remind the participants of the different reactions to Jesus' teaching and actions so far. After having explained Peter's reaction, he should point out that Jesus' question is relevant for each person today. Remind the participants there are really only three options: either Jesus was a fraud or deluded or He was what He said He was: the Son of God. This segment ends with Jesus predicting his death. It may be beneficial at this point to have the groups discuss what they think is the cost of following Jesus today.

Since this lesson covered a lot of ground, be sure to give ample time for any questions. Recap the main points covered. Encourage the participants to continue reading through the gospel of Luke and end with prayer.

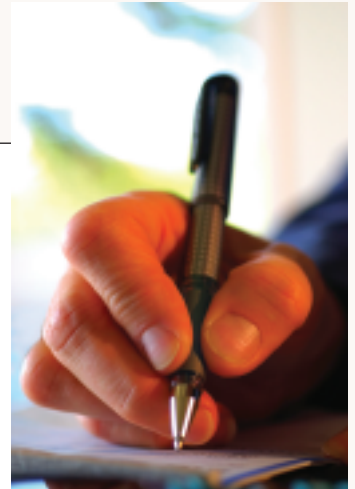
If you would like to view the outline for this lesson, go to www.reformedevangelism.com and follow the links. We have added a new article to our site dealing with The Jesus Seminar. It is good background reading for anyone teaching lesson three.

Next time, we hope to introduce the fourth lesson: "The death and resurrection of Jesus."

Please note that the email address for Rev. Dick Moes was incorrect in issue #7.

The correct address is:
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Letters to the Editor



Dear Editor,

I agree with Arend Harke's statement in his letter of March 12, 2004 that we have failed to make use of the opportunity we have to promote our Christian and moral principles in the past. I also agree with him and Rev. Aasman that we don't have to involve ourselves *only* in the CHP. But I do think that we also failed to use the CHP and that we should use that party first and foremost. If every Christian and anyone who calls himself a Christian would have supported and voted CHP the situation would have been completely different.

Yes, we should help and support those politicians who are also greatly concerned about the direction in which our country is going. There are still many around. How many? Even if we add them to the candidates the CHP is running, there are still more than half of the ridings completely in the hands of humanists, without even a chance to vote for a pro-life candidate. Without joining their party we should support and encourage the many who still have a chance to speak up and are not handicapped by party discipline and fear of losing their job.

We should let them know how many of us agree with them, give them moral support, but in the meantime build up the CHP so that when they get kicked out of their party there is a solid backup waiting for them.

We should also produce, besides ministers and teachers, doctors, lawyers and other academics, and we should also set up a Christian daily newspaper beginning with forming a capital by selling \$100 shares, so that we don't have to live by the grace of the "neutral" media.

Finally, what I am amazed about is that br. Harke still thinks that it is possible to work in the main parties. Did the Larry Spencer case not prove enough?

Hank Metzlar
Guelph, Ontario

Dear Editor,

We look forward to regularly reading Rev. Stam's "What's New???" Knowing my colleague a bit, I'm sure he will be providing the occasional shot of Tabasco in the Vanilla.

George van Popta
Ancaster, Ontario

C. Van Dam

The Winter Semester at the Theological College

Dr. C. Van Dam is principal and professor of Old Testament at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Hamilton, Ontario. cvandam@canrc.org

In the previous issues of *Clarion* we could introduce and welcome Dr. A. J. de Visser as the new Professor of Diaconology and Ecclesiology. We rejoice in this provision of the Lord our God and we look forward to his installation in his new position at the next College Evening in September. In the meantime more has happened at the College and so let me recount some of the highlights of this winter semester.

New teachers

Because of the present vacancy in the Diaconological and Ecclesiological



Dr. G. Nederveen

disciplines, we can again benefit from the expertise and goodwill of neighbouring pastors. Dr. G. Nederveen, minister of the Ebenezer church in Burlington, is introducing students to the diaconological disciplines while Rev. J. Van Woudenberg, minister of the Guelph church, teaching poimenics which deals with shepherding the flock. He was also able to attract additional expertise in the person of Mrs. Joyce De Haan (see further below). The church history from 1800 to the present is being taught by Dr. J. Visscher of Langley, B.C. Because of the distance he is coming from, his lectures have been concentrated in two periods of two weeks each (in January and March). We are very grateful to these men for giving of their time and gifts for the benefit of our College. Our gratitude also extends to the consistories who have given these pastors the necessary time to make their contribution possible. The full time faculty has continued to take care of the weekly sermon sessions.

Special lectures

Once again we had the happy occasion of an alumnus returning to the College to give a guest lecture. This time it was Rev. R. C. Janssen, part-time pastor of the Church of Nagele, The Netherlands. This place is close to Kampen where Rev. Janssen is pursuing part-time doctoral studies in church



Dr. J. Visscher

polity. Rev. Janssen happened to be in Canada to visit the Synod in Chatham as an official representative of our Dutch sister churches and so it was a perfect opportunity for him to give a presentation to the College community as well. On February 16 he spoke on "Aspects of Confessional Subscription." This topic is in the area of his doctoral research which investigates the history of Reformed churches in The Netherlands during the last two centuries in order to identify factors and distinctions relevant for the issue of binding to ecclesiastical doctrine (also known as confessional subscription). Although his project is still a work in progress, his lecture generated an interesting discussion and we wish him well as he continues his studies.

The senior students were privileged to have Mrs. Joyce De Haan speak to them on several occasions in the second half of February. She holds degrees in



Rev. R.C. Janssen

Social Work, both a BA from Dorcht and a Masters degree from Wilfred Laurier University in Waterloo. A twenty-two year veteran in the field, she lectured on counselling skills, active listening, interaction with professional counsellors, depression and anxiety, and sexual abuse.

Foreign student bursary fund

Although the main focus of the Theological College will remain equipping men for the ministry in the Canadian Reformed and sister churches, we also have wonderful opportunities to train those who come from different parts of the world. We consider it a singular privilege to be able to share the rich heritage of the Reformed faith that the Lord has given us. At the moment we are able to support one foreign student from Sudan. His studies are going well and he is looking forward to rejoining his wife and children in Sudan for the summer after the final exams.

Another opportunity to help is starting to take shape due to another foreign student's funding becoming unstable and unreliable. The Foreign Student Bursary Fund would very much like to help this student (whose family is also living in their homeland to save costs). He is a promising student and deserves the opportunity to continue his studies at our College in the coming years. Please consider whether you may be able to make a contribution to this Fund. Donations can be directed to The

Theological College, 110 West 27th Street, Hamilton, Ontario L9C 5A1 Canada, with cheques made out to "The Theological College, Foreign Student Bursary Fund." Tax receipts will be issued. This fund functions completely outside the budget of the College, but is carefully monitored by its Finance and Property Committee.

Australia and the college

We are very grateful for the continued support coming from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. Earlier in this school year, Professor and Mrs. J. Geertsema could visit our sister churches in that country from October 2 to November 24, 2003. A full report of this trip will appear in either this *Clarion* or a following one.

Of conferences

Academic conferences are an important way of keeping abreast of research and meeting others who are working in the same disciplines. The past November, Prof. G. H. Visscher was able to attend the meetings of the Evangelical Theological Society, as well as the Institute of Biblical Research, both meeting in Atlanta. Needless to say our colleague concentrated on New Testament presentations and was edified by the proceedings.

As those who follow the activities in the churches, there is a growing contact with the Église Reformée du Québec. On April 6, instructors and students from both schools hope to come together in Hamilton for a joint one day conference in which four lectures followed by discussions will be held. We look forward to this event.

Last but not least

Shortly after Synod Chatham concluded its business, the Board of Governors met. One of the things that needed to be done was to bid farewell to the retiring governors and to welcome

the new ones. It is appropriate that we here publicly acknowledge the labours of the retiring governors: Rev. R. Aasman, chairman of the Board, Rev. B. Berends, vice-chairman of the Board, Mr. M. Kampen, chairman of the Finance and Property Committee, and Mr. J. VanderWoude. Unless one is intimately involved in the affairs of the Theological College, one has no idea of the amount of work that goes on behind the scenes to ensure a smooth running of a school like this. Thank you, brothers, and enjoy your well deserved "retirement"!

The new Board is now composed (listed alphabetically) of: Mr. L. Jagt, vice-chairman of the Finance and Property Committee, Rev. J. Moesker, chairman of the Board, Rev. G. Nederveen, Vice-chairman of the Board, Mr. G. J. Nordeman, secretary of the Finance and Property Committee, Mr. W. Oostdyk, treasurer, Rev. R. Schouten, secretary of the Board, Rev. W. B. Slomp, Mr. W. Smouter, Rev. Cl. Stam, Rev. J. VanWoudenberg, and Mr. K. Veldkamp, chairman of the Finance and Property Committee. We wish the brothers the blessing of the Lord in their labours for the training for the ministry.



Rev. J. Van Woudenberg



Press release of the Board of Governors' Meeting held at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Hamilton on February 23, 2004.

The vice-chairman, Rev. B.J. Berends, called the meeting to order. He welcomed all present. The chairman, the Rev. R. Aasman sent his regrets, as did the Rev. Cl. Stam and br. J. Vanderwoude.

As first point on the agenda was the official farewell by the Board to Dr. and Mrs. J. De Jong. On behalf of the Board of Governors, Reverend Berends expressed our deep gratitude and appreciation for the work Dr. De Jong has done for the past thirteen years as professor of Diaconiology and Ecclesiology. He carried out his task out of love for Christ and his church. Other governors used the opportunity to add their personal reflection and it was an emotional farewell seeing the rapid deterioration of Dr. De Jong's health. We thank the Lord for the many good things our brother has contributed to the College and the churches as a whole in training men for the ministry.

After Dr. and Mrs. De Jong left the meeting, the next order of business was to welcome the new governors appointed by General Synod 2004. The brothers L. Jagt and K. Veldkamp take the place of the brothers M. Kampen and J. Vanderwoude on the Finance and Property Committee, and the Revs. W.B. Slomp and J. Vanwoudenberg take the place of Revs. R. Aasman and B.J. Berends on the Academic Committee. The brothers each presented a letter of acceptance and the vice-chairman read the Declaration of Governors which the new governors signed.

The next item on the agenda was the election of a new chairman and vice-chairman. Rev. J. Moesker was chosen as chairman and Rev. G. Nederveen as vice-chairman. Rev. R. Schouten volunteered to stay on as secretary and br. W. Oostdyk was reappointed as treasurer.

At this point in the meeting Rev. J. Moesker took over as chairman. He thanked the brothers who served in the previous term and wished them the Lord's blessing on their labours.

The Board then proceeded to appoint Dr. Adriaan Jan De Visser as professor of Diaconiology and Ecclesiology as of June 1, 2004. Rev. Moesker congratulated Dr. De Visser on his appointment and spoke words of thanks and encouragement. Dr. De Visser responded with words of appreciation for the trust and confidence placed in him and for the way he was received. He expressed the hope that God would allow him to be an effective servant of the gospel in his new task as professor at the College.

Rev. J. De Gelder was appointed temporary lecturer in church polity for the fall semester of 2004-2005.

The decision of Synod Chatham regarding the Pastoral Training Program (PTP) was reviewed and the Board concluded that this needs further study. The brothers in the Finance and Property Committee will investigate the financial implications while the brothers in the Academic Committee will study the relationship of the PTP to the College curriculum.

The meeting finished the remaining items on the agenda which included a notification of a guest lecture on Church Polity by a former student of the College, the Rev. R. Janssen; a conference report by Prof. G.H. Visscher and a



progress report by the same on his Ph.D. studies.

Rev. Moesker led in a prayer of thanksgiving and closed the meeting.

*On behalf of the Board of Governors,
G. Nederveen, vice-chairman*

Press Release of Classis Central Ontario, March 12, 2004

1. On behalf of the convening church at Toronto, the Rev. W. den Hollander called the meeting to order. He read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28 and, after a brief meditation on this passage, he requested the brothers to sing Psalm 122:1 and 3 followed by prayer.
2. The credentials were examined by the delegates of Ottawa and were found to be in good order.
3. Classis was constituted. The appointed officers were: Rev. W. den Hollander, chairman; Rev. G. Nederveen, vice-chairman; Rev. J. De Gelder, clerk.
4. Memorabilia:
 - The chairman remembered the fact that General Synod could be held in Chatham earlier this year;
 - He mentioned that several ministers of this classis have been or are involved in teaching at the Theological College due to the absence of Dr. J. De Jong;
 - The Churches of Burlington Fellowship, Flamborough and Toronto are busy with plans to build their own places of worship;
 - Burlington Fellowship is vacant at the moment and the chairman

Church News

Eligible for call:

Candidate Walter Geurts

3417 Rockwood Drive
Burlington, ON L7N 3H6
905-631-8433

wgeurts@cogeco.ca

Declined the call to Cloverdale,
British Columbia:

Rev. W.M. Wielenga

of Lynden, Washington, USA.

Called by the church of St.
Albert, Alberta:

Rev. P.H. Holtvlüwer

of Aldergrove, British Columbia.

- wished them the Lord's blessing in calling a pastor and teacher;
- The Church at Toronto is engaged in a project of urban mission among the Portuguese speaking people in the Toronto area. This is done in cooperation with the OPC;
 - Finally, he mentioned some recent developments in Papua and Papua New Guinea.
5. The agenda was adopted.
 6. Reports: The Church at Burlington-Waterdown submitted three audits re.: the Books of the Treasurer, the Fund for Needy Churches, and the Fund for Needy Students.
 7. Question Period according to art 44 CO.
The Church at Burlington Ebenezer sought advice in matters of discipline and the Church at Burlington-Waterdown sought advice on a matter of pastoral care. Advice was given in closed session.
 8. Correspondence: A letter was received from the Grace United Reformed Church in Simcoe County extending an invitation to send a delegate to their March 24, 2004 classis. Rev. J. Huijgen is delegated.
 9. Appointments
 - a. Convening church for the next Classis: Burlington Ebenezer on June 11, 2004, D.V.
 - b. Suggested officers: J. Huijgen, chairman; J. DeGelder, vice-chairman; W. den Hollander, clerk.
 10. Question period was used.
 11. Censure according to art 34 CO was not needed.
 12. The Acts were adopted and the Press Release approved.
 13. The vice-chairman, Rev. Nederveen, requested the brothers to sing Psalm 67:1 and 2 and led in closing prayer.

For Classis Central Ontario, March 12, 2004
G. Nederveen
(vice-chairman at that time)

Press Release of Classis Manitoba, March 22, 2004

Classis was opened on behalf of the convening church, Winnipeg-Redeemer, by Rev. T.G. van Raalte. He read Colossians 2:1-15, and opened with prayer. Under Memorabilia, Rev. Van Raalte mentioned the call he received and declined, the recently held synod, and the appointment of Rev. A.J. de Visser as professor in the place of Prof. J. De Jong. He also mentioned the health situation of Professor De Jong.

The credentials of the delegates were found in good order and Classis was constituted.

The moderamen was appointed as suggested by the previous Classis: Rev. K. Jonker, chairman, Rev. D.M. Boersma, vice-chairman, Rev. T.G. van Raalte, clerk. After the agenda was edited and adopted, Br. Siepman of Providence URC in Winnipeg was welcomed and seated as a fraternal delegate.

Several reports were received and accepted. In one instance, Classis decided to ask for a more detailed report according to Classis regulations. Church visitor reports were read and discussed in closed session. A prayer was offered for each church after the report was read.

Rev. Pol read the report of his visit to the Northern Plains Classis of the Reformed Churches of the United States. A prayer was offered for these churches.

Rev. Van Raalte reported on the status of the contacts with the OPC (Presbytery of the Dakotas). A letter of greeting from the Presbytery of the Dakotas was read. Classis prayed for the Orthodox Presbyterian Churches.

The Church of Winnipeg-Redeemer had sent a letter, requesting the grounds for a decision by Classis September 2003 regarding the compensation for lost wages for delegates to Regional Synod. Grounds could not be found in the minutes.

Br. Siepman of Providence URC in Winnipeg addressed Classis and expressed gratitude for the pulpit exchange and contacts between the churches in Winnipeg. The chairman answered him by mentioning some of the decisions General Synod Chatham made regarding the contacts with the URC, and expressed gratitude for the local contacts. A letter from the Classis Central US of the URCNA was read. Prayer was offered for the United Reformed Churches.

Question period according to article 44 CO was held. All churches were functioning properly and there were no requests for advice.

A convening church and the suggested officers for the next Classis were appointed. Next classis is to be convened on June 21 with September 20 as an alternate date.

A personal question period and brotherly censure were held. The Acts and press release were read and approved. The chairman closed the meeting with prayer.

On behalf of Classis Manitoba
March 22, 2004,
Rev. D.M. Boersma

Reviewed by J. Geertsema

The Dort Study Bible: vol. I, Genesis - Exodus: An English translation of the Annotations to the Dutch Staten Bijbel of 1637 in accordance with a decree of the Synod of Dort 1618-1619.

Inheritance Publications, 2003. The price of this beautifully hardbound book is \$24.95.

As the title says, this is the republication of the Dutch State translation with the added *Annotations* (in Dutch *Staten vertaling met Kanttekeningen*), in the English language. The Dutch States (government) gave the order for this State translation to the Synod of Dort. We read (p. 21f) that the States “found it fitting . . . to authorize, and require those at the National Synod held at Dort, in the years 1618 and 1619 that they would take in hand the aforesaid translation, and appoint some learned and experienced theologians. . . .”

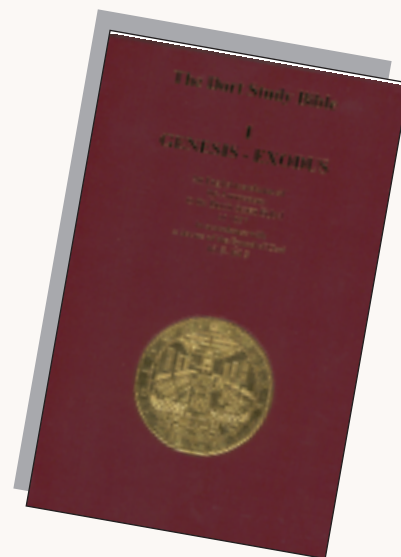
This Synod also gave order to add notes (“annotations”), as was the custom in those days. The article “*Kanttekeningen*” (in *Christelijke Encyclopaedie*, vol. 3, p 285) tells us that:

In its eighth session, the Synod of Dort has established the rules with which the Annotations had to comply. If a Hebrew or Greek expression had to be translated in a somewhat freer way because of the different Dutch idiom, then the more literal translation had to be taken up in the Annotations. Further, some short explanations could be given, but without presenting thereby the development of any point of doctrine. Finally, similar texts must be noted. . . . For the explanation the

translators made use of the best available to them, in particular the commentaries of Calvin and Beza . . . [while the “learned and experienced theologians” also added their own, J.G.]. One can say that the annotations on the State translation present a precious piece of work and have been of great importance for our people.

These last words appear true, since even in 1980 and again in 1997 new editions of the Dutch State translation with their Annotations were published (see p. 7). Their importance is also evident in the fact that in 1648 the Westminster Assembly in England decided that it was good to have these Annotations translated into the English language for the English people. When the publisher of Inheritance Publications, Roelof Janssen, planned to publish these “Annotations” in the English language, he was told about this existing English translation of about 1650. He found it and used it for this revised 2003 English edition (p.7-8).

Now it is true that today there are many, more or less extensive, commentaries on the market. Yet, these “Annotations” hold their value. For they present a Reformed interpretation of the Scriptures, going back to Calvin, Beza, and other Reformed Scholars from 1619 till 1637. One of the strengths of these Annotations is their reading of Old and New Testament as a unity: as the one Word of God that in both Testaments gives us testimony about Christ Jesus. At Genesis 3:15 the following note is added at the word “Seed” (with a capital letter): “This Seed is actually the Lord Jesus



Christ, the only begotten Son of God, who was to be born in the fullness of time, of a woman, a virgin, by the working of God’s Spirit, in order to dispossess the devil of all his brute force, through the merit of his death and the power of his Spirit, and to tread him under his and his church’s feet. See Ps. 110:1; John 12:31; Rom. 16:20; Hebrews 2:14; 1 John 3:8. This is the first Gospel promise of life, put in opposition to the first denunciation of death. See also Col. 2:15.” And the note with the words that Satan will “crush his heel” reads, “That is, the devil and his seed shall persecute Christ and his church, but never be able to eliminate or destroy them.” These Annotations belong to the books I personally consult, and I know colleagues who do the same.

I thank the publisher, and congratulate ourselves and our global English speaking brotherhood with this second, revised publication of the Annotations in the English language, now in a modern format. I sure wish and hope that this book too will find many buyers, and that this first volume with Genesis and Exodus will be followed by all the other books of the Bible.

J. van Bruggen, *The Church says Amen: An Exposition of the Belgic Confession.*

Inheritance Publications, Neerlandia, AB. 2003; 230 pages, including an index. Price: \$ 15.95.

This book, with a handy index, was originally published in 1964 in the Dutch language, and saw its seventh printing in 1977. The author is the late Rev. J. van Bruggen, at that time minister of the Reformed Church (Liberated) in Assen. From the days of its first publication, I have regularly used this book for my teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism, together with *Annotations to the Heidelberg Catechism*, from the same author, also published in an English translation by Inheritance Publications. For the study of the Belgic Confession I made much use of another book too, which was published by Inheritance Publications ten years ago: *The Belgic Confession and its Biblical Basis*, by Lepusculus Valensis, 1993. This older book on the Belgic Confession is more “technical,” analytical, adding four kinds of very useful notes to the (English) text. One explains words, another gives cross references within the Belgic Confession and with the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dordt, and a third presents fully quoted text references, in which additional notes give further explanations. While the original Dutch contains also the French and the Latin text of the Belgic Confession, the English translation leaves them out.

With thanks, we congratulate the publisher that now, ten years later, he provides us with this second help in our study of the Belgic Confession. J. van Bruggen’s exposition is a very good tool. Not only does he explain the contents of the articles in a clear way, with different headings above the sections, but he also shows the structure of this Confession as a whole and in its parts in brief overviews.

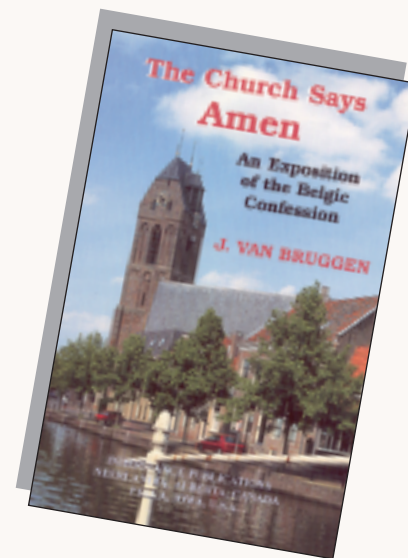
The Belgic Confession follows the structure of the Apostles’ Creed. In the introduction it is mentioned how this confession antithetically confesses the truth of the Scriptures over against the Roman Catholic, the Anabaptist (very much biblicistic), and the (what later

became) Arminian deviations in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. We find this opposition on the basis of Scripture against the old, but also against new, throughout the book. Special attention is given to the modern, existentialistically influenced teachings of Karl Barth which are influenced by the modern existential philosophy and liberalism, rather than by Scripture. In the liberated Reformed Churches in The Netherlands, the rejection of Barthian teachings was strong before and after the Second World War, led by Dr. K. Schilder. This opposition is still needed, since the influence of Barth continues also in evangelical circles.

An example of the good Reformed exposition of the Belgic Confession is the explanation of Article 5 about the divine authority of Scripture as the Word of God. “We believe without any doubt all things contained in them not so much because the church receives and approves them as such, *but especially because the Holy Spirit witnesses in our hearts that they are from God. . . .*”

Regarding this italicized statement, van Bruggen states (p 40): “In actual fact it is by the witness of the Holy Spirit in our hearts that we recognize the authority of Scripture.” But “this witness may never be considered to be independent of Scripture (John 16:14). It does not have a content or message of its own; it is not a whisper: ‘those books are true.’ The Spirit Himself testifies in Scripture that it is the Word of God.” J. van Bruggen mentions a number of texts, after which he goes on to write, “The Spirit (by means of faith) lets this witness within Scripture sound forth in our hearts. . . .” van Bruggen is here completely in line with K. Schilder and S. Greijdanus (for those who know Dutch, I refer to K. Schilder, *Heidelbergische Catechismus*, vol. II, pp 490f, where Schilder refers to Greijdanus and other Reformed theologians in preceding days, especially over against the “Ethicals” in the nineteenth century, who are mentioned by van Bruggen on p. 39). Here sounds a clear no against subjectivism, maintaining Scripture as basis of our faith.

Another interesting point comes with the Articles 27-28 about the



church. Art 27, is about the “Catholic or Universal Church,” which “is everywhere, in every place where Christ gathers it.” By “[B]eing a member of a local church, one is a member of the universal church.” Under the headings “One . . . Church” and “Orientation,” van Bruggen tells how, in the previous century, the idea of pluriformity (with its root in the Greek philosophy of Plato) was very much the accepted official concept of the church in the Dutch Reformed Churches. But neither our Confession, nor the Scriptures, present this concept. And it makes null and void the calling in Art 28 “to join the Church,” that is, according to Art 29, “the true Church,” easy to be distinguished from “the false church” if we compare the distinguishing marks of both.

I may add the remark that the confession does not say that there can be only one true “denomination;” it gives the marks of the true and the marks of the false church. When there are more than one true churches, in one place (or country), we are called, in line with Art 28, to join one another. The pluriformity concept kills the urge to church unity. But taking the Confession serious implies an appeal for institutional unity of true churches and of true believers, to the glory of the Head of the church and to the edification of its members.

It is evident that I heartily recommend this book for personal and society study. You do yourself a service by buying and reading it.

