

# Clarion

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*Belonging to  
the Church*

*No Easy  
Moralism*

*Catechizing  
and the Home*



*Campfire!  
2004*



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# Belonging to the Church

*The church is the church of the triune God:  
Father, Son and Spirit.*

## Withdrawals

A sad reality within our churches is the fact that some brothers and sisters withdraw themselves from the supervision and discipline of the congregation. Sometimes that is done to escape church discipline. Sometimes it is done with complaints such as, "There is not enough love in the church," or, "We are looking for a more modern, lively liturgy." Some who withdraw are not doing so in order to join another church. In fact, they make a point of saying that they still believe and still belong to the church of Jesus Christ. In other words, they hold to an invisible church concept which downplays the importance of the local assembly and congregation of Jesus Christ.

We all know what our confessions say about this. Article 27 of the Belgic Confession speaks of the church in this way:

We believe and profess one catholic or universal church, which is a holy congregation and assembly of the true Christian believers, who expect their entire salvation in Jesus Christ, are washed by his blood, and are sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit.

Article 28 adds:

We believe, since this holy assembly and congregation is the assembly of the redeemed and there is no salvation outside of it, that no one ought to withdraw from it, content to be by himself, no matter what his status or standing may be. But all and everyone are obliged to join it and unite with it, maintaining the unity of the church.

Even a statement like, "and there is no salvation outside of it," does not deny that there may be believers outside the body of Christ which is the holy assembly and congregation of the redeemed. This is not an absolute statement as article 28 makes clear when it says: "it is the duty of all believers, according to the Word of God, to separate from those who

do not belong to the church and to join this assembly wherever God has established it."

However the point is made very clear that to withdraw from the church or to be by oneself is dangerous and it is wrong. Why do we say that? We may consider three very important things.

## The glory of God

We can never speak of the church or even think of the church without thinking of God first. The church is the church of the triune God: Father, Son and Spirit. We may think of Jesus Christ's high priestly prayer in John 11 where He said this to his Father: "I will remain in the world no longer, but they are still in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them by the power of your name – the name you gave me – so that they may be one as we are one." He speaks of the importance of unity among those whom He redeemed more than once. Then He says, "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world."

What is important here is the glory of Jesus Christ. He laid down his life for the church and He desires to be glorified in and by his church. And how is He glorified? When there is unity among all those who are washed in his blood and Spirit: when they are one even as the Father, Son and Spirit are one. Jesus Christ is not glorified when Christians have little to do with each other, when they live as islands separated from each other, when they do not cooperate with each other, and when there is not a unified front to evangelize to the world. This is why our Belgic Confession speaks as strongly as it does: Christ is glorified in the true unity of his church. He demands that unity. We must be obedient.



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**Our salvation**

Very closely related to the fact that the united church gives glory to Jesus Christ and so to the Father, Son and Spirit, is that the unity of the church is for the wellbeing and salvation of the members. Jesus Christ is the Head and King of his church and He has all power and dominion in the world to gather, defend and preserve his church. In gathering his sheep as one flock, He is able to defend the church and cause her to flourish.

Consider what He said to Simon Peter and the others disciples in Matthew 16: “on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.” Why cannot even death overcome the

**Inside . . .**

A sad reality of church life is that there are brothers and sisters who withdraw from the discipline and supervision of the church. The editorial examines the dangerous consequences of this and why it is important to belong to the assembly of true believers.

Dr. F.G. Oosterhoff continues her series on how we read the Bible. In the present article she deals with an essay by A.L.Th. De Bruijne which examines the use of figurative language in biblical exegesis in general.

Campfire! 2004 is now history. It has proven to be a blessed summer. Many plans are under way for new facilities. Please read what is happening and consider the requests which are made of us.

Who doesn't like a mystery? Rev. E. Kampen has one: who is E.B.? I don't know if you can solve the mystery, but the point of his article is no mystery. It is fitting considering we are entering a new catechism season.

We have our regular columns, *Treasures, New and Old, Education Matters, and Children's Catechism*. We also have a press release of a classis contracta and one letter to the editor.

RA

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church? It is because the church has the keys of the kingdom: the preaching and church discipline. We also read in 1 Timothy 3 about “the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.” Similarly in Ephesians 4 which speaks about the unity of the church and the blessings of the ascended Christ on his church – the office bearers – this leads to an assembly of true believers growing and maturing in faith so that they are no longer cast about by every wind of doctrine, and “we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.”

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*This is why our Belgic Confession speaks as strongly as it does: Christ is glorified in the true unity of his church.*

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The church which is the assembly and congregation of those who are washed in the blood and Spirit of Jesus Christ is also a communion of saints. Think of what Paul writes about this in 1 Corinthians 12. As believers sit under one preaching of the Word and go to one table, they see each other’s joys and needs and so build each other up. Brothers and sisters who sit united at one table will see to it and must see to it that no one, in any circumstances, should live lonely and unloved within the congregation.

Again, to withdraw from the congregation not only deprives God of his glory, but also puts the brother or sister who withdraws at grave risk concerning their salvation and wellbeing. Moreover, it deprives the congregation of that person’s gifts.

### **A witness**

Finally, withdrawals from the church sends a terrible message to the world: it suggests a fragmented church and the fact that church membership seems an optional matter. It makes church membership look like membership in a club: if you like then stay, but if you don’t then go. I have heard a number of times over the years from people who start attending our worship services their deep perplexity and dismay at church members who attend irregularly and who withdraw from the church. Here people come from outside the church who welcome the preaching like gentle rain on a parched land. And meanwhile, those who have been privileged by church membership for years seem to disdain it. What a terrible witness this is to the world!

### **Why I belong**

To belong to the church of Jesus Christ with all one’s heart, soul and mind, to have the preaching of the gospel, the sacraments, church discipline and the communion of saints is an inestimable blessing. We should appreciate deeply what Jesus Christ has given us. Psalm 133 speaks of how good and pleasant it is when brothers live in unity: “For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.” It is for this reason that we not only understand the significance of the Belgic Confessions exhortatory words, “and there is no salvation outside of it,” but why the first question and answer of Lord’s Day 21 which deals with the church closes with these words: “I believe that I am and forever shall remain a living member of it.”





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## No Easy Moralism



MATTHEW 13:52

*“What causes fights and quarrels among you: Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? . . .*

James 4:1-6

The letter of James often confuses us. It can seem like an unorganized collection of moralisms. Martin Luther dismissed James as an “epistle of straw” to be thrown into the fire. The epistle has remained in the Bible, but Luther’s blunt assessment of James reflects one that many have in a more nuanced way. This is especially the case when we realize that James is writing to the church. He writes to the “twelve tribes scattered among the nations” (1:1). This refers to the scattered Jewish Christians who were forced to flee Jerusalem because of the persecution following Stephen’s death (Acts 8:1; 11:19). James addresses them as members of the new Israel who have been driven from their city. It is fitting that James addresses them as “firstfruits” (1:18).

But in chapter 4:1,2, James calls this church of the firstfruits murderers! Surely, James must be referring to unbelievers, or apostates, but not the church. Of course, we all know that we are sinners who are prone to hate God and our neighbour. This is not all bad from our point of view. Sin can allow me to take myself seriously. Rigorous self-examination has the virtue of saying that I and my sin are important. Not only that, but we know (or think we know) that our sin is subtle and complex. Spending time acknowledging and repenting of our sins can be very attractive. We can be impressed by the cleverness and complexity of our sin, and by our piety in uncovering it. We can be proud of our rigorous searching of ourselves.

James does not address us as those in need of this kind of self-examination.

He does not address us as subtle and complex sinners. Our sin, he says, is very simple: we want something and do not have it, so we commit murder. Surely, this is far too simple. There must be more psychological depth to things. Not so according to James: our sin comes from the fact that we desire the wrong things. We are slow to ask and when we do ask, we do not receive. Because we do not receive, we are frustrated. And when that happens, someone has to pay. It is inevitable that we become frustrated, for we desire things that can never satisfy. What we desire is shaped by our friendships with the world and not with God.

Throughout his letter, James has been building on creation themes from Genesis 1-3 and he continues this here. We were created to be loved by the Father of Lights (1:17) and to love Him. When our love is misdirected, life degenerates into disordered desires. We are brought back to Genesis 3 and the desire to be as God. Genesis 3:6 tells us that Eve *desired* the fruit. This desire led to the original sin. At root, all sin comes from this desire to be god.

There are philosophies and religions that claim as their goal the extinguishing of all desire. Biblical faith is not like that. Our problem is not that we desire things. Our problem is that we desire the wrong things. We try to be content with things that never can satisfy, because we try to be god. We were created to live in a covenant with God; apart from this are murder and death. There is no complexity here, no need for rigorous self-

examination (which is often nothing but a wallowing in sin).

James sees things clearly: Christians think that they can be friends with the world and with God. If we are friends with the world, if we adopt its standards, then we are enemies of God and of each other – all because we desire to be as God. The Gospel, however, tells us that we are creatures in need of salvation and not God. We prefer a large collection of subtle and complex sins that we can uncover and confess, rather than admit that we are not the center of all things. We want to desire what we will and we do not want to live under God’s blessing. Yet, we must be humbled in just this way if we are to approach God (4:6). We must not seize at God’s blessing, but receive it as a gift.

The straw-like epistle of James proves more demanding than anticipated. There is no easy moralism here. We cannot get off the hook by being better, more moral people. The Gospel does not call us to be better than the world; we are not called to be like the world only with better behaviour – no cursing, no adultery, etc. The issue is that we are called to be holy as our Father in heaven is holy; we are called to be utterly unlike the world, even in what we desire. We must be doers of the Law as well as hearers. When we are, we know the God who gives the Law. We cannot will ourselves out of our disordered desires. That requires God’s work in Jesus Christ. Those in Him move from disordered desire to self-giving service in the covenant.



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# How Do We Read The Bible? (2)

## Metaphor and Exegesis

In the previous article I gave a summary of the teachings of A. L. Th. de Bruijne, ethicist at the Reformed theological university in Kampen, The Netherlands, on the role of non-literal language in biblical interpretation. De Bruijne expressed his views most fully, we noted, in a series of three essays in the Dutch volume *Woord op schrift*.<sup>1</sup> Herein he tried to answer the question whether it will benefit Reformed theology if greater use is made of non-literal interpretation of parts of Scripture than has generally been done in the past.

In the present article we will give attention to the first of these essays, which is entitled “*Hermeneutiek en metaforie*” and deals with the use of figurative language in biblical exegesis in general. In the other two essays, which I hope to discuss later, De Bruijne focuses respectively on the use of figurative language in *historical* passages in the Bible, and on the question whether a non-literal approach can help us in our search for biblical guidance in matters of *lifestyle and ethics*.

In all three essays De Bruijne is in discussion with the Reformed theologian B. Loonstra,<sup>2</sup> who promotes an extensive use of non-literal explanations in the belief that this will help overcome the “strangeness” of the Bible for modern people – a strangeness that is caused by the cultural differences between biblical and modern times. Because much of what De Bruijne writes is in reaction to Loonstra, I will in what follows more

than once state the latter’s position before discussing De Bruijne’s own.

## Metaphor – its nature and use

When speaking of non-literal or figurative language, De Bruijne often makes use of the term “metaphor.” Before I proceed with the discussion of his work, some preliminary remarks about the meaning and usage of this term are in order.

The word “metaphor” is derived from the Greek verb for “to transfer,” and this naming is apt: when we speak metaphorically, we speak of one thing in terms that are transferred (or borrowed) from another. When we do this primarily for adornment, we speak of a literary metaphor. In our days it is increasingly recognized, however, that the metaphor has also a *cognitive* function – which means that it plays a role in the process of knowing and understanding. One reason why this is so is that language and knowing are connected, and that it is difficult for us to understand something new unless we can approach it with words and images that are already familiar. These words and images the metaphor supplies.

Metaphors are used in all fields of knowledge, including theology. Among theologians who were aware of the role played by figurative language in religious understanding was John Calvin, who often spoke of the use of metaphor in Scripture and in scriptural exegesis.<sup>3</sup> He referred to it, for example, when explaining the Bible’s anthropomorphic (man-like) speaking about God, such as

his sleeping and waking up, his hands and feet, his eyes and ears. The Bible speaks here metaphorically, Calvin writes. It uses words and images from our earthly reality in order to acquaint us with a different reality, namely a spiritual one.

Calvin shows that the Bible uses metaphoric language to convey other truths. The description of hell as a place of punishment by fire and sulphur and brimstone, for example, is metaphorical. So is the description of the heavenly life. Here again, this-worldly terms (such as golden streets, pearly gates, and so on) are employed, and necessarily so, for it would be difficult for us to envision, in Calvin’s words, “the blessed immortal life, unless it be shadowed out by some figures adapted to our capacity.”<sup>4</sup>

## Metaphor and image

Metaphors, then, help our understanding by describing the unfamiliar in familiar terms. They serve not only our logical, but also our imaginative understanding. There is something pictorial about the metaphor; and what applies to pictures, namely that they can be “worth a thousand words,” applies to metaphors. Let us take as an example the truth that God cares for us and gives us what we need for this life and the life to come. This can be stated in literal language, and the Bible often does so. But Scripture gives the message also by using metaphors, and in doing so opens up new and unexpected associations.

One such metaphor is God’s speaking of Himself as the shepherd of his people. By using this figure of speech

He conveys the message of his care and providence, just as He does in literal language. But as the author of the Twenty-third Psalm shows, there are additional meanings which are not communicated by a strictly literal statement. The metaphor brings to the psalmist's mind the abundance of green pastures and still waters; it reminds him that he does not have to fear evil even when going through the valley of the shadow of death; it speaks to him of a shepherd's rod and staff that not only discipline but also bring comfort. When the Lord Jesus applies the metaphor to Himself, further meanings are disclosed. We learn that his sheep hear and recognize his voice, that He knows the name of each one of them, that He seeks the sheep that goes astray and carries it home on his shoulders, that He not only protects his sheep but gives his life for them (John 10). We learn also something about ourselves – about our stubbornness, our proclivity to go our own way, our helplessness, our utter need for guidance. In those senses we are indeed like sheep. (See also the well-known words of Isaiah 40:11 on God's care for us as our shepherd, and the passage on shepherd and sheep in Ezekiel 34.)

What applies to the metaphor of the shepherd applies to other figures of speech the Bible uses when speaking of God and Jesus Christ – such as those referring to God as a rock and fortress, a sun and shield, a fountain of living water, a vine-dresser; and those referring to Christ as the door, the way, the vine, the bridegroom, the cornerstone, and the Lamb of God. Another example of metaphoric speaking in Scripture is Christ's statement at the Last Supper that the bread and wine are His body and blood. Here again the associations are many, as Lord's Days 28 to 30 of the Heidelberg Catechism make very clear.

This example reminds us at the same time that we may not forget the special nature of metaphors. They refer to something that is real, but they do not give a literal *description*. While they tell us something about reality, they do not tell us everything. They reveal and conceal.

The example of the Lord's Supper further reminds us that we can go astray when interpreting something literally that is meant metaphorically. In explaining the Lord's words in the upper room, the Roman Catholic Church has failed to distinguish between literal and figurative. Its teaching that bread and wine become the literal body and blood of the Lord has led to a magical view of the sacrament and in the end, in the words of Lord's Day 30, to idolatry.

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### *Metaphors are used in all fields of knowledge, including theology.*

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Finally, it must be kept in mind that metaphors focus on one aspect or set of aspects while leaving out others. We are therefore often given many different metaphors. But this limitation does not make the cognitive value of figurative language inferior to that of literal language. We are finite beings, and as is increasingly recognized in our days, all our knowledge is partial, also that which is conveyed in a literal manner. What is important is not the type of language that is employed (literal or figurative), but which of the two conveys most clearly the intended message. Sometimes this is best done by literal, sometimes by figurative language.

And again, the former is not necessarily more expressive than the latter. Here, too, we can learn from Calvin. He wrote, as we saw, that the biblical description of hell as a place of punishment by fire and brimstone is a metaphorical one. But as one of his commentators points out, "this is certainly not to say that Calvin regarded flaming fire and brimstone as what some of our contemporaries (even theological contemporaries) would naively call a 'mere metaphor,' meaning thereby that it means either nothing or almost nothing. For Calvin it meant the ultimate horror of separation from God, 'which we can neither imagine nor express properly. . . with our words.'"<sup>5</sup>

## **May we replace biblical descriptions?**

De Bruijne gives much attention, we noted, to B. Loonstra's views on the role of metaphor in the Bible and in biblical exegesis. An important element in the latter's theory (an element that De Bruijne rejects) is the idea that all biblical language is metaphoric and that the "strangeness" of the Bible can be removed, or at least alleviated, if we interpret certain elements that the author intended literally in a figurative sense. This can be done, for example, by "modernizing" some of the Bible's figurative language.

Loonstra's argument runs as follows. In inspiring Scripture the Holy Spirit adapted Himself to the culture of the times. This explains why the human authors of the Bible describe spiritual and other unfamiliar truths metaphorically, i.e., by using words and images from their own world. This is a proper procedure: only in this manner could the original readers understand the message. But because worldview and world-picture keep changing, later readers will have difficulty understanding and applying the message unless they replace the original descriptions and metaphors with ones that reflect the way in which they themselves visualize reality. Such a replacement, according to Loonstra, is therefore justified and sometimes even required.

There are exceptions. Loonstra distinguishes between foundational metaphors and illuminative ones. The former, to which God in the course of history gave a special redemptive-historical content, must be retained. Loonstra mentions in this connection covenant, creation, atonement, incarnation, resurrection, final judgment, and kingdom of God. Furthermore, the Bible teaches that redemption takes place by means of God's deeds in history. If the abandonment of certain metaphors places the historicity of these deeds in jeopardy, then again their replacement is unacceptable. In short, foundational metaphors must be kept, no matter how

strange they may seem. Illuminative ones, on the other hand, may be “updated” in order to prevent unnecessary estrangement (pp 116f).

### **An example: Christ’s ascension**

Loonstra gives various examples. I am using the one concerning Christ’s ascension, because it not only gives a clear description of Loonstra’s theory but also shows the differences between his views and those of De Bruijne.

In describing the ascension, Loonstra writes, the biblical author made use of the then current conception of the universe, which was a hierarchical one. Heaven was situated at the highest level, then came the earth, and then hell, which was located at the very bottom, within the bowels of the earth. According to this world-picture [sometimes referred to as that of the three-decker universe], Christ “ascended” literally when leaving this world – that is, He moved up to a higher place. The modern image of the universe is very different from the one we meet in the New Testament. For people living today, the earth, rather than being the centre of the universe, is a mere planet circling around its sun and occupying an infinitesimal spot in boundless space. In the modern picture of the universe there is no longer an up and down, an above and below. And so, while the event of Christ’s return to the Father is to be interpreted as truly historical and factual, we are justified, according to Loonstra, in replacing the particular New Testament *presentation* of the event by a more modern one, according to which Jesus did not ascend from an earth below to a heaven above, but moved to another dimension, namely to ‘the space of God’ (115f., 144, 148).

De Bruijne disagrees with Loonstra’s replacement theory. While admitting the role of the then current world-picture in the event and narration of Christ’s ascension, he questions the assumption that modern readers can give meaning to

the text only if they replace the original presentation with a modern one. Much of the estrangement we moderns feel in our contact with the Bible, he suggests, is a result of the fact that we absolutize our modern world-picture and want to know things on our own terms. But that is not a proper approach. A better means of bridging the gap between then and now is to relativize our present-day way of looking at things and to develop a real interest in what is different from our situation and culture. If we look at the Bible as an object of knowledge, we will understand that we indeed should attempt to understand it on its own terms, for we do the same with other things we seek to know.

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### *One such metaphor is God’s speaking of Himself as the shepherd of his people.*

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What we must realize is that it was not only in the narration of the ascension event, but also in the manner in which it in fact took place, that God accommodated Himself to the views of the times. In reading of the event, we simultaneously realize that what we are told really happened *and* that the people to whom it was first revealed had another view of reality than we have. There is no need to replace that view with our own, although it is possible, if we wish, to *supplement* the biblical presentation with a modern one, such as that of a multi-dimensional universe (144f).

To believe that biblical metaphors can be replaced is, De Bruijne believes, to misjudge the uniqueness of the language God used in giving his revelation. Also when replacing only those metaphors which (in Loonstra’s words) do not have a redemptive-historical content, we risk losing essential aspects of the biblical message. This is evident in the example of

the ascension. It is true that the historicity of Christ’s return to the Father does not depend on a world-picture that places heaven above the firmament. But that presentation involves associations and incorporates meanings that are lost when we replace it with the modern view of the universe. For one thing, in the description of Christ’s return to heaven as a going from low to high, we are reminded of God’s ascending Mount Zion in David’s times, an event that forms a type of fore-shadowing of Christ’s ascension (Ps 68, Eph 4). Furthermore, the association between heaven and height is found in other biblical messages. Examples: Jesus receives the *highest* place; after his suffering and death He rises *above* sin and misery; we can *lift up* our eyes to heaven; from heaven He looks *down* to oversee and govern all things; the heavenly Jerusalem where God’s throne is established fulfills a type of central function with respect to the earth, just as Zion did with respect to the country of Israel (148f.).<sup>6</sup>

All this, De Bruijne concludes, strengthens him in his conviction that we must not replace biblical descriptions and metaphors, no matter how strange they appear to us. The fact that God used them in his providential care means that they have a particular fitness to be vehicles of his revelation, a fitness that our substitutes lack. Although we tend to describe them as pure metaphor, it is possible to speak here of a form of “literalness.” In any case, we must hold on to the fact that Christ has literally ascended; that He looks down on us so that we can look up to Him (149).

### **Knowing in relationship**

In the foregoing we concentrated on one disagreement between De Bruijne and Loonstra, namely that concerning the question whether biblical descriptions and metaphors can be replaced. We must give attention to yet another disagreement, which also falls within the general category of figurative speaking in



the Bible. It concerns Loonstra's assumption that all biblical language is metaphoric and that this is necessarily so, because if God wants to reveal something about Himself He *must* speak metaphorically and use representations from our world.

De Bruijne disagrees with this view. For one thing, he points out, it threatens to make God and his revelation dependent on our experience and on the language that we, human beings, have come to see as significant in our interaction with the world. But this ignores the fact that God Himself chooses words and that He takes these words not as metaphors from a reality that is foreign to Him, but from a human language to which He has from the very beginning given the ability to speak rightly about Him (143, 145f.)

Furthermore, Loonstra's teaching suggests that there is an absolute separation between subject and object, or between man and God. De Bruijne believes, however, that we can and must speak of knowledge *in relationship*. He refers to the work of the English theologian Colin E. Gunton, who has written about the role that this concept plays even in fields of secular knowledge, including science. Philosophers of science are beginning to realize that knowledge of the world of nature is possible for us because we are connected with that world, being part of the same reality. (Christians would say that we are connected with it because both nature and we are God's creatures.) This suggests that the old idea of a radical dualism or division between the subject (the knower) and the object (the known; in this case the world of science) is being replaced by a more integrative and holistic one (141f.). A noteworthy implication is that we are no longer *imprisoned* by our language and its metaphors, as indispensable as both are in the process of knowing. There are other avenues to knowledge and truth.

Again following Gunton, De Bruijne believes that the same concept can be

applied to religious knowledge and understanding; that there also we can speak of knowing in relationship. As there is a connection between the human spirit and the surrounding world, so there is one between the human spirit and God.

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*We should be open to the possibility that biblical writers may consciously have included metaphorical elements in passages where we do not expect them.*

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It is true – and De Bruijne strongly emphasizes this – that we are speaking of different realities, and that the relationship is not the same as that between man and the world. It should also be kept in mind that God teaches us directly and personally; that his Spirit dwells in us. But the point of comparison is that in both cases our knowing and speaking is not to be seen apart from our *relation* to 'the other' (143).

## Conclusion

Loonstra tries to remove some of the "strangeness" of the Bible for modern readers by a more extensive use of the possibility of non-literal interpretation. He suggests two specific ways. One, which we discussed in the foregoing, is to interpret elements in the Bible which the author intended as literal, in a figurative sense. Part of this procedure is to replace "outdated" descriptions and metaphors in the Bible with modern ones. For reasons that will have become clear in the foregoing, De Bruijne rejects this approach.

He adopts, however, the other suggestion of Loonstra, which is that we should be open to the possibility that biblical writers may *consciously* have included metaphorical elements in

passages where we do not expect them, and that we should take care to interpret such elements as intended. With Loonstra, he warns against an attitude in Reformed theology according to which figurative language is held *by definition* to be less capable of conveying truths than literal language (152-59). Such an attitude, he argues, has a restrictive effect on biblical exegesis. When meeting problems (for example in historical sections) it is not in principle wrong to assume that the writer may have intended parts of these sections metaphorically. De Bruijne admits that it can be difficult to decide when we can speak of such metaphorical elements in a literal context, but concludes that we do not have to rely on literary pointers alone (160). In what follows we will see how he applies these views.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> C. Trimp, ed. *Woord op schrift: Theologische reflecties over het gezag van de Bijbel* (Kok, 2002). Page references to this book are placed between brackets within the text.

<sup>2</sup> Loonstra is a member of the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerk* in The Netherlands; De Bruijne of the *Gereformeerde Kerken (vrijgemaakt)*.

<sup>3</sup> Calvin did so in the context of his theory of accommodation (according to which God in his revelation accommodates Himself to the limits of our intellectual and moral capacities). For examples of Calvin's views on the role of metaphors and related tropes in Scripture and biblical exegesis, see Roland M. Frye, "Calvin's Theological Use of Figurative Language" in *John Calvin and the Church: A Prism of Reform*, ed. Timothy George (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), pp. 172-94; and Dirk W. Jellema, "God's 'baby-talk': Calvin and the 'errors' in the Bible," *The Reformed Journal*, April 1980, pp. 25-27.

<sup>4</sup> Jellema, p. 26.

<sup>5</sup> Frye, p. 179.

<sup>6</sup> For a similar explanation by John Calvin (who more than once admitted that "scientifically speaking there is no place above the skies"), see Frye, p. 177.

# Campfire! 2004: A Cook's Perspective

“What time is it?” The question rings out and as one, over seventy joyous voices shout back, “Service opportunity time!!” It’s breakfast at Campfire! and we’ve just finished our meal under “the banana hut,” the much-patched yellow tent which shelters the picnic tables from the elements. We’ve read God’s Word, sung his praises and prayed, and campers are now ready, with enthusiasm, to tackle chores before heading on to chapel and planned activities.

As a cook for one week this year, it was a real joy to witness the workings of camp. It was fun to labour together preparing nutritious meals the campers and counsellors would enjoy. We laughed and talked and sang as we worked, taking pleasure in contributing in a small way and being amply rewarded by enthusiastic comments and cheers at meal times. As the temperatures soared and ovens heated the small kitchen even more, we joked that the saunas at Gordon Lodge are free.

The camaraderie in the kitchen was enjoyable. But far more wonderful and memorable was the opportunity to see so many twenty-something and teens leading younger children, modeling Christ to them and, by God’s grace and in reliance on Him, studying Scripture with them, showing them love and patience, having great fun with them, and themselves growing in the Lord. Some of the children who attend camp come from disadvantaged homes where there may be few boundaries or little consistency in parenting. These children often blossom under the attention given them and listen intently to the Gospel message, drinking it in as plants in a



*Sword (Bible) Drill*

thirsty land. Their faces light up as they sing or recite a Bible text correctly.

They love witnessing also the book of creation, some having rarely or never spent six days in a place of green hills and glorious wildflowers, a place where you can hear the birds and crickets and at night witness an amazing panorama of stars or gaze into the flickering flames of a campfire.

“Churched” kids also delight in the whole camp experience, relating to their counsellors with affection and appreciation, loving the antics of the staff as they put on hilarious skits, rising to the challenge of the Confidence course, appreciating the worship at Chapel and campfire times and just growing in the knowledge of their precious Lord and Saviour. Friendships are formed and a

desire to follow Christ strengthened. I will never forget singing “In Christ Alone” accompanied by a trio of guitars at a glowing campfire after Randy or Dave have just lead us through glorious Gospel truths.

Campfire! is a wonderful experience for all who attend – tiring (especially for counsellors who are “on call” all day long), but definitely a blessing. I thank God for all those who give of their time to this ministry, committee members who labour to prepare for camp, and then all summer long those who volunteer for a week or more as chaplains, counsellors, cooks, nurses, lifeguards and bus drivers. Then there are those who give of themselves for the entire duration – the staff. They are real examples of walking in the light and we



can be thankful for all that these amazing young people are for our children and for disadvantaged youth from the Hamilton. Many thanks to Captain Lodz (Randy Lodder), Sargent Pinky (Dave DeJong), Strum (Ryan DeJonge), Beanie (Carina Ploeger) and Ivory (Anne-Marie Van Popta) who lead Campfire! so ably as well as to Auntie Ann (Ann Wierenga) who keeps the kitchen running and everyone's tummies full and content.

This is, as you've likely heard, the last year that we can use these facilities. The grounds of the Boy Scout Camp are beautiful and the buildings have proved adequate if very basic. Camp, of course, is so much more than mere structures. Still, the buildings are a necessity and we are so thankful that the response to the fund-raising drive for the new property near Markdale has been good. To date, more than \$230,000 has been raised. Many thanks to all those who have given so generously to this cause! However, still more is needed if the dream is to become a reality. If you meant to give but haven't yet gotten to it, there is still time. If you have given already and can manage another gift, it would be most welcome. Before we commence building the main



*Music and entertainment time.*

lodge and cabins, the basics required to ensure that Camp runs next summer, we would like to have raised \$300,000. Down the road, we plan to construct the remaining proposed facilities as funds permit, including a comfort station, staff quarters and a chapel building. In this, as in the necessary mountains of preparatory work that have already been moved, e.g. water studies, architectural



*Cabin pack devotion time.*

## **SUPPLIERS, CONTRACTORS, SKILLED AND GENERAL LABOURERS NEEDED:**

**Campfire! is looking for contractors, suppliers and skilled and general labourers to assist in the development and building of our new facilities.**

### THE SERVICES AND MATERIAL NEEDED INCLUDE:

Excavation, Septic System installation, Concrete forming, Concrete floor finishing, Masonry, Structural Steel, Miscellaneous Metals, Wood Framing, Lumber Supply, Finishing Carpentry, Steel Roofing, Foundation Waterproofing, Insulation Contractors, Window Supply, Door Supply, Drywalling, Painting, Flooring, Plumbing, Heating, Electrical, etc.

If you are able to assist us in any way (for example, donating time, material and/or wish to bid on one of the above-mentioned jobs) please contact our construction manager

Peter VanGrootheest at  
mail@sheldoncreek.com,

or by phone: **519-843-1193.**

There are also many tasks which will require general volunteer labour. We thank all of the volunteers who have already signed up in this regard and plan to be in touch with you within the next number of weeks.

If you are interested in donating some of your time to this valuable project but have not yet signed up please contact Pete VanGrootheest.

The Lord willing, we hope to commence the construction of the main lodge in mid-to-late September (2004). Thank you in advance for your willingness to assist us in this work.

*Campfire! Property Committee*

drawings, permit applications, the clearings for buildings, pond cleanup and much more, we go forward in humble dependence on the Lord, knowing that this is his work and "unless the Lord builds the house, those who labour, labour in vain."

May we continue to uphold this work with our prayers and gifts as we are able, building on the vision of those who started Campfire! and worked sacrificially to make it a reality. Let us do the same in humble dependence on our loving Creator and Redeemer and to the praise of his glorious grace which He has freely bestowed on us, his children.





# Catechizing and the Home

Rev. E. Kampen is minister of the Willoughby Heights Canadian Reformed Church at Langley, British Columbia.  
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Some time ago, I came across a modified English version of the Heidelberg Catechism printed in London in the year 1617.<sup>1</sup> While it is interesting to know that this Catechism was available to the English-speaking world already in the early seventeenth century, what is even more interesting and instructive is the preface supplied by the translator, identified only by the initials "E.B." This preface is addressed "To Christian Parents, Householders, Schoolmasters, and such as have charge of youth." The author was concerned about the neglect of catechizing by those who had care of the youth. In his preface, the author sets out his three main objectives, namely, to show the benefit of catechizing, to remove the contempt shown for it, and to prove that those addressed have a responsibility to catechize those under their care. A review of what he wrote will refresh our own understanding of catechizing in general. Hopefully, it will also stir up a renewed commitment by parents to their role in catechizing. Such commitment, after all, was E.B.'s primary concern.

## Benefits of catechizing

With respect to the benefits of catechizing, the author begins by stating that catechizing is beneficial with respect to the preaching as listeners become skilled in the principles of religion. He makes a link with baptism. By instruction the listeners will be able to derive comfort from their baptism. He also lays a link with the holy Supper. Catechizing will ensure that those who come to the



holy Supper are properly prepared guests and will not eat and drink judgment unto themselves. Catechizing is also essential for learning to understand the Scriptures properly. Without catechizing the Scriptures will remain a closed book. Further, catechizing will preserve people from spiritual seducers and impostors. It will also instil the fear of God, which is so necessary for a peaceful society. A mental image will come to mind when he writes that catechizing is like taking a person by the hand to lead him out of the darkness into the light and sight of Christ and him crucified. We are reminded of the depravity of the human mind when he writes that the doctrine of the Gospel must be taught since the natural man cannot perceive the things of God on his own. There is an awareness of the different levels of Christian maturity when he writes about two types of Christians, babes in faith and those more mature. The many babes in faith need milk, not meat. Finally, catechizing is necessary to enable a person to achieve a firm standing in grace.

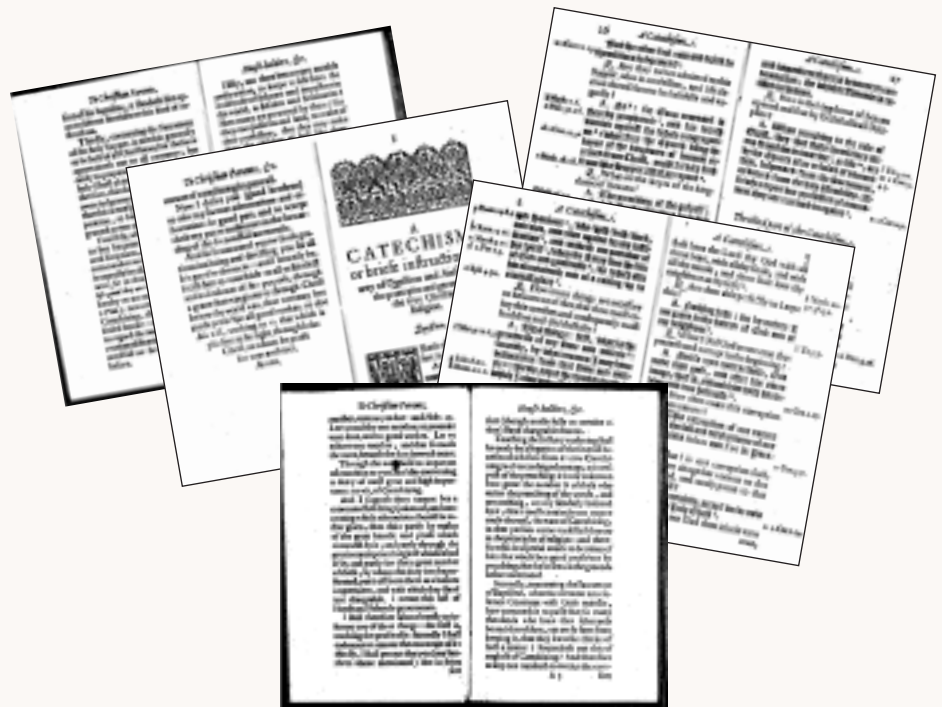
## God accomplishes his purpose

In order to remove contempt for catechizing, the author states that while catechizing may seem like foolishness, nevertheless God uses it to accomplish his purpose. It is in the same category as the preaching, which is considered foolishness by men. God's foolishness is stronger than man's wisdom. He points out how catechizing of those under their care was faithfully done by those already considered honourable to God, such as Abraham. We should follow their good example. In the same vein, but now taking examples from the history of the church, he points out that catechizing was practised by the church fathers in the first centuries, and all the churches that have come out of the Great Reformation urge and require catechizing. The final point, and perhaps the most compelling, is that it is an apostolic ordinance to teach the first principles of religion.

## Who has the duty

In the third section, the author shows how those whom he addresses have a duty to catechize. He begins by speaking of the way every Christian is a prophet with the general duty to teach about Christ. If this is a general duty, how much more is this the case for those who have youth entrusted to their care. He then focuses especially on the head of the family. It remains ever important to stress that with the role of headship comes the duty to teach those in the family. This role of the head of the household is reinforced by the explicit commands to teach, as found in such passages as

Deuteronomy 6, Psalm 78, and Ephesians 6. These passages single out the fathers. Furthermore, teaching about the LORD is a debt of love. No greater love can be shown than to help others come to know the way to eternal life. The author adds to this that believers are Abraham's spiritual children and therefore should do the works of their father Abraham. One of his works was to teach those under their care. He follows this by stating that if you desire that those under your care come properly prepared to the holy Supper and not eat and drink judgment unto themselves, you must teach them. He adds a practical dimension when he writes that if you wish to have obedient children, you must catechize them. He concludes by stating that the family can be seen as a little church. As catechizing is to be a basic part of church life, it should not be a stranger in home life.



## Conclusion

The author concludes by explaining why he did not speak about the ministers and their role in catechizing. He did not see a need to spell out what was commonly understood to be a minister's duty. The concern was to encourage catechizing beyond the setting of the church. In response to the comment that if ministers do their duties, the parents have to do no more but bring their children to the minister, he responds that if the parents do not do something in private, the benefit of the public teaching may be endangered. In response to those who say catechizing is too difficult, he points to the many helps available,

including the version of the Catechism found in the subsequent pages.

The words, freely summarized, of the somewhat anonymous E.B. give us much food for thought. How much catechizing is done in the home setting? At the very least, do parents ensure that their children know their catechism well before catechism class? Is attendance at catechism class considered as important as going to church every Sunday? Is there some discussion about the things learned in catechism class? It bears repeating that if the parents do not do something in terms of catechizing in the privacy of the

home, the benefit of the public teaching may be endangered.

May reading these words stir us up to renewed zeal in our prophetic task with respect to our children, and let us pay out to them our debt of love. That means, be involved in the catechizing of the children God has entrusted to your care.

<sup>1</sup> *A Catechisme or Briefe Instruction in the Principles and Grounds of the true Christian Religion. With a Short Treatise premised concerning the profit and necessity of Catechizing.* London: Printed by Edward Griffin for Henry Featherstone, 1617.

J. Wiskerke van Dooren

# Lord's Day 19

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



When I was your age, my grandfather lived close by. He often visited us. And when he left, I went with him for part of the way. Mother stayed home and waved goodbye. One time, my mother talked to me after I had come home. She said: "Next time you walk grandpa home, you let him walk at your right hand. That way you show that grandpa is different from a friend. It means you honour him. And you should do that with other elderly people, too."

Many young people laugh at this. They say: Right or left, what is the difference! They think it is ridiculous nonsense. But if I were you, I would do it anyway. For you know, being on the right side has always been the place of honour.

When the Lord Jesus had ascended into heaven, He received the place of honour. The Apostles' Creed says that He sits at the right hand of the God the Father. That is because of all the work He had done on earth for all God's children, for the church of Christ. There He is

sitting in glory at God's right hand to help the church on earth.

We all may know that we belong to the church. You too! The Lord Jesus looks after his church people, also those people who live in countries where it is hard to serve the Lord. They are often oppressed, or thrown in a prison. But then it also happens that more people believe in Jesus Christ. Isn't it good that He can do all that?

But don't think that we need not do anything. He wants us to work for Him, and we should do that. We help when we pray for the church. And when we speak with others about the church. And when we work for the church. Later you will hear more about that.

The church is sometimes called a body. And just as a body has a head, so the church has a head. We say that Jesus is the head of the church. He makes sure that all the people on earth who belong to Him will come to Him. Until everything is completed. That happens when He comes back on the clouds of heaven. And all his enemies disappear.

Do you remember that we learned about the Trinity? About God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit? We first talked about the Father. Next, we have discussed the Son. There was much to say about Him, but that part is now done. The third part is about the Holy Spirit. Do you think this is hard? Keep it up.





**Keith Sikkema**

*Mr. Keith Sikkema is a grade 8 teacher and vice-principal at John Calvin School in Smithville, Ontario. ksikkema@juno.com*

## Is it really worth it?

*Having our children instructed in the ways of the Lord is the only option.*

At this time, the frenzy of hiring and establishing budgets for the next school year should be behind most school boards and education committees. Teachers and school society members can now internalize and prepare for the implications of those decisions made during the past several months. Owen Sound's chairman reflected on such implications earlier this school year:

The tuition costs, the dedication of driving the children in to school every day... sometimes we may question, "Is it really all worth it?" But when we really stop and think about what our focus in this world is to be, then we realize that there can be no other way... Our focus is to be toward our final destination, Heaven. When we think about that, then we see that having our children instructed in the ways of the Lord is the only option. Thank you to all of you, parents. May you also be given the strength required in your task. We are also thankful for the communion of saints... As members of Christ's church we are all responsible for one another's spiritual well-being, which includes having fellow members taught in the Lord's ways.

### Combined efforts

Combined efforts of our communities are needed to provide Reformed education to the children of the covenant, not just in terms of staffing and curriculum, but also in terms of

facilities and finances. In Burlington and Flamborough this "combined effort" has taken on a special meeting, as a committee was struck to do "some preliminary research" to see if recombining the schools of Burlington (shrinking) and Flamborough (growing) may have any merit "regarding staffing, membership base, building requirements, transportation, etc." In Fergus and area, this combined effort deemed it wiser at present to not implement an earlier decision to add Kindergarten and grade 11 to its operation. May God bless the societies in their on-going commitment to provide that necessary Reformed education in their communities.

### Re-evaluate the school goals

The staff of DCS in Carman reflected on the goals of Reformed education, and found that "every goal is reflected somewhere in our curriculum" and that "it would be a good idea for the school society to re-evaluate these goals to determine if and how relevant these goals are today." Their conclusion is similar to one that the Board of Guido de Brès Christian High School in Hamilton made a few years ago when they reviewed their school goals.

The Carman school society also quietly remembered its fiftieth anniversary, as mentioned by the principal Mr. Rob Van Spronsen:

A good number of people showed up for DCS's open house and 50th anniversary celebrations. Initially, there seemed to be some confusion

about the 50th anniversary part – how can the school be 50 years old when it seemed like only yesterday that we celebrated the 25th anniversary? The answer lies in the fact that while the school itself began operations in 1973, it was 50 years ago that the Canadian Reformed School Society of Carman, Inc. was founded. According to the history book, *Many Grains, One Bread: On April 22, 1954*, a meeting was organized to discuss the possibility of Reformed education in Carman... The discussion centered on the promises made by parents at the baptismal font – the promise to tell our children about the commandments and promises of our Lord. By the end of the meeting, all those present became members of the Canadian Reformed School Society and a board was elected... Initially, the school society operated a Saturday school – from 1954 to 1973. Under God's blessings, in 1973, the Society could provide Reformed education five days per week in a "new" school building. The original building, a church, was turned into a two-room school with a basement. Today, after many expansions and renovations, the Society could not only celebrate 50 years of existence but also express thankfulness for a newly expanded and renovated facilities.

## Continue our support for Covenant College

The Chairman of Covenant Canadian Reformed School in Neerlandia, Alberta, outlines his reasons to continue to support the Covenant Canadian Reformed Teacher's College in Hamilton, and refers to its search for accreditation:

First of all, we have just benefited directly from the work that goes on at the college. Second, Redeemer College in Hamilton has just recently received permission from the Ontario government to offer Bachelor of Arts and Education degrees, and the Ontario Teacher's Association has given its approval to offer teaching certificates to graduates of these programs. . . . The next step, and the one we need to address is the possibility of a closer relationship between our Teacher's College and Redeemer College, so that courses taken at Teacher's College could be given credit for transfer to a completed education at Redeemer. This is very much in the early stages, but one aspect that requires prayer and consideration. For these reasons alone I think it imperative that we continue with our support to the College. With the Lord's blessing we may be able to acquire more recognition for our post secondary students and for their careers as teachers, and this, in a country that is turning more and more away from recognizing the Lord Almighty as being in control. Let us continue to look to the Lord for all that we require including the operation of the school society.

## Developing Reformed curriculum

Having a school and Reformed teachers is not the capstone of Reformed education. There is always work to be done, whether in process and curriculum development, communication, or teacher in-service training. Owen

Sound's education committee makes a point of "regularly reviewing the curriculum materials one area at a time," completing a teachers' handbook, visiting classrooms, and noticing the Lord's blessings on the school. This involvement will undoubtedly enhance the affinity between the school and the community, and impact positively on the education provided.

Lastly, there is also some news from the west and from the east on the topic of curriculum development. From an RCDC report, we glean that the B.C.'s Fraser Valley's Reformed Curriculum Development Committee approved of a Curriculum Cooperative Committee proposal:

to continue the Social Studies work done at last summer's two-day Social Studies Symposium. This time we have scheduled and accounted for a 5-days-in-July work session. It appears that all participants of last summer's session are looking forward to participating in this summer's session too. As a reminder, this is a



## Church News

Eligible for call:

**Candidate Walter Geurts**

3417 Rockwood Drive,  
Burlington, ON L7N 3H6

905-631-8433

[wgeurts@cogeco.ca](mailto:wgeurts@cogeco.ca)

Revised address:

**Pilgrim Canadian Reformed Church at London**

Box 9072,

White Oak Postal Outlet

1795 Ernest Avenue,

London, ON N6E 2V5

email: [heyink@execulink.com](mailto:heyink@execulink.com)

New address for Dr. de Visser:

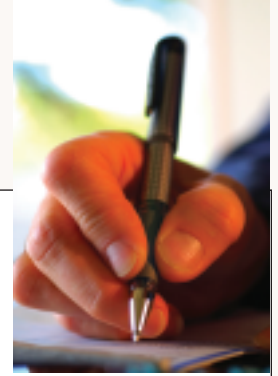
**Dr. A.J. de Visser**

239 Jacqueline Boulevard

Hamilton, ON L9B 2T6

project that has the cooperation of Canadian Reformed schools from each of our "Can. Ref." provinces. We pray that God will bestow us with much wisdom and bless our endeavours, to the glory of His name. The RCDC is also pleased to report that Book 2B of *The Flame of the Word* series is scheduled for completion in August, 2004.

Meanwhile, the League of the Canadian Reformed School Societies in Ontario decided not to proceed with a proposal to hire a curriculum coordinator. They have turned the proposal back to the CARE (Curriculum Assistance for Reformed Education) committee whose will revisit it, seek another way to effectively develop curriculum, or to simply continue the present manner of curriculum coordination—getting teachers together during summer or throughout the year to revise or develop Reformed curriculum. May God continue to bless this important curriculum development work.



**Dear Editor:**

In his article “Christians and Conservative Politics” (*Clarion*, May 21, 2004), Rev. P. Holtvlüwer counters the various reasons many Christians, including Reformed Christians, have gotten involved in the Conservative Party of Canada. He ends his article endorsing the CHP: “It would take another article to speak about the pros and cons of the CHP itself, and whether improvements couldn’t be made, but suffice it to say that in the present situation, the CHP is our best alternative.”

Having suggested it himself, I think it is only fair that Rev. Holtvlüwer take up the task and write that article about the CHP. As he did with the Conservative Party, a close examination of the CHP is warranted. Perhaps then we’ll see how weak and ineffective the CHP truly is. It’s fine to say that we are fulfilling our God-given cultural mandate by supporting the CHP, but the CHP cannot even influence the debate on election reform and proportional representation that could give it a voice in Parliament.

Is the Conservative Party of Canada the ultimate answer to our political involvement in Canadian politics? Certainly not. Rev. Holtvlüwer has clearly outlined the challenges that Christians face in the Conservative Party. If Christians stopped being such arm-chair critics and became actively involved in the Conservative Party, however, perhaps the challenge would not be so difficult and the outcome as predictable.

Rev. Holtvlüwer states that “Canada is a free, democratic society.” He continues, “Unlike Esther, Daniel, and Nehemiah, we do not find ourselves in a totalitarian state with no freedom of speak of the God who rules the world through his Son Jesus Christ.” I would ask, for how long?

We have already seen Bill C-250 take away our right to publicly oppose homosexuality, or risk being charged with a “hate crime.” Religious views based on “sacred books” are currently protected under the legislation. Again I ask, for how long? Homosexual activists will not be content to let anti-gay statements be made in the name of religious freedom. In the next ten to twenty years, our religious freedoms will also be under attack. Without a strong, united political opposition, the homosexual movement will win this battle as easily as that of gay marriage. (I know the redefinition of marriage has not been passed into law yet, but the Liberals have promised to deal with it during the next session of Parliament.)

There is much to do in Canadian politics. May we be the Lord’s instruments, also in politics, so that our children and grandchildren may continue to enjoy the freedoms we take for granted today.

*Ron Bremer, Carlisle, Ontario  
President,  
Ancaster-Dundas-Flamborough-Westdale  
Conservative Party Riding Association*

**Press Release of Classis Contracta Northern Ontario, July 28, 2004, in Guelph, Ontario**

1. On behalf of the convening church, Rev. J. VanWoudenberg opened the meeting of the delegates by requesting the singing of Hymn 64:1, reading of Deuteronomy 32:1-4, and prayer.
2. The churches of Orangeville and Guelph sent delegates.
3. After classis contracta was declared constituted, Rev. VanWoudenberg was appointed as chairman, B. Vanderwoude as clerk, and the agenda was adopted.
4. The Church at Orangeville requested classis contracta to release Rev. R. Pot from classis effective September 1, 2004. Having ascertained that the relevant documents were all in good

- order, classis decided to most honourably release Rev. R.E. Pot from his ministerial duties in the classical district of Classis Northern Ontario on September 1, 2004, and to commend him to the Lord and the Word of his grace with sincere gratitude for all the work that he has done in this classical region.
5. In light of Rev. Pot’s departure, the Church at Orangeville requested the appointment of Rev. B.J. Berends as its counsellor. This was granted.
  6. The Church at Orangeville also requested monthly pulpit supply beginning in September. In light of the fact that,
    - 1) pulpit supply is already arranged for Fergus North,
    - 2) the next regular classis will be in September, 2004,
    - 3) Orangeville should be able to count on the willingness of the

- other churches to ensure it has a minister to officiate at the September Lord’s Supper,
- 4) classis decides to deny the request for September pulpit supply, and advised Orangeville to bring this to September classis.
7. The Church of Orangeville also invited a delegate from classis to the farewell service of Rev. Pot. Classis contracta appointed the Church of Grand Valley to represent classis at this farewell service.
8. After the chairman judged that censure according to Article 34 CO was not necessary, the Acts were adopted and the press release approved for publication.
9. After leading in prayer, the chairman declared the meeting closed.  
*For Classis Contracta Northern Ontario,  
July 28, 2004  
B. Vanderwoude (clerk at that time)*