

Trouble in the Church

The Mighty Men

31st Convocation of the Theological College

*Remembrance Day:
A celebration of
freedom. . .*





J. Visscher

Dr. J. Visscher is co-pastor of the Canadian Reformed Church at Langley, British Columbia. jvisscher@canrc.org

Trouble in the Church

It is not hard to find trouble in the church.

One of the most attractive promises in life is the promise of being trouble-free. Computer salesmen are quick to direct you to what they call a “trouble-free computer.” Books which promise us “trouble-free travel” or “how to raise trouble-free children” or “how to have a trouble-free marriage” are instantly attractive. How we long to live a trouble-free life.

The same goes for the church. How we yearn to belong to a “trouble-free church” – a community of faith where everyone gets along, no one raises his or her voice, all are in agreement on the issues that matter, and the decisions of the consistory are readily accepted. Could anything be nicer?

Nevertheless, our fallen world is not that way. And churches, in spite of their claim to be “in the world but not of the world” are not that way either. The saints know how to fight. Put your ear to the ground, listen carefully, and you can soon hear someone recount an ecclesiastical horror story. Or, at least, what they think may well be such a story, if their sources are correct.

The fact that we have always done something in a certain way may have value but it does not mean that it can never be altered.

Unfortunately, all too often they are. In this regard for some time now I have been receiving rather disturbing stories of developments and happenings in our sister churches, The Reformed Churches in The Netherlands. Apparently there are a lot of unhappy fellow believers in the old country. They are reacting negatively to changes in the worship services, to what is being sung in church, to what they perceive to be a growing laxness on such ethical issues as marriage and

divorce, Sabbath observance, and sexual co-habitation, to the inroads of biblical criticism, as well as to closer relations with certain churches.

Now, from what I can gather, some of these issues are local ones, being experienced in some places but not in others. Other issues, however, are more common and widespread. The overall impression is of a church community that is nervous, defensive, and unsettled. The fact that hundreds of members have departed and started a new church which they claim to be a continuation of the old has not helped matters either.

Of course, if we want to see trouble we do not need to look across the Atlantic pond. We need only look in our own backyard. North American Christianity too faces countless challenges. Why, even Reformed churches and believers have their issues: contemporary or traditional worship, women in office, framework hypothesis, justification, and the new perspective on Paul. In short, it is not hard to find trouble in the church.

Dealing with trouble

Nevertheless, finding it and dealing with it are two different things. How does one deal with trouble in the church? What are you supposed to do as a believer if your local church or federation is going in a wrong direction?

Historically, there have been different reactions. At least four common ones come to mind.

1) *Accommodation*: This reaction is one of adjustment and re-alignment. Church members are confronted with new teachings or new practices and what they decide to do is to go along with whatever is being suggested or proposed. In many cases they go out from the assumption that the church leadership must know what they are doing, and therefore the best thing to do is to follow their leading. There is also the underlying view that the church needs to adjust to new times



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and situations, hence change is to be expected and embraced as necessary and vital.

2) *Toleration*: There is also another reaction which is not so positive and receptive. It is one in which church members are really not happy with what is being proposed and done in the church, but in which they decide to go along anyway. After all, the argument often goes, “I was born in this church” or “all my children and friends are in this church” or “the changes are not so major.” In other words, as long as the positives outweigh the negatives, there is ample reason to remain, be patient, and count to ten.

3) *Reformation*: Moving a step further down the scale, we come to reformation. It is the view that the church is definitely going down the wrong path and that a change of direction is very much needed. Members with this mindset are not prepared to tolerate or to accommodate. They want to change things so that they conform again to the Word of God. Often this also seems to mean changing things back to the way they were thirty, forty, or fifty years ago.

4) *Separation*: But what happens when reformational change fails or is stymied? In such circumstances some will say that there is only one remaining course of action, and that this is one of separation. The current church body has become so deformed, so infected, so wayward, that there is no alternative but to depart. Either one needs to join another church body that is still considered to be faithful, or one has to institute a whole new church.

Which is correct?

Once having outlined these four positions or reactions, the next question that almost naturally surfaces is, “What is correct? Which reaction is right?” As Reformed believers steeped in a history of reform and revival, we may be inclined to say, almost without thinking, that reformation or separation is the only real option.

Here, however, a word of caution may be fitting. For if the changes being proposed in the church are minor or of little consequence, little can be said against the saints if they chose to be accommodating or tolerant. A decision to change the worship times or to switch from a pipe organ to an electronic organ, to have the elders sit at the back of the church instead

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of the front or to say the Credo in unison, does not warrant a call for reformation or separation.

The same applies to changes in church traditions. The fact that we have always done something in a certain way may have value but it does not mean that it can never be altered. Here the members need to be able to distinguish clearly between what is biblically rooted and based and what is not. And that is hard for some to do. There are always those who automatically equate custom and historic practice with Scripture. It may or may not be. If it is, then by all means hang on to it. If it is not, then at a certain time you must be prepared to let it go.

On the other hand, when teachings arise that run contrary to the Scriptures, we are into a different and much more precarious situation. Then we need to speak out and, if necessary, sound the call for reformation.

What about separation? That too may be necessary; however, before such a step is taken there must be great searching of heart. In addition, there must be clear and unequivocal proof of deformation and a refusal to hear, receive, and return.

Insight from Calvin

In this connection, one would do well to give careful consideration to the words of the great Reformer John Calvin. Writing about the church in Corinth, he pens some very insightful words in his *Institutes*, “Among the Corinthians no slight number had gone astray; in fact, almost the whole body was infected. There was not one kind of sin only, but very many; and they were no light errors but frightful misdeeds; there was corruption not only of morals but of doctrine. What does the holy apostle – the instrument of the Heavenly Spirit, by whose testimony the church stands or falls – do about this? Does he seek to separate himself from such? Does he cast them out of Christ’s Kingdom? Does he fell them with the ultimate thunderbolt of anathema? He not only does nothing of the sort; he even recognizes and proclaims them to be the church of Christ and the communion of saints (1 Cor 1:2)!” (Book IV, Chapter I, section 14)

In spite of the presence of doctrinal and moral errors, Calvin is not prepared to withhold from the church at Corinth the name of the “church of Christ.” Later on in this same part of the *Institutes*, he adds that “the church abides among them

because the ministry of Word and sacraments remains unrepudiated there.”

Applying it today

All in all, this wisdom from Calvin should make us cautious. Not all calls for reformation are at the same time also calls for separation. By the same token, not all errors and shortcomings in the church supply sufficient rationale to depart, join, or establish a new church. Calvin would seem to suggest that only an actual repudiation of the gospel would warrant such drastic action.

Not all errors and shortcomings in the church supply sufficient rationale to depart, join, or establish a new church.

Yes, and that brings us back to the situation in The Netherlands and the call to separation that was issued there some time ago. Was it warranted? It may well be true that there is cause for concern about what is happening liturgically in some local churches. A person may also have serious questions about the direction in which the churches as a whole are headed. Believers may be disturbed too about what they see as a drift away from Reformed distinctives and towards evangelicalism. Yet the vital and fundamental question remains: have these churches turned their back on the gospel? Now that, in my view, is something that remains to be proven.

In the meantime, we do well to let all this serve as a learning experience for us in the Canadian Reformed Churches. It is a call for us to discern and proceed with care when changes are proposed in our own church life. It is as well a call to extend a helping hand to struggling sister churches elsewhere and to speak the truth to them in love. Then too, it is a call for us to make sure that we live close to the Word of God ourselves, continuing to hold dear what we confess as Reformed believers. Finally, it is a call for us to pray for our churches and for Reformed churches around the world.

May the Lord help us, and especially those churches in difficulty, and lead us all to that day when the church of Jesus Christ will be “trouble-free” at last and forever.



R. Bredenhof

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The Mighty Men



MATTHEW 13:52

“These were the chiefs of David’s mighty men – they... gave his kingship strong support to extend it over the whole land, as the Lord had promised.”

1 Chronicles 11:10

Each year on November 11 we remember those soldiers who fought to defend our freedom. Even though some of the battles were contested sixty or even ninety years ago by numerous battalions and squadrons, individual acts of heroism still stand out. A lowly private who stormed a machine gun nest with only a rifle. A pilot shot down behind enemy lines who crawled all the way back to safety with a broken leg.

Each year such stories are retold as shining examples of dedication, bravery, and patriotism. Hearing these true tales of victory, and seeing all those white crosses that mark the resting place of many whose stories are now forgotten, we are moved to say thanks to those ever-dwindling veterans with medal-covered chests.

The remembrance of war heroes is found in Scripture, too. In 1 Chronicles 11:10-47 we can read of King David’s mighty men. We find here numerous names, but some of these stand out because of the greatness of their deeds. Jashobeam, who killed 300 men single-handedly (v. 11). “The Three,” who broke through Philistine lines in order to get David a drink of water (vv. 17-18). Or Benaiah, who “struck down an Egyptian who was seven and half feet tall” (v. 23).

Like the military heroes of our nation, these mighty men of Israel carried out such exploits with purpose. It wasn’t mindless bravado; it was intentional combat. For the Chronicler says this

about the great Israelite warriors and their chiefs: “They... gave [David’s] kingship strong support to extend it over the whole land, as the Lord had promised” (v. 10).

These men fought to help David in his rule as king. The nation Israel faced a host of external enemies and internal challenges, yet in these mighty men God provided David with strong and necessary military support. With them lined up behind him, David was able to defeat the Philistines, the Moabites, the Arameans, and many others. What’s more, the whole nation could now be united under one stable and godly king.

In the grand scheme of things, the individual acts of these mighty men were very small: 300 enemies killed here, a tall foe there. Yet it was on the backs of these war heroes that the Lord built for Himself a mighty kingdom. Just as God had promised, David would be king over all Israel!

And God’s promise extended way past the modest gains made in David’s time. The Lord also swore to David that one of his offspring would be set over God’s house and kingdom forever (cf. 1 Chron 17:14). David, and all Israel with him, looked forward to an eternal Messiah, who would be a great king – as great as David, or even Solomon, and then so much greater.

The mighty men of David fought for a king who was but a shadow of coming greatness. One day King David would die,

one day Israel would fall, yet the brave deeds of the mighty men were not in vain. Yes, they are remembered, for by God’s grace and with his power these men had their part in preparing the way for the coming King. With spear and sword they defended the house from which the Messiah would come!

It was God who ensured the enduring impact of David’s mighty men – let us pray to God that also the past deeds of our nation’s military are not in vain. Though their stories are recorded in the history books, the names and deeds of our nation’s brave soldiers are now slowly fading from relevance. For today the tyrant of unchecked lawlessness is advancing and our free country is being willingly enslaved.

May we pray and work fervently for our nation, but at the same time let us work for our other country, the one not of this earth. Remember the victory of our great King, the son of David, who single-handedly vanquished his enemies. Remember the victory of Christ – and heed his call to join his army as kings and as queens. Mighty in the power of the Spirit, let us fight the devil and fight all those who are on his side! For though our deeds be small and our hearts fearful, it’s God “who leads us in triumphal procession in Christ” (2 Cor 2:14). In Christ God gives us the victory that never fades.



J. Wiskerke van Dooren

Lord's Day 4.8

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



Do you study geography in school? Then you will be able to find all kinds of countries in an atlas or on a globe. Some of these nations are kingdoms: the Kingdom of England, the Kingdom of The Netherlands, the Kingdom of Spain, and many more.

What about the Kingdom of God? Can you find that somewhere in your atlas? No. You may check all the maps, but none of the nations is called "the Kingdom of God."

What can we say about the Kingdom of God? We know that it is stretched out all over the world. God the Lord governs the whole world. However, the Lord can only use those people in his Kingdom who are happy that He is King, who want to listen to Him, and who follow his commands.

Thankfully, there are many people on earth who are children of God. But many, many others go on listening to Satan. They listen to God's enemy. These people are much more interested in the riches of money than in the riches of the Bible.

When we pray to God "Your Kingdom come," then we ask first of all that we ourselves may be more and more obedient to the Lord. We also ask the Lord to continue to protect the church and that more and more people will join the church. We especially pray that Satan will be defeated, so that he will not draw the people away from the Lord.

The Lord listens when we pray for these things. He will make sure that one day a great nation will arise. It will be an innumerable nation. It will be the people Christ has bought with his blood, but Satan and his followers do not belong to it.

When it is time the Lord Jesus will return on the clouds. Then this world will become brand new. All people who live on the new earth will be glad that God is King and everything will be good. We look forward to that kingdom of heaven. The Lord Himself is looking forward to it. Therefore we pray respectfully, "Your Kingdom come."





D. Moes

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reformedevangelism.com

Knowing God: Living the Gospel

Lesson 1: Understanding your *Oikos*

In last month's column we introduced the growth stage of *Emmaus: The Way of Faith*. We saw that the *Emmaus* Growth courses are published in four books, each book containing four or five (short) courses on aspects of Christian living. The first book in the Growth series is called *Knowing God*. The next four installments will deal with the first course in this book called "Living the Gospel." This is a simple course on sharing our faith with others who make up our own network of relationships. The lessons are: (1) Understanding your *oikos* (network of relationships); (2) Praying for your *oikos*; (3) Serving your *oikos*; (4) Building stepping stones to faith.

Pictures of evangelism

After having welcomed the people and given an overview of the purpose of the course, have the groups spend some time together in which they share their experiences of sharing the Christian faith. The facilitator should keep in mind that the topic of evangelism makes many people feel guilty and inadequate. People should be given permission to share these feelings. Draw the sharing together by reminding everyone why we are called to share our faith. This could be done by emphasizing that the church is now the visible presence of Jesus Christ on earth that is called to continue to announce the good news of the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God, just as Jesus did in his day.

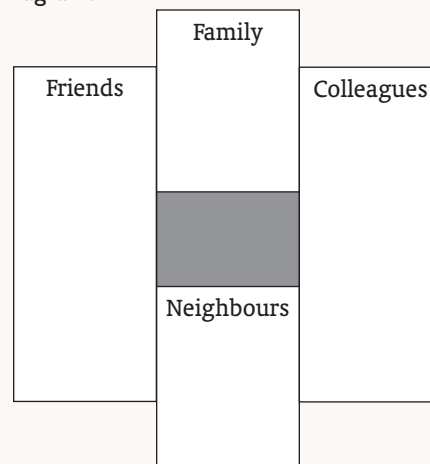
Oikos in the New Testament

Now you have arrived at a point at which you should explain the word *oikos*,

the Greek word meaning "extended household" or "network of relationships." Have the groups look up the Scripture passages on the handout that illustrate how much of the evangelism in the New Testament is based on the *oikos* or network of relationships principle. Ask the people if they can begin to see the principle of *oikos* evangelism and if they can think of any other New Testament passages where the principle applies. It will be beneficial if the facilitator illustrates the *oikos* principle from his own life and asks the groups if they have any practical illustrations of their own.

Discover your *oikos*

Take some time to introduce this activity, stressing its purpose and relevance. Then have the groups discover their *oikos* by drawing the following diagram:



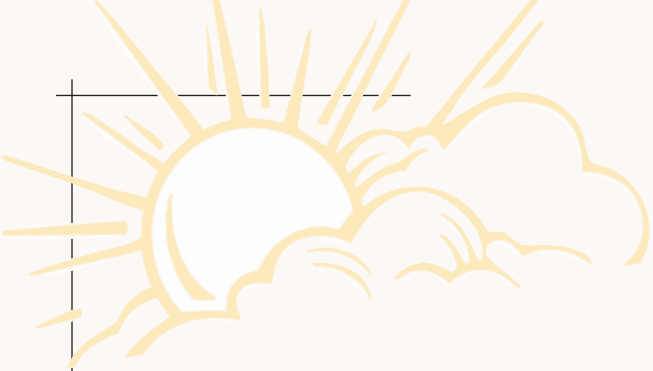
Have the members of the group write their own name in the shaded section of

the diagram. In the "Family" section have them write the names of their extended family that they are in meaningful contact with, such as uncles, cousins, grandchildren, etc. In the "Neighbours" section have them write the names of their neighbours or people in their community that they know well. In the "Colleagues" section have them write the names of their work colleagues or people they know through work. In the "Friends" section have them write the names of their friends and people they know through hobbies, sports, etc. Then have the groups put an asterisk by everyone who is already a Christian.

Since some people may be embarrassed at not knowing many people at all, the facilitator should be sensitive and affirming. This also counts for the fact that some people may not know many non-Christians. People should be allowed to draw their own conclusion from this fact. At this stage everyone, whether Christian or not, should be written down.

Before the next meeting have the people make a neater copy of their *oikos* on the special handout provided in the course. Also ask them to pray once for each member of their *oikos*, listening to anything God is saying to them about any family member, neighbour, colleague, or friend.

If you would like to view the outline of this lesson, go to www.reformedevangelism.com and follow the links. Next time, we hope to introduce the second lesson of this course: "Praying for your *Oikos*."



Ray of Sunshine

By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

“This, then, is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven. . . .”

Matthew 6:9a

“One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When He finished, one of his disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray’” (Luke 11:1a). The disciples make this request in a humble way. It shows their reliance on the Lord. They go to Him as Master and Teacher from where they must learn what to pray.

We will learn through this series of articles on the Lord’s Prayer that prayer is not a simple matter of asking for whatever we wish. A child cannot simply ask his parents for whatever he wishes to ask. Likewise, prayer must remain within the context of the covenant relationship that the Lord has made with us. As long as we are inclined by nature to all forms of evil, the thoughts that pass through our minds and form into words on our lips during prayer must be guarded by the knowledge of God’s will. For when we pray according to the instruction He gives us, prayer becomes an act of faith.

We begin by addressing God as our Father. This is, however, clearly not something which can be taken for granted. From Romans 8 it is clear that it is through the power of the Holy Spirit that we are able to call God our Father. As the Catechism teaches us, this address is also to awaken in us at the very beginning of our prayer that childlike reverence and trust toward God which should be basic to our prayer.

The Lord Jesus also warned the disciples in Matthew 6:5-8 about his rejection of the prayer of a hypocrite. For not everyone who calls upon God as his Father believes it or acts according to it. The Lord had voiced this complaint through the prophet Malachi. In chapter 1:6 we read, “‘A son honours his father, and a servant his master. If I am a Father, where is the honour due me? If I am a Master, where is the respect due me?’ says the Lord Almighty.”

Throughout various times in the Old Testament the Lord had also voiced this complaint to the children of Israel because He had adopted them to be his children. He had adopted them to be the children of his covenant.

In the New Testament times this warning also applies to us. For covenant children are those who by a true faith are grafted

into Christ by the working of the Holy Spirit and his Word. For we have “received the Spirit of sonship, and by Him we cry, ‘Abba Father.’ The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children” (Rom 8:15b, 16).

The Father whom we address in prayer is the God of heaven and Judge of the earth. As humble children of God we may address God as “our Father who art in heaven” with full confidence in Christ. He is our Saviour through whose blood we have become true children of God and through whom we are taught to begin our prayers in this way.

*Our Father, clothed with majesty,
Who, dwelling in eternity,
Hast set Thy glorious throne on high,
In Christ, Thy Son, do we draw nigh,
In humble prayer to seek Thy face
For Thy paternal love and grace.*

Hymn 47:1

Birthdays in December:

10 JAMES KAMMINGA will be 21

Box 1125
Carman, MB ROG OJO

16 JULIE KAMMINGA will be 17

Box 1125
Carman, MB ROG OJO

Congratulations to you both, James and Julie, on your respective birthdays. May God bless you in this new year with good health and happiness. Have an enjoyable day together with your family and friends.

Till next month,

Mrs. C. Gelms and Mrs. E. Nordeman
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Convocation Report of the 36th Anniversary Meeting and 31st Convocation of the Theological College, held September 9, 2005

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The thirty-sixth anniversary meeting and thirty-first convocation of the Theological College took place on a warm September evening in the Redeemer University College auditorium, Hamilton, Ontario. I'm not sure how many people attended, but I'd estimate there were approximately 350 people in the audience. The very capable organist, who led the singing throughout the evening, was Brother G. Woudenberg.

After reading 2 Corinthians 5:11-21 and leading in prayer for God's blessing on this occasion, yours truly spoke a few words of welcome. I mentioned that since the last annual meeting and convocation, two former professors had been taken home by the Lord – Dr. J. Faber, the first principal, and Dr. K. Deddens. It is our hope that Sister Faber and Sister Deddens as well as the families continue to find their comfort in the sure and glorious promises of the Lord. Congratulations and best wishes were passed on as received from a number of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, namely the churches at Albany, West Albany, Armadale, Kelmscott, and West Kelmscott. The letters from those churches show there is good interest for the College down under and much thankfulness for the ministers and missionaries serving there who are alumni of the College.



Board of Governors and Mr. Adrian Vanleeuwen, a representative from the Australian churches:
(l to r) front row: Rev. J. VanWoudenberg, Rev. W. Slomp, Rev. R. Schouten, Mr. A. Vanleeuwen.
Back row: Mr. L. Jagt, Rev. G. Van Popta, Mr. K. Veldkamp, Rev. J. Moesker, Mr. W. Smouter,
Mr. G. Nordeman, Dr. G. Nederveen

Words from Australia

Brother A. van Leeuwen, one of the Deputies for Training for the Ministry of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, spoke some words of appreciation and support on behalf of those churches. At their last synod the Australian sister churches reaffirmed the goal to work toward their own theological training. As that goal remains a distant one, however, the Australian churches gladly support the Theological College in Hamilton with prayer and financial contributions, as well as in the

sending of men who aspire to the ministry. The Free Reformed Churches of Australia, by the way, give around \$70,000 annually to the operation of the College, and we certainly appreciate this considerable contribution as well as their prayers. Due to our common commitment to Scripture and confessions, our bond with these churches remains strong. We also appreciate that brother van Leeuwen was able to sit in on Board of Governors meetings the previous day. It was good to have face-to-face contact with one of the Australian deputies.



Senate and graduate (l to r) front row: Dr. N.H. Gootjes, Dr. C. Van Dam, Prof. J. Geertsema.
Back row: Prof. G.H. Visscher, Dong Woo Oh, Dr. A.J. de Visser

Greetings from The Netherlands

Dr. W.H. Rose, who teaches Semitic Languages and ancient Near Eastern history at the Theological University of Kampen, The Netherlands, spoke words of greeting on behalf of that institution of our sister churches in The Netherlands (Reformed Churches, Liberated). Dr. Rose noted the bond between the two colleges and mentioned that Dr. A. J. de Visser, our “new” professor of Diaconiology and Ecclesiology, is also an alumnus of Kampen. The Theological University celebrated its 150th anniversary last year, carried out extensive renovations to its facilities, and recently reorganized its academic programs. He expressed the hope that there would continue to be cooperation between the institutions in Canada and The Netherlands and wished God’s blessing on the training at our college.

Principal’s Report

Dr. C. Van Dam presented his principal’s report – a summary of what

took place at and around the College over the past academic year (published in this same issue of *Clarion*). This was Dr. Van Dam’s final report, as he has now completed his three-year term as principal of the College. We are thankful for his capable leadership in this position and we wish Dr. N. Gootjes, who has now taken over that responsibility, God’s blessing and guidance.

The Keynote Address

The keynote address was delivered by Dr. de Visser, who assumed the position of Professor of Diaconiology and Ecclesiology last year. The speech was entitled “A Vision for Evangelism: A Look at the Missional Church Movement.” This interesting speech will also be published in this magazine. I’m sure it will motivate further discussion on how we, as Reformed churches, should reach out in an ever more secularized society.

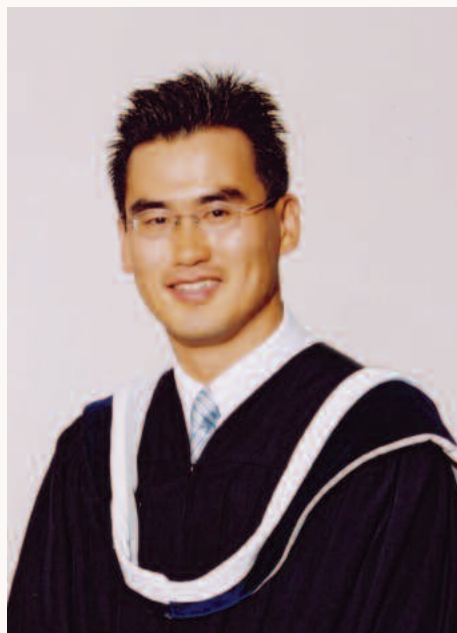


Dr. A.J. de Visser



Our Graduate

The degree of Master of Divinity was conferred on Brother Dong Woo Oh. His parents had travelled from Korea for this special occasion. After the solemn conferring of the degree, brother Dong Woo Oh spoke words of gratitude for the solid, Reformed instruction he received at the college and for the communion of saints he experienced among the churches. He also explained how he discovered the Biblical basis for the Reformed practice of taking candy at the beginning of the sermon in Psalm 119:103, "How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!" We congratulate our brother and wish him God's continued guidance so he may pass on what he has learned to others. Psalm 134:1 and 3 were sung in response to the conferring of the degree.



Graduate Dong Woo Oh

Women's Savings Action

The Women's Savings Action, represented by Sisters J. Van Dam, W. Gootjes, and C. Nienhuis, presented the outgoing principal with the sum of \$30,000 for the College library. A brief demonstration was given of how some of the money given last year has been used to upgrade and digitalize the tracking of borrowed books. The money collected by the Women's Savings Action is crucial to

the existence and operation of the library, and we remain deeply grateful for the considerable amount of money collected among the churches each year and over the years.

Foreign Student Bursary Fund

A collection was held for the Foreign Student Bursary Fund, which offers assistance to foreign students who study at the College. This is a valuable service, as this fund has already provided help to a number of students, some from third world nations. Also by means of this assistance the College has influence abroad and the true gospel of Jesus Christ is brought to distant nations. \$2,312.00 was collected on this evening! Please continue to give for this worthy cause.

Rev. G. Ph. van Popta offered up the closing prayer at the end of the ceremony. In his prayer he sought God's continued blessing for the college and for the graduate. He also asked the Lord to continue to move men to aspire to the ministry through studies at the College, as there is a growing need for ministers and missionaries in the churches and in the world. Rev. van Popta also brought Dr. J. De Jong and his wife and family before the Lord in prayer and requested Him to surround them with his merciful care and help.

After the singing of our national anthem, opportunity was given to offer congratulations to the graduate and his parents and to socialize and enjoy some refreshments. All in all, it was an evening of celebration of achievement over the academic year gone by, with all the glory being given to God. May He also bless the College and the faculty and students this new academic year!



Dr. C. Van Dam, Dr. N.H. Gootjes, Dong Woo Oh

C. Van Dam

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Principal's Report

Transitions

This past year can be characterized as having been a year of change and transition. With respect to the faculty, we experienced a new beginning with the arrival of a new full time professor, Dr. A. J. de Visser, who filled the vacancy left with the illness of Dr. J. De Jong. Change and transition was also noticeable with respect to those who have served in previous years as full time professors. We take note of the fact that the Lord called home to himself Dr. J. Faber on September 30, 2004 and Dr. K. Deddens on February 10, 2005. Also with respect to the Board of Governors, there was unusual change. Rev. Cl. Stam had to resign as governor for health reasons and Rev. G. Ph. van Popta, as the alternate, took his place.

We remember with great gratitude the work done by all these co-workers who have moved on. In the case of those who have left this earthly life, In Memoriams have been published to express our thankfulness to God for their labours.

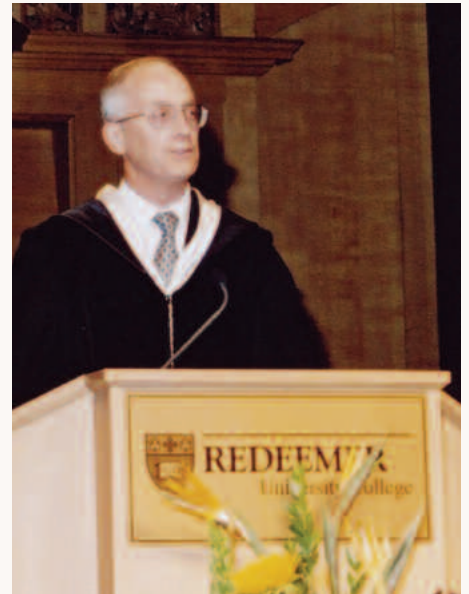
Together with thanksgiving for God's grace evident in the lives of those who have departed from the College scene, there is in all these transitions also the pain that comes with living in a world that groans in the brokenness of this present life and that looks forward to the day that "the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Rom 8:21). It is therefore appropriate to remember the ongoing health struggles of Dr. J. De Jong. This past summer, on July 5, 2005, the Lord blessed Dr. and Mrs. De Jong with twenty-five years in holy wedlock. We

commend them and their family to the continued care of our heavenly Father. We likewise commend in God's care the widows, Mrs. Faber and Mrs. Deddens. We also wish our brother Rev. Stam God's blessing in his sickness.

Yet, as Christians we also do rejoice that the gospel gives us every reason for hope in the midst of the struggles of this life. We have a living Lord and Saviour who has conquered sin and death and the brokenness of this life. He is the one who ultimately oversees also the work done at the Theological College. We rejoice in that reality which makes our work at the College a real privilege.

College evening 2004

At the College evening last year we were edified by a speech of our dogmatician, Dr. N. H. Gootjes, entitled "How Much Did Jesus Christ Know?" Next, Dr. de Visser was officially introduced and he signed the Form of Subscription. Tonight we will have the opportunity to hear him speak to us on the topic of "A Vision for Evangelism: A Look at the Missional Church Movement." Last year we had a graduating class of four: Mr. Reuben Bredenhof, who now serves as minister for the Canadian Reformed congregation in St. Albert, Alberta; Mr. Albert Gootjes, who is presently in a Ph. D. Program at Calvin Theological Seminary; Mr. Pila Nyuka, who now serves the congregation of Kataka in the Gereja-Gereja Reformasi Indonesia in Sumba; and Mr. Ian Wildeboer, who is now a missionary in the service of the Free Reformed Church at Armadale, West Australia working in Lae, Papua New Guinea.



Students

Tonight we can witness the graduation of our Korean brother, Mr. Dong Woo Oh, and we can welcome four new students to the College. Those admitted to the M. Div. program are: Mr. Ken Bergsma of Guelph, Ontario, Mr. Ryan De Jonge of Ancaster, Ontario, and Mr. Rodney Vermeulen who hails from Albany, Australia. We also welcome Jea Man Chwè as a new student in the Diploma of Theological Studies program. In addition to these four new students, we have thirteen returning students for a total of seventeen. Next year we hope to graduate two with a Master of Divinity Degree and two with a Diploma for Theological Studies.

Academic year

Besides the new Professor of Diaconology and Ecclesiology, Dr. de Visser, we also have a new instructor in Church Polity. The Board of Governors has appointed Rev. J. De Gelder of Flamborough as temporary instructor in Church Polity for a three year term. We



hereby officially welcome our brother to the teaching staff! We also take this opportunity to thank Rev. De Gelder for being the first co-ordinator of the Pastoral Training Program, a task he has done very well for six years. Dr. de Visser now takes over these duties.

The Lord has blessed faculty and students with health and strength and the work of the past academic year could proceed unhindered. We are very grateful for that.

We were privileged to have a number of special lecturers. In the fall semester Rev. Paulin Bédard of the Reformed Church of Quebec (L'Église Réformée du Québec) outlined the enormous challenges the Reformed church faces in Roman Catholic and secular Quebec and showed how they try to meet the challenge by being faithful to the Lord and his Word. Dr. Adolfo García de la Sienra, professor in the faculties of economics and philosophy at the University of Veracruz in Xalapa, spoke on "The Reformed World and Life View in Mexico." Mr. Henk Van Dooren, Director of and counsellor at the Christian Counselling Centre, conducted three workshops for the freshmen on aspects of the minister's work and counselling.

In the second semester Rev. Tony Zekveld of the United Reformed Churches gave two lectures to the sophomores on his work as a missionary in western Toronto among the Sikhs where he has laboured since 1995. Dr. Richard Peters, a public speaking expert who teaches at Tyndale University College in Toronto, conducted three sessions at the Theological College for the benefit of all the students. Near the close of the semester, Dr. Riemer Faber, Associate Professor of Classical Studies at the University of Waterloo, lectured to the entire College community on "Erasmus and the Metaphorical Sense of Scripture." All these lectures enhanced the work at the College and were a blessing.

Foreign student bursary fund

With great thankfulness we can report that this Fund could meet its objectives during the past academic year. We are very grateful for donations large and small. This is a wonderful way of enabling the training of foreign students who otherwise would not be able to study here and so eventually sending abroad Reformed preachers of the gospel! Please continue to remember this fund. There will be an opportunity to make a contribution to it this evening.

Special activities

The bond with the churches is very important to the College and so there were again the regular trips to western churches. In March and April the principal travelled to Winnipeg, Carman, and Denver to strengthen the ties with these churches by giving a lecture and preaching on Sunday. Earlier, in January, the principal also participated in a series of lectures on Leadership Training organized in the Fraser Valley by giving two presentations on the office of elder in the Old and New Testament.

Within the context of the bonds with churches it can also be mentioned that Dr. de Visser attended a Missions Committee meeting of the International Council of Reformed Churches (ICRC) in Zwolle, The Netherlands in March. The purpose of this meeting was to prepare for the upcoming ICRC meeting in Pretoria, South Africa this fall. It was to this country that the principal travelled in May to visit our sister churches there and to participate in discussions on theological education and lecture to their theological students. This was an enriching experience and gave an insight into the special challenges facing our sister churches in that country with respect to the training for the ministry. It was fitting that I could be present at the installation of Rev. P.

Boon, the successor of Dr. de Visser for the mission work in Soshanguve.

Three other conference related items can be mentioned. Dr. Gootjes was able to benefit from the Sixteenth Century Conference which was held in Toronto last October. In May Professors Geertsema and Visscher attended a three day conference on translating the New Testament at McMaster University in Hamilton. On the last day of May and the first day of June the College hosted a two day Missions Conference organized by Professors de Visser and Geertsema. This conference featured many speakers from home and abroad and attracted excellent attendance.

Finally, with respect to the work of the professors, it should be mentioned that besides preaching and speaking in the churches and writing for *Clarion*, professors sometimes speak elsewhere and work on manuscripts and endeavour to publish. Dr. Van Dam spoke on "Defending a Christian View of Marriage" for the first annual Ignite our Culture Conference sponsored by Equipping Christians for the Public Square Centre in Burlington, Ontario. Dr. Gootjes' article, "Calvin on Epicurus and the Epicureans: Background to a Remark in Article 13 of the Belgic Confession," appeared in *Calvin Theological Journal* 40 (2005) 33-48, and the senate published Dr. De Jong's meditations under the title *Treasures New and Old*, which was edited by Dr. Van Dam with the assistance of student Kristen Kottelenberg Alkema.

It is the task of the principal in the final year of his term to see to a new edition of the College Calendar, in cooperation with his colleagues. This publication got a considerable face-lift this year, due in no small measure to the work that Rev. T. G. Van Raalte volunteered to put into this project. We acknowledge his contribution with gratitude.

Library

The library is an integral component of the Theological College and we are very thankful for the competent work of our librarian, Margaret Van der Velde, and of course for the indispensable labours of the Women's Savings Action. Without the labours of these ladies there would be no library. We are profoundly grateful for the efforts of the board of this volunteer organization, as well as the diligent efforts of the many ladies who collect the money within the congregations. Thank you so much! Running a library is quite an undertaking, and I would also herewith like to thank publicly the work of our dedicated library volunteers, Mrs. Dinie Gootjes and Mrs. Harmina Vanderbruggen. Their labours are much appreciated!

This past year a major upgrade to the library computer system, as well as the network it is on, greatly enhanced the operations of the library. Books can now be electronically signed out and checked in again, and inventory taking is greatly simplified. Another big project was to create a new interface to the database used to order books by the administrative assistant and the librarian, so that professors can consult the database and place orders directly. This has cut out needless duplication of effort in terms of workflow and record keeping.

In June our librarian attended a conference of the Association of Christian Librarians held in South Carolina. She was able to attend a variety of workshops discussing developments and approaches to the many different aspects of running a library. It was also very valuable to be able to meet other librarians, working in theological libraries. Since the librarian at the College works on her own, it is both encouraging and challenging to interact with others.

Administration

The daily administration of the College is in the capable hands of Catharine Mechelse, who also has the benefit of the expert assistance of Mrs. Karen Schuurman in the book keeping department. We are thankful that after a two week absence in April due to health

reasons, Catharine Mechelse is back on her feet and enjoying her College work again. We appreciate her multifaceted work at the "front door" of the College, so to speak.

Congratulations

Three congratulatory events merit special mention in this report. On October 30 the College community, along with family and friends, could officially celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Prof. G. H. Visscher in the ministry of the Word in a joyous evening of celebration. We wish our colleague many more years of service under the blessing of the Lord. May your labours for the College, including the writing of your dissertation, prosper!

Secondly, it has recently come to my attention that our colleague, Dr. Gootjes, has now been teaching as a professor of theology for twenty-five years. He started as Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology at the Kosin Theological Seminary in Pusan, Korea as a missionary professor on behalf of our Dutch sister churches. We congratulate Dr. Gootjes on this milestone and wish him and his wife the continued blessings of the Lord in his work at the Theological College.

Finally, in terms of congratulations, this past academic year a college graduate, John Smith, received his Doctor of Philosophy degree in the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations at the University of Toronto. This was awarded in part for his dissertation on a study of selected psalms in the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible. Our brother is now an ordained minister in Albany, Australia. May his ongoing labours also be blessed.

The future

It is good to know and to remind ourselves that the churches and the school of the churches are in God's hand. He takes care of his work. At the same time we have our obligations, also in looking to the future. As churches we face a shortage of ministers and it appears that this shortage will get worse before it gets better. In order to encourage prospective students to think of the ministry of the gospel, the College

organized an evening in Hamilton (October 7, 2004) in which Professors Van Dam and Visscher spoke respectively on preparing for the ministry and life in the parsonage. Also, when Prof. Van Dam was in southern Manitoba, time was taken on a Saturday morning (March 5, 2004) to introduce the study for the ministry. Attendance at both events was encouraging. Rev. J. Visscher and also Rev. R. Schouten, along with student R. Horlings, have also organized something similar meetings in the Fraser Valley and there too attendance was good. May the Lord work in the hearts of many a love for the proclamation of the glad tidings of Jesus Christ and the shepherding of his flock! The need is there, both on the home front as well as the missionary front for labourers in the vineyard.

In closing

It is a singular privilege to work at the Theological College in the service of our risen Lord and Saviour. Indeed, I find it difficult to come up with a more glorious task than the task of preparing eager young men for ministry. It is also most encouraging to do this task with the realization that the bond of churches both here in North America, as well as in Australia, stand behind this work in prayer and in tangible support.

This is my final principal's report. The last three years have been years of considerable change, and I would like to end by expressing my heartfelt thanks for the fine cooperation I could experience with the colleagues in the senate, especially with Dr. Gootjes as vice-principal. Much is involved in the smooth operation of the college, and besides the support of the colleagues, I would also like to thank our Librarian, Margaret Van der Velde as well as our Administrative Assistant, Catharine Mechelse, for the excellent manner in which we could work together. The same applies to the Board of Governors. The work that the governors do behind the scenes is considerable and I wish to express my gratitude for their support and the fine working relationship.

May the Lord our God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, graciously continue to bless this school of the churches!





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The Missional Church Movement (Part 1 of 2)

An abbreviated version of this article was given as a speech at the College Evening of September 9, 2005

The missionary calling of the church appears to be a topic that attracts much interest and debate in the Canadian Reformed Churches. When I listen to discussions and debates, it seems to me that our churches are in a process of re-evaluating their missionary calling in this country.

To illustrate this: in September 2005 I have received invitations from several local congregations to come and speak to them, and they all want me to speak on the topic of "Evangelism by the local church." I referred to discussions and debates; on the one hand there are those among us that feel that our churches are too inward looking and that we should do much more in the area of evangelism. On the other hand there are those that have certain fears, for example the fear that we might become Arminian if we get involved in evangelism projects.

Sometimes the matter is formulated in terms of a dilemma. Should we be doing evangelism projects *outside* the church if there is so much work to be done *inside* the church? Should we really go out into the world in order to save a few people if we are losing church members because of pervading worldliness?

Yet, no one can deny that the church has a missionary calling. The question is, what is our calling in the present circumstances? What does the Lord expect us to do? How should our churches use the "talents" which the

Lord has given us in this time and age, in this country?

We are not the only ones wrestling with these issues. I would like to introduce you to a new evangelism movement, the so-called Missional Church (MC) movement. I shall describe the movement and evaluate it. Having done that I intend to raise the question of how the Canadian Reformed Churches are challenged by this movement.

Missional

In recent years the word "Missional" has become a new buzzword. Ten years ago few people had heard of it, but now you see it everywhere. An internet search on the word "Missional" gives you 150,000 hits in less than a second. We hear about missional church, missional theology, and even "the missional God."

Centres for evangelism promote the missional church vision by organizing missional courses and seminars. Theological seminaries offer courses in missional theology. Princeton Theological Seminary has appointed a Professor of Missional and Ecumenical Theology. Churches have jumped on the bandwagon as well. The Mennonite Church of Canada, for example, describes itself as "a church with a missional vision."

Historically speaking, the beginning of the MC movement in North America was marked by the publication of the book *Missional Church. A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* in 1998. A team of authors from various backgrounds (Methodist, Baptist, Anabaptist, Reformed) worked together to describe their vision for a missional church.

There had been developments leading up to the publication of this book. The editor, Darrell L. Guder, reports: "This book arises out of a study and research process inaugurated by the Gospel and Our Culture Network. The Network emerged in North America in the late 1980s as the continuation, on this side of the Atlantic, of the Gospel and Culture discussion initiated in Great Britain during 1983 by the publication of Bishop Leslie Newbigin's short monograph, *The Other Side of 1984: Questions for the Churches*. The concerns raised by the bishop were certainly not new. But as a missionary statesman and leader who had returned after decades in India to minister in Britain, Newbigin analyzed with penetrating clarity the challenge presented by the changing context of Western society" (p. 3).

This quote illustrates that Bishop Leslie Newbigin is considered to be the spiritual father of the MC movement, although it is not clear to what extent the late bishop himself would have been happy with the direction the MC movement took as it emerged in the 1990s.

The quoted passage also reveals something else: the MC movement believes that North American society has changed dramatically, but that the church has failed to appreciate this. The society has become post-modern, post-Christian, and secularized. North America has become a mission field. But the church clings to an outdated view of evangelism as if nothing has changed. The church should analyze the dominant culture of the day and adapt accordingly. Therefore, in the book *Missional Church*, a chapter is devoted to analyzing the North American

culture with its consumerism, its bureaucracy, its technological development, etc.

The MC movement calls for a new view of the missionary calling of the church. They criticize traditional ways of doing evangelism and even more recent evangelism approaches such as used by Willow Creek and the seeker friendly evangelism movement. According to the MC movement we must break with the traditional idea of a congregation which gathers in a neat church building and which operates one or more evangelism projects with the aim of attracting people to join the church.

The MC movement believes that evangelism should change dramatically in two ways. First, the church must break free from its comfortable position in North American society and become more of a contrast community, a community that is different from the society it lives in. Secondly, the church must become less church-centered in its thinking and regain its “sense of sentness” into the world.

Let me explain both of these characteristics briefly.

Contrast community

The MC movement believes that the churches have become ineffective as a result of a long period in history during which there was a close relationship between the churches and the society at large, an era which is called the Christendom era. This term “Christendom” is very important in MC thinking. The MC movement divides church history in three stages: pre-Christendom, Christendom, and post-Christendom.

Pre-Christendom was the time of the early church, the first three centuries, when the church had no political rights. Despite hardships and persecutions it was a glorious time for the church. The church had a missionary character and Christianity spread all over the Roman world.

The second period started when Emperor Constantine recognized the Christian church as a legal religion and

gave it a privileged position. This had an enormous impact on the church. From being a weak and sometimes persecuted minority, the church suddenly moved to a position of power and superiority. From being aliens and sojourners in the world, Christians became settlers and citizens. A kind of merger of church and society developed which is called “Christendom.” During this period the church had a lot of influence in the world. But at the same time the world had a lot of influence in the church.

The third phase of church history is the post-Christendom era. The church has become, or is becoming, a minority without much influence. Churches are losing members by the thousands. The ever-growing cities have become new mission fields. The churches try to stem the tide, but what we see is that the churches are retreating to suburbs and small-town, rural areas.

How should our churches use the “talents” which the Lord has given us in this time and age, in this country?

These, then, are the three major eras of church history according to the MC movement. It is clear that nearly all MC supporters share a view of the Christendom era which is very negative. They believe that the church compromised its calling, that the church was taken captive by the world, and that the church was “domesticated.” According to this view the Reformation was no more than a partial liberation of the church. The church was liberated from Roman Catholic bondage; however, the church of the Reformation continued to function within the “Christendom” mindset. This mindset was exported to North America as well. Though the USA and Canada did not recognize Christianity as the official religion, in effect there has

always been a kind of Christendom situation, practically speaking.¹

The concern of the MC movement is that this so-called “Christendom-mindset” is still influencing the life and practice of the churches, even if we have already entered the post-Christendom era. Therefore, the MC movement says: “This is a time for a dramatically new vision. The current predicament of churches in North America requires more than a mere tinkering with long-assumed notions about the identity and mission of the church. Instead... there is a need for reinventing or rediscovering the church in this new kind of world” (*Missional Church*, p. 77).

How should the church then take position in the society, according to the MC movement? A phrase that is used consistently in MC literature is the phrase “alternative or contrast community” (*Missional Church*, p. 9).

In a follow-up book, entitled *Treasure in Clay Jars*, the authors of *Missional Church* have included a chapter called “Taking Risks as a Contrast Community.” In this chapter we read case studies about congregations that willingly move into neighbourhoods that are plagued by drug use and burglaries, congregations that choose against middle-class materialism and identify with the poorest people in town. Generally speaking, missional churches are those that minister to the dropouts and the outcasts of society.

It is interesting that the MC movement has found common ground in their view of the church. Although the movement is made up of birds of different theological feathers (Methodist, Reformed, Baptist, Anabaptist), and although they acknowledge that there are various views of the church among them,² they have found a common position in the viewpoint that the church should be a contrast community. It is my impression that the Anabaptist tradition, with its critical approach toward government and society, is quite influential in the MC movement. Michael W. Goheen has made the same observation.³



Sent-ness

MC supporters emphasize that the church is “being sent” into the world. The church of the Christendom era was too static and isolated, we are told.⁴ It was too ecclesio-centric (church centred) in its thinking: too much focused on getting people to leave the world and join the church. Instead, the MC movement believes that the church should regain its “sense of sent-ness,” its sense of being a people moving into the world to be a witness and a sign of God’s reign.

It comes as no surprise to us that the MC movement is not overly enthusiastic about the marks of the true church as confessed in Belgic Confession, Article 29 (true preaching, right administration of the sacraments, Christian discipline). These marks are considered to be outdated.⁵ In the sixteenth century they may have been useful as boundary markers to distinguish the true church from the false church, but in the current situation we need a new approach to describe the essence of the church.

The four classic attributes of the church (the church as one, holy, catholic, and apostolic) are treated with more reverence, but the MC movement prefers to change their order and to redefine their meaning. The number one attribute of the church should not be its unity or its holiness, we are told, but its apostolicity (*Missional Church*, p. 255), and then not “apostolic” in the classic sense of being founded on the teaching of the apostles, but rather “apostolic” in the literal sense of being sent.

This view of the church as “being sent” is closely connected to theological developments over the past fifty years. Guder, in his inaugural address at Princeton (2002),⁶ describes how his thinking has been influenced by Karl Barth and David Bosch. Time and space do not permit to describe this background fully, but we need to mention the so-called *missio Dei* concept here.⁷

The term “*missio Dei*” means “mission of God.” It is used to emphasize that mission work is God’s activity. On first hearing, this sounds quite positive of course. Who would want to deny that mission and evangelism is God’s work? Reformed authors have always said the same. However, Karl Barth introduced the term “God’s mission” to create a contrast with the “church’s mission.” Subsequently, the term “*missio Dei*” became very popular. Many people started to use it, but it was given a wider,

Generally speaking, missional churches are those that minister to the dropouts and the outcasts of society.

more horizontal meaning than Barth had intended, eventually referring to God’s concern for the whole world.⁸ In fact, “*missio Dei*” has become quite a vague concept. Generally speaking it conveys the idea that God is on a mission to the world and that He is establishing his Kingdom in the world.

At the same time, it is not so clear what the character of that kingdom is and how it is going to be established. Will there be a day of judgment? Will everybody have to bow the knee to Christ one day? There is vagueness in the area of eschatology. The same applies to salvation. The traditional goals of mission work (salvation of souls, planting of the church) are considered to be outdated. But what, then, is salvation? Is it reconciliation with God? Is it forgiveness of sins? There is vagueness in the area of soteriology as well.

As far as the identity of the church is concerned, it seems that the church is not so much seen as a place of safety,

but rather a movement into the world. The emphasis is not on defending the true gospel and guarding the boundaries of the church, but rather on being sent into the world and representing God’s grace there.

In the next article we shall evaluate the MC movement and see what challenges it raises for us.

¹ The Missional Church movement refers to a “functional Christendom” situation in this regard. Quote: “Even when the legal structures of Christendom have been removed (as in North America), the legacy continues as a pattern of powerful traditions, attitudes, and social structures that we describe as “functional Christendom.” Guder, *Missional Church*, p. 6.

² Guder writes: “The definition of the term *church* itself continues to present challenges to us.” *Missional Church*, p. 8.

³ Michael W. Goheen, “The Missional Church: Ecclesiological Discussion in the Gospel and Our Culture Network in North America,” in *Missiology: An International Review* (Vol. XXX, No. 4, October 2002), p. 479-490. He writes: “It is the Anabaptist tradition – which Bosch calls elsewhere the alternative community and countercultural model (...) – that has been gaining ground and begun to function as the dominant model in the North American context among many who are calling for a missionary encounter with North American culture.” (p. 483)

⁴ Shenk, “New Wineskins for New Wine,” *IBMR* (April 2005), p. 73.

⁵ Hunsberger judges that these marks “narrowed the church’s definition of itself toward a “place where” idea.” In other words, in his opinion these marks became stumbling blocks for the church’s missionary calling. *Missional church*, p. 80.

⁶ Darrell L. Guder, “From Mission and Theology to Missional Theology”, in *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* (Vol. XXIV, Nr. 1, New Series, 2003), p. 36-54.

⁷ For a broader treatment of the subject, see David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (New York: Orbis, 1991), p. 389-393.

⁸ See Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, p. 391-392, for an excellent overview.

Presentation of the Women's Savings Action at the College Evening



Left to right: Mrs. J. Van Dam, speaking, Mrs. D. Gootjes, Mrs. C. Nienhuis

Mr. President, Members of the Board and Faculty, Graduate, Brothers and Sisters:

During the last academic year, many changes have taken place in the library of the Theological College. And because they are closely connected with the financial contributions of the Women's Savings Action, we want to show some of these changes tonight.

The most obvious improvement is in the way books are checked in and out. It used to be that all books had a card in an envelope in the back. If you wanted to take a book out, you had to write out your name and the date on the card and put it in a little box. Once a week a volunteer would come and put all these cards in their proper order in this big box. Later, the volunteer would sit down with a cart full of books that had been returned that week, find the cards belonging in the books from between the hundreds of cards in the big box, and put them back in the book. I have often done both the checking in and out of books. Every time I did this, I had one great fear: what if I would drop the big box and all the hundreds of cards came spilling out to fly all over the place. . . . Each one has a letter code and a number. The letters would not be so much of a problem – our library uses only a few combinations; but those numbers. . . .

Does BX 2685.2.S55E9 come before or after BX 2545.E9H39? And how about BX 2680.T4.B42? After ten minutes of that, all numbers start doing a little dance before your eyes and the cards end up in a very “creative” order. So having to put all those cards back in the box has been a recurrent nightmare.

Now there is a new dream system: all books have a bar code on the outside, like your groceries. When you want to take books out, you just go to the computer with the scanner, scan your library card and the backs of all the books you want to take out,

and you are done. The volunteer is done too, no cards to sort, no boxes to drop. We don't do anything about it. When the books are returned, the only thing a volunteer has to do is scan the books that have come in. A lot quicker and a lot less stressful!

Then last year the Women's Savings Action financed the acquisition of a very special scanner. It contains a chip with all the information about which books should be on the shelves and which books are out. This year Margaret, our librarian, with the help of a few eager volunteers, did a complete inventory by scanning all the books on the library shelves. Quite a job, but a lot less work than printing out a long, long list of all the books that are supposed to be on the shelves – that is, around 26,000 of them – and going through the books in the library, comparing their numbers to those on the list. This scanner does not make doing an inventory a dream, but it certainly is no longer the impossible nightmare it was.

As you can see, there have been a lot of changes at the library. With full computerization it has truly become a library of the twenty-first century. We have to keep up with the times! That is good.

And yet something has not changed and that is also good. The funds for the library are still provided by the Women's Savings Action. Just as in the days of those green cards, women of the church are still saving and collecting money for the purchase of books and periodicals. Why do it this way? Why not simply have an amount set aside on the budget of the Theological College? Wouldn't that be a lot easier? Especially in a time when everyone is so busy already. Well, you know, if the amount for the library would simply appear on a budget, there would really be something missing: the element of a labour of love by the women of the church wanting to show their support for the work of the training for the ministry.

When our librarian, Margaret Van der Velde, attended a conference of Christian librarians, she found out that she was in a very enviable position; she was librarian in a library which had no problem getting funds! Yes, the Lord has richly blessed the decision taken many years ago to organize the Women's Savings Action. And we know that the dedicated efforts of the representatives and all those who assist in collecting and counting, and the generous donations of all who give to this most worthwhile cause, have never been taken for granted, but have always been greatly appreciated by the whole College community.

It is with great gratitude to the Lord that we may announce that during this past year a total of \$34,912.92 was collected, making it possible to hand over a pledge of \$30,000 for this coming year. A heartfelt thank you to all of you.



Press Release of the meeting of the Board of Governors held at the Theological College in Hamilton on September 8, 2005.

The chairman, Rev. J. Moesker, opened the meeting with Scripture reading and prayer. He welcomed all the governors to the meeting and he also extended a special welcome to Dr. C. Van Dam who attended his last meeting as principal, to Dr. N.H. Gootjes who will be the new principal, and to Mr. A.C. van Leeuwen who was present on behalf of the Deputies for the Training for the Ministry of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. After the Minutes of the Board meeting of February 10, 2005 were adopted the agenda was established.

The Board dealt with the following reports:

1. The Academic Committee reported that interviews had been conducted with Mr. Ken Bergsma, Mr. Ryan DeJonge, and Mr. Rodney Vermeulen. These brothers were admitted to the M. Div. program.
2. The Finance and Property Committee presented its Twenty-third Annual Report. Audited Financial Statements for period ending December 31, 2004 were approved by the Board. The Committee also presented a budget for 2006. There will be no increase in the assessment for the churches.
3. Rev. R.A. Schouten and Rev. W.B. Slomp reported on their visits to the lectures at the Theological College on January 7-8, 2004. They concluded their report by writing that the instruction offered is "done in humility and in accordance with the Scriptures and the Confessions. May the Lord continue to strengthen the professors and the students in their labours."

Some discussion took place regarding whether the number of sermons prepared by students in the course of their training is sufficient.

The feeling of the Board was that the present requirement of nine sermons in the course of study is sufficient. It would be very difficult to find space in the current curriculum to allow for a greater number of sermon proposals.

4. The Senate reported that all courses for 2004-2005 were completed in accordance with the adopted program of studies. The Board expressed gratitude that the teaching ministry of the College could continue without hindrance.
5. The Principal gave a well-rounded survey of college life during the last academic year.
6. In his report, the Registrar made us aware of the requests for information and admission over the course of the last year. As a result, three new students could be admitted to the M. Div. program as noted above.
7. Our Librarian submitted a comprehensive report which indicates that all aspects of the Library are running smoothly. Modernization is continuing in the areas of inventory control, book ordering, indexing, computer upgrades, and cataloguing software. She also submitted a report on the annual conference of the Association of Christian Librarians she attended in June. She gave an overview of the workshops she attended and concluded that the Conference enabled her to think critically about her work at the College and to compare it to others. Without any fellow librarians at the College, participation in the conference is invaluable.
8. The Lecture Schedule for 2005-2006 was approved as presented by the Senate.
9. The Convocation Committee reported on its activities in preparation of the September 9, 2005 College Evening. A letter was received from a brother suggesting that the College make a video recording of every convocation and

distribute a copy to the churches. The Board favoured this idea and instructed the Convocation Committee to implement this and to make sure that the video recording is of good quality.

10. The Faber-Holwerda Bursary Fund Committee reported that some bursary money was awarded to students. The Selles Book Prize was awarded to Albert Gootjes at the 2004 Convocation.
11. The Publication Foundation has published a book of meditations authored by Dr. J. De Jong. The Board expressed its gratitude that this work could be completed. Rev. G.Ph. van Popta was appointed to the Publication Foundation as member of the Academic Committee.
12. Dr. Van Dam presented a report on visits by the Faculty to the supporting churches. He visited the churches of Classis Manitoba in March and April of this year. Through these visits the bond between the College and the supporting churches was strengthened and many potential students of the College were reached.
13. Prof. G.H. Visscher filed a report on the 2005 Bingham Colloquium at McMaster University he attended in May. This year's conference focused on concerns about the text of the New Testament and its translation. This conference helped him in terms of keeping abreast of ongoing research and developments in the area of NT textual studies and translation.
14. Dr. A.J. de Visser and Prof. J. Geertsema reported regarding a mission conference organized by the College in the spring of 2005. The conference drew forty-five participants including active and retired missionaries, members of mission boards, council members of sending churches, theological students, and other interested persons. A total of eleven lectures were offered during the conference. Participants were asked to evaluate

the conference and gave it high marks both in terms of the quality of the presentations and in the opportunities to network with other mission workers.

15. The principal submitted a report on his visit to South Africa. The purpose of the visit was to participate in discussions and to give input and advice on theological education within the context of the challenges of our South African sister churches are currently facing. Details of this visit have been published in *Clarion*.
16. In March of this year Dr. de Visser participated in the meeting of the ICRC Missions Committee in Zwolle, The Netherlands. He found it to be valuable not only in terms of papers presented but also in terms of contact with other leaders in the area of mission and evangelism.
17. Rev. J. de Gelder wrote a report concerning the activities of the Pastoral Training Program over the last two years. All aspects of the program have been functioning well and the PTP is well-appreciated by both the students and the churches. Rev. de Gelder expressed gratitude for being able to function as the coordinator for the program over the last six years. From now on, the PTP will be under the direction of Dr. de Visser. The Board expressed gratitude for the contributions of Rev. de Gelder during the first and formative years of the PTP.

Deputies for the Training for the Ministry in the Free Reformed Churches of Australia inquired by letter about the possibility of expanding the PTP to include the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. The Academic Committee recommended to the Board that this be approved in principle, provided that the Australian churches follow the adopted guidelines of the program and also bear the costs of any student working in Australia, and

provided that a student himself desires to work in Australia. A positive aspect of this possibility is that students working in Australia from June to August would be exposed to the full range of activities in church life including teaching catechism and participating in making family visits. The Board decided to endorse the recommendation of the Academic Committee in this matter.

18. A report of the Ad-hoc Committee on Permanent Principalship served the Board with several recommendations towards having a permanent principal. A fifth professor would lighten the teaching load for the remaining professors and would make the rotating principalship more bearable and fruitful. A fifth professor would also allow the College to entertain requests from prospective M.Th. students. However, the Committee was not sure that a fifth professor would allow for a permanent principalship – especially in view of the expanding role of the principal. The Board mandated the Committee to study this further with the guidelines that the Committee is not any longer bound exclusively to considering permanent principalship to be the ultimate goal.
19. The Governance Committee had provided all the Board members with a new edition of the Faculty Handbook. The Board approved By-law 12 in principle. This is a consolidation of all the by-laws which will become the Operating Bylaw of the College. The Board appointed Brs. Moesker and Slomp to carefully read through this by-law to flag any errors by the January or February, 2006 meeting of the Board.

In other matters, Dr. G. Nederveen and Rev. G.Ph. van Popta were appointed to visit the lectures in the fall of 2005 and Revs. Moesker and Slomp are appointed to do the same in the spring of 2006.

An earlier request from the Deputies for the Training for the Ministry of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia to consider the possibility of distance education was considered by the Senate. The Senate recommended not going in this direction due to the difficulty of teaching languages and exegesis without direct contact between teacher and student. In addition, the College lacks expertise, manpower, and equipment to carry out a distance learning project. The Board adopted this recommendation from the Senate.

After various items of correspondence passed our review, the chairman asked Br. Van Leeuwen to close the meeting in prayer.

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

Press Release of Classis Central Ontario, held September 16, 2005

On behalf of the convening church of Flamborough, Rev. J. de Gelder called the meeting to order. He requested the singing of Hymn 8:1, 14. He read from Exodus 3:1-12 and reminded us that though the church is weak by human standards she enjoys the holy presence of the Lord. He opened in prayer and then welcomed the delegates.

The Church of Burlington-Waterdown examined the credentials. The churches were properly represented. There was one additional instruction.

Rev. de Gelder declared Classis constituted. The following officers took their place: chairman: Rev. J. Huijgen; vice-chairman: Rev. M. Jagt; clerk: Rev. W. den Hollander.

Rev. Huijgen thanked the Church of Flamborough for its work in convening Classis. He gave thanks the Church of

Church News

Called by the Church of Lincoln,
Ontario:

Rev. W. den Hollander
of Toronto, Ontario.

Flamborough is still being served by a minister of the Word. He noted the vacancy of Burlington Fellowship and wished them the Lord's blessing. He also gave thanks that: the Church of Toronto has recently moved into its new building; on May 1 the Church of Burlington Ebenezer celebrated its fiftieth anniversary; Rev. J. Mulder has been able to serve the churches for fifty years and still continues to be an active minister in the churches.

The provisional agenda was adopted.

The church visitors reported on visits to all the churches. These were received with gratitude.

The Church of Burlington Fellowship found the classical archives in good order. Classis received the report of the treasurer. The treasurer recommended an assessment of \$2.00 per communicant member for Classis and \$2.00 per communicant member for Regional Synod. This was adopted. The treasurer was thanked for his work.

The Church of Burlington-Waterdown reported the books of the treasurer were found to be in good order. The church for the Fund for Financial aid to Students for the Ministry will give its report to the next classis. The

Committee for Needy Churches submitted its recommendations. Classis agreed to support Ottawa as recommended and to the proposed assessment of \$22.50 per communicant member. The Church of Burlington-Waterdown reported the books for the Fund for Needy Churches were found to be in good order.

Classis was also informed that an observer was sent to the North American Synod of the Free Church of Scotland as well as the June Classis of the United Reformed Churches in Southern Ontario.

The chairman thanked the churches for their work.

In accordance with Article 44 C.O., the churches reported that the ministry of the office bearers is being continued and the decisions of the major assemblies are being honoured. Three churches received advice on matters of governing and discipline.

The Church of Burlington Fellowship requested monthly pulpit supply. Classis granted this request for another year.

Mr. E. Schouten was appointed to the Committee for Needy Churches. All other appointments remained the same.

Delegated to Regional Synod East (November 9): ministers: Rev. de Gelder and Rev. den Hollander, alternates: Rev. Huijgen and Rev. G. Nederveen; elders: G. Nordeman and I. Vanderee, alternates: H. Kampen and E. Pol.

The Church of Ottawa was appointed to convene the next classis to be held on December 9 in the Burlington Ebenezer church building at 9:00 a.m. The following officers were suggested: chairman: Rev. de Gelder; vice-chairman: Rev. Huijgen; clerk: Rev. Jagt.

There were no questions. The chairman asked whether censure was necessary. It was not required. The Acts were read and adopted. The Press Release was approved for publication. The chairman thanked the brothers for their good co-operation. After the singing of Hymn 8:3, 4 he closed the meeting with prayer.

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

