

Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

Volume 58, No. 16 ■ July 31, 2009

*Suffering and evil seem to cry out
against the existence of God*



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Paul the Joker

*Both man and woman are to serve God
and Him alone*

There is always discussion about the place and task of women in the church. Last year in our Dutch sister churches a survey was done on what the members thought about women serving in the offices. It appears that one third feels that women should be ordained as office bearers, one third was against this ordination, and one third really did not care.

Shocking, really. More than half would not oppose women's ordination in the offices of elder and minister. I don't think that the situation is the same in our Canadian churches. But we are bucking the trend that tends towards inclusion of women in the offices.

We may not explain a passage in such a way that it factually no longer exists or is made to say the opposite of what it, in fact, says

The Synod of Zwolle decided that further study was necessary and instructed deputies to provide the churches with relevant conclusions on this matter. It will be a three-tiered approach: the members of the churches were called to discuss the matter, the professors at the Theological University were exhorted to publish studies on key Scripture passages, and the deputies would serve the next Synod with an official report.

It has not been so long ago that women in these churches were given the right to vote for office

bearers. Some then expressed fear that soon the women would be called to serve in office. Call it "the slippery slope" argument.

I have never accepted the slippery slope reasoning. But I must admit that present developments overseas do make me a bit uneasy. If you take step one (voting), will it lead to step two (serving)? While this is not necessarily the case, our sister churches appear poised to prove me wrong. Sigh. I wish it were not so.

Scripture passage

My concerns became stronger when I read a series of articles published by an emeritus minister of our sister churches in the magazine *De Reformatie* (Achtergronden, *De Reformatie*, Vol. 84, No. 11, December 13, 2008). These articles deal with a well-known passage from 1 Timothy 2:11-15. This passage has been understood as one of the classic proof texts against the ordination of women.

It says there that a woman must learn in quietness and submission. She may not teach or have authority over a man. She must be silent. The reason is, "For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived. It was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner." The woman was the last one created; yet she was the first one to fall. Her leadership led to rebellion.

Therefore the Apostle Paul writes that woman must again take in her proper place. Her task is to bear children. She is saved with a view to the fulfilling of her task as mother. Christ restores women as mothers. This is not meant exclusively as if each woman must be a mother. It is meant as a general



Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd., Winnipeg, MB

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One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5
Phone: (204) 663-9000 Fax: (204) 663-9202

Subscriptions: clarionadmin@premierpublishing.ca

Advertisements: clarionads@premierpublishing.ca

Website: www.premierpublishing.ca

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Subscription Rates for 2009

	Regular Mail	Air Mail
Canada*	\$49.00*	\$ 81.00*
U.S.A. U.S. Funds	\$62.00	\$ 80.00
International	\$90.00	\$135.00

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Full Colour Display Advertisements: \$21.00 per column inch

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Agreement No. 40063293; PAP Registration No. 9907; ISSN 0383-0438

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rule: the first task of women in the church is to be mothers. In this way they help to build the church of God. Last I heard, man cannot bear a child. This is exclusively the blessed place of woman.

The emeritus minister who discussed this passage in *De Reformatie* explains that Paul was in his own way a joker. He was exaggerating a bit here and showing a sense of humour. It is a kind of a tongue-in-cheek statement: women, mind your step, you were last created and first fallen! The emeritus adds that Paul was not stating a general rule for all time. He was only kidding. It would be wrong therefore to close the offices in the church to women on the basis of this text. Paul was merely joking. Lighten up!

Apostolic humour

I am sure that the Apostle Paul had a keen sense of humour. The emeritus finds evidence of this humour especially in the letter of Paul to Philemon. The NIV translators tell us that this letter to Philemon was written in "a lighthearted tone which he creates with [α] wordplay."

The same tone would be evident in 1 Timothy 2:14. Paul was only approaching a heavy matter in a lighthearted way. If ever Paul needed to use humour, it was in addressing women in the church as to their place and task. We have in this passage, therefore, evidence of tasteful apostolic humour.

I can accept that humour is very important, especially in stressful situations and when dealing with weighty matters. I have myself always appreciated and valued the use of humour. Not everyone always laughed at my jokes, alas, but the use of self-deprecating humour often serves to ease the tension of the moment.

This time, however, I could not laugh. I do not think that Paul was trying to be funny in 1 Timothy 2:14. I rather think that Paul was being very serious on a highly sensitive point. Women are not called to serve in the offices in the church. Paul makes clear that this is not something new but was the case already at creation. We are faced with a divine ordinance and that is no laughing matter.

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Woman was not created to serve man. This is a terrible misunderstanding. Both man and woman are to serve God and Him alone. *But the point is that God has appointed the woman to assist man in the service of the Lord. She has not done so, as is evident in the fall. But her position has been restored in Christ. Man cannot proceed without woman: she is the mother of all the living (Gen 3:11). But she does again have to take in her proper place. That's Paul's drift.*

She is not called to leadership in the church. The ordinance of creation is not abolished by Christ but finds new meaning in Him. Did He not say, "From the beginning it was not so. . ." (cf. Matt 19:8)? Woman is restored in her office to assist man in serving God. This service requires joyful and voluntary submission. It precludes being in an office of authority. That is the apostolic teaching.

Freedom of exegesis?

Our Dutch emeritus is quite convinced that the Apostle Paul was a humorous man. Besides the text in 1 Timothy, he has only the letter to Philemon as possible proof for Paul's being a funny man. It is not really a solid basis on which to exegete (explain) a key passage.

Proper explanation of Scripture means first that we take the text seriously. It says what it says. It is true that in the Reformed tradition there has always been the acceptance of a certain freedom of exegesis. Not everyone explains a text in the same way. Agreed. But we may not explain a passage in such a way that it factually no longer exists or is made to say the opposite of what it, in fact, says. We should expect better especially from our emeriti whose life-long vocation it has been to explain what it says.

Our emeritus makes clear that being created earlier does not mean having a lower rank. *Earlier* is not by definition *lower*. Otherwise mankind would be lesser than animals. Cute. I like his sense of humour. He is right, of course. We don't have to go back to the sci-fi thriller "*Planet of the Apes*."

*Women, as mothers,
help to build the church of God.*



But Genesis 2 makes clear that the creation of woman *after* man does have a specific reason. The woman is to be a suitable *helper* for the man. This is a specific ordinance of God. We cannot get around this ordinance. Paul concludes *on this basis* that a woman may not hold an office in the church. Genesis 2 is not a humorous anecdote but further revelation on how God sets the relationships and determines tasks. Whatever freedom of exegesis we have does not allow us to explain away God's clearly revealed will.

It is not side-note but an important biblical reference. Paul was hardly a comedian.



R. Ijbema



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A Masterpiece (Part 1)



MATTHEW 13:52

“Ascribe to the LORD, O mighty ones, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.”

Psalm 29:1

The world is a masterpiece. That is something all mankind agrees upon. Any human being, on his one-way journey from birth to end, is impressed by what he sees. And if not, just bring him over here and show him the wild beauty we are surrounded by in the Fraser Valley. It’s a masterpiece.

But who is the Master behind the work? The Bible states it is the one true God. Behind creation, you have to hear the voice of the Lord, the Master’s voice. One day He said, “Let there be light.” And there was light.

And the Lord had more to say than just that grand opening. He had words for earth, wind, and water, for animals and humans. The voice of the Master had the right frequency to start atoms vibrating. The voice of the Master had enough volume to show the seas their place and the mountains too. The voice of the Master was tender enough to call mankind into being, male and female. A masterpiece.

The Bible tells us that we see the hand of the Master and that we hear the voice of the Master through his work of creation and preservation. But people today take a different view. They say the awe comes from within ourselves. They say it is only human to be impressed by the world surrounding you. The story of the beauty of the world is not the story of a Creator, they say. The creation story, in their opinion, is only an invention of the human mind. The

beauty of the world is in the eye of the beholder – and that’s it.

Psalm 29 was given by the Holy Spirit in a world in which people did not think the awe they felt was just something they imagined. They knew their fear at the powers of nature came from without. But from whom or what?

The answer of the nations inhabiting and surrounding the Promised Land was that there must be countless powers behind every occurrence of the might of nature. In, with, and under the natural phenomena, you sense the power of the gods. There is the god of the sun, there is the goddess of spring – you name it!

In the days when the Holy Spirit moved David to write Psalm 29, the most revered god was Baal, the lord of thunder. What is as awesome as a dark sky when a thunderstorm draws near? What is as frightening as lightning when it strikes near you? What is as threatening as the thunder rolling in the mountains of the Promised Land? It is not a surprise that the god who governs the storms and the rains became number one in the circle of gods in the not-yet-holy land. Everybody knew of him, and if not, the wild and dangerous songs and dances of the priests of Baal made him known.

But then the Holy Spirit inspires David to write Psalm 29. In the name of God, David proclaims the domain of the Lord: “Ascribe to the

Lord, O mighty ones, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.”

What “mighty ones”? Mighty men? Maybe, but not likely. Mighty heavenly forces, angels, then? It’s possible. But I think that when David mentions the mighty ones, he basically becomes “a heathen to the heathens.” He says, “What if there were a circle of all the gods, of Baal and the like. Who, if such a round table existed, would be the Master amidst his non-peers?”

I would not be surprised if one day a clay tablet was found, inscribed with a song of Baal, and opening like this, “Ascribe to Baal glory and strength...” But David, through the Holy Spirit, shouts out: “Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name.” The Lord Yahweh is Master, not Baal!

So that is the message of this psalm: Creation is a masterpiece of the Lord. And no, we still do not all agree. Three thousand years ago, people believed in the power of Baal. But David says, “Give honour to the Lord!” Nowadays, people believe that the beginning and existence of all is just a coincidence. But we say, “Give honour to the Lord!”

This world is a masterpiece, brought forth by the one Master Himself. Even today, it is in need of being carried by God’s voice and power and love. That is the claim of Psalm 29, be it in a world of a multitude of gods, or in a world without any god. Glory to the Lord!



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God: The Architect of Evil? (Part 1 of 2)

As of late the subject of apologetics is receiving more attention in our circles and for this we may be glad. It's been a long time coming. Apologetics is basically the defence of the Christian faith. Apologetics deals with important issues we encounter when we speak with non-Christians. In this two-part series, I want to consider one of those important issues, namely the problem of evil. I should note at the outset that is not going to be an exhaustive treatment of this important subject. There's a lot that could be written about it, but these articles will only be introductory in nature.

The problem of evil is addressed by apologetics. As a discipline, apologetics has its roots in what the Bible says in 1 Peter 3:15, "But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect." This is a command that comes to all believers, young and old alike. We are to be prepared to give an answer; literally it says, "be prepared to do apologetics." In other words, be prepared to give a careful, reasoned defence for what

you believe.

If you speak regularly with unbelievers, you start to see patterns emerge. There are certain key objections that come up regularly. These objections have always been there and they've often left believers speechless, not knowing what to say. That's why apologetics is important – it equips us to have an answer. Now maybe it won't be an answer that unbelievers appreciate or find convincing, but we should still be able to give them a well-thought out answer to any objections that they might have to the Christian faith.

The resurgence of Atheism

Over the last couple of years, there have been a number of popular books by atheists. For instance, Richard Dawkins wrote *The God Delusion*. Dawkins is a biologist and he argues that belief in God closes people's minds to science, oppresses women and children, and stands in the way of the evolution of the human race. Christopher Hitchens wrote *God is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*. Hitchens argues that atrocities performed in the name of religion throughout history make a solid case against God. However,

there was another book that also came out and it too received a lot of publicity. It's by a former atheist, Antony Flew. His book is entitled *There is a God: How the World's Most Notorious Atheist Changed His Mind*. Now Flew hasn't become a Christian, at least not yet. However, he did make the move from denying God's existence to believing in God's existence and in this book he explains how.

First he explains how he became an atheist as a teenager. There was one particular issue that drove him to this position. Antony Flew's father was a minister, a Christian preacher. Actually, he was a man of some importance in his church and this led him to do a lot of travelling throughout Europe. And he was able to take his wife and son on those travels. Antony Flew was in Europe in the time right before World War II. In Germany, he observed the Nazi preparations for the holocaust, the anti-Jewish signs and regulations. He says, "Such experiences sketched the background of my youthful life and for me, as for many others, presented an inescapable challenge to the existence of an all-powerful God of love." The seeds of atheism were planted and they started to bear

fruit in high school where he says, "I was regularly arguing with other twelfth graders that the idea of a God who is both omnipotent [all-powerful] and perfectly good is incompatible with the manifest evils and imperfections of the world." It was partly this problem, what we call the problem of evil, that led Antony Flew to become an atheist.

Taking the problem seriously

We have to take the problem of evil seriously. This is the most serious objection that an unbeliever can bring against the truth of the Christian faith. Suffering and evil seem to cry out against the existence of God, at least a God who is both all-good and all-powerful. Look around you and you'll see man's cruelty, stories of oppression and hatred, poverty and racism. Even in the natural world, we see suffering and pain: birth defects, parasites, cancer, starvation, hurricanes, tornadoes, wildfires, earthquakes, and we could go on.

We need to take all of this seriously. We must insist upon the reality and the serious nature of evil. Evil is real and it is ugly. Suffering is real and we can't just pretend that it doesn't exist.

The problem of evil has been wrestled with not only by theologians and philosophers and people who study apologetics, but also by novelists. One of the most famous examples is from Fyodor Dostoevsky. I think Dostoevsky captures the essence of the problem very accurately in a well-known passage from his novel *The Brothers Karamazov*. It's a bit of a long passage, and I should warn you that it is graphic, but I think that by the end of it, you'll understand full well what the

problem of evil is and how serious it is. This is Ivan speaking with his brother Alyosha:

"People talk sometimes of bestial cruelty, but that's a great injustice and insult to the beasts; a beast can never be so cruel as a man, so artistically cruel. . . .

I've collected a great, great deal about Russian children, Alyosha. There was a little girl of five who was hated by her father and mother. . . You see, I must repeat again, it is a peculiar characteristic of many people, this love of torturing children, and children only. . . It's just their defenselessness that tempts the tormentor, just the angelic confidence of the child who has no refuge and no appeal that sets his vile blood on fire. . . .

Suffering and evil seem to cry out against the existence of God

This poor child of five was subjected to every possible torture by those cultivated parents. They beat her, thrashed her, kicked her for no reason till her body was one bruise. Then they went to greater refinements of cruelty – shut her up all night in the cold and frost in an outhouse, and because she didn't ask to be taken up at night they smeared her face and filled her mouth with excrement, and it was her mother, her mother did this! And that mother could sleep, hearing the poor child's groans! Can you understand why a little creature, who can't even understand

what's done to her, should beat her little aching heart with her tiny fist in the dark and cold, and weep her meek unresentful tears to dear, kind God to protect her? Do you understand why this infamy must be and is permitted? Why, the whole world of knowledge is not worth that child's prayer to 'dear, kind God'!

Imagine that you are creating a fabric of human destiny with the object of making men happy in the end, giving them peace and rest at last, but that it was essential and inevitable to torture to death only one tiny creature – that baby beating its breast with its fist, for instance – and to found that edifice on its unavenged tears, would you consent to be the architect on those conditions? Tell me, and tell me the truth."

"No, I wouldn't consent," said Alyosha softly.

You may think that's just a fictional novel, but there was a recent news story about the discovery of an abused feral child somewhere in the United States that's very similar. This child never received any human love or interaction and grew up to be feral, basically a wild child who didn't know to speak or relate to other human beings. Those sorts of stories make us angry and indignant. How can people do this? Moreover, they evoke this reaction not only with us, but also with unbelievers. Unbelievers also get upset about the evil and suffering that exist in the world. However, for them, it is an argument against God. The problem of evil keeps them from joining with us in our faith.

In the second installment, we will consider one way to address the problem.



263rd Synod of the RCUS

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The RCUS has a long history in North America, going back to the mid-eighteenth century. It was our privilege to attend their 263rd synod, which was convened May 11-14, 2009, in the St. Paul's Evangelical Reformed Church in Hamburg, Minnesota. Before the sessions of Synod began, there was a worship service conducted by Rev. Herman Van Stedum, with Rev. George Syms preaching on Romans 1:16-17. He stressed the power of the gospel and the need to preach it with the view to the salvation of sinners instead of adapting it to the demands of a culture that often relies on special programs and techniques to achieve its goals. Salvation by faith alone does not mean that our faith centres on our experiences but that it focuses on Jesus Christ as the object of our faith, for it is through Him that we are justified.

The president of Synod was the Rev. V. Pollema, vice president was Rev. J. Sawtelle, Rev. P. Treick served as stated clerk, while elder T. Griess was treasurer. Since all the congregations of the RCUS are represented at synod, certain items appear on the agenda that we would not see at Canadian Reformed synods. This includes a variety of administrative items, as well as, for example, the official reception at synod of new ministers



St. Paul's Evangelical Reformed Church in Hamburg, Minnesota

who have been ordained in the RCUS during the preceding year.

It was clear during Synod as well as through informal contacts that the RCUS appreciates its contacts with other churches. At this 263rd synod, Br. A. Poppe and I represented the Canadian Reformed Churches.

Education

The RCUS does not have its own seminary. It does, however, have ministers who serve as board members of Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and Mid-America Reformed Seminary and who reported to Synod. A report was also received from a minister who serves as board member of Dordt College. Representatives from those institutions as well as one from City Seminary in Sacramento, California, received the

opportunity to give presentations to the Synod. City seminary operates under the authority of the local RCUS consistory in Sacramento. Funding comes from local businesses. This seminary has attracted about twenty-five students from a variety of church backgrounds, introducing some for the first time to theology developed along the lines of the Reformed faith. The local RCUS hopes in this way to exert a positive influence among future leaders of the churches in Sacramento. There were also presentations from New Geneva Seminary and Heidelberg Seminary.

Mission work

Rev. T. Mayville reported on his work at Knox Theological Seminary in Uganda and on the work of the Free Reformed Church of Kenya. Although the work of the RCUS takes place in different areas than the Canadian Reformed churches, it became clear that it faces similar challenges in leading people and churches on mission fields toward the goal of becoming independently functioning churches that are able to sustain themselves.

The discussions during Synod in regard to mission work in Africa highlight familiar themes of challenges involved in promoting the development and maturity of



Interchurch Relations Committee of the RCUS together with fraternal delegates from Canada (Dr. A.J. Pol and Br. A. Poppe to the left) and from The Netherlands (Rev. P. Waterval, second from the right)

churches in the Congo. The RCUS works in tandem with the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (liberated) who are active in the same country.

At Synod we also had the opportunity to speak with Rev. Eric Kayayan about the French language broadcasts (Reformed Faith and Life) that he is involved with in South Africa, reaching various parts of Africa as well as Quebec City (via Rev. Ben Westerveld of the ERQ). Although there is the desire to expand the radio broadcasts beyond Quebec City, insufficient finances are currently a limiting factor. During the sessions of Synod, Rev. Kayayan gave a speech on "The Catholicity of John Calvin" and preached a sermon in which he shared many of Calvin's insights on the text. On the final day of Synod, he gave another lecture on John Calvin.

Church visitation

It was interesting to hear the discussion of a report on church visitation. The RCUS does not have church visitations as we do, although at classis delegates of individual churches are called to respond to "constitutional questions" that we would normally associate with church visitation. A committee studied the scriptural background, historical

development, and implementation of church visitation, and reported to Synod that is biblically warranted and historically justifiable. Although there was a desire to open the way for the churches to move forward on this, there was no unanimity on the best way to go about it. After hearing the report and discussing it, Synod decided to ask the committee to study the matter further and submit another report to the next synod.

Financial aid

Various financial matters are dealt with at RCUS synods that we deal with through other channels. For example, there were discussions concerning "benevolent aid" for ministers (comparable to what we achieve through our superannuation fund) and for particular churches (our "needy churches fund") as well as financial aid for students of theology (comparable to our "needy students funds").

Ministerial aid for retired ministers and wives is taken care of on a case by case basis by decision of synod and the amounts vary according to circumstances, thereby giving it the character of a "gift" that is not a taxable amount for the recipient and not an "entitlement" or a fixed amount from a "retirement fund."

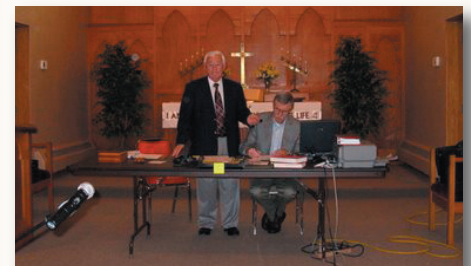
Interchurch Relations

Rev. P. Waterval spoke on behalf of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (liberated). He touched on the cooperation in mission work in the Congo. He went on to talk about the Dutch Synod 2008, noting that although there are tensions in the churches, Synod could do its work in harmony. He mentioned the growing missionary awareness

among the Dutch churches. A committee has been given the task to discuss the position of women, but Rev. Waterval assured the RCUS Synod that the Dutch churches do hate liberalism and are committed to upholding the Reformed confessions. Certain views are changing in the churches as a result of cultural pressures and such changes need to be addressed by Scripture, which has to provide the final criteria.

Rev. G. Syms responded, expressing thankfulness for the contacts with the Dutch churches and also for the cooperation in mission work in the Congo.

As delegate from the Canadian Reformed Churches I received the opportunity to address Synod, touching on some aspects of Canadian Reformed history and explaining the decisions of Synod Smithers 2007 in regard to the RCUS. The speech also included some suggestions as to ways in which the relationship with the RCUS could become more fruitful. In addition to this there was an overview of current activities of the Canadian Reformed Churches in the areas of mission work at home and abroad. Mention was made of the proposed revised text of the Genevan Psalms that can be found on the Internet. Finally, there was also an invitation to the RCUS to



President of Synod, Rev. V. Pollema, with Stated Clerk of Synod, Rev. P. Treick



Rev. E. Kayayan

send fraternal delegates to attend Synod Burlington 2010.

In response to a question about church visitation, given the discussion at the RCUS Synod on this topic, I explained how this is done among the Canadian Reformed Churches. In view of the concern of some RCUS brothers that there is potential for a hierarchical approach in church visitation I stressed that it is not a matter of classis deputies "lording it" over a local church. Their role is advisory and focuses first of all on preventing problems and if necessary to help defuse situations. Feedback later from various delegates showed that they found the explanation enlightening and helpful for their further discussions. They also expressed the desire for further input in the process of learning how to implement church visitation in a responsible way. Br. Poppe and I promised to follow up on this.

Rev. R. Potter responded to the address, expressing the desire for more contact. He emphasized that we share mutual concerns. He also noted with thankfulness the faithfulness of the Canadian Reformed Churches and said that the RCUS is looking forward to more cooperation, giving as an example mission work.

Br. Larry Johnson from Prinsburg, Minnesota, addressed Synod on behalf the URCNA. He

stressed the importance of adhering to Scripture and the Reformed confessions, highlighting the fact that the URCNA Synod does not make extra-confessional statements, although it did address the matter of federal vision. It is left up to the local church to determine how to deal with matters that arise. There is also freedom in regard to the liturgy of the local churches. This is a matter of trusting each other. Time will tell how things work out.

Br. Johnson also touched on the merger with the Canadian Reformed Churches and that various issues are being worked on. The URCNA and RCUS have been working together in the mid-west, with pulpit supply. The more things like this take place at the local level, the more familiar the churches will become with each other and this will promote the cause of unity.

As to church visitation, he explained that the purpose is to prevent problems rather than dealing with them after the fact. It is therefore important to see the nature of the contact in terms of a pastoral rather than a legal perspective, since everyone is "guilty" before the law. If there are difficulties, it is therefore important to work on reconciliation, focusing on healing in the relationships rather than placing the emphasis on who is right and who is wrong. He suggested it would be good to ask an older minister to visit with younger ministers and to ask church visitors also to visit separately with the elders without the ministers.

Br. Johnson explained that the document adopted by the URCNA synod in regard to federal vision was to help the local consistories.

The influence of such a view has been felt in the OCRC and some of those churches have been received into the URCNA. This became another reason to make sure the churches are all on the same page. He stressed that the URCNA prefers not to have position papers because the Three Forms of Unity have served them well and position papers have potential for being divisive.

Evaluation

Attending the RCUS Synod has once again proved to be a fruitful experience. The brothers there were very appreciative of our presence and it was clear that the bonds have grown stronger in the course of the years. During the discussions on the floor of Synod as well as in the informal contacts they also gave clear evidence of a strong commitment to upholding the authority of Scripture. Their repeated references to the Three Forms of Unity during these discussions also indicated that subscription to these confessional standards is not a formality but a living reality for them.



*Rev. P. Waterval of
The Netherlands*



Jesus is our Jubilee

The Canadian Reformed Church at Ottawa has experienced many blessings throughout its fifty plus year history. To help celebrate God's good and gracious care for us, we invited former members, as well as friends of our church family, up to Ottawa this past Victoria Day weekend. And what better time to visit the nation's capital. . . when the snow of deep winter has retreated and our parks are dotted with a magnificent display of Dutch tulips that commemorate Liberation Day.

The response to our invitation was beyond expectation. On May 16, more than 200 participants gathered in Redeemer Christian High School to enjoy a delicious dinner prepared by members of the congregation. Special touches included decorative flower pieces prepared by Linda DeVries, picture place-mats drawn by children of the congregation, and a bookmark keepsake featuring the new logo of Jubilee Church created by our talented artist, Karyn Schutten-

VanDooren. This motif also adorned the cover of our program and could be found on various merchandise, including t-shirts, a series of buttons featuring no less than 12(!) different Ottawa-connected themes, coffee mugs, and a Jubilicious cook book (see note). After dinner, a veritable smorgasbord of entertainment was presented under the masterful direction of Malcolm Wildeboer.

To begin, an account of the fifty year history of our church was given by Lydia Schreimer and Ronda Wildeboer, assisted by younger members holding a large map of Eastern Ontario. This was followed by the singing of "Trust and Obey," and "Thank you Lord" by an enthusiastic children's choir guided by Heidi Feenstra. What is it about the voices of children that so tugs at the heartstrings? A break for *gebakjes* was followed by Reuben Helder's slideshow that offered a pictorial peek at the past accompanied by a wonderfully poignant audio track. Next up was



a rendition of "Great is Thy Faithfulness" by a talented ensemble of flutes, voices, piano, as well as pastoral guitar accompaniment. Jubilee Church is blessed with an incredibly dedicated College and Careers group that were instrumental in helping Henk Cazemier set up the high school for this event. Somehow they also found time to present a spirited version of Psalm 47 as well as a musical setting of a well known Robert Frost poem speaking of "promises to keep." Waiting in the wings were the Wildeboer sisters who gave a graceful interpretation of Vivaldi's "Sing to the Lord."

The history of our church is closely connected with the VanWeerden family and we were honoured to have several of them in our midst. Mien VanWeerden spoke of the early pioneering years and Neil and Konnie gave us a sense of what it was like to grow up in a truly tiny church that was remote from the rest of the





federation. *"Sterkte in de isoloment!"* We recognized the support of our church federation during those years and also in the last twenty-six years when we were able to enjoy the leadership of Rev. G. H. Visscher, Rev. G. van Popta, Rev. J. van Popta, and Rev. M. Jagt. Most recently, Rev. G. van Popta has returned to pastor the flock in Ottawa. It was wonderful to have each of these ministers present at our celebration and each spoke eloquently of the special challenges and circumstances of their ministry in Ottawa. The reminiscences continued on a lighter note with some impromptu items: an enigmatic "NoTel Networks" calling machine specially designed to guarantee success in (re)calling a minister. The intrepid operator of this device, Malcolm Wildeboer, managed to produce a life-size image of Ottawa's first minister, Rev. H. Krabbendam; this resulted in a photo-op for all ministers who have served (are serving) in Ottawa. An equally hyperbolic look at the past was provided by a series of nostalgic conversations about past events featuring Ken Boessenkool, Rob Speijer, Gerard Torenvliet, and Marc Jagt. The evening concluded with a performance by our adult choir who sang three compositions by Natalie Sleeth, "Come let us sing," "Go ye, go ye into the world," and Psalm 121. We were privileged to be accompanied by our

accomplished concert pianist, Evelyn Niewenhuis, as well as our flautist in residence, Carolyn Timmerman. The adult choir was ably conducted by Jubilee's organist, maestro Peter Buist.

The following day we attended church services in the gymnasium of the Ottawa Christian School since the Merivale United Church, where we normally worship, could not accommodate the large crowd. In the morning, Pastor George preached on the Jubilee theme and showed how Jesus fulfilled the magnificent promise of Isaiah 61 in our release from the bondage of sin. A special day was made even more special with the baptism of Cara Leanne van Popta, daughter of Chris and Charlene Van Popta, who, in turn, are children of two former pastors of Ottawa, Rev. G.H. Visscher and Rev. J. van Popta. Dutch Bingo anyone? Between

services we enjoyed a lunch prepared by the ladies of the church and further opportunity for fellowship was given before reconvening for the afternoon service. Pastor George elaborated on the familiar words of blessing we receive every Sunday as found in Numbers 6:22-27. Indeed for fifty years, we in Ottawa have been blessed with the protection, pardon, and peace granted by our Triune God.

By all accounts the Jubilee celebration in Ottawa was very well received. To those who travelled to be with us: Thank you! To those who could not attend, but continue to support us: Thank you! We are so blessed to have the gospel preached every Sunday at Jubilee Church and we hope you can join us soon. For more information on church activities, do consult our website, www.jubileechurch.ca.

NOTE: For more information on availability of these items to raise funds for our elementary day school that we hope to open September 2011 DV, please contact ellie.buist@gmail.com, andre.schutten@gmail.com or irenehelder@gmail.com.



Farewell to the 't Hart Family



After having served as a missionary in Papua New Guinea for the last twelve years, Rev. 't Hart and family arrived in Toronto to say final farewells to the sending and supporting congregations; having accepted a call to Baldivis, Australia.

On Saturday, May 16, 2009 an open house was held in the Bethel Canadian Reformed Church building where the members of the Toronto congregation could enjoy a time of fellowship with the 't Hart family. The following Sunday we had a day of thanksgiving and prayer for the 't Hart family and for the work that was done and is continuing in Papua New Guinea.

In the morning service Rev. den Hollander proclaimed God's Word as we find it in Philippians 1:3-6, 9-11.

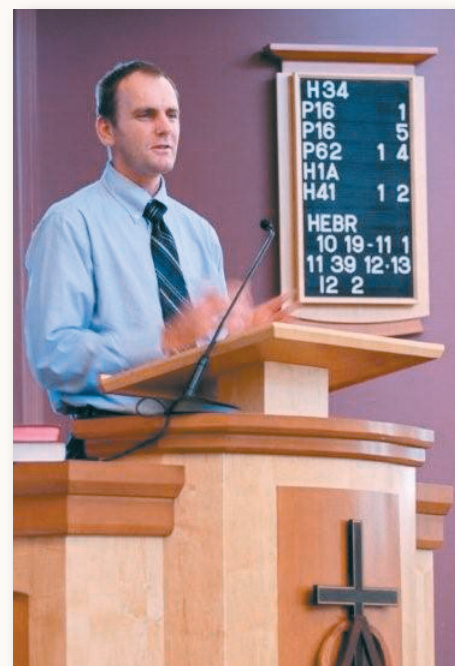
He noted that this passage was about thanksgiving and prayer. The focus of our thanksgiving and prayer is the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. The purpose of our mission work in Papua New Guinea includes this same goal, to work towards the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the afternoon service Rev. 't Hart preached his farewell sermon. He used as text Hebrew 12:2, which reads as follows: "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Rev. 't Hart expressed that the work that he and his family had been doing in Papua New Guinea gave great reasons for rejoicing although there were also the difficult, discouraging times. Despite the many struggles, the main goal of this work was to direct the people away from themselves and set their eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. Only a faith that keeps its eyes firmly fixed on Jesus is a faith that will last. This applies to our brothers and sisters in Papua New Guinea, but we must never forget this in our own lives here as well. There is no room for complacency; we must never think we can take our eyes off of Jesus.

Following the service, everyone was invited to stay for a short program and then a light supper.

Br. Gerald Boot welcomed everyone, especially the 't Hart family and members of the supporting churches. Br. Boot began by addressing the 't Hart family. He gave an overview of the last twelve years – recognizing that all praise and glory goes to God, for He has abundantly blessed the work of Rev. and Mrs. 't Hart. He expressed thankfulness for the time they spent in the mission field and the sacrifices that went along



with it. Opportunity was then given to any representatives that were present from the supporting congregations to say a few words, after which Br. Boot read a number of letters from the congregations that were not represented in person. On behalf of the Mission Board, Br. Boot presented Rev. 't Hart with a painting of a fisherman (with the comment that Rev. 't Hart really enjoyed the sport of fishing as well as his calling as a "fisher of men" in Papua New Guinea) as a gift of appreciation and memory of his ministry. He wished the 't Harts God's blessing as they now take up their new calling to the church at Baldivis.

On behalf of his family, Rev. 't Hart thanked everyone for all the



support and encouragement they received in the past twelve years. He noted that Rev. Versteeg would

be replacing him in Papua New Guinea and that this work would continue with God's blessing.

Press Release

Press Release of Classis Contracta of Classis Central Ontario June 12, 2009

Br. R. Ludwig, on behalf of the convening church Burlington-Waterdown, called the meeting to order. He requested the brothers to join him in singing Hymn 46:1 and 2. He read John 3:1-21 and led in prayer.

The credentials were examined by Br. Ludwig. He reported that four churches were lawfully represented: Burlington Ebenezer, Burlington-Waterdown, Flamborough, and Toronto. Classis Contracta was constituted. Rev. Jan DeGelder was appointed as chairman and elder Gerard Nordeman as clerk. The provisional agenda as prepared by the convening church was adopted.

The only item was the approbation of the call to Rev. H. Versteeg by the church at Toronto according to Articles 5.B, 5.D, and 9

of the Church Order, to labour as a missionary minister in Papua New Guinea. The following supporting documents were presented and found to be in good order:

1. The letter of call to the Rev. H. Versteeg, including financial arrangements.
2. The letter of acceptance from the Rev. Versteeg.
3. The certificate of the honourable release of Rev. Versteeg from the church at Chatham.
4. An attestation regarding Rev. Versteeg from the church at Chatham.
5. The letter of the honourable release of Rev. Versteeg from Classis Ontario West.
6. A declaration from the church at Toronto that appropriate announcements were made to the congregation regarding the acceptance of the call by Rev. Versteeg and that no objection was raised.

Classis declared that the call can be approbated.

During personal question period a question was raised regarding representation from Classis Central Ontario at the installation of the Rev. Versteeg on June 14, 2009. The church at Flamborough was appointed to represent the churches of this classis.

Censure according to Art. 34 C.O. was not found to be necessary. The Acts and Press Release were approved. The chairman spoke some words of congratulations to the delegate of the church at Toronto with the acceptance of the call and wished the church at Toronto and the Rev. Versteeg God's blessings in the continuation of the mission task in Papua New Guinea. He then closed the meeting with prayer.

For the Classis Contracta of Classis Central Ontario, G.J. Nordeman, clerk at that time



By Pastor Iain Wright



Iran: Ministering to God's Suffering People

In the Western world, even in our low times, we are never far from a spiritual oasis of fellowship that will revive the soul. The regular experience of our brethren in Iran is so very different:

A Family

Here is a family who arrived late to our small gathering. The bus trip was planned to take 48 hours (not a comfortable, air conditioned coach). In fact it took even longer because the only driver fell asleep at the wheel.

"O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water."

—Ps. 63: 1



The bus left the road and rolled over before coming to rest. The family arrived stiff and bruised but, by the grace of God, otherwise unharmed.

A Young Man

Here is a young man who was held by the authorities for a month, suspended from his wrists and beat-

en on the soles of his feet only because of his love for Christ.

A Young Woman

Here is a young woman whose eyes fill with tears when Christ is preached and is eager to hear more. Every word that points her to her Master is treasured and pondered.

Father and Daughter

Here is a father with his daughter, who struggles to write everything down lest he should miss any important truth that he can later provide to other believers for their edification. In his face there is an earnestness and determination to receive the whole counsel of God. Perhaps the Berean Christians looked like him.

An Addict

Here is a man with his family. Having his family with him is no small miracle. It is reckoned that as much as 60 percent of the population of Iran has a problem with drugs, and he was one of them. His abuse of drugs was so severe that he could barely walk and

Top: During the Persian New Year holiday, MERF hosted Rev Iain Wright to teach a group of Iranian converts.

his life expectancy was negligible. In a stupor and unable to go any farther, he sat down outside a store. The owner came out to him. In God's amazing, wonderful, glorious providence, the store owner was a Christian and bold enough to



present Christ to this hopeless wretch of a man. What delight! He was converted.

Christ worked such miracles of grace and mercy not only to cleanse him from all unrighteousness, but to cleanse him from his addiction to drugs. The Lord restored his wife and daughter to him—gave him back his family. Like the woman in the house of Simon the Pharisee, having been forgiven much he loves much.

Despite the risks, he couldn't help but tell others of what Christ had done for him. It was not long before the authorities took him in for

questioning and told him to stop. His question to them was simple, "When I abused drugs and caused problems you left me alone. Why do you stop me and question me now that I am free from drugs?!"

"We would rather you had killed yourself with an overdose, than speak of Jesus!" was their reply.

A Young Couple

Here is a young couple who, while they are away, have the secret police visit their home. When they return they are going to be summoned to meet with the secret police. They

have received a suspended sentence for having spoken of Jesus and witnessed to friends. The phone has been tapped for years and they have been under surveillance.

A Preacher

Here is a young woman who is no stranger to grief. Her father, a preacher of Christ, was on his way to her birthday party some years ago when he

together around the throne of grace! For some, this is the only time that they are able to experience the fellowship of the saints before returning to a land which is even yet a "dry and weary land where there is no water." They thirst for fellowship, and the Lord has providentially provided at intervals this oasis for his people through MERF.

May such stories of God's gracious dealing with individuals be remembered as a foreshadowing of an outpouring of God's blessing on lands now dry. Soli Deo gloria.



was snatched off the street. She never saw him again.

Each in turn seems to have a story that marks these ordinary believers as anything but ordinary. They have come together—often with some difficulty and never without risk—not because of the pull of some well-known speaker, but because they delight in Christ. Just to sing His praise together thrills them. How seldom do they get to unite their voices with others, rejoicing in the one they adore! What joy from praying with one another and sharing

Rev. Iain Wright is a Scotsman who pastors a congregation in the USA.

Top: Boys in Bam await food aid.

Right: After the earthquake, girls in Bam, Iran, received diaconal aid, including shoes.

From MERF-Canada

In June Dr. A. J. De Visser, together with his wife, are scheduled to give lectures at a conference in Cairo. We thank them for their willingness to participate in this conference and pray that these meetings may be a blessing for all.

Thank you so much for your financial contributions which continue to come in faithfully. Please also continue to remember the work of MERF in your prayers - especially remember Christians in countries like Iran who live in very difficult circumstances.

Yours in Christ's service,
Rev. J. DeGelder, chairman; Mrs. J. VanDam, secretary

Reminder: Please make cheques payable to MERF-Canada and send them to the address below.

*"Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise You."
—Psalm 63:3*

Reviewed By W.L. Bredenhof

Rev. W. L. Bredenhof is co-pastor of the Canadian Reformed Church at Langley, British Columbia
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Meet the Puritans, Joel R. Beeke & Randall J. Pederson, Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006

Additional Information:
Hardcover, 896 pages, \$35.00 US

It was C.S. Lewis who warned most sagely about the prejudice against old books. In his introduction to a very old book (*On the Incarnation*, by Athanasius), Lewis advised that if ordinary readers were forced to choose between old and new books, they should always choose the old: "And I would give him this advice precisely because he is an amateur and therefore much less protected than the expert against the dangers of an exclusive contemporary diet. A new book is still on its trial and the amateur is not in a position to judge it." Lewis concluded that the best rule is that having completed a new book, one should never pick up a new one until an old one has been read in between. He concluded, "If that is too much for you, you should at least read one old one to every three new ones."

But that raises the issue: how do we find the old books that we should be reading? That brings us to the value of a book such as this one by Joel Beeke and Randall Pederson. In this thick volume, we're introduced to a wealth of wholesome old books and their authors.

These authors have been known as Puritans. Sadly, the Puritans have developed a reputation both inside and outside Christian circles as dour, legalistic kill-joys. The American journalist H.L. Mencken famously quipped, "Puritanism is the haunting fear that someone, somewhere might just be having a good time." *Meet the Puritans* presents a much more sympathetic and nuanced view of these Christian brothers and sisters of old. In a helpful preface, the authors point out that the Puritans were biblically oriented, passionately committed to Trinitarian theology, ecclesiastically grounded, and smitten with the gospel. Beeke and Pederson elaborate, "Doctrinally, Puritanism was a kind of vigorous Calvinism; experientially, it was warm and contagious; evangelistically, it was aggressive, yet tender; ecclesiastically, it was theocentric and worshipful; politically it aimed to be scriptural, balanced and bound by conscience before God in the relations of king, Parliament and subjects" (xviii-xix).

Format-wise, *Meet the Puritans* is best described as a concise encyclopedia of Puritanism. The book covers the time from William Perkins (1558-1602) to Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) and figures in America, England, Scotland, and The Netherlands. Every important



Puritan has an entry and Beeke and Pederson also give helpful information about modern reprints and translations. Rounding out the volume are worthwhile appendices with information about secondary sources on the Puritans as well as a glossary of terms and events.

The reader desiring to follow the wise advice of Lewis will be well-served by this guide. Not all the Puritans are equally worth reading nor are all of their books equally accessible, but this book will point one in the right direction. It's my understanding that another edition is in the works, reflecting the growing appreciation for old Puritan authors. We can let "the Narnian" have the last word: "Every age has its own outlook. It is specially good at seeing certain truths and specially liable to make certain mistakes. We all, therefore, need the books that will correct the characteristic mistakes of our own period. And that means the old books."

Reviewed By W.L. Bredenhof

***Saved by Grace: the Holy Spirit's Work in Calling and Regeneration*, Herman Bavinck (translated by Nelson D. Kloosterman and edited/introduced by J. Mark Beach), Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008**

Additional Information:
Hardcover, 184 pages, \$30.00 USD

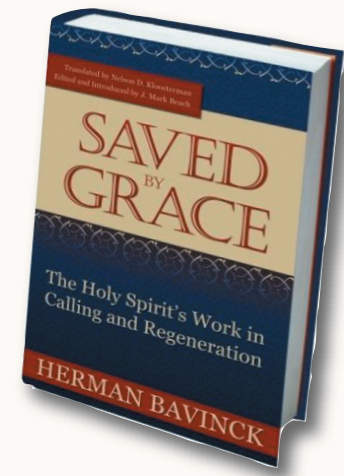
Herman Bavinck (1854-1921) scarcely needs any introduction. This Dutch Reformed theologian is well known for his epic four-volume *Reformed Dogmatics*. He is universally recognized as a careful scholar who based his theology on Scripture, a deep respect for the Reformed confessions, and a keen eye for church history. Despite these endearing qualities, it is only in the last two decades that we've witnessed a surge of interest in Bavinck and translations of his writings.

The rationale for the translation of this particular volume has to do with ongoing discussions about the doctrine of salvation in the North American context. The contemporary discussions are dissimilar in some respects and so the book includes a helpful Introductory Essay in which the original context of Bavinck's work

is clearly outlined. He was working in a context where the theology of Abraham Kuyper raised many questions about regeneration, especially regarding how and when it takes place. In today's context, some of those questions are reappearing, though they sometimes take a different form.

The two most helpful chapters in this book are chapters 11 and 12, dealing with "Holy Scripture on the Spiritual State of Adults in the Covenant" and "Calling and Regeneration and its Relation to Preaching." In chapter 11, Bavinck unfolds the differences between apostolic missionary preaching and preaching to the church. In the next chapter, he goes further and discusses the differences between evangelistic and edifying preaching in Christian churches. Bavinck argues that both are needed.

One can also appreciate Bavinck's discussion of the means of grace, the preaching of the Word and the administration of the sacraments. Unlike so many in our day, Bavinck has a high view of these means. With regards to the Word in particular, he insists on a proper distinction of law and gospel. He notes that one of the problems with Rome is that "the gospel is not essentially different from the law; in fact, it is a new



law: it contains only commands and counsels. . ." (138). Reformed theologians instead asserted: in the gospel God graciously gives what he commands in the law (158).

One of the intriguing things about *Saved by Grace* is that this book was originally a series of articles written in a popular, non-academic style. Perhaps it says something about our age when a seminary-educated pastor finds much of it to be tough going, even with the helpful footnotes added by the editor. Although it's not a long book, I suspect that the average church-goer would find this a difficult read. To be quite honest, Bavinck is not at his most readable in this volume. Nevertheless, for those who are struggling with questions surrounding regeneration, this book should prove to be helpful.

