

# Clarion

The Canadian Reformed Magazine  
Volume 51, No. 15, July 19, 2002

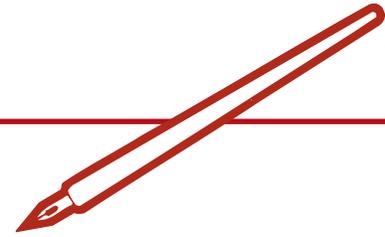


*Numbers*

*10:1-10*

*Theology –  
and no fun?*

INSIDERS!



By N.H. Gootjes



## Professor Boer and Theological Education

A book opened out of curiosity may unexpectedly turn out to be much more interesting than expected. I had on my shelves a book dealing with the life of Professor G.E. Boer, who lived from 1832 to 1904.<sup>1</sup> Not many of us will have heard of this professor. I did not know anything about his life, either. But as I read through his autobiography, I found it interesting in many ways. It is, of course, a book about the church as it was in the nineteenth century. There is a great difference between that century and our lives at the beginning of the twenty-first century. At the same time, people remain the same and we can learn from books like this that there is a basic continuity between the church more than a century ago and the church in our own time. I was surprised how great that continuity is on the issue of theological education, as can be seen from the past. But first we need to know more about Boer, for he had an interesting life.

*The Lord provided for him in a remarkable way.*

Boer was a farmer's son who after the retirement of his parents worked on the farm of a widow. When he was about twenty-five years old, he made a halfhearted attempt to prepare himself for the ministry. This was only a few years after the theological Seminary of the Secession Churches had been established in 1854. But from several sides he was discouraged from taking up the study of theology, because people thought him too old. As he himself did not think he was called to the ministry, he was satisfied with the negative advice. Later, however, a minister convinced him that he could not prove that he was not called until he had attempted it. This minister urged him to begin the study of Dutch, Latin and Greek in the spare hours not spent on the farm.

The Lord provided for him in a remarkable way. By the time he was ready to begin his studies at the Seminary in Kampen, his employer, a widow, sold the farm. She was willing to lend him the money needed for studying at the seminary. Around the same time, he inherited some money. These circumstances allowed him to go to Kampen to study for the ministry. He was twenty-nine years old by that time!

### In the ministry

After having graduated, his life consists of three periods. First, he served as a minister in the Netherlands from 1865 to 1872. In that year, he was called to serve a church in Grand Rapids. This was a church consisting of Dutch immigrants who had belonged to the Secession churches in the Netherlands. He ministered this church till the time the Synod of Chicago 1876 appointed him as teacher for the theological students of this Dutch Reformed Church. A picture in the book shows him as the teacher surrounded by seven students. He was the only teacher (with the exception of Geerhardus Vos, who briefly taught Greek and Latin) until 1884 when Rev. G. K. Hemkes (who was the editor of the book on Boer) was appointed as the second teacher. Boer retired in 1902, and died two years later, at the age of seventy-one.

### Theology and languages

Boer's recounting of his own life is remarkable for the emphasis he put on the biblical languages. It actually begins before he went to Kampen and while he was still working on the farm. A neighbouring minister urged him, together with some other young men from the area, to come to him for lessons in Dutch, Latin and Greek. He had to ask permission from the lady he worked for. Having received permission, he even took his books to the threshing floor to study during lost moments.

*The Reformed churches realized the importance of the knowledge of the biblical languages for their ministers.*

In 1861 he went to Kampen, but first he had to concentrate on the languages. In addition to Dutch, Latin and Greek, which he had studied before, he also learned Hebrew. This was not part of the theological curriculum of the seminary; these were preparatory studies. This period lasted for two years, and only after having completed this was he admitted to the theological studies.

This is remarkable for two reasons. As already stated, he began to study theology in Kampen in 1861. This was seven

years after the opening of the seminary because it had been established in 1854 to provide capable ministers to the churches coming out of the Secession. These churches wanted ministers who would know the Scriptures and who could read and understand them in the original languages.

This is all the more remarkable when we consider that Boer was a mature student. He was twenty-nine years old when he entered the Theological Seminary in Kampen. Even in his case, the language requirement was maintained. He had studied the languages before he came to Kampen, but he received further instruction in them in the introductory years of study at the seminary. The Reformed churches realized the importance of the knowledge of the biblical languages for their ministers.

The people from the Secession continued in this tradition when they came to this continent. In addition to Dutch(!), the students were instructed in Latin, Greek and Hebrew.<sup>2</sup> As one man had to teach all these different subjects, it cannot have been a very intensive and in depth study of the biblical languages. But the intention was there

### What's inside?

In recent months, many of us have read or heard about a letter of Prof. J. Douma to the General Synod of Zuidhorn 2002, the Netherlands. In this letter, Prof. Douma expresses regret for his role in the conflict that led to a division in our sister churches during the sixties. While some have appreciated Prof. Douma's explanation and regrets, others have raised questions about his letter. Dr. J. DeJong gives his opinion on this, referring at length to comments by Prof. C. Trimp. I am sure that you will find this interesting.

The Free Reformed Churches trace their roots back to 1834. Many Canadian Reformed Church members do as well. It is, therefore, only natural that the FRC and the CanRC are in a relationship which the FRC describes as "limited contact." A report by Rev. W. B. Slomp on a recent FRC Synod, as well as a speech delivered by yours truly at that Synod, will acquaint the readers with certain aspects of FRC life and the relationship which we have with them.

The editorial by Dr. N.H. Gootjes concludes that life in the theological school world is not without a little bit of humour. Apparently it is possible to head for the ministry and still have some fun. I assume that ministers can do the same.

We have some of our regular columns: *Treasures, New and Old, Ray of Sunshine* and *Education Matters*. In addition, Rev. W. Bredenhof provides a review of a new book for our consideration. Finally, two press releases of classes in Ontario keep us apprised of what is going on in the daily lives of our churches. Notably, the brothers W. Geurts and J. VanSpronsen have been declared eligible for call, and brother E. Dethan was given permission to speak an edifying word. We congratulate these brothers, and we thank the Lord our God for enriching his church with faithful men who can serve in his vineyard.

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Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd., Winnipeg, MB

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#### SUBSCRIPTION RATES FOR 2002

	Regular Mail	Air Mail
Canada*	\$39.50*	\$65.00*
U.S.A. U.S. Funds	\$42.00	\$54.00
International	\$64.00	\$97.00



\*Including 7% GST – No. 890967359RT

Advertisements: \$12.50 per column inch

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada, through the Publication Assistance Program (PAP), toward our mailing costs.

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Agreement No. 1377531

PAP Registration No. 9907

ISSN 0383-0438

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right from the beginning that ministers who were to teach the doctrines of Scripture should be able to read the Scriptures in the original languages.

We cannot imagine a smaller theological school than the one founded by the people from the Secession in America in the nineteenth century. The vision was larger than the opportunity. But we feel united with them in maintaining the important place that biblical languages have in the study of theology.

### Theology and fun

The biographical account of the life of Prof. Boer includes several pictures, taken at different periods of his life. In the beginning of the book, two early photographs are inserted in which he really looks like a farmhand uncomfortable in his Sunday suit. Later in the book, a picture of the mature Boer is included, in which he looks very distinguished. It is hard to believe that they portray the same person. But one fact connects these pictures: on both he looks very serious.

*He announced: This Bible does not have the book of Jonah!*

When we think of the people living during the second half of the nineteenth century, and the long hours they had to work, the hardships they had to face, both in the Netherlands and on this continent, we may think that these were people who did not have any fun in life. But that impression would be wrong, for theological students can have fun and can make fun just as well as everyone else. Also at the seminary of the Secession churches in America funny things happened.

Boer himself tells several stories. One concerns a bearded student who had made a trip to the Netherlands, and had returned clean shaven. While he was in the office of a professor, one of the students told another that the Baron of Constein was visiting the seminary, and offered to introduce him

to the Baron. The student, who wanted to make a good impression, made a deep bow before the "Baron," and asked him about his visit to this continent. He did not recognize him as one of his classmates! When the deceived student was told of the trick played on him, he was rather angry at first. Another story concerns a student who had to present a sermon proposal. This student was going to deliver a sermon proposal on a passage from Jonah, and wanted to read the text from the Bible before he started on delivering his sermon. In his nervousness he could not find the book of Jonah in the pulpit bible. He announced: This Bible does not have the book of Jonah!

Just like Christians in general, theologians are sometimes regarded as people who cannot have any fun. This is just not true. If even during the more formal lifestyle of the nineteenth century jokes were a normal part of student life, this is even more the case in our more relaxed times. In the past year, we had two special occasions at the Theological College, where the humorous side of studying theology was brought forward, as the reports in *Clarion* also show. Even a "treasured" text book was so severely criticized that it had to be ripped in pieces! Studying theology is hard work, but also much fun. And, speaking for myself, teaching theology as well, is hard work and at the same time much fun.

The churches continue to need ministers. Our situation is quite different from that of Boer, but we want to continue in the same direction the churches already were going in his time. The Lord of the church grant that many may come to be prepared for preaching the joyful gospel of salvation.

<sup>1</sup>G.K. Hemkes (ed.), *Een man des volks: Het leven van Prof. Geert Egbert Boer* (Grand Rapids: Hulst, 1904). The larger part of this book consist of an autobiographical account by Boer.

<sup>2</sup>H. Beets, *De Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerk in Noord America* (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids Printing Company, 1918) 152.



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*Theology students having fun in the 70s.*

By M.R. Jagt

## The Crescendo of Salvation

*"The angel of the LORD appeared to her and said, 'You are sterile and childless, but you are going to conceive and have a son'."*

Judges 16:3

When I say "Samson" you probably think of a strong man with a weakness for women. Pictures of long hair or collapsing temples come to mind. But look at the very beginning of his life, for a moment. There is something wonderful even about his conception and birth.

The LORD comes to a couple. With all the other judges, God came to a grown man and called him to be his saviour. But here God plans a birth. Even from the time of his conception Samson is set apart for the service of God. His mother must also live by the law of the Nazirite.

The LORD comes to a couple who are barren. In the Old Testament barrenness was specifically a punishment from God (Deut 28:18). It shows you what sin does to us – sin brings death, sterility. You can also see in this barrenness our helplessness. Sin brings us to a dead end that we cannot overcome.

The LORD comes to a couple who are barren just as the Philistine oppression begins. Take a look at the timing of this angelic declaration. Samson was a judge in Israel for twenty years (Judges 15:20). He probably began to judge Israel when he was close to twenty years of age, although he could have been older. The Philistines, we're told, were a threat to Israel for forty years (Judges 16:1). That means, at the very least, that it's about the time the Philistine oppression begins that God also makes his announcement of the birth of Samson, his deliverer.

The LORD comes to a couple who are barren just as the cruel Philistine domination starts and the Israelites have not even cried out to Him! There is a clear pattern in the book of Judges: the Israelites sin, God delivers them into the hand of their enemies, they cry out and God sends salvation. But here there is no cry for help, no repentance. But yet God raises up Samson to begin the deliverance from the Philistines!

Do you see how wonderful that is? It's wonderful for you personally, because you too have received a Saviour from God like this, our Lord Jesus Christ! Throughout the book of Judges there are all these different redeemers who give different angles on the great Redeemer, our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Judge *par excellence*, the One in whom all of these themes are taken up perfectly and in the greatest way!

Look at Christ. He too is set apart before He was born, from the foundation of the world to be our Saviour! His entire life on this earth was dedicated to our salvation! There was not a moment He lived where He did his "own thing." Samson had trouble with being a Nazirite. But our Saviour was always devoted to the task the Father had given Him – to accomplish our deliverance from sin and Satan!

He is born of a virgin! God makes an incredible beginning when we are at a dead end. He makes a new Adam, one who does not share in the fall of the first, in whom we can receive a new start! In Christ God offers us salvation that reaches beyond the whole curse of our sin and our helplessness!

He is set apart to be our Saviour even before the enemy arrives! The Philistines had begun to oppress Israel and God promises Samson. But with Christ, it is even more amazing! Even before the devil had fallen and dragged us all down with him, before we had committed even one sin, the Son of God was set apart to come to save us! God's salvation is not something hastily thrown together, as if the devil and our sin surprised Him. It is not a superficial "Band-Aid" approach to our problems. Before the world began, God knew what would happen and perfectly planned for it in Christ.

He comes also to us although we have not cried out for Him. The LORD, thankfully, did not wait for us to act before He decided to save. In the beginning, after Adam and Eve sinned, it was God Himself who came and gave that first promise of a Saviour. Adam and Eve wouldn't have had the boldness to ask God to save them, much less die in their place. Would you? But thankfully God isn't dependant on our initiative!

In Samson God showed himself to be wonderful, even in this man's conception and birth (Judges 13:18). But with Christ, we see something even greater, truly the wonder of wonders! "Wonders of grace to God belong; repeat his mercies in your song!" (Hymn 61:1, *Book of Praise*).



Rev. M.R. Jagt is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Ottawa, Ontario.

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# Report of the delegates of the Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity to Synod 2002 of the Free Reformed Churches of North America

By *W.B. Slomp*

## Introduction

The Free Reformed Churches (FRC), in their Synod of 2000, extended to the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) "limited contact." This means that we are officially invited to their synods, and that we also receive their Acts of Synod. Because this federation is relatively small, there are no Classes. Instead the FRC hold a synod every year, where every church is represented by two delegates. This year the synod was held in Vineland, Ont., from June 4-11.

Dr. J. DeJong, who was there on behalf of the committee for the evening prayer service, reports that this service was led by Rev. K. Gangar (Bellevue, WA), who preached on Rev. 2:1-7. He urged the delegates of Synod to work together in love. Rev. Gangar also expressed the hope that the proceedings of this Synod would be characterized by a spirit of love in dealing with all the issues before it. Rev. G.R. Procee (Hamilton, Ontario) was elected as chairman.

The following day, Wednesday June 5, 2002, Rev. R. Aasman and I, having flown in the previous day from Edmonton, also attended. We were there the following day as well, and flew home early Friday morning. We were warmly welcomed and were officially seated as observers. During these two days the various committee reports were tabled and discussed.

## External Relations

This committee reported on its various activities during the year. It is the custom in the FRC, at the request of a local church, to have the committee approve ministers from outside their fed-

eration to preach in their churches. In order to be approved such a minister has to submit himself to a Colloquium Doctum (examination). Two ministers from the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregations (HNRC), and one minister from an independent church in Lethbridge were given permission to preach. Nine others had their preaching privileges renewed for another year. These actions were approved by the Synod.

The FRC continues to forge closer ties with the HNRC. They have nearly completed a joint statement on Reformed Doctrines, and are encouraging closer contacts at the consistorial and congregational level.

The committee also reported on its contacts with other federations of churches. Of interest to us is their contact with the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA). They had one meeting with them in the past year wherein they discussed "the Appropriation of Salvation." It appears that they differ somewhat on this point, and thus further discussion is needed.

During the course of Synod, Rev. H. Zekveld, representative from the URCNA, was given the opportunity to address the brothers. He spoke eloquently about their common heritage and of the need for unity. His words were well received.

In the report a positive account was given concerning the contact with the Canadian Reformed Churches. The report does state, however, that they "are not yet ready to consider moving towards federative or organic unity, which is the goal of the Canadian Re-

formed delegates." The report also states that there are "different emphases in our churches, we on the true Christian, and they on the true church."

Rev. R. Aasman, when he was given the opportunity to address Synod on behalf of the CanRC, addressed some of these issues (see his address in this issue). Dr. L.W. Bilkes (Abbotsford, B.C.) responded warmly, but reiterated that the FRC is not ready to pursue federative unity as vigorously as we might like.

## Theological Education

The students for ministry are currently being trained in the Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary. This seminary was established a few years ago by the HNRC. At this point the seminary has two full-time professors, one from the HNRC, and the other, Dr. G.M. Bilkes (son of Dr. L.W. Bilkes), from the FRC. Also ministers from the respective churches take turns to lecture. The agreement with the HNRC is that the FRC will have a teaching input of around forty-five percent.

During the course of Synod Dr. G.M. Bilkes was officially appointed as professor. However, since he is not an ordained minister, he will not be allowed to preach.

Candidate Eric Moerdyk presented himself to Synod with a view to being declared eligible for call. This brother, after having finished his studies in Canada (he also had a year of training at our College) went to the Netherlands to obtain his "doctorandus" title from the Theological University of the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in

Nederland. He was first examined by the Theological Education Committee before Synod was convened. Having successfully passed that exam, he was also examined on the floor of Synod. This Colloquium Doctum took about half an hour, and concentrated on "his personal sense of call and fear of the Lord as well as views on the doctrines of God's Word." To give him time to complete his studies, he will be not be eligible for call until Nov. 1, 2002.

### Bible Translation

The Ad-Hoc Bible Translation Committee was given the mandate to investigate and evaluate the NKJV, and to consider updating, in consultation with others, the current KJV. The committee sent letters to "all denominations and Christian leaders in the Anglo-Saxon world that ... might be willing to support this endeavour." Some negative and some positive responses were received. Other responses are still being awaited. From the discussion on the floor of Synod it became apparent that the NKJV was not to be preferred by some because it uses "you" instead of "Thee and "Thou" as a personal pronoun for God.

The issue concerning Bible translations is quite a contentious one in the FRC. Some churches stated that they would no longer wait for Synod to act and that they would go on their own and use the NKJV in the worship services. They expressed the frustration some young people feel in having to use the archaic language of KJV, and cite this as one of the reasons some young people are leaving the church. The chairman urged the delegates to be patient and not act too unilaterally.

### Other reports

Synod dealt with various other committee reports, dealing with Evangelism, Finance, Foreign and Home Missions, Publications, Theological Student Fund, and Youth and Education. It dealt most extensively with Church Visitors Reports and Church Reports. It was good to hear these reports, for it gave us a flavour of what lives in the churches. They are struggling with many of the same issues as we do.

### Conclusion

We have no doubt that the FRC wants to be faithful to God's Word, as it is summarized in the Ecumenical Creeds and the Three Forms of Unity. It

was a pleasure to be in their midst and to experience the hand of fellowship. It was evident in many ways that we share a common heritage and thus we felt a close bond with them.

There are notable differences, however. They like to maintain the archaic language of the past in their worship services, as evidenced by their use of the KJV, and old translations of the confessions. They also emphasize experiential preaching, which they claim is different from our preaching. They are of the opinion that we tend towards covenantal automatism in the preaching. These issues have been discussed on the committee level, and will continue to be discussed. On the committee level, however, we have come to the conclusion, after having exchanged sermon tapes, that our preaching is in reality not much different from theirs.

It was a privilege for us to represent the CanRC at the Synod of the FRC. There is much we can learn from another as we struggle to maintain the truth. May the Lord bless the contact between the CanRC and the FRC. 

*Rev. W.B. Slomp is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Neerlandia, Alberta.*

## BOOK NOTES

By W.L. Bredenhof

### *The Ancient Love Song: Finding Christ in the Old Testament*

Charles D. Drew, Phillipsburg: P & R, 1996 (2000), 203 pages, softcover.

The challenge is always there, both for ministers and others in our churches: how do we read the Old Testament while keeping our eyes on Christ? This question has often been the question in Reformed discussions about preaching for the last 60 years. It's that question which this book has as its focus. The author, Charles D. Drew, is the Associate Pastor at Redeemer Presbyterian Church in Manhattan, and is a graduate of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.

The intriguing thing about this book is that it isn't a summary version of the well-known *Promise and Deliverance* by S.G. DeGraaf. Instead, this book

goes to the heart of the approach behind that very important and well-used set. In academic terms, we would say that the *Ancient Love Song* is about the Christology of the Old Testament. But this is anything but an academic book. Rather, it's written in very plain and earthy language. Drew allows the notes of the "Love Song" to be heard with digital clarity. His illustrations are engaging and his writing style is inviting. Take this example from the last chapter: "The Exodus, the manna in the wilderness, the Conquest, and even the golden age under King Solomon were like prison house film festivals – brief diversions from the grim reality of barbed wire, impenetrable walls, and gun-toting officers." By the way, that last chapter ("the Death of Death") will leave you in prayerful wonder at the complexity and beauty of God's Word!

The *Ancient Love Song* can be highly recommended for personal study use, but it may also be found helpful for our study societies. To that end, each chapter features a set of questions for discussion and reflection. Some of these questions are on the weak side and inconsistent with the tenor of the book (e.g., "Imagine yourself as Eve..." – page 7), but the majority will kindle profitable discussion (e.g., How does Jesus' resurrection resolve the theological problem inherent in the Wisdom Literature? – page 81). A book for pulpiteers and pew-sitters alike, the *Ancient Love Song* will renew appreciation for the Old Testament and rouse us to a greater love for our Lover. 

*Rev. W.L. Bredenhof is missionary in Fort Babine, British Columbia.*

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# Address of Fraternal Delegate to the Synod of the Free Reformed Churches of North America, June 6, 2002

By R. Aasman

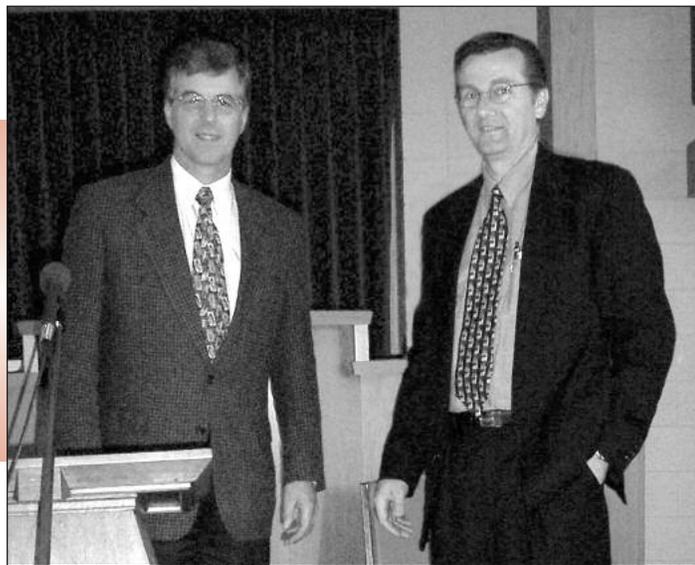
Dear brothers, on behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches, I extend greetings to all of you. As churches, we remember both your Synod and your churches in our congregational prayers. We value the fraternal contacts which we have together very highly. Rev. W.B. Slomp and I are most pleased to be here.

## Missions

In order to acquaint you with some of the things going on in our churches, permit me to update you on our mission activity, particularly on the local scene. Our churches have been active in mission activity in the area of Indonesia and Brazil. More recently, we have Rev. Frank Dong engaged in mission activity among the Chinese in the greater Vancouver area; Rev. Wes Bredenhof is continuing the mission work in Fort Babine, northern British Columbia. Rev. Bredenhof lives with his family at Fort Babine and thus has very good contact with the people in that area. Also, Richard Bultje is working as an evangelist in the downtown area of Hamilton, Ontario. The Lord has blessed his work richly, guiding people from broken backgrounds to the church of Jesus Christ. We are very thankful for the Lord's blessings in this respect.

## Church relations

Rev. Slomp explained our church contacts to you at your previous synod. I do not need to repeat that. But there is something very striking about the ecclesiastical fellowships which we established or were reciprocated after our Synod Neerlandia 2001. We entered into a sister-church relationship with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and



Rev. R. Aasman and Rev. P. VanderMeyden (FRC).

the Reformed Church in the United States. We also decided to enter into Phase 2 of unity with the United Reformed Churches of North America. This includes such things as pulpit exchanges. The remarkable thing, and the very gratifying thing, is that our churches have accepted these developments with enthusiasm. Our churches are not known for quick or easy church relationships. However, our churches have appeared to accept recent developments both quietly and gratefully. It is quite possible that with the blessing of the Lord, the CanRC and the URC will work toward full federative unity in the near future. When we see these developments, then we marvel and conclude that this is not our work. We see very clearly the hand of the Lord, and for that we are very thankful.

## Free Reformed Churches

By your own definition, the CanRC and the FRC are in a relationship known as "limited contact." This relationship is very special to us, particularly because of our common history dating back to 1834. Rev. Slomp and I have been sitting in your midst for the second day, now, listening to the presentations, discussions and decisions. We have been thinking that it is so good and pleasant to sit among brothers in the Lord, and to see the common affinity in the faith. As we listened to the discussions with a candidate for the ministry, a professor of theology, a missionary, as well as the presentations of church visitations, we said to ourselves, we feel very much at home here.

The CanRC committee for ecclesiastical contact, of which Rev. Slomp and I are members, have had excellent

contacts with the FRC brothers who were appointed to meet with us: Revs. L. W. Bilkes, K. Gangar, H. Overduin, and W. Wullschleger. Our discussions have been productive. We focussed on perceived differences, and we spent considerable time discussing covenantal automatism. We also exchanged sermons. After listening to each other's sermons, we concluded from both sides that the sermons were much appreciated. This was a cause for real thanksgiving.

Because of the good progress in our talks together, it came as a bit of a surprise yesterday when it was stated at this synod that the difference between the CanRC and the FRC could be typified by the former emphasizing the marks of the church, and the latter emphasizing the marks of the Christian. Brothers, this is a caricature. Perhaps the blame for this lies with the CanRC who may have done things to give that impression. I refer to the report of your subcommittee which mentions that it happens within the CanRC that during a withdrawal, someone is announced as "withdrawing from the church of Jesus Christ," or "withdrawing from the church of Jesus Christ in this place." This can even happen when such a person is joining a FRC. We have already explained to the brothers in the FRC subcommittee, that we cannot agree with such an announcement, particularly when it involves someone going from a CanRC to a FRC. We are sorry that such things happen, and that they may give the impression that the CanRC regards itself as the only "true church." We acknowledge and rejoice in the fact that the FRC are true churches of our Lord Jesus Christ.

### Marks of the church

Brothers, we may say that the marks of the church are important to us, in line with what we confess in the Belgic Confession, article 29. This is not meant to give ourselves a pat on the back, but this is meant to make us strive to be faithful churches of Jesus Christ. We are to strive, even as you do, for faithful preaching, pure administration of the sacraments, and biblical church discipline. What is important is for us is not a checklist which ratifies that the marks are kept, but that through faithful preaching, along with the sacraments and church discipline, the Holy Spirit is the seal who places Jesus Christ on our hearts, and that instead of grieving the Holy Spirit, we give our lives in thanksgiving and obedience to the glory of God! This leads to church members who show the marks of a Christian, that is, a living faith that flees from sin and pursues righteousness.

### Get to know us

I have the feeling that the FRC ministers out west have come to know us fairly well in recent years, and together we have formed a close bond. I suspect that in the east there is not the same kind of interaction and knowledge of one another. I would suggest, and I make the plea, that we get to know one another better in the coming years. It is so easy to let certain stereotypes and anecdotal evidence colour our relationship. If, after you get to know us well and we have some good mutual discussions, and you conclude that there is not a good basis for establishing greater unity, then we can respect that decision. That is because it will be a decision based on facts and



Bethel Canadian Reformed Church at Toronto

**Effective July 7, 2002**

Worship services will be held at Thornhill Presbyterian Church  
271 Centre Street, Thornhill, ON  
At 9:00 am and 4:00pm

### Church Mailing address:

Bethel Canadian Reformed Church at Toronto  
P.O. Box 32180, 250 Harding Blvd.  
Richmond Hill, ON L4C 9S3

brotherly discussions. However, it is our hope and prayer, and our belief, that better discussions at the federative and local levels will only convince us of the one faith that unites us.

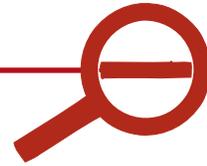
### Unity

I will not repeat what Rev. H. Zekveld of the United Reformed Churches said yesterday about the need to work toward unity among faithful churches of Jesus Christ. We agree with him totally, and we applaud his encouraging words. May the Lord bless your work as Synod, and your work in the local congregations. May the Lord also bless the discussions which the CanRC and FRC hope to continue in the coming years. C

*Rev. R. Aasman is minister of the Providence Canadian Reformed Church in Edmonton, Alberta.*



Photo by Cor Lodder



## A Letter in Discussion

In the month of April *Christian Renewal* published an English translation of Prof. J. Douma's letter to the General Synod of Zuidhorn, 2002. Prof. Douma is an emeritus professor of ethics of the Theological University in Kampen, and currently lives in Hoogeveen, Holland. In the letter, Douma expresses regret concerning his own role in the conflict that led to a division in the churches in the sixties, and also asks the Synod to formulate a statement of apology concerning the way Rev. B.J.F. Schoep of Amersfoort was treated in 1966. Prof. Douma's regret concerns specifically the way things developed and unfolded at the time. While for the most part this conflict did not affect Reformed churches in North America, our churches are perhaps the most involved because of our continued relations with the Reformed Churches (Liberated).

*Douma expresses regret concerning his own role in the conflict that led to a division in the churches in the sixties.*

It is not my intention to reprint the entire letter of Prof. Douma here since *Christian Renewal* is also widely read by readers of *Clarion*. However, it may be appropriate for us to deal with the comments that Dr. N. Kloosterman, the translator of the piece, added to his translation of Douma's letter. Here then follows Dr. Kloosterman's comments:

Most of us are unfamiliar with the historical details surrounding the 1967 Dutch church split. So it may require another read of Dr. Douma's explanation of the synodical condemnation of the *Open Letter* in order to comprehend precisely what it is that he is acknowledging as wrong.

"Nailing the other person down to conclusions that we draw," writes

Douma, "without taking into account what he himself intended, or may upon further reflection intend, engenders alienation."

That sentence summarizes the first mistake made by the General Synod of Amersfoort-West, namely, acting not on the basis of explicit declarations, but on the basis of implications which the synod thought were necessarily contained in the *Open Letter*. Merely asking the question whether the confessional foundation of the Liberated Reformed Churches was identical to the foundation of the catholic Christian church was thought to be adequate warrant for accusing the signatories of casting suspicion on the Reformed confessions.

Another related error was that the synod attributed these implied conclusions to every signatory of the *Open Letter*, when in fact many of those signatories had themselves not drawn the conclusions which the synod thought were necessarily implied.

A third mistake was that the synod did not allow a man whose views were considered objectionable (Rev. B.J.F. Schoep) the opportunity to explain, and defend himself. It may certainly have been the case that his ecumenical sympathies would have led to a softening of commitment to the Reformed confessions. But before condemning him on the basis of his allegedly erroneous confessional commitment, the synod should have given him a chance to explain his views fully.

I believe we can learn from this recent Dutch Reformed church history. Put a bit more forcefully: I believe we must learn from this history, and soon, among the URCNA. We ourselves can easily succumb to the alienation engendered by the rhetorical practice of nailing someone down to implications of some-

thing said or written without bothering to investigate whether those implications are in fact understood or intended.

*"Let me summarize my view on this, – which the editorial board requested of me – in a few words: the proposal of Douma is well-meant, wrongly presented, and hence – sadly enough – not effective to its stated purpose." C. Trimp*

At this point the unsympathetic reader might be saying, "It doesn't really matter whether such implications are understood or intended by the author. If what was said or written necessarily implies the conclusion I am drawing, then on that basis alone it is worthy of condemnation." The formula for this condemnation lies ready at hand: "If someone criticizes a familiar formulation of doctrine 'x,' that person will necessarily end up denying the gospel (or the Reformed faith, or the Confession)"

I believe Dr. Douma's analysis provides a healthy reminder that we need to exercise fraternal caution when it comes to rhetoric and judgments of this sort. Instead, we are obligated to investigate whether in fact such alleged implications are understood, intended, and defended. Surely the judgement of charity demands nothing less.

It is of course always easy to criticize decisions or actions made by synods after the fact. No synod is perfect, and, even if the intentions are well-meant, sometimes the end results are tainted with error. However, I question not only the *accuracy* of Dr. Kloosterman's

criticism against Amersfoort-West as drawn from Prof. Douma's letter, but also the overall usefulness of these criticisms for us in 2002.

***“Anyone who submits an appeal 35 years after the fact in effect puts a new issue on the agenda of synod.” C. Trimp***

Regarding both the accuracy and the usefulness of these criticisms, it may be helpful for us to listen to another person directly involved in the conflict of the sixties, Prof. C. Trimp. Upon request, he provided the journal *Nader Bekeken* with his comments concerning Douma's letter. Here follow his comments (my translation):

On January 19, Dr. J. Douma sent his public letter to the forthcoming Synod of Zuidhorn. He requests this synod to draft a statement of apology with regard to the course of events at the Synod of Amersfoort-West, the synod which refused to receive the Rev. B.J.F. Schoep as a delegate of the churches of North Holland.

This rupture between the synod and Rev. Schoep marked the beginning of the separation of a number of churches in North Holland from the federation of the Reformed Churches. The subsequent Synod of Hoogeveen (1969) refused to receive a delegation from those churches. That action precipitated a permanent split between the Reformed Churches (Liberated) and what became the Netherlands Reformed Churches (referred to as “buiten verband” for many years, JDJ).

The so-called *Open Letter* of October 31, 1966 was the occasion of this severe conflict which began to manifest itself in Amersfoort in 1967. Dr. Douma wants to go back to the beginning and hopes to undertake a breakthrough with regard to the shameful fact of this ecclesiastical rupture between the Reformed Churches (Liberated) (GKV) and the Netherlands Reformed Churches (NGK).

He regards it as necessary and honourable to introduce this breakthrough with the above mentioned confession of guilt. Since the letter to ‘Zuidhorn’ has been freely dis-

tributed in the public press, we all can read along.

We can recognize in this letter the Douma known to us all: a clear argument, a genuine, open-hearted position statement, an openly-stated sorrow because of the division of the Reformed believers in our country, a heartfelt desire to heal the breach, a warm-hearted approach to people who since 1967 went another way than he did (because of other viewpoints), and a readiness without reservations to admit his own errors and shortcomings.

How should we, who naturally know ourselves to be involved with this initiative and who can read this letter, evaluate this initiative of our emeritus professor? Let me summarize my view on this, – which the editorial board requested of me – in a few words: the proposal of Douma is well-meant, wrongly presented, and hence – sadly enough – not effective to its stated purpose.

I would like to clarify this ultimately negative judgment with the following four points:

1. The basis of our ecclesiastical fellowship is our common faith commitment, as this has been formulated in our confessional statements. This foundation of our ecclesiastical fellowship is the basis and norm of our interaction with each other as believers and as churches.

It goes without saying that when we meet each other at ecclesiastical assemblies (consistory, classis, synod, and so on) this basis cannot be lacking. It's the basis of our whole ecclesiastical life. Hence the first point on the agenda at our major assemblies is the submission of credentials from which it is clear that a) the brothers have been authorized by the minor assemblies (beginning with the consistory) to function as representatives of the sending church and b) the brothers previously had promised that the norm of all ecclesiastical life was to be respected, i.e., the confessions, in agreement with the adopted church order.

Therefore it is a distinct moment at the general synod when the delegates rise together to confirm the above-mentioned confessional allegiance. This

means at the same time receiving each other as co-members of the assembly. And only then is the assembly really in existence, and legally constituted. A good Reformed custom since 1571!

At the synod of Amersfoort 1967, at the time of the declaration of agreement with the confessions, it happened that one delegate from North Holland was not accepted by the assembly. It was felt that the position of Rev. Schoep was not in agreement with his expressed acknowledgement of the confession, and reference was made to the *Open Letter* which he had signed. Rev. Schoep left the synod, and the ecclesiastical division started to manifest itself.

2. Dr. Douma's letter is concerned with this moment (*Acts*, Article 18, April 16, 1967). Douma is definitely not defending the *Open Letter* itself. But – with more reflection – he does have genuine regret regarding the course of events at the time. He asks the synod to review the process of events and to take back its errors with a confession of guilt.

***“I also do not at all find that the Open Letter was open to a two-fold interpretation. The letter had the tone of a manifesto. It was as if people were determining their positions. Personally I saw it as a provocation.” C. Trimp***

A central complaint (Douma calls it an ethical issue) is that the Synod came to its judgment regarding Rev. Schoep without any form of a hearing or counter-hearing. Here in my view the argument of my esteemed colleague derails.

The *Acts* make clear that Rev. Schoep refused to speak. Rev. Schoep felt that he could not speak concerning the material that had been tabled. “The first time that I will speak concerning the complaints brought forward will be at what I see as a

properly qualified gathering, wherever it is held, and only when a further explanation of my position will be requested.”

Everyone who reads the Acts, Article 9 to 16 will have to agree that the central complaint of the letter writer (Dr. Douma) is incorrect.<sup>1</sup>

The poor presentation to which I referred is also clear from the fact that the assembly of appeal with regard to the decisions of Amersfoort-West 1967 would be the synod of Hooerveen 1969, or – if necessary – the Synod of Hattem (1972). Anyone who submits an appeal 35 years after the fact in effect puts a new issue on the agenda of synod.

The decisions of Amersfoort-West and Hooerveen were integrated into our ecclesiastical life around 1973, when the churches regained their stability.

No one knows better than Dr. Douma that at Hooerveen a lot of work was done with regard to the previous synod and the effects of its decisions, especially in North Holland. As the reporter Dr. Douma managed to fill 56 pages describing these issues, (Acts, Appendices 10-12)

It is not possible in this connection to review all of the material surrounding the *Open Letter*. Besides there is hardly any difference of opinion on these matters between Douma and myself.

Furthermore, it must be noted that at the time (in Amsterdam on June 23, 1967, see *De Reformatie*, vol. 42, p. 323, 330) Dr. Douma went out of his way to accommodate Rev. Schoep on the point of the interpretation of the so-called “foundational” sentence in the *Open Letter*, (i.e., the issue whether the Dutch confession, the Three Forms of Unity, and the doctrine of the catholic Christian church are identical). At this occasion, with much disappointment, Dr. Douma had to take leave of Rev. Schoep, as is clear from the report. In my view, Douma then became the victim of his own goodwill (See *De Reformatie*, August 5, 1967).

Hence it puzzles me that in 2002 Douma still has not resolved the identity issue (i.e., declaring the confessions as identical with the doctrine of the catholic Christian church, JD)).<sup>2</sup>

Regardless of the material of the *Open Letter*, the fact remains that the letter to Zuidhorn is being presented 35 years after the fact. And that’s not all. All the minor assemblies – the first bodies mentioned in the Church Order to determine the agenda of a general synod – were completely bypassed.<sup>3</sup>

***Rev. Schoep received the opportunity to speak, and actually addressed the synod more than once. To be sure, he declined to go into the issues, but that was his own decision.***

With this one man campaign towards Zuidhorn (without the involvement of any minor assemblies) Dr. Douma obstructs his own stated objective, that is, reconciliation with the NGK through a confession of guilt on the part of us all. Before a general synod does anything like that, I would first like to hear the voices of the local consistories.

To give an example close to home: in Kampen a few things also happened on the local scene around the 1967 issues. For many in this congregation the decision of Hooerveen was experienced as a liberating step!

3. As a church federation we are not bound to qualify opinions, arguments or actions of 1967 some 35 years later, (e.g., ecclesiastical exclusivism). A general synod does not get together for that purpose. A synod must judge concrete words and actions that have been brought to it in the lawful way.<sup>4</sup>

In the sixties of the previous century we had to deal with concrete issues: troubles in Breda, Beverwijk and Groningen-South. The issue of cooperative endeavour (for example, in the

political arena) was not an ecclesiastical issue at the time. And Dr. Douma was not the only one who now and in the past spoke out against exaggerated or reactionary accentuations.<sup>5</sup>

That after many years Dr. Douma sees several issues in a different light and therefore has regret concerning aspects of his own actions or omissions in those years does not in any way dishonour him. But this is not a matter that a general synod has to deal with. On these points Another will give his judgment.

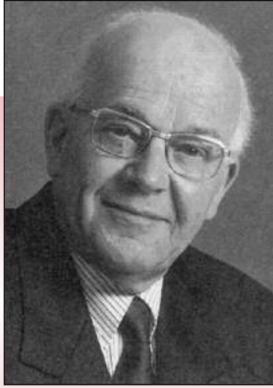
Besides, Douma’s change of perspective should not mean that we all need make a similar about face, and then on top of that, via a synod statement made on *behalf of the churches*.

We all undoubtedly desire the restoration of the peace of the GKV and NGK. For years the deputies of our synods have been working on this. Let’s all read and judge their reports. But on this point we read very little in the letter to Zuidhorn.

4. Should the synod of Zuidhorn declare Dr. Douma’s letter admissible, then I permit myself to add one more word of warning.

If it appears permissible after several decades via a one man solo action to tie up a synod and set the delegates to work on issues dealt with long ago, then we will have to hold many extra synods. One example, as an illustration: In the Acts of the Synod of Assen 1926 one finds the decision to suspend and depose Dr. J. G. Geelkerken (Acts, Art. 209/219 and 242). Quite a bit can be said about this decision, and if desired a lot of commentary can be brought in. Just read the recent publications on this issue. But anyone who wants to review the history of the Reformed Churches in Holland via after-the-fact-judgments or by revisiting synod decisions will without any doubt crumble under the weight of the work. It’s an impossible job, and un-called for as well.

My conclusion: we agree with Douma’s warning against the “chaotization” of the ecclesiastical federative community.<sup>6</sup>



Prof. C. Trimp



Prof. J. Douma

To these remarks of Prof. Trimp, which are clear in themselves, I would only add the following points in regard to the position taken by Dr. Douma and Dr. Kloosterman:

1. It seems to me inaccurate to suggest that the authors of the *Open Letter* were "merely asking a question." The synod made the statement that raising the issue in the manner that it occurred was tantamount to putting the validity and sufficiency of the doctrinal standards of the Liberated churches in dispute. Why? Clearly the next two questions of the *Open Letter*, with their opening words indicated that the signatories were ambivalent on the identity issue, and that explicit ambivalence put them in conflict with their own subscription to the Reformed confessions. Besides, their approach put the basis of the churches in dispute without following a proper church-orderly procedure.
2. It appears rather loaded to charge a synod with errors when in fact all the signatories not only knew what they were signing (they had read it) but also knew that the statements contained in the *Open Letter* did in fact put the confessional basis of the churches in dispute. To be sure, Douma suggests the delegates were not entirely aware of what they were signing. But what proof can be offered for that assertion? Besides, the signatories (for the most part ministers) could well have understood that the procedure for submitting a gravamen to the confession was not correctly

followed by sending out an *Open Letter* which cast suspicion on that basis, and which was essentially designed to support a schismatic action in a local church.

On this point, Prof. Trimp also provides a different approach. He says: "You sign for what the statement says. I also do not at all find that the *Open Letter* was open to a two-fold interpretation. The letter had the tone of a manifesto. It was as if people were determining their positions. Personally I saw it as a provocation."<sup>7</sup> All this is more than "merely asking a question."

3. Dr. Douma, and following him, Dr. Kloosterman also suggest that Rev. Schoep was judged without having any opportunity to defend himself. But has Dr. Kloosterman examined the accuracy of Douma's position? I do not think so. Rev. Schoep received the opportunity to speak, and actually addressed the synod more than once.<sup>8</sup> To be sure, he declined to go into the issues, but that was his own decision. Besides, he had made his position clear in an article which he had previously published in the magazine *Woord en wereld*. Douma asserts that Schoep's article was not relevant to the issue at hand. But why not? Schoep's public writings (there were other articles as well) served to indicate where he stood. Furthermore, the references to his writings were brought forward in a lawful way by the Regional Synod of Drenthe.

It is not my intention to suggest that Amersfoort-West 1967 was a

faultless synod. But I certainly question the haste in which these so-called "mistakes" are presented. I believe Dr. Kloosterman is drawing very heavily on Dr. Douma without providing any of his own supporting evidence. No doubt we can all learn from Douma's comments, and those of Dr. Kloosterman as well. We can all agree that synod judgments need to be characterized by fairness and equity. But synods do not function like secular courts, and no one should expect that of them either. I can only concur with the remarks of Prof. Trimp that ultimately Douma's position, although well meant, cannot be supported by the facts themselves.

<sup>1</sup>This will be even clearer for those who consider that at the Synod of Amersfoort-West the rebuttal of Rev. Schoep given at the Regional Synod of North Holland, was reproduced and answered in its decision of August 25, 1967 (*Acts*, Article 161, 162, pp. 160-170).

<sup>2</sup> Trimp writes that the term "identity" or "correspondence" (Dutch: "samenvallen") is rather unfortunate in this connection.

<sup>3</sup>Precisely Art. 33 KO (the Dutch Church Order, JDJ) which refers to eventual changes in decisions made by general synods draws the attention to the role of the minor assemblies.

<sup>4</sup>See *De Reformatie*, vol. 42, p. 326: J. Douma about the suspension of J. Van der Schaft – completely in the line of the Synod of Rotterdam-Delfshaven 1964 (*Acts*, pp. 56-60).

<sup>5</sup> Let me limit the comments to myself: already in the *Open Response Letter* of December 20, 1966, (*De Reformatie*, 24 December, vol. 42, p. 99) I wrote about "the cold, legalistic zeal, narrow-mindedness, introverted attitudes, conservatism, sterility, self-satisfied airs, judaist zealotry, and pharisaical arrogance" in our circles. See also my article "Unity and Reunion" in *De Reformatie*, vol. 63, (November 7, 1987) 134-138.

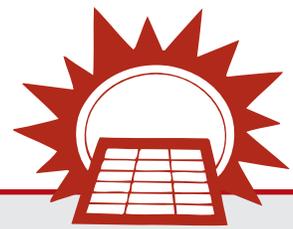
<sup>6</sup> J. Douma, *De Reformatie*, vol. 42, p. 331 (August 5, 1967).

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in *Nederlands Dagblad*, October 26, 1991.

<sup>8</sup> See R. Kuiper, W. Bouwman (eds) *Vuur en vlam. Aspecten van het vrijgemaakte-gereformeerde leven 1944-1969*, (Buiten & Schipperheijn, Amsterdam, 1994) 231ff.



Dr. J. De Jong is principal and professor of Diaconology and Ecclesiology at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Hamilton, Ontario.



By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

## The Plan of the Master Weaver

Our lives are but fine weavings  
That God for us prepares,  
Each life becomes a fabric planned  
And fashioned in His care.  
We may not always see just how  
The weavings intertwine,  
But we must trust the Master's hand  
And follow His design,  
For He can view the pattern  
Upon the upper side,  
While we must look from underneath  
And trust in Him to guide,  
Sometimes a strand of sorrow  
Is added to His plan,  
And though it's difficult for us,  
We still must understand  
That it's He who fills the hole  
It's He who knows what's best,  
So we must weave in patience  
And leave to Him the rest.  
Not till the loom is silent  
And the shuttles cease to fly  
Shall God unroll the canvas  
And explain the reason why—  
The dark threads are as needed  
In the Weaver's skillful Hand  
As the threads of gold and silver  
In the pattern He has planned.



*Jesus is our sure defence.  
Why should we then fear or waver?  
All our hope and confidence  
Rests on Him, the risen Saviour.  
Even in our darkest hour  
He will shield us with His power.*

*God His own shall glorify  
In a wondrous transformation:  
Though not all of us may die,  
All shall gain their full salvation  
In the twinkling of an eye  
When the Lord comes from on high.*

Hymn 51:1, 5

### Birthdays in August:

- 4: TERENCE BERENDS will turn 26**  
Anchor Home, 361, Thirty Road, RR 2  
Beamsville, ON L0R 1B0
- 5: PHILIP SCHUURMAN will be 43**  
65 Lincoln Street West, Welland, ON L3C 5J3
- 9: ROSE MALDA will be 45**  
Oakland Centre, 53 Bond Street,  
Oakville, ON L6J 5B4
- 18: FENNY KUIK will turn 50**  
140 Foch Avenue, Winnipeg, MB R2C 5H7
- 23: JACK DIELEMAN will be 30**  
5785 Young Street, Apt. 704  
Willowdale, ON M2M 4J2

Congratulations to you all on your birthday ! May our heavenly God and Father bless you throughout this new year with much health and happiness. Have an enjoyable day together with your family and friends.

Till next month,

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



## CRTA-East Convention's Keynote Address: Covenantal Education Revisited

By K. Sikkema

The eastern CRTA Teachers' Convention took place in rural Attercliffe in November 2001, and the weather was nice enough for many teachers to forego the option of taking the shuttle bus between the church and the school and to walk instead. The theme of the convention was "Thank the Lord and Come with Praise," and the decorations throughout the school were certainly reminiscent of agricultural goodness.

### Keynote address

In his keynote address<sup>1</sup>, Rev. Cl. Stam began by sharing his reflections on a speech he did for the CRTA in January, 1979. Among the speeches presented to the CRTA in the mid-seventies was one by Dr. F.G. Oosterhoff about the biblical image of man. In it,

*The image of God is valid for all students and all teachers. As such, it could not function as a basis or foundation for Reformed education.*

there had been an emphasis on the nature of being created in the image of God, such as intelligence and rationality, which sets man aside from other creatures. Clearly man was placed above animals, and Rev. Stam appreciated the positive approach in that speech. However, he did not find it convincing as a notion that sets our children apart from those of unbelievers: the image of God is valid for all students and all teachers. As such, it could not function as a basis or foundation for Reformed education.

Rather, Rev. Stam would start with the form for Baptism in our *Book of Praise*, which shows that there is not much left of man's initial goodness but total depravity. As the Canons of Dort put it, we even use our left-over good *against* God. Just like one can see from the remaining foundations of an old barn what the structure must once have been like, the image of God that is left in us is but a ruin that needs to be rebuilt. The main point is that our children are *sanctified in Christ*. That is their unique position which does not hold true for children of unbelievers. Even as little infants, our children share in the merits Christ earned on the cross. These covenant kids want lasting relationships, are open to the present culture and other faiths, and at the same time they are scared of the real world out there. They struggle and need to be reminded that they are indeed covenant children of God, and that problems they experience may be resolved on that basis. God said that they are his, and they should be treated that way.

Without ignoring what is in the child and their individual differences, we must not build our education on the image we have of them; rather, we should build on the covenant which is about what God said to that child: he belongs to God. This is the central and simple idea of the covenant: I am your God, and you are my people. Covenantal education must start with what the children are: God's people, and the aim must be to let them become what they already are. A classroom full of children that are God's people can be brutal at times, and stiff-necked like the Israelites in Moses' days, and no better than others. We should not be surprised that our children act no better than those of unbelievers despite years of Christian upbringing; nor should we become obsessed with that observation. We are God's children by *grace* alone. What we are is what God has made of us, and if we realize that as educators, we won't come down hard on them.

Some, including Dr. Oosterhoff and the late Rev. J. D. Wielenga, postulated that the term "covenantal education"

had become part of our standard terminology. As it didn't work as well as we had hoped, we kind of let go of it. However, one aspect of the covenant is that God does not deal with us in one point in time only, but from the womb to the grave, our whole life-time. The eight years of elementary school don't always reap instant fruits, but in the long run it does make a difference. One can stand amazed at who makes public profession of faith at such occasions. Indeed, building a Christian is a matter of a life-time, and teachers are part of the building committee and the work-force.

*Covenantal education must start with what the children are: God's people, and the aim must be to let them become what they already are.*

### Practical but not pragmatic

While practical, we are not pragmatic. It appears that the Dutch have pragmatically adopted a mentality of chucking out what doesn't work, for instance in the liturgy and preaching. If the old style doesn't work anymore, this mentality appears to turn to narrative preaching instead of preaching Christ. Rev. Wielenga didn't want teachers to touch the children's religious life, even though Peter says that we rejoice in the salvation of their souls. We are concerned about their eternal salvation. It seems that Rev. Wielenga could never come away from his own negative and unspiritual school experience, and that this background set the tone of his negative stance towards Christian schools in general. To him, faith and faith education was a matter for the church. However, children must learn to see *all* they are taught in the context of God's service. They are covenant children, called to live on this earth that is passing away, and destined to live on the new world that will not pass away. If something does not seem to work at this moment, it may

work and bear fruit later. There is no reason to abandon something that is good "because it doesn't work." There is no reason to stop talking about covenantal education.

### Impression of guarantee

Some twenty-five years after his initial speech, Rev. Stam feels he gave too much the impression that the covenant is a contract with guaranteed election. But with a contract, as in a sale, there is no lasting relationship. The covenant is a living relationship that needs ongoing work. Every Sunday that God says, "I love you," we must say, "I love you" back to God. In that way it is just like a marriage. We don't throw out marriage because some don't work, either. If we read the Bible, we find many covenantal passages in both the Old and New Testaments, as God is constantly exploring and explaining the relationship with His people. God comes down to man time and again to spruce up the

covenant with Adam, Abraham, Moses, David, Israel, and so on. He also makes us feel warm by rekindling our love and our faith.

There is no room for a haughty "we are the true church" mentality, but the covenant is a relationship in which we receive God's love. The term "covenant of grace," as a legal term, is actually unfortunate, as it limits our understanding of God's love, caring, attention, compassion, longsuffering, and faithfulness. This is what we have to bring to our children in the classroom. We must teach pastorally, unfolding material to them through telling, questioning, discussing, concluding, and through challenging our children to think. Our curriculum should also be Christ centred, and besides aiming for cognitive learning outcomes, it must also hit the affective domain. We need not aim for affective outcomes, and not all growth needs to be measured. God's covenant of love is there for each of

them individually, but also collectively as a community. We should also show that we care for the students and others outside the classroom, and interact with them, and pray for them. "Students don't care what you know, unless they know that you care."

Rev. Stam did not make a dramatic change in his position on the topic since 1979. As there were not many teachers in the audience that heard the original presentation, it was good to have this brought to our attention again as a refresher to think of reformed education as covenantal education.

<sup>1</sup>This report of his speech has been enriched with comments Rev. Stam made at the National Principal's Conference. 

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



## **The Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches**

The Thirty-third Anniversary Meeting and the  
Twenty-eighth Convocation of the Theological College  
will be held, D.V., on

**Friday, September 6, 2002 at 8:00 p.m.**

in the auditorium of Redeemer College (777 Garner Road East, Ancaster, Ontario)



Prof. G.H. Visscher, TH. DRs. will speak on the topic:

**"So What Does Separate the Sheep from the Goats?"**

**A Closer Look at a Misunderstood Parable (Matthew 25:31-46)**

*The Master of Divinity Degree will be conferred on:*

**Edwer Yaner Dethan • Walter Geurts • Julius Van Spronsen**



A Collection will be taken for the Foreign Student Bursary  
(TAX RECEIPTS AVAILABLE)



## Press Release of Classis Ontario West, June 12, 2002, held in Chatham, Ontario

### 1. Opening

On behalf of the convening Church of Chatham Rev. H. Versteeg called the meeting to order. He requested the delegates to sing from Psalm 113:1, after which he read from 1 Samuel 2:1-10 and led in prayer.

### 2. Credentials

The delegates from Chatham examined the credentials and found them to be in good order. Classis was declared constituted. The officers are Rev. J. Slaa - chairman, Rev. J. E. Ludwig - clerk and Rev. Versteeg - vice chairman.

Rev. Slaa took the chair and thanked the Church at Chatham for its work as convening church and welcomes everyone. A special welcome was expressed to br. Julius VanSpronsen and his wife and br. Edwer Dethan and his fiancée. Br. VanSpronsen requested preparatory examination in order to declared eligible to the ministry of the Word and br. Dethan requested to be examined with a view to speaking an edifying Word in the churches. Grades 3-6 of the Eben- Ezer Christian School of Chatham were also welcomed. As matters of memorabilia Rev. Slaa mentioned that Rev. J. E. Ludwig accepted the call extended to him by Grand Rapids. Grand Rapids was congratulated. The Church at Glanbrook was also congratulated with the installation of their minister, Rev. D. Vandeburgt, who was present for the first time in this classis.

### 3. Adoption of the agenda

The agenda for this meeting was adopted after some modification.

### 4. Signing of the subscription form

After the subscription form was read, it was willingly signed by Rev. Vandeburgt.

### 5. Examination of br. J. VanSpronsen

Br. J. VanSpronsen was examined to be declared eligible for call. Br. VanSpronsen delivered his sermon proposal on 1 Samuel 2:1-10. It was discussed in closed session. Classis judged the sermon proposal to be sufficient and

decided to proceed with the rest of the examination. Br. VanSpronsen is examined in Old Testament exegesis, Psalm 16 and Jonah 1, in New Testament exegesis, Romans 12, as well as in the knowledge of doctrine and creeds. It was discussed in closed session. Classis judged the examination to be sufficient. Br. VanSpronsen was declared eligible for call. The chairman requested Classis to sing Psalm 118:1 and the clerk, Rev. Ludwig led in thanksgiving prayer.

### 6. Examination of br. E. Dethan

Br. Dethan delivered his sermon proposal on Luke 9:46-50. The sermon proposal was discussed in closed session. Classis decided to proceed with the rest of the examination. Br. Dethan was examined in the knowledge of doctrine and creeds. It was discussed in closed session. Classis granted br. Dethan permission to speak an edifying Word in the churches for a period of one year. The chairman requested classis to sing Psalm 147:1 and Rev. G. Ph. VanPopta led in thanksgiving prayer.

### 7. Approbation of call of Rev J. E. Ludwig to the Church at Grand Rapids

The Church at Grand Rapids asked that the call to Rev. J. E. Ludwig be approbated. After the pertinent documents were examined and found to be in good order, the call was approbated. The installation of Rev. Ludwig will take place, D.V., on Sunday September 1, 2002 in the a.m. service. The Church at Kerwood is appointed to represent classis.

### 8. Question Period (CO 44)

All churches affirmed that the ministry of the office-bearers is being continued and the decisions of broader assemblies are being honoured. Several churches requested advice from Classis. Advice was given. Rev. Slaa was appointed as counselor for the Church at London.

### 9. Proposal re inviting fraternal delegates.

The Church at Ancaster presented a proposal with respect to inviting fraternal delegates to our meetings of classis. Classis decided to appoint a church to function as contact for other Churches.

### 10. Reports

- Classis received a report from the new classical treasurer, br. B. Vanderhout of Hamilton. The assessment for classical expenses was set at \$6.00 per communicant member. Classis decided to establish mileage allowance according to Canadian government guidelines.
- Classis received a report from the fund for needy students. The Church of Chatham, as deputy church of the fund for needy students, was requested to split the funds equally with the newly appointed deputy church of classis Niagara, the Church of Lincoln.
- The Church at Kerwood gave a report on their examination of the classical archives.
- The church visitors reported on their visit to the church at Grand Rapids.

### 11. Appointments

- convening Church for next Classis: Glanbrook
- suggested officers:  
chairman – Rev. Cl. Stam  
vice-chairman – Rev. J. Slaa  
clerk – Rev. J. Ludwig
- date: September 18, 2002
- delegates appointed for Regional Synod to be held September 4, 2002  
Ministers: Revs. Cl. Stam and G. Van Popta; Alternates: Revs. J. Slaa and J. Ludwig; Elders: brs. B. Harsevoort and P. Kingma; Alternates: brs. A. Dieleman and A. Witten.
- Church for contact with other churches: the Church of Kerwood.
- Church treasurer: br. B. Vanderhout.

### 12. Personal question period

Opportunity was given for personal questions.

### 13. Censure ad Article 34. C.O.

Chairman thankfully noted that censure was not necessary.

### 14. Adoption of Acts and Press Release

The Acts were adopted and Press Release was approved.

### 15. Closing

The chairman requested the Classis to sing Hymn 58:1, 2 and then he led in prayer. The chairman closed classis.

H. Versteeg  
Vice-chairman



## Press Release of Classis Central Ontario, June 14, 2002

1. On behalf of the convening Church at Burlington Ebenezer, the Rev. G. Nederveen called the meeting to order. He read James 1:1-18, led in prayer and requested the brothers to sing Psalm 99:1,2,3,6. Rev. Nederveen welcomed the Rev. R. Sikkema as observer from the United Reformed Churches.
2. The credentials were examined by the delegates of Toronto. There was one instruction which was added to the Agenda as item 8.2
3. Classis was constituted. The appointed officers were: Rev. J. De Gelder, chairman; Rev. G. Nederveen, vice-chairman; Rev. C. Bosch, clerk.
4. Memorabilia: Rev. J. DeGelder thanked the convening church for preparing Classis. He wished br. Walter Geurts well with his preparatory examination. He remembered the Church at Burlington-Waterdown in her search for a new pastor and teacher since Rev. W. B. Slomp had declined the call extended to him. The chairman wished the brothers the blessing of the Lord in the search to fill this vacancy. The Church at Toronto was disappointed when their call to the Rev. T. Lodder for the mission in PNG was declined, but has just extended a call to candidate Julius VanSpronsen for the mission work. Flamborough congregation is moving towards purchasing property for their church facilities.
5. The agenda was adopted.
6. Preparatory examination of brother W. Geurts.  
The necessary documents were presented and found to be in good order. Classis proceeded to the examination. After the sermon proposal on James 1:19-27 was presented, Classis decided to continue with the examination. Br. Geurts was then examined on Exegesis Old Testament, Exegesis New Testament, Doctrine and Creeds.  
The examination was sustained and br. Geurts was informed of this decision. He was given a certificate that he has been declared eligible for call within the churches.  
The chairman requested the meeting to sing Hymn 24:1, 5 and Rev. Bosch led in prayer of thanksgiving.
7. After lunch the chairman called the meeting back to order. Roll call showed that every one was present.

10. The chairman gave Rev. Sikkema the opportunity to address Classis. Rev. Sikkema extended fraternal greetings on behalf of the United Reformed Churches in Classis Ontario and expressed his appreciation for being present to witness the work of Classis. The chairman responded with appropriate words.
9. Reports:  
Church visitation reports to Burlington Ebenezer, Burlington Fellowship, Burlington-Waterdown, Flamborough, Ottawa and Toronto were read. These were all positive reports and they were received in gratitude to the Lord for the faithful care by the office bearers in these churches.
10. Question Period according to art 44 CO.  
The Churches at Burlington Ebenezer and Burlington Fellowship sought advice in matters of discipline. Advice was given in closed session.
11. Proposals and instructions
  - a. A proposal by Burlington Ebenezer re: Observers to URCNA Classes was presented. In it Classis was overtured to decide
    1. To ask Classis Northern Ontario, Classis Niagara and Classis Ontario West to adopt a schedule so that the two Classes nearest to the location of the URC Classis each send an observer who extend the fraternal greetings on behalf of all the Canadian Reformed churches in the four Classes;
    2. To inform the URC brothers of this arrangement if the other three Classes agree with this proposal;
    3. To adopt a rotation schedule for the ministers in Classis Central Ontario to take turns going to the URC Classis.

- Classis endorsed the proposal and instructed the clerk to submit the material to the convening churches of the three other Classes.
12. Correspondence received
    - a. Reply from Classis Northern Ontario of March 22, 2002 which considers the joint responsibility for the Fund for Needy churches closed. Classis Central Ontario decides to acquiesce in the decision of Classis Northern Ontario.
    - b. Appeal from a brother in another classical district appealing a decision from one of the churches in Classis Central Ontario. This appeal was dealt with in closed session.
  13. Appointments for next Classes:
    - a. Convening church for the next Classis: Burlington Fellowship on September 13, 2002.
    - b. Suggested officers: W. den Hollander, chairman; C. Bosch, vice-chairman; J. DeGelder, clerk
    - c. Delegates to Regional Synod East to be convened on September 4, 2002: Ministers: C. Bosch and W. den Hollander. Alternates: J. DeGelder and M. Jagt. Elders: J.H. Harsevoort and H. VanDooren. Alternates: L. Jagt and R. Cowle.
  14. Question period was used.  
Censure according to art 34 CO was not necessary.
  15. The Acts were adopted and the Press Release approved.
  16. The chairman requested the brothers to sing Psalm 108:1, 2 and led in closing prayer.

*For Classis Central Ontario,  
June 14, 2002  
G. Nederveen*



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By Aunt Betty



## Dear Busy Beavers

I have not received any mail this time, so I will say hello especially to everyone!! Have you all been very busy lately? You must be almost getting ready to have school holidays soon. Projects at school are being finished off and bits and pieces of cleaning up are being done in your classroom and your desks. Don't you just love it when summer decides to come around? There are always so many things to do at this time of the year. But you also have to think about those kids who are now into their winter. In the southern hemisphere, it is cold and wintry, and in some places they will be skiing and skating, etc.

Sometimes it would be really nice to be able to ski and skate during the summer too, don't you think?

Lots of love,  
Aunt Betty



## Jokes

- Teacher:** "Were you copying his sums?"  
**Katie:** "No, just checking that he got mine right."  
**Teacher:** "This note from your father looks like your handwriting."  
**Rennai:** "Well, Dad borrowed my pen."  
**Teacher:** "Simon, can you spell your name backwards?"  
**Simon:** "No, miss."  
**Barney:** "Do you ever get straight As?"  
**Anton:** "No, but I sometimes get crooked Bs."  
**Teacher:** "You missed school yesterday, didn't you?"  
**Corey:** "Not one bit!"



**Aunt Betty**

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## Puzzles

### Occupations

When God called the following people, they were busy working at something.

Match the person with what he or she did for a living.

- |                                   |                           |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Moses, Exodus 3:1              | a. Farmer                 |
| 2. Gideon, Judges 6:11            | b. Seller of purple cloth |
| 3. Elisha, 1 Kings 19:16-19       | c. Shepherd               |
| 4. Lydia, Acts 16:14              | d. Judge                  |
| 5. Priscilla and Aquila Acts 18:3 | e. Thresher               |
| 6. Zacchaeus, Luke 19             | f. Scribe                 |
| 7. Luke, Colossians 4:14          | g. Queen                  |
| 8. Baruch, Jeremiah 36:4          | h. Tentmakers             |
| 9. Deborah, Judges 4:4            | i. Tax collector          |
| 10. Esther, Esther 2:17           | j. Doctor                 |

## Surprises!

- This great army received a great surprise at night. *Judges 7*
- The seating arrangement at a table was a great surprise to these men. *Genesis 43*
- Even Jesus was surprised at the faith of this man. *Matthew 8*
- Five thousand men received the surprise of a lifetime. *Mark 6*
- A fig tree was the source of astonishment for these men. *Matthew 21*
- He was surprised to learn that Jesus was already dead. *Mark 15*
- This priest was greatly surprised in the holy of holies. *Luke 1*
- They were surprised beyond measure to see Peter at the door. *Acts 12*
- These young parents were surprised by a visit at midnight. *Luke 2*
- They were surprised to see the Master conversing with a sinful woman. *John 4*