

Clarion

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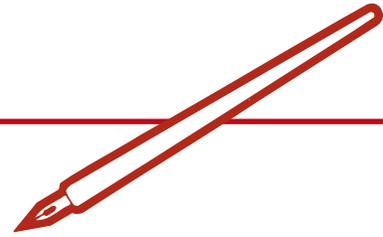


Numbers

10:1-10

*Office
bearers in
Christ's church:
their cooperation
and consultation*

INSIDE!



By Cl. Stam



The Evaluation of Divergences (3)

In my last two editorials I introduced to the readers the Evaluation of Divergences report which was presented to and received by General Synod Burlington, 1986. The “divergences” are the main points of difference existing between the Three Forms of Unity (Canadian Reformed Churches) and the Westminster Standards (Orthodox Presbyterian Church). Synod 1980 had asked that these divergences as yet be evaluated to see if these formed impediments to further unity. The deputies appointed for this evaluation reported to Synod 1986 that *none* of these divergences are impediments to recognition and a sister-church relationship.

What are the divergences?

At this point I come to the realization that I have not listed or specified what these divergences are. Some readers may be asking: what are these divergences about which so much fuss is made? So perhaps it is good now to list these items, in order to deal with each later on. At least, we’ll all know what we’re talking about.

The desire to evaluate the divergences was first formulated in a mandate given by Synod Orangeville 1968. Hence Synod 1971 already received a report regarding the divergences. Synod 1983 did not give a new list, so it is best to go back to 1971 to ascertain what these divergences are. I mention already now that Synod 1983 *added* some items, but we’ll deal with those later. The initial list was evaluated and presented to Synod 1971, six years before recognition was given in 1977.

The deputies appointed for this evaluation reported to Synod 1986 that none of these divergences are impediments to recognition and a sister-church relationship.

In Supplement V of the Acts of Synod 1971, we find that the divergences discussed are divided over two categories, those of a *confessional* (doctrinal) nature and those dealing with matters of church government or church *polity*. Comparing the report to Synod 1971 with the report to Synod 1986, I conclude that the following items are considered to be divergences:

Doctrinal

1. the teaching about the visible/invisible church; also here the relation between the church and the elect
2. the teaching about more or less pure churches
3. the teaching that assurance does not belong to the essence of faith
4. the teaching about with whom the covenant of grace is made
5. the meaning of “He descended into hell”
6. the understanding of the Ten Commandments.

Political

1. autonomy of the local church
2. relationship with the Christian Reformed Church
3. admission to the Lord’s Supper
4. membership in the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES).

I conclude that the churches have stuck to one track: the divergences merit further discussion but they are not impediments to unity and a sister-church relationship.

Synod 1971 Report

The Deputies who reported to Synod 1971 made it quite clear that these divergences were *not* impediments towards recognition and relationship. The only two matters which were considered to be obstacles were the OPC’s membership in the RES and their relationship with the GKN (and the sister churches of the GKN, among whom especially Christian Reformed Church).

The 1971 report contains conclusions, which have been maintained by all Synods since then. “The divergences in confession between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church are not of such a nature that they should prevent the Canadian Reformed Churches from recognizing the OPC as a true church of the Lord Jesus Christ and entering into correspondence with this church.” It also says, “Although considerable divergences exist in church polity and in the Form of Government, there is no difference between the essential truth of Christ’s headship over the church and of the absolute authority which his Word should have in the government of the church.”

It appears that the only matters that really formed an impediment have been the membership in the RES and the

relationship with the GKN and the Christian Reformed Church. Synod 1971 decided accordingly and stated that the “divergences in confession and in Church polity are serious enough to remain the subject of further and frank discussion” (Acts, Art. 92, page 44). This was not a stated as a prior condition, but seen as an ongoing matter. We can be sister-churches despite some serious divergences, which require further discussion.

Interim conclusion

Reviewing the reports and decisions from 1968-2001, I conclude that the churches have stuck to one track: the divergences merit further discussion but they are not impediments to unity and a sister-church relationship. Thus Synod Coaldale 1977 decided to recognize the OPC as a true church, and the 1986 report which later gave the grounds for the 1977 decision, was of the same content and substance as the 1971 report. We started to go in circles here.

The decision of Synod Coaldale 1977 led to shock waves throughout our federation. There are many reasons for this, which need not be discussed now. I have had my difficulties with the timing, format and legality of Synod Coaldale’s decision. But we all could have seen it coming. You have to be consistent as churches. I have come to understand and accept that our churches have always said: these divergences are not impediments. Therefore Synod Neerlandia 2001 had to come to resolution of the matter.

In a next editorial I hope to begin discussing the divergences themselves. And I will do so by first outlining my own position with respect to the Westminster Standards and Catechisms. 

Rev. Cl. Stam is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Hamilton, Ontario.

What’s inside?

Since a new season of home visiting is upon us, Rev. W. den Hollander’s speech delivered to office bearers a while back may get us thinking about our approach to such visits. It is a very serious responsibility to be a shepherd of Christ’s flock. Thus preparation is important.

In his editorial, Rev. Cl. Stam again examines the “divergences” which were discussed by a number of Synods in connection with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. He writes, “I have come to understand and accept that our churches have always said: these divergences are not impediments.” He adds, “Therefore Synod Neerlandia 2001 had to come to resolution of the matter.”

In *Observations*, Rev. G. Ph. van Popta examines the trend of our little girls trying to copy pop culture in the matter of dress code. This makes me think of a lady who was at our local Christian school and concluded: there is something different about your school, and it has finally struck me what it is, your girls look like girls. This is something that we should strive to keep as Rev. van Popta makes clear.

Dr. J. De Jong continues his very interesting press release. We also have a book review by Dr. C. Van Dam, our column *Ray of Sunshine*, and three letters to the editor.

RA



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By W.M. Wielenga

The Assurance of Salvation

“He who did not spare his own Son . . . shall He not also do the rest?” Romans 8:32

Assurance of salvation belongs to the gift of God for his children. It is not an added gift given only to some of the saved, or attained by those who strive for a higher form of Christianity. Assurance belongs to salvation – salvation is, by its nature, an assured thing. That is as we also confess in Lord’s Day 7 of the Heidelberg Catechism: true faith is at the same time a sure knowledge and a firm confidence. Assurance, firm confidence, belongs to true faith; and true faith belongs to all those who are saved in Christ. That is not to say that there may be times when we lose the sense of assurance of God’s favour. The brokenness of life, the attacks of the oppressor, the weakness of our condition, can all play a part in taking away the sense of God’s favour. With the Canons of Dort, V 11, “This Assurance Not Always Felt,” we confess this reality. Nevertheless, with the surrounding articles we confess that assurance is God’s gift to those whom He receives in Christ.

Our assurance of God’s love and favour is not based upon something that is in us. Faith looks away from self to God and his work in Jesus Christ. Faith is secure(d) in the outside-of-ourselves historical person and work of Jesus Christ, in the historical events which God in Christ accomplished among us. Faith (which includes assurance) comes through the power of the gospel concerning Christ; and the power of the gospel of Christ is God’s covenant faithfulness, his righteousness revealed in Christ (Rom 1:16-17).

Romans 8:32 comes in that section of the letter to the Romans where the apostle is taking stock-so-far of God’s righteousness, God’s covenant faithfulness. In doing this, the apostle extols God’s justice and God’s love through which his covenant faithfulness is manifest for all the world to see, for Jew and Gentile equally to enjoy. This verse, Romans 8:32, particularly focuses on the love of God.

The thing that the apostle is teaching here comes in the form of a rhetorical question, designed to arrest our attention and force us to the only conclusion. “He who did not spare his own Son, but delivered him over for us all, how will He not also with him freely give us all things?” We must conclude: Yes, it is not possible that God will not do that, having already done this first. We must notice the comparison being made, a comparison between the greater (harder) and the lesser (easier) thing: If God has already done the ultimately great thing – let’s say the hardest thing – it is not possible that He would not now do the lesser thing, the easier thing. That’s the nub of the argument, which we must catch.

What is it that God has done which is the sure guarantee of, and which includes, things to come? He has not spared his own Son, but delivered Him over for us all. The words “has not spared his own Son” have been seen by many to be a reference to what Abraham did in sacrificing his son Isaac (Gen 22). There is here a word association, which alerts us to the deeper meaning of what the apostle is saying. The act of Abraham to not spare his own son Isaac was, in effect, the ultimate act of Abraham’s covenant faithfulness and loyalty and love for the LORD. In this regard, that God did not spare his own Son but delivered Him over as the sacrifice for sin, can rightly be said to be the ultimate act of God’s covenant faithfulness and loyalty and love. There is no higher act of covenant love conceivable than that God spared not his own Son for us; that He delivered Him over to the hour of darkness on our account. And, even more: by this revelation of love, the LORD, who acted in his great faithfulness, fulfilled also Abraham’s act of faithfulness, on Abraham’s behalf. We know: Abraham’s son was, in fact, spared – Abraham’s supreme act of covenant love was cut short, in mercy,

by the angel. God gave his Son, then, to perform the ultimate in Abraham’s act of covenant love. God, in his Son, gave Abraham and his seed, gave us, the complete fulfillment of the covenant from both sides, in his own Son Jesus Christ who performed the divine-and-human covenant love to the end. This happened in history, in our world, in our flesh and among us, witnessed and testified for us. This is the heart-beat behind God’s justifying us: He, in covenant-fulfilling love, gave the way to, made perfect provision for, our justification: in his Son.

This is the basis for our being assured of “the rest.” How will He not also with Him freely give us all things? What can hinder the road to glory now? So the apostle can speak of “overwhelmingly conquering” through Him who loved us, more-than-conquerors through all these things: tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, sword. Indeed, nothing can separate us from God’s love in Christ. We could put the words of the text in terms of verses 28- 30: He who has justified us in Christ, how shall his great love now not also glorify us with Christ? What Paul writes here has been illustrated somewhere thus: someone who has to bike over a steep hill to get home will certainly not give up when he has made it over the top of the hill – it’s all downhill from there! He who did not spare his own Son . . . how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things? He has done the greatest thing for us. Who could ever consider the notion that He would now not do the rest? It is not possible to imagine. The very thought should be put away. Be assured, therefore: God is for us; who spared not his own Son!

Rev. W.M. Wielenga is minister of the American Reformed Church at Lynden, Washington.

Office bearers in Christ's Church¹

By W. den Hollander

We're here together as office bearers of Christ's churches to up build each other for the execution of our office. This mutual edification is a common aspect in our work as office bearers anyway (consider CO Art 73). Then we need to have a good understanding, however, of the *duties* of our office. We also need to know the *parameters* of each office. Essential as well, is a strong awareness of the *relationship* among the offices and office bearers. For, a good cooperation among the office bearers is basic to an effective functioning of the leadership and communion in the congregation! That will be the focus of my address this morning:

1. Office bearers in Christ's church: their cooperation and consultation

Basis

The origin of the offices in the church is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the great Office Bearer, the Anointed one, appointed to be Prophet, Priest, and King. (Lord's Day 12) He is Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest whom we confess. (Heb 3:1) He *still* executes his office and calling in this position given to Him by the Father. The offices in the church proceed from Him and from his work as the Office Bearer *par excellence*. He continues his work as Office Bearer for his church on earth, and He does so, although not exclusively, yet *also* and *especially* by means of the office bearers. Office bearers, therefore, don't do their *own* work but they do *Christ's* work in his Name. Elders and deacons must recognize in each other service for the same Master! In Him they also find the basis for their *relationship* as office bearers. That's then the first aspect I want to consider: their relationship!

Relationship

All the offices in the church are gifts from the ascended Lord (Eph 4:11). In

his Name they have their special calling in his church. They execute this calling for the upbuilding of his church: "to prepare God's people for works of *service*, so that the body of Christ may be built up" (Eph 4:12). *Service*, therefore, or *diakonia*, is the all-encompassing *objective* for all activities and positions in the church of Christ: for the proclamation of the gospel, the supervision and discipline, the governance, the works of mercy, etc. At the *heart* of all this service is the administration of reconciliation, as the apostle Paul points out in 2 Corinthians 5:18-20. Each and every member should be motivated in his/her service to God by the restored position before God!

All the offices in the church are gifts from the ascended Lord (Eph 4:11)

When Christ, the ascended Lord, gave his gifts to his church, He first gave apostles, prophets, and evangelists. They lay the foundation of his New Testament church with the *proclamation* of reconciliation. They represented Christ on earth in their exercise of *charity*. They executed the *government* of the local congregations as well. As the Christ was gathering, preserving and defending his church, He governed his apostles with his Spirit and Word, *moving* them to appoint *special* people among his congregations. Thus differentiation and division of duties entered the picture. First the *deacons* were appointed to ensure the good progress of the work of mercy. Then we see them appoint *elders* in every city. Yes, even among these elders a differentiation took place, leading to the task for *certain elders* of proclaiming the Word of God. Yet, *Christ*

is active in them! In *Christ* their offices are united! Hence we confess in BC Art 30 the government of the church by ministers, elders and deacons, who form the Council of the church.

2. Unity and differentiation

Since the offices in the church have their origin in Christ, these offices are inseparably connected in a firm *unity*. In Christ the three offices are essentially *one* office, which for *practical* purposes only may be *distinguished*. There is *differentiation* for the purpose of an effective upbuilding and a good functioning of the congregation. Yet *unity* remains, because each service and servant is serving under the one Master, in the one congregation, for the one goal of the upbuilding of the congregation.

These offices, also, are *equal*, and are not arranged in some hierarchical order. *Christ* is coming to his people through them; one Spirit and Word unite them in service. It's not so that the minister is the highest office bearer, then the elder, and finally the deacon. A *deacon* is not promoted to the office of elder, but also in the work of the *deacon* there is much pastoral work involved. According to the "Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons," they are called to encourage and comfort with the Word of God those who receive the gifts of Christ's love. *Christ's* Spirit and Word *unite all three* offices in the *one* work of shepherding the flock. As H. Bavinck concludes his treatise of the government of the church, "*He [Christ]* instructs by the office of teacher, *He* leads by the office of elder, and *He* tends by the office of deacon; by all three *He* shows Himself to be our highest Prophet, our eternal King, and our merciful High Priest." (H. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, Vol. IV, p. 371)

Within this unity there is yet *differentiation* in the tasks that are executed by the respective office bearers. The distinctions, however, remain somewhat *fluid*. There is variety in service, yet equality of office and unity in pursuit. The Form for Ordination clearly articulates this diversity. The *elders* in the execution of their office concentrate in their leadership on the holiness of the congregation, on the commitment of the members to Christ and the communion of his saints, on a life as living members of Christ in church and world.

Christ instructs by the office of teacher, He leads by the office of elder, and He tends by the office of deacon.

The *deacons* serve the congregation in their care for the needs among the members. They mobilize and stimulate the congregation to service in the way of *showing* the communion of saints to one another in various acts of mercy. Thus, in what's sometimes called a *diaconal* congregation the *deacons* lead the members in showing themselves as Christians, who are united as household of faith in doing good to one another, and who are active in showing mercy to those who are in need outside as well.

3. The position of the deacon

Before we focus more closely on the matter of cooperation and consultation, it will be good to pay some attention to the position of the deacon. There has been an impression of inequality and inferiority of their position; an impression also as if the deacons are just helpers for the elders. This has given to their position a sense of ambiguity and lack of clarity. This regrettable situation is due in part to a perceived discrepancy between the Belgic Confession, Art 30, and the Church Order Art 38, 39. The BC states that the council of the church is composed of the ministers, elders, and deacons, while the church order says that the consistory consists of ministers and elders. According to this CO, there are various reasons why the consistory must meet with the deacons, yet they do not really seem to belong to the consistory *itself*.

Evidently we are touching here upon a somewhat complex historical issue. It is understandable, therefore, that

attempts have been made to correct this discrepancy. The Free Reformed Churches have adapted the CO to the confession (1952), by *including* the deacons with the consistory or council of the church. Thus, the position of the deacon is much less ambiguous in their midst. Among our sister churches study committees have submitted reports to various General Synods, examining the need for revision of the CO. Some, however, *question* whether the deacons are office bearers at all (Van Bruggen). Others plead for a *correction* of the situation because the CO appears out of line with Scripture and the confession. In the mean time nothing has been changed.

The question can be asked why the New Testament does not mention the deacons every time the "elders" are mentioned. Dr. Te Velde suggests that the term "elders" was used in a more general sense at times, denoting the overall leadership of the congregation, including the deacons. (*Gemeenteopbouw* 2, p. 104; e.g., in 1 Timothy 4:14, where Paul speaks about "the *body* of the elders"). It seems that the BC also expresses this *broader* understanding of leadership and government of the church. Art 30 does not only *include all three offices* in the council of the church; it, also, states that together they "*govern*" the church, according to the Spiritual order which our Lord has taught us in his Word. We confess: "By these means *everything* will be done well and in good order. . ." which includes the work of the deacons too, of course. Historically, BC Art 31 read that "everyone must hold the ministers of the Word and the *governors* of the church in special esteem because of their work. . ." *again* including the *deacons* in the sense of Art 30.

On the other hand, however, seeing how it is the purpose of the *Church Order* to *regulate* the work of the respective office bearers, its specific stipulations for each office *does not necessarily have to imply* that the office of the deacons is *inferior* or *subservient* to the office of ministers and elders. It could also mean to express that the deacons do not *need* to take part in the spiritual government of the congregation in a *stricter* sense (i.e., matters of supervision and discipline), in which the consistory leads the congregation. However, in the so-called "broader" consistory, or council, there still are many aspects of government in which the deacons' involvement is required.

In other words, we could simply conclude that the confession just expresses this broader notion of "governing" and "consistory" more specifically than the Church Order does. Hence, this perceived discrepancy between confession and Church Order does not *need* to lead to ambiguity or inferiority among the offices. Considering, therefore, the various activities in which the deacons *are* involved in the work of the consistory as regulated by the CO (Art 3, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 46, 71, 72, 73), the view has been expressed by Trimp, Kamphuis, and others, that the actual practice of cooperation and consultation of the consistory and the deacons should be as *flexible* and *extensive* as possible. There may be *differentiation* for the sake of an effective upbuilding of the congregation, *yet the unity and equality remains*. Each office bearer pursues his service under the *one* Lord Jesus Christ, in the *one* congregation and for the *one* goal of equipping the church of Christ for service! So let's move on, then, more specifically to this matter of:

The actual practice of cooperation and consultation of the consistory and the deacons should be as flexible and extensive as possible.

4. Cooperation and consultation

For the sake of the love and care for the church of Christ, the office bearers should pay close attention to the many *common* concerns and *common* pursuits in which each office bearer is involved. They should prevent as much as possible that ministers, elders, and deacons are working *independently* on a case, or even working against each other. Rather, they need to see themselves as part of a *team*. Too often a situation exists in which deacons are sensitive about the elders lording it over them. It also happens that the elders are defensive when it is suggested that certain visits deacons and elders could best make together. Instead, however, they should be committed to the principle and practice of *teamwork*. The consistory has to be an example of how brothers of the same house live and work together!

The reality in this regard is still far from perfect. It does not happen too often yet that the council dedicates special time and attention to the practice of mutual cooperation and consultation. It would be recommendable, therefore, that the office bearers sit down together. At the beginning of the season, for instance, they should discuss together their common concerns and strategies. They should seek to establish agreements about the manner and method of cooperation and consultation. The exchange of information, for instance, could be greatly improved, when *section* elders and deacons would agree to sit down together to discuss the needs and concerns regarding certain members in their wards. Then there may be a legitimate concern for confidentiality in this regard. However, this should not lead to an independent and secretive approach to the work for the well being of the members. Energy spent on protecting one's own "turf" could well undermine this well being. Rather, the office bearers will benefit greatly from an optimal exchange of information.

Discussions of this nature could also lead to a *more balanced division among the office bearers of visits* to the sick and the elderly. This could improve the effectiveness and time-management of the office bearers greatly. Not only in the congregation but also among the office bearers there is a lack of agreement and clarity about the way certain situations should be handled. It happens in certain situations that a member or family receives a visit from *both* the elders *and* the deacons, while *the minister as well* drops in for a visit. Now, in some very special situations such an "overdose" of attention may be necessary and beneficial; however, it should *not* be the general practice. Many an office bearer struggles with his time management already. He wishes to concentrate on the more serious cases that are more pertinent to his specific duty as minister, elder, or deacon. Then a good cooperation and consultation could lead to a better division of the work and a more efficient shepherding of the flock. The office bearers, therefore, may wish to take some time at their meeting to preview the visiting schedule for the weeks to come and decide on the question "Who will visit whom?"

In *this* context as well, it may help to stress the *equality and unity* among the offices. For such activities as visit-

ing the sick, the chronically ill, and the elderly, the *deacons* could be involved *more* than is the case presently. Their office is not second rank but *equal and adequate* also for *these* acts of mercy and comfort. Their visits, therefore, should not be perceived as inferior to the visits made by the elder or minister, but as *equally* spiritual and up building as those of their colleague office bearers. The Form for their Ordination *correctly* echoes 1 Timothy 3, articulating that such men who "keep hold of the deep truths of faith with a clear conscience" should be *called* "to encourage and comfort with the Word of God those who receive the gifts of Christ's love."

The office bearers, therefore, may wish to take some time at their meeting to preview the visiting schedule for the weeks to come and decide on the question "Who will visit whom?"

Deacons and elders *together* could also coordinate the involvement of the *congregation* in such situations. When the congregation grows in the Lord and functions as a *diaconal* and pastoral congregation in which the communion of saints flourishes, much work could be *delegated* to brothers and sisters whom the Lord has blessed as well with special gifts. A good cooperation and consultation among the office bearers will show in this stimulation and mobilization of the congregation, while yet the ultimate responsibility for the shepherding of the flock remains with them.

In regard to this cooperation and consultation, much depends of course on the attitude which elders and deacons have toward each other. How open or how closed they are concerning their activities among the congregation. Here too, it should be the *Spirit of Christ* and the *mutual trust and confidence*, which works a good cooperation. Thus, the word of Paul in Philippians 2:4 applies, "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." Pastoral care, visits, and acts of mercy should not be rendered independently of each other but in close consultation with each other. In the process toward im-



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proved communication among the office bearers, the minister could coordinate and stimulate the cooperation and exchange of information.

At the council meeting, therefore, there should be an opportunity for exchange of relevant information, which was discussed at the consistory meeting or at a meeting of the deacons. A deacon could update the elder(s) on a situation of unemployment or illness or of some form of addiction in a certain family. An elder could inform the deacons that in a certain family the discipline in that family has been stepped up from silent censure to the first step of discipline. During silent censure, as a rule the deacon does not need to be involved. It is conceivable, however, that the matter under discipline could hamper the deacon's work. From experience we also know that there could be a need to prevent manipulation and division among the office bearers. That way the deacon does not need to be ignorant of the situation in a family when he makes his visit there. The deacon does not need to *judge* the matter, yet he is aware of the greater spiritual need in a family. Of course, such exchange of information does not always need to wait till the council meeting; also before or after the Sunday services there may be an opportunity for further update on changes in a situation. Elders and deacons should *know* of each other, however, that there is *openness* for such exchange and consultation!

Now, the pursuit of such forms of cooperation and consultation could be

organized concretely, for instance, by means of regular meetings of the ward elders and deacons. Once a year the minister could attend such a meeting of these respective wards as well. For the evaluation and cooperation of the work of the deacons with the minister, it would be advisable that the minister attends the meeting of the deacons at least once a year. Also for the transition of office bearers after the yearly "changing of the guard," a meeting of these office bearers with the *new* elder and/or deacon in the ward would facilitate the *continuity* in the care. In accordance with Art 42 of the CO, the deacons "shall give account of their labours to the consistory." Additional to the regular reporting of the deacons in the council meeting, therefore, it would be beneficial for the good cooperation when some special attention is given once a year to the *policy and approach* developed by the deacons. This should be done, *not* for purposes of *supervision* or scrutiny but rather *for the promotion of a common care* for the congregation.

As you can see, the great variety of common concerns and strategies should warrant a special meeting at the beginning or end of the season of congregational activities. Why not organize such a meeting on one special Saturday in June or early September, at which the office bearers can speak with each other about their work and the

best method and approach to it. Such a meeting will give the office bearers a forum for a general evaluation of their work: their visiting (e.g., the frequency), their contributions to the meetings, their reporting, their performance as liaison for council in a particular committee,

Why not organize such a meeting on one special Saturday in June or early September, at which the office bearers can speak with each other about their work and the best method and approach to it.

etc. At this meeting agreements can be made regarding cooperation in matters of visiting the sick, the elderly (including birthday-visits), making "baby-visits," and the like. The office bearers could also decide on a coordinated approach for welcoming new members, i.e., welcome visits, and the promotion of the voluntary contributions (including a policy for delinquent members in this regard). Besides, at this meeting the theme for the family-visits in the new season could be introduced as well.

Such a meeting may be a good opportunity also to evaluate together the work of the *minister* in the congregation:

his performance in the worship services, his visiting schedule, his leadership in meetings, in bulletins, in prayers, his catechism teaching. The office bearers can be of help to the minister in regard to the development of *his* gifts; *also* with a view to the upbuilding of the congregation. A special sermon discussion could take place to assist the minister in his assessment of the needs of the congregation. The minister in turn could express to his colleague office bearers in what way they could serve him. At their installation the elders promised to support him with "good counsel and advice." How well this functions, generally speaking, I don't know, but from experience I know that here too, much work is being done in solitude instead of in common pursuit.

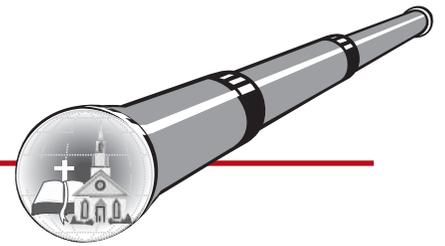
Thus, in the way of an integrated approach and close cooperation of the office bearers the body of Christ may be built up "until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

¹Address by Rev. W. den Hollander to an office bearers' conference. 

Rev. W. den Hollander is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Toronto, Ontario.



Photo courtesy Cor Lodder



Marketing sex to our little girls

By G.Ph. van Popta

As a middle-aged father of adults and teenagers, I do not get to the children's clothing section at the department store; however, I am told that mothers are finding it increasingly difficult to find "normal clothes" for their preteen daughters. It seems that the choices for eight-year old girls does not go much beyond clothes that reveal the most intimate parts of the body, from hip-hugging pants to belly-exposing tops. Mothers say that it is very hard to find modest girls' clothes at the local stores.

Young people have always wanted the latest styles. When I was young, one year we just needed to have pants with bell bottoms; the next year the jeans just had to be stove pipes. It has always been like that and still is. Daughters have long argued with mom about the length of hem lines. Most teenagers have always craved the latest fashions. However, there has been a distressing shift in recent years. The trend is ever more to the hyper-sexualization of clothing: the tighter and the smaller, the better, it seems. The shift is all the more distressing because it is directly aimed at our little girls. And it is all about marketing.

Tweens

The American clothing retail industry has discovered a huge potential in marketing to the preteen age group. According to estimates, the "tweens" in North America (eight to twelve year-olds) represented about US \$170 billion per year. Girls, aged six to fourteen are estimated to have an independent spending power of US \$100 billion annually.

Stores are aggressively going after this huge market by hyper-sexualizing fashion for youth because it has realized it as an effective way to maintain a lucrative market share. Do not think that the clothing industry is interested about *anything* but the bottom line and keeping the shareholders happy. Sex sells. The fashion industry is applying that basic principle to children's clothing – in spades.

Marnie Ko writes in *Report Magazine*:

Even lower-priced department giants have begun targeting tweens with a racy line of clothing by the Olsen twins, the actors Mary-Kate and Ashley, best known for their role on the sitcom *Full House*. Slinky clothes, including midriff-baring crop tops, short skirts and shirts with spaghetti tops straps, are increasingly found in the children's clothing section. And parents are buying. A

Wal-Mart spokesman said orders for clothes by the Olsen twins have doubled for this fall.¹

The chief *apostlette* for the sexualization of our little girls is twenty year old pop princess Britney Spears. She is the role model of many young girls today. With her revealing clothing and "come-hither" image, Miss Spears is sending a message to young girls that body image is of primary importance – a difficult problem for many young females.

When Britney Spears (or Christina Aguilera or Foxy Brown) comes to town thousands of preteen girls go to the sold out concert dressed as Britney lookalikes. Of course

they fail because they do not have the resources a pop diva has – makeup artists, silicone enhancements, and millions of dollars.

Fashion and pop culture

Parents, please do not be naive about this. The clothing industry is after your little girls. The music, movie and TV culture is complicit with the fashion enterprise. Sex-driven music videos, innuendo-laden comedies airing at 8 PM, PG-13 movies featuring flashes of female nudity – it is common. Pop culture is blanketing society with sexual images aimed at eight-year olds. The clothing designers work hand in glove with the entertainment industry, to the great detriment of all of society, not least our preteen girls.

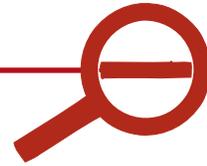
Parents, let your little girls be little girls. Children should dress like children, and not like tiny tarts. The mothers and older sisters of the little girls should set a good example in this regard. The law of chastity (see Lord's Day 47 of the Heidelberg Catechism) demands modesty of old and young when we dress our bodies. In addition to the universal call of God to modesty, older sisters and mothers should show love to the children by setting a good example. If they dress provocatively, the little girls will want to as well. That's the way little girls think and act.

Think about it.

¹ *Report Magazine*, Oct. 8, 2001, p. 36.



Rev. G.Ph. van Popta is minister of the Canadian Reformed church at Ancaster, Ontario.



On the Unity and Disunity of Churches (Part 2)

Rev. W. G. De Vries held a second speech for the Free Reformed Study Centre in Armadale, Australia on February 5, 2002. His remarks are enlightening, also for American and Canadian and readers. Here follows the second installment of his speech:

Pluriformity within the church?

This raises the question to what degree difference of opinion is possible without the church splitting apart. The question is important! For it has happened more than once in the history of the church that a church schism arose out of personal hurt. Someone felt ignored, someone believed to have suffered an injustice, and suddenly there is an issue on the table concerning a matter of principle - which has more to do with the personal injury than with standing up for God's honour and justice. Numerous examples could be mentioned here, but disagreements of this kind have nothing to do with a healthy pluriformity within the church. There is much talk today in the *Nederlands Hervormde* (Dutch Reformed) and the Synodical *Gereformeerde* (Reformed) churches about "plurality." What this means is that those who talk about plurality demand tolerance for viewpoints that contradict the Apostles' Creed in every respect, such as the confession of the virgin birth of Christ, his God-head, resurrection and ascension.

They are the two churches currently uniting under the banner of "Together on the Way" (Dutch: *'Samen op weg'*). It goes without saying that Calvin's writings about upholding the pure doctrine and about faithfully exercising church discipline condemn these developments out-of-hand.

I believe also that local churches, office-bearers and believers who remain in these church organizations are co-responsible for this departure from God's Word. To them applies the exhortation: Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues, Revelation 18:4.

People have said in answer to this that there are still places with a conservative church council and congregation, where church membership is quite pleasant. But the Bible says something different. When Achan stole from the treasures of Jericho all Israel was paralyzed. We read in Joshua 7:1: But *the children* of Israel committed a trespass regarding the accursed things. And in I Timothy 5:22 we read that we may share in other people's sins. Paul says this to Timothy in the context of ordaining office-bearers in the church: Do not lay hands on anyone hastily.

Anyone belonging to a church community which allows its leaders to teach heresies shares in the responsibility. The Reformed Church (*Hervormde Kerk*) calls itself a Christ-confessing church. In an official declaration just after World War II, it states: The church *rejects* everything that contradicts its confession. Nowadays it *tolerates* everything that contradicts its confession, and it allows Christ to be deeply offended. I say this with great sadness. For the destructive consequences are visible to everyone. One of the prominent leaders of the Synodical *Gereformeerde kerken*, Dr. G. Puchinger, says that church members are wandering around the ruins. Those situations have nothing to do with pluriformity. It is nothing else that a rejection of the living God.

But what about genuine pluriformity? Genuine pluriformity is that there are diversities of gifts, in ministries and activities, but everything under the same Lord, (1 Corinthians 12:4-6). And at the same time that we continue in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers, (Acts 2:42). Calvin once called these the four marks of the church. Within that church there is much pluriformity, but not where it concerns the life-giving doctrine about which Paul writes to Timothy (1 Timothy 4: 16): Take heed to the doctrine, and he also commands him to charge some that they teach no other doctrine (1:3).

If anyone does not bring this doctrine, we may not receive him into our house nor greet him (2 John:10). Accepting such a person as a professor at the Theological College or as a church minister is out of the question. The Bible forbids that kind of tolerance.

Diverging opinions

The situation is different where it concerns church members or office-bearers who hold diverging opinions but do not promote these. The church will have to exercise much patience, especially in a time of spiritual confusion and weakening convictions. In that situation the minister's faithfulness to the doctrine of the church is of critical importance. They promised at least in the Reformed Churches (*Gereformeerde Kerken*), not to preach or teach or publish or promote any diverging opinion they may hold on any point of the doctrine, but instead go the church-orderly way.

Let's admit that the Confessions of our churches have formulated a *minimum* as regards the unity in the faith. The *Three Forms of Unity*

do not deal with everything that is in the Bible. The source is more than the little stream that originates from it. But we did make promises to each other in the church regarding “that source” being the Word of truth. And it is within the boundaries of that Word that there is freedom of prophecy. The Bible is and remains our only rule of life. For that reason life in the church is joyful and rich, because Christ has made known to us all the things he heard from his Father, John 15:15.

Divided as churches and united as Christians?

Now we come to the question whether we should still see something positive in the interchurch cooperation in all kinds of activities. Does this not offer hope for the unification process of the churches?

Let me begin by pointing out that this idea was propagated by Dr. Abraham Kuiper. In 1898 he delivered a number of speeches in America, published in his book *Het Calvinisme* (Calvinism). He states that Calvinism must get rid of every ecclesiastical colour. The large number of different churches is, according to Kuiper, a result of our “natural one-sidedness” which will always demand “a multitude of organizations.” He regards that multitude of churches even as a “superior form of development.” “I praise the multiformity and regard it is a higher form of development,” he says.¹

It was pointed out in the beginning of this lecture that the Bible does not support this train of thought. The Bible says there is only one church.

In line with Kuiper’s teaching, the first half of the twentieth century saw the development of a number of organizations based on the principle “Divided as churches but united as Christians.” Has this development contributed in any way to greater church unity? Not at all. The disunity among churches increased.

And what about today’s situation? In many churches the believers despair because of Bible criticism and denial of the confessions. But they remain where they are. Sure, they’re alarmed. And they establish their clubs and associations of concerned members which publish magazines and organize rallies. But for the rest? They remain in their church and become partly responsi-

ble for the sins of others. Those people also establish “Bible-based” organizations, like the *Evangelische Omroep* (the Evangelical Broadcast Association) which they use to condemn the things they tolerate in their churches. It’s like mopping up under a running tap!

Is it not about time that we in the Netherlands turn our words into deeds and start a reformation in the church? The *Hervormde Kerk* continues to exist, thanks to the tolerance of hundreds of thousands of members of the *Gereformeerde Bond*. Is that what God wants?

The Bible is and remains our only rule of life. For that reason life in the church is joyful and rich, because Christ has made known to us all the things he heard from his Father.
John 15:15

Professor van ‘t Spyker wrote in his magazine *De Wekker*: “The Confession knows nothing about one, two or three true churches. It speaks of only one church! But we have many. It is our confession that outside the church there is no salvation. But we have said that belonging to the church is not all that important as long as one is a living member of Christ himself – as if that can be divorced from his body, the church.” He concludes: “This pushes the obligation to seek unity to the background. People content themselves with contacts they maintain via the organizations.” I agree fully with this criticism.

Many say: But doesn’t the miserable situation of our days urge us as Christians to cooperate as much as possible? I answer that this miserable situation has been caused partly by that very attitude of: “It doesn’t matter what church you’re in.” The problems start when people let things go in the church and turn a blind eye to deformation.

I point to the large number of congregations of conservative members that exist within the modernistic Dutch Reformed Church, (*Hervormde Kerk*). Though they live in organizational unity with the wing of liberal believers in that

church, they are satisfied that it is up to the Lord to work reformation.

In the meantime we are stuck with ten times *Gereformeerd* in the Netherlands. Does God’s Word allow or promote that situation? I’m sure no one has the courage to say ‘yes’ to that question. Ephesians 4:3 says: one body and one Spirit, and that leaves us in no doubt. Neither do the words: *one faith, one baptism, one Lord and one God and Father of all*.

But what are we doing about it? *Deny our own will and without murmuring obey God’s will which alone is good?* (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 49) Or do we quietly sit in our ecclesiastical shelters, waiting for the last day?

The whole flock

I will finish with a nice story I read somewhere. It’s about the disunity of churches. Once it happened that one of the sheep got separated from the flock and lost its way. What did the shepherd do when that bleating sheep kept wandering around outside the sheepfold? He led all his sheep outside, giving the lost sheep an opportunity to join the flock again, and so find the door to the fold.

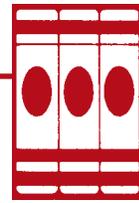
The message of the story is clear: We must do everything we can to bring that sheep back to the flock. Let everyone go outside under God’s open sky – meaning: let every church community apply the norm of God’s Word to see whether each sheep of Christ’s flock can join it. In other words: Do we have the courage to take that risk? It means that we ask the great Shepherd of the sheep: “Search me O God and know my heart; try me and know my anxieties. See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:24).

Would that not also apply to our church ways? How many tensions and cooperation issues would disappear if all true Christian believers would live together in the one church! And . . . there would be joy in heaven.

¹*Het Calvinisme*, page 178



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



By C. Van Dam

God and Cosmos

John Byl, God and Cosmos: A Christian View of Time, Space and the Universe. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2001. Paperback, 243 pages; \$ 12.99 US

This is a very important book that hopefully will be read by many. Its stated aim “to probe beneath the usual questions of origins, digging deeper into various underlying philosophical issues The emphasis will be on theological presuppositions on the one hand, and, on the other, the significance of the Bible for cosmology” (p. xi).

The author, Dr. Byl, earned his doctorate in astronomy and now teaches Mathematics at Trinity Western University, but this book is directed to the general reader. As one who fits that category and is not trained in the scientific fields that underlie much of this book, I think that Dr. Byl admirably succeeds in achieving his stated purpose. The book is very well organized and discussions are regularly summarized with clear conclusions. He is able to communicate lucidly scientific material which is obviously quite intricate. All this does not necessarily mean that the book is always an easy read. However, reading it will always be well worth the effort for the issues Dr. Byl tackles are of great importance.

It is beyond the scope of this brief review to touch on all the very interesting issues the author raises. Let me therefore note the main points he is making and then mention some other issues that struck me.

Fact and theory

A theme that recurs constantly in various forms throughout this book is what exactly defines a scientific fact? How do you know something is true? Obviously, a most important question! Scientific theories abound. But how do we know what is factually accurate? The author repeatedly argues that “only direct, confirmed observational data can be accepted as genuine, undoubted

‘facts’” (p. 221). He distinguishes sharply between scientific theorizing and what is a confirmed truth. This distinction places science in a more realistic light, but it also underlines how limited our human knowledge really is. Theorizing that something may be true does not make it so.

How does science come to its theories? It does so on the basis of perceived evidence. But another very important factor is the underlying presuppositions of the scientist. As the author notes at the outset, “Science in general – and cosmology in particular – is plagued by the lack of definite, objective criteria that might allow us to easily separate true theories from false ones. It is at this critical point that we must often be guided by extra-scientific factors” (p. 5). In other words, the faith commitment is of utmost importance in the formulation of scientific theories.

Now our faith commitment may be Christian or non-Christian, but Byl repeatedly warns that in *both* cases one needs to distinguish clearly between fact and theory. A theory may be in harmony with what Scripture says, but that does not necessarily prove its absolute factuality. Our human knowledge is very limited and we must recognize that restriction and be aware that new discoveries can make an earlier theory obviously incorrect. We must also not base our Christian faith on a current scientific theory, no matter how convincing it seems. Our faith must be in the God of Scripture and his trustworthy Word. It must never be in scientific theories which are “but the speculative inventions of man’s creative imagination” (p. 8) and should be distinguished from our observations of nature and established fact (pp. 2-11).

At the end of his book Byl notes that even well established scientific theories should not be accepted as fact. If one says, “well some theories surely can be accepted as fact,” Byl’s answer is: “How can we determine which theories are more likely to be true? Surely not by a mere majority vote. But what criteria should then be used? And by

what criteria should we choose the criteria? To those who wish to expand the scope of scientific knowledge I leave the challenge of establishing and justifying suitable criteria for discerning true theories. This has yet to be done” (p. 221).

The place of Scripture

The author accepts the Bible as God’s Word and thus recognizes the authority of the Word with respect to all it speaks about. But does creation (and thus science) not also provide an avenue for God to reveal truth? Early on, Byl has important things to say on this issue. He notes that divine revelation relevant to science should be limited to special revelation, the Bible (p. 9). The role of general revelation in revealing truth is that God uses it to reveal himself, that is “his eternal power and divine nature” (Rom 1:20). As we confess in the Belgic Confession (Art 2) we know God by two means. “First, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe; which is before our eyes as a most beautiful book, wherein all creatures, great and small, are as so many letters leading us to ‘perceive clearly the invisible things of God,’ namely, ‘his eternal power and deity,’ as the apostle Paul says in Romans 1:20 Second, He makes Himself more clearly and fully known to us by his holy and divine Word as far as is necessary for us in this life, to his glory and our salvation.” Byl stresses that “the knowledge revealed through nature concerns only God’s attributes and that this knowledge is acquired through our direct experience of nature, not through our scientific models. There is no biblical evidence suggesting that God reveals himself through fallible human theorizing. Indeed, the Bible stresses the limitations of human knowledge, particularly with regard to origins” (p. 112).

Recognizing these constraints is important for recognizing the limited place of science in establishing absolute truth. From the beginning of the scientific revolution, the idea of divine revelation in Scripture *and* nature has been

used to reconcile science and Scripture. Historically, however, this doctrine of the two books “has led to a decline in biblical authority” (p. 9). This is understandable for we thereby allow the premise that some scientific theories can be taken as divine truth. We then in essence allow the “book of science” to modify our reading of Scripture and so our understanding of Scripture will be in a constant state of flux, depending on what the current scientific theory is (p. 9). The proper relationship is that we understand creation in the light of Scripture (see also p. 221).

A corollary of the above is that as new scientific theories come up that appear more compatible to the Christian faith, we must resist the temptation to prove the accuracy and truth of Scripture by appealing to such scientific evidence, for that in effect makes the fallible scientist the judge of Scripture (p. 13). When there is a conflict between the Bible and science, it is a conflict between the Bible and scientific *theorizing* (p. 13). In his book, Byl shows that scientific theories of modern cosmology are not sufficiently established to warrant their elevation above Scripture.

Acknowledging the supremacy of Scripture does, of course, bring us to the question of the interpretation of

Scripture. Byl affirms that Scripture must be its own interpreter and it should be read in its natural or literal sense unless there are compelling reasons not to do so. Although there will always be differences of opinion on exegetical points, and we should allow for these, Byl’s point as a general guideline is well taken.

Other issues

Byl raises many interesting issues in this book. The crucial issue with Galileo was that “he presented the Copernican system not as a mere theory, but as the truth, a truth before which Scripture, or at least the Church’s interpretation of it, had to retreat” (p. 32). The end result was that human reason came to be considered as an independent source of truth, superior to Scripture, at least in scientific matters (p. 35).

Quite some pages are spent on the big-bang hypothesis of the world’s origins. Byl correctly deeply regrets that some Christian apologists endorse the big-bang cosmology for that gives far too much credence to speculative theorizing under the guise of general revelation. Should that scientific model be dethroned, it will be a theological disaster for such apologists. The big-bang cosmology is essentially hostile to the Christian faith.

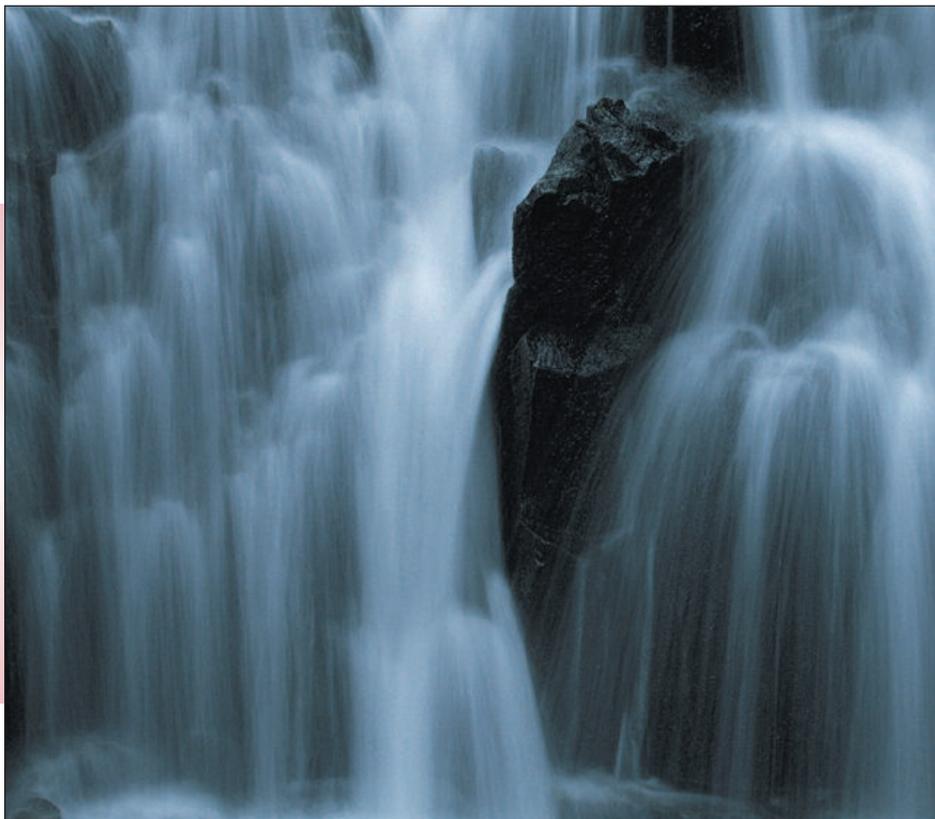
Other topics of interest include the question of whether there are natural intelligent beings besides man in the universe, the identity of the star of Bethlehem, the age of the earth, and heaven’s relationship to our time and space. To find out more, read the book! One does not have to agree with everything Byl says in order to profit immensely from his writing. For instance, while agreeing with his contention that the earth is young, exegetical arguments can be raised against insisting that the earth needs to be about 6,000 years old (p. 167).

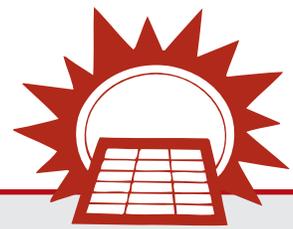
In conclusion

This book is well written and it is highly recommended. It is a must read for those in science and education and should be read by everyone interested in understanding something of what a Christian view of reality, knowledge and creation entails. An extensive bibliography and a functional index of names and subjects further enhance this work.



Dr. C. Van Dam is professor of Old Testament at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches in Hamilton, Ontario.





By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Galatians 5:22-25

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

When we read the Bible, we are told many times how we ought to live before God. The Lord shows us clearly in his Word how we must conduct our lives in service to Him. Daily we must fight against our many sins and ask the Lord to forgive us our sins. We may even wonder that when we try our hardest to serve Him: have we done it properly? The Bible mentions in many verses about the fruits of the Spirit. What are these fruits? Some of these fruits are love, patience, joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, which can be found in Galatians 5:22.

As a healthy fruit tree can give us an overflowing abundance of fruit, so having the fruit of the Spirit in us should give us an abundance of joy. As the Heidelberg Catechism teaches us so beautifully in Q&A 86: that with our whole life we have to show our thankfulness to God, for his benefits, that He may be praised by us.

This prompts us to ask the question why is it so important to have the fruits of the Spirit in our lives? We have to foremost understand fully what has been done for us in Christ. God went all the way in giving us his only Son for our sins. He did not have to do this. As a result of his death we now have eternal life. If it were left to ourselves we would have died and would never have a place in his kingdom. Knowing all this should make us so very thankful, that our lives cannot but show all the fruits of his Spirit.

This thankfulness does not come on our own, but by the Holy Spirit who works this thankfulness in us. Here lies great comfort for us. Christ renews our lives daily to meet the purpose for which we were created. We would live empty lives were it not for the constant work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit works in our hearts by the preaching of the gospel, and strengthens it by the use of the sacraments (Lord's Day 25). The Lord also promises to hear our prayers when we ask for the Holy Spirit to work in our hearts. He will not deny us.

It is not always easy to carry all the fruits of the Spirit. To always love each other and to be faithful in all things does not come from ourselves. But we must not despair, for we are not left on our own. The Lord promises to help us to serve Him. His Word is there for us everyday. "He knows our frame, that it is weak and humble and He keeps in mind how prone we are to stumble" (Psalm 103:5, *Book of Praise*). His unfailing love toward us will never perish. If we long to serve Him and ask the Lord to guide us, the fruits of his Spirit will be overflowing in our lives.

We also know that faith without works is dead. To know God, to say we love Him, but not to show this in our lives makes our faith useless. Faith has to have results in our lives. Through faith, which is given by the Holy Spirit, the fruits of this faith will also be seen. Our kindness, love, gentleness and humbleness toward each other should be overflowing. We see how Christ showed all the fruits of the Spirit toward us and we cannot but show this love to one another.

The great blessing of having the fruits of the Spirit within us is that through this, God gives us joy, satisfaction, confidence, happiness and strength. We become a blessing to everyone around us.

Let us continue to allow the Holy Spirit to renew us so that we may always strive do what is right before God. Thanks be to Him alone for revealing in His Word how we ought to live before Him!

*When we cry, "Abba! Father!"
The Spirit witness bears
That God made us His children
And we, with Christ, are heirs.
The Spirit, as the first fruits
Of glorious liberty,
Helps us await with patience
What we do not yet see.*

Hymn 37:4

Birthdays in September:

8: MARSHA MOESKER will turn 25
PO Box 164, Carman, MB R0G 0J0

11: MARY VANDE BURGT will be 46
c/o Fam. W. Togeretz
32570 Rossland Place, Abbotsford, BC V2T 1T7

14: JERRY BONTEKOE will be 38
Anchor Home, 361 Thirty Road, RR 2,
Beamsville, ON L0R 1B0

29: PAUL DIELEMAN will turn 33
3 Northampton Street, Brampton, ON L6S 3Z5

Congratulations to you all who are celebrating a birthday in September. May our heavenly Father continue to surround you with his love and care in this new year that lies ahead of you. Till next month,

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Please mail, e-mail or fax letters for publication to the editorial address. They should be 300 words or less. Those published may be edited for style or length. Please include address and phone number.

Dear Editor:

I read with great interest Prof. Gootjes' article "Professor Boer and Theological Education" (July 19, 2002). The article inspired me to think more about the strengths and weaknesses of earlier patterns of Reformed theological education, in comparison to our present situation. For those of your readers who were also stimulated to reflect on these matters, here is something further for their musings. In a volume published by Calvin College in 1926, Albertus Rooks, who was the Dean of Calvin College at the time, offered this description of the preparatory program in the early days of theological education at the Grand Rapids school where Professor Boer had taught:

In reflecting upon the course of study of that time in which students, fresh from the farm and shop, were required to take up, all at once, a half dozen languages – English, Dutch, German, Latin, Greek, Hebrew – and with these Philosophy and Logic and other branches, to carry on for four years and then to conclude with one oral examination in all these studies before the Faculty and Board of Trustees, I admire – and with me all those who know something of the difficulties of Higher Education admire – the ambition, the courage and the perseverance of the men who undertook and carried forth the study of all these languages and other branches of study at one and the same time.

True, some soon became discouraged and fell by the way and no wonder; others plodded on but in the course of time succumbed to the heavy burden with a wrecked mind, and broken body and a discouraged heart. Those who surmounted the difficulties, especially of the earlier years of literary study, became men and servants of the Lord of no mean or ordinary power and ability.

I certainly acknowledge that there were great warriors for the faith who were shaped by that rigorous process. But I was also pleased to read Professor Gootjes' positive words about the more relaxed mood in Reformed theological schools these days – and to see the picture of Canadian Reformed students kicking soccer balls with abandon!

*In Christ,
Richard J. Mouw
President and Professor of Christian
Philosophy
Fuller Seminary*

The "soccer balls" are actually made of concrete. We may thankfully report that the students only pretended to kick them.

Editor

Dear Editor,

Keith Sikkema's report on a South African education conference is a thoughtful and clearly presented attempt to facilitate up building dialogue between those whose children attend Reformed day schools and those whose children are educated at home. Hopefully it will help accomplish the author's goal of reducing divisions among God's people.

One small point, however, must be addressed. Most Dutch people would agree with the statement that, in the Netherlands, home-schooling is not allowed. For some unknown reason, very few Dutch people know that parents can legally request and receive exemptions from the Dutch education law. We requested such an exemption and received official permission to home-school for the two school years we lived in the Netherlands. According to one estimate, approximately 200 children are home-schooled in the Netherlands but there is no way of verifying this number since school attendance is controlled locally.

N.P. Schriemer, Ottawa

Dear Editor,

In *Clarion*, Volume 51, No.15 (July 19, 2002), on p.367 we read the following in the "Education Matters" column: "It seems that Rev. [J.D.] 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." When we read these remarks in their context, the reader must conclude that it was this "experience" and "background" that led Wielenga to the position that he "didn't want teachers to touch the children's religious life" and that "to him, faith and faith education was a matter for the church." All of this is written by K. Sikkema in his report of the CRTA-East Convention's Keynote Address: Covenanted Education Revisited. This assessment amounts to unacceptable psychobabble – poor Wielenga could just never "come away."

It is difficult in this case to be entirely certain whether one must be responding to Sikkema or to Cl. Stam, whose address is being reported. A report is a report; the reader is left with what is on the page of *Clarion*. What is unfortunate about this approach of Stam/Sikkema is that by way of this "final" assessment of Wielenga, the authors sadly reduce and dismiss the carefully argued position of Wielenga, which position, by the way, is not so simplistic as to be characterized as a "negative stance towards Christian schools in general." One can, of course, argue with arguments and positions – that's a good idea sometimes; and often stimulating. But now Stam/Sikkema cause Wielenga to appear in the final analysis as just another helpless victim of his upbringing, responding in the only way that might be expected of another victim-of-circumstance. Which might just leave the impression that what he actually said need not be taken too seriously. However, reading Wielenga's "Profile of the

School Graduate,” (and we can only assume that that is the reference we are to be cluing in to for Wielenga’s position) one cannot possibly come away with such a reductionist dismissive assessment about what he said. Wielenga himself did not give any indication that his childhood experience(s) actually formed his adult thoughts and arguments about education. In fact, once he gets beyond his introductory remarks about his own school experience (which are just a preliminary “side-show” for his address), his arguments stand quite well by themselves as arguments and not as inevitable adult Freudian responses to negative child-

hood experiences. So let’s cut the psychobabble. After all, could we also say that if his mother had just cut his sandwiches diagonally instead of square, his whole school experience may have squeaked him out on the “right” side of the discussion? Psychospeak can go in a lot of directions; dealing with arguments keeps a discussion steady.

About the education discussion itself: as mentioned above, it was not Wielenga’s position to be negative “towards Christian schools in general.” That would be foolish; he was not a fool. His aim was to try to challenge and untangle the far-too-tight knot of the too-much-assumed but questionable (to

him: objectionable) triangle of church-home-school. Perhaps that he dared to challenge the triangle at all, and then so thoroughly, and in the setting he did, may altogether have led to some befuddlement about what he was up to – but that is speculation, maybe just psychobabble. In the final analysis: although one does not have to agree with everything Wielenga said, it’s still true that one can safely challenge the triangle and still take an entirely necessary positive stance towards Christian schools and Reformed education.

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Photo courtesy Cor Lodder