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# Clarion

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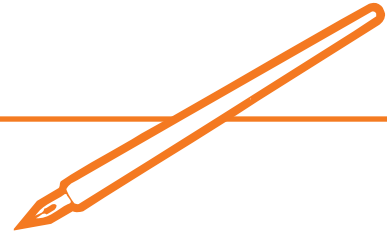
*Rev. Ed Dethan  
Niagara's Missionary to West Timor*

## INSIDE:

- *Remembering Calvin*
- *God's Shining Face*
- *Reformed Missions and the Church Order*



By J. DeJong



## Remembering Calvin

On May 27, 1564, John Calvin passed on to be with his Lord at the age of fifty-four. Calvin was a tireless worker in the kingdom of God and his legacy is still powerful today. He was a pastor, preacher, organizer and writer. He was a special servant of God to set the tone for the time of reformation.

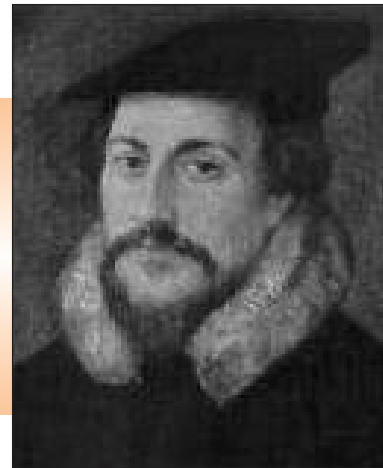
Calvin was first a humanist in Paris. Already in 1523 he was acquainted with the ideas of the Reformation. He had heard of Luther's work. But it was not until ten years later that the real conversion came in his life. It was sudden conversion for him, and the biblical notion of justification by faith set hold on his heart more and more. But it was not an easy process. Prior to his conversion he was often tormented in his conscience, and he struggled profusely with his sins. But once the conversion set in, he devoted his energies to spreading the teachings of the Word of God.

The chief work he left behind is the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which in itself forms the sharpest contrast to the Roman Catholic teachings of the previous periods. Rather than putting all the weight on the church, Calvin stressed the sovereignty of God. This rule set the tone for his teachings. God is in full control of the world, and He has all things planned. He does not rule out human responsibility, but He also controls and masters it. God has made us in such a way that we can live a responsible life; yet nothing happens to us without his will.

*Prior to his conversion he was often tormented in his conscience, and he struggled profusely with his sins.*

Of course, this approach does not rule out the strong Christological component in Calvin's work. While he stressed the active role of all three persons of the Trinity, he also put great emphasis on the suffering and death of Christ as the only atoning sacrifice to pay for the sin of the world. From this perspective he developed a strong Christological component in his preaching. Christ was for him present in the preaching, not physically but spiritually through the work of the Spirit. And it was in Christ that the marks of the church had to be maintained: the true preaching, the use of the sacraments as instructed by Christ and the maintenance of true discipline.

Calvin was a powerful preacher in Geneva, and next to his pastoral work he devoted his energies to maintaining discipline, not only in the congregation, but also in the city. Especially in his pastoral work, he put emphasis on main-



taining the use of the sacraments, and maintaining church discipline as well. The basis of our Reformed system of church government has its roots in Calvin. He instituted overseers in the church; he also urged the youth to make confession of the faith.

Calvin also concentrated in teaching the youth. Calvin first followed Luther's catechism, but in 1541 he wrote the *Geneva Catechism*, in which the order of the elements of the gospel was slightly reversed. Luther put the law first; Calvin put the creed first, along with the sacraments, and then the law as a rule of thankfulness.

In Geneva he was first a reader of Scripture, but then became the regular preacher. He continued to work hard in the city. He defended four offices: pastor, teacher, elder and deacon, and for the most part that legacy continues in the Reformed churches today.

*We do well to remember the gifted servants God has given to his church and his people.*

Calvin also worked hard to defend and promote the unity of the church. For him the break with Rome was irreparable, even though he did try to organize union discussions. But he put more effort and concentration on seeking unity with the Lutherans. Unfortunately, a full union was never realized.

Nonetheless we must still uphold as much as possible the legacy of Calvin. Although he followed in the steps of Luther,

he left his own unique stamp on the Reformed tradition. His goal was to open the Scriptures for the people, and use the Word to build faith in their hearts.

As parents and teachers we would do well to instil in our youth the legacy of Calvin. Our tradition is for the most part based on his work. Of course he was partly shaded through the work of other great leaders such as Kuyper, Schilder, Van Til and others in the Reformed tradition. Yet, next to the regular reading of the Scriptures a reading of the *Institutes* is a very helpful and spiritually refreshing endeavour.

Calvin also left behind many tracts, letters and sermons. He left a series of sermons on the Ten Commandments which are still edifying and enlightening in our day. The roots of the Reformed churches go back to Luther and Calvin, and in the various northern European countries such as Germany, Holland and parts of France, the influence of the Reformed faith is still present and growing. We do well to remember the gifted servants God has given to his church and his people.



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## What's inside?

In his editorial, Dr. J. DeJong remembers the important contributions made by John Calvin to the Reformation of the sixteenth century. Dr. DeJong highly recommends the reading of Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* to readers today.

Dr. F.G. Oosterhoff presents us with the second part of her series of articles on "Genesis 1 in Context." Clearly there is an orderliness and security in creation which was to the comfort of God's people. In this God also sets limits. Man gets into real trouble when he crosses the boundaries which God has set.

Brother Ed Dethan, like his brother Yonson, came to the Theological College in Hamilton after studying theology for several years in Sumba. After completing his studies, brother Dethan accepted a call from the Church at Smithville to serve in Timor. Later this summer Rev. Dethan plans to return to Indonesia with his wife and family to take up his task there. We have a report in this issue.

One of our home missionaries, Rev. W.L. Bredenhof addresses the question whether a missionary must follow the Church Order in exactly the same manner that the ministers and elders do in the established churches of the home federation. His contention is that it is wrong to insist that a mission church must look exactly the same as a regular church in the federation. As he says, the Church Order does not directly apply to the mission congregation.

We have a book review, two letters to the editor, and our regular columns, *Treasures New and Old* and *Ray of Sunshine*.

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By Andrew J. Pol

## God's Shining Face

*"May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us."*  
Psalm 67:1

### A striking prayer

When we ask God to be gracious, we are asking for something we don't deserve. Nevertheless, the opening words of Psalm 67 give hope. They have been recorded to teach us to pray for forgiveness and life in fellowship with God. We need the forgiveness of our sins. When the relationship with God is restored, we may also hope and pray for further blessings as we live in fellowship with Him.

The request in our text brings to mind the blessing that the high priest Aaron and his descendants were to pronounce on the people of God (see Numbers 6:24-27). First they had to bring sacrifices to God, atoning for the sins of his people. Then they could give the people his blessing. That is also the order in our text. We first ask for God's grace, his compassion, his favour. From this fountain, further blessings then flow.

God is not detached from those blessings. Blessings are signs of his presence and proofs of his activity. We should never want his gifts without Him. A solid house and a good income cannot guarantee happiness. Material prosperity and physical health are no automatic guarantees that life will be worth living.

### The greatest blessing

What makes life truly worth living is knowing and experiencing God's active presence in our lives. Think of the name "Immanuel." It means "God with us." This is a central promise of the covenant. It is what we need.

The greatest blessing we can receive is to enjoy a good relationship with God. This is reflected in the second part of Psalm 67:1. We ask Him to "make His face shine upon us."

A person's face can reflect the contents of his heart. It can be angry, or

light up with joy. But what does it mean that God's face "shines?" When God's face "shines" you see something in which his character is displayed. His face "shines" through blessings that He gives. Behind the blessings you receive, learn to see the outlines of his face shining upon you.

God's face shining upon you involves salvation. We see this in Psalm 31:16, for example: "Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your unfailing love!" In Psalm 80:3 we hear the plea: "Restore us, O God; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved!" This salvation has temporal and eternal aspects. God can give help in the midst of the difficulties of this life. But the greatest gift is that of eternal life: life in unbroken fellowship with Him.

### The importance of the Word

You may see certain blessings as signs of his shining face. But don't depend on earthly comforts for the assurance of his love! That assurance has a deeper foundation. To see God's shining face even in periods of trouble, we need the guidance and comfort of his Word. That Word is more important than any other blessings He may give. That is why in another Psalm, we hear the request: "May your face shine upon your servant and teach me your decrees" (Ps 119:135). When your spiritual insight grows, God's face is shining on you.

Read and meditate on his Word. That is how you will learn to know Him personally more and more. God speaks to you through his Word. Be diligent in responding in prayer, in praise and in obedience. As life goes on, you will learn more and more to discern his will and do it. He will bless that in more ways than you can imagine now. And as you receive his blessings, you will continue to see the face of God

shining in your lives. It will be a source of joy to you. Psalm 89:15 exclaims: "Blessed are those who have learned to acclaim you, who walk in the light of your presence, O LORD." What greater blessing is there than to know that you are walking in the presence of God's shining face?

People can look for good things in many places and in many ways. They can enjoy many of the gifts God has put into creation. But ultimately, such gifts cannot give total satisfaction. They can be signs of God's favour. But we know we need more than that. We need his grace. We need his loving presence in our lives. Without Him, our hearts will remain empty. God alone can really fill the vacuum that is in a human heart. Our text expresses this desire for ongoing fellowship with the LORD. God's face shining upon us is the greatest good we could ask for.

### A full blessing

God lets his face shine in our lives as a Triune God. He has revealed the depths of his grace through Jesus Christ. He draws us into his fellowship through the power of the Holy Spirit. That is why in the New Testament, we learn to see the ultimate blessing as coming from the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In 2 Corinthians 13:14 we read Paul's final words of blessing "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." This blessing comes from God and focuses on Him. He is the source and the goal of our lives as Christians. May your desire to be blessed by Him go together with the desire to glorify Him.



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# Genesis 1 in Context (Part 2)

By F.G. Oosterhoff

## The “days of creation”

Discussions among Christians about the scientific implications of Genesis 1 usually focus on the nature and extent of the days of creation. Some hold that the days were ordinary ones, exactly 24 hours in length, while others believe that Scripture does not force us to follow this interpretation; that the days of Genesis 1 may well have been longer or shorter than our days, or even that they have only a symbolic meaning. As I suggested before, debates like these are necessary and valuable, but they do not help us much when we try to get to the theological meaning of the creation account. The message of Genesis 1 was directed in the first place to ancient Israel, and by concentrating on modern-scientific issues we introduce elements that do not belong to the original context. That tends to obscure things. If we want to find out what was meant by the days, we must begin by asking what their meaning or meanings may have been for ancient Israel.

A partial answer to that question was proposed at the end of the previous article. There I suggested that one of the messages conveyed by the days is that God *finished* the work of making the heavens and the earth, and so to counter the pagan belief in ever-repeated acts of creation. The message that creation had been completed, that no repetition was necessary, was an important one. It showed that the forces of disorder, emptiness, and darkness had indeed been overcome. Israel could rest secure in the protection of a God who had majestically and effortlessly – simply by speaking his word of power – proclaimed his lordship and sovereign control over the forces of nature. It is true that if man turned away from God these forces could be unleashed again, as in fact they were at the time of the flood. But the account of Genesis 6-8 makes clear that rather than being

God’s rivals, the waters of the flood were his servants and did his bidding. It was God who called them into service and who, after they had accomplished the task He had assigned them, returned them to their proper place. God’s control is confirmed in other places in the Old Testament, for example in the well-known passage of Job 38:8-11, where we read,

Or who shut in the sea with doors,  
when it burst forth from the  
womb;  
when I made clouds its garment,  
and thick darkness its swaddling  
band,  
and prescribed bounds for it,  
and set bars and doors,  
and said, “Thus far shall you come,  
and no farther,  
and here shall your proud waves  
be stayed?”

(See also Psalm 104:6-9, and Jeremiah 5:22)

The days, then, conveyed the message that God had completed the work of creation. There are other possible meanings. The concept of the days will also have shown that with the creation of heaven and earth God inaugurated time and history – that is, history as a linear, progressive, goal-directed process. Pagans did not know of history in this sense. Like their accounts of creation, their view of history also was modelled on nature with its ever-repeating and essentially hopeless cycle

of birth, growth, decay, and death. The gods themselves were subject to this cycle: they died with the arrival of winter and came back to life with the coming of summer, or they died at the end of every day and were reborn every morning. Unlike the believers in these nature religions, the people of Israel knew that their God was always there; that He neither slumbered nor slept; that his providence was everlasting.

Yet another meaning the days will have had for Israel is that they suggest order and a plan. The creation events led to the preparation of a habitable earth, one that would offer a secure place for humanity, which was, after all, the crown of God’s creation. The division of creation into six days, together with the contents of these days, showed that this preparation was done with care. God began by making light and by separating the waters both vertically and horizontally, allowing the dry earth to appear. Out of this earth sprang forth trees and plants which would serve as food for the creatures that would appear in subsequent days. God proceeded to fill the water with fish and other marine animals and the sky with winged creatures. It was only when all this was ready on the sixth day that He made the land animals and man.

The orderliness can be illustrated by the so-called structure of “forming and filling.”<sup>1</sup> The structure can be visualized as follows:

### Days of forming

1. “light” (v. 3)
2. “water under the expanse... water above it” (v.7)
- 3a. “dry ground” (v.9)
- 3b. “vegetation” (v. 11)

### Days of filling

4. “lights” (v. 14)
5. “every living and moving thing with which the water teems... every winged bird” (v. 21)
- 6a(i) “livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals”(v. 24)
- 6a(ii) “man” (v. 26)
- 6b. “every green plant for food” (v. 30)

The orderliness of God's creation, too, is stressed elsewhere in Scripture. We draw attention to the statement in Isaiah 45:

For thus says the LORD,  
who created the heavens  
(he is God!),  
who formed the earth and made it  
(he established it;  
he did not create it a chaos.  
he formed it to be inhabited!):  
"I am the LORD, and there is no other  
. . ." (Is 45:18)

*One of the messages conveyed by the days is that God finished the work of making the heavens and the earth, and so to counter the pagan belief in ever-repeated acts of creation.*

### The number seven

The idea that creation was perfect, complete, and non-repeatable will have been conveyed to Israel not only by the sequence and contents of the days, but also by their number. Various numbers had a symbolic meaning, both in Israel and in surrounding countries. Among them was the number seven (with its multiples), which occurs often in the Bible and signifies completeness. To mention a few examples out of many, and starting with the Book of Genesis itself: in the original Hebrew the first verse of Genesis 1 consists of exactly seven words, the second of exactly 14; there is the seven-day week of creation; there are seven names in the genealogy of chapter 4; various sevens occur in the story of the flood; 70 descendants of Noah's sons are mentioned (chapter 10); Abram receives a sevenfold promise (Gen 12:2-3); there are seven years of abundance and then seven of famine in Egypt (chapter 41); and there are 70 descendants of Jacob (chapter 46).<sup>2</sup> Additional examples can be found throughout the Old Testament, and again in the New – from Matthew's division of the genealogy of Jesus into three sections of 14 names each, to the sevenfold Spirit, the seven lamp stands, the seven stars and the seven churches in Revelation 1 to 3, and the seven seals, trumpets, thunders, and golden bowls in Revelation 6, 8, 10, and 16 respectively. It can hardly have seemed ac-

cidental to Israel that the creation account incorporates the number of perfection and completeness.

A related function of the number seven is, as commentators have pointed out over the centuries, that it teaches the importance of the Sabbath. In this respect the account of Genesis 1 is again unique. Seven-day schemes were not unknown among the surrounding nations, but nowhere is a statement to be found in pagan myths that the creator-god rested on the seventh day. God's resting on the seventh day, however, is emphasized in the Genesis account, and it once again symbolizes the completeness and once-for-all nature of creation. A primary message for man, as we learn from Exodus 20:8-11, is that he is to follow God in hallowing the seventh day and so to glorify Him. Moreover, by pointing to the blessings of the weekly day of rest, the six days also point to the eternal Sabbath. ". . . There remains a sabbath rest for the people of God" (Heb 4:9).<sup>3</sup>

*The concept of the days will have shown Israel that with the creation of heaven and earth God inaugurated time and history – that is, history as a linear, progressive, goal-directed process.*

### The principle of separation

The first part of Genesis 1 states on five occasions that God made a separation or division. He separated light from darkness (verse 4), announced the formation of a firmament to separate waters from waters (verse 6), separated the waters above the firmament from those below it (verse 7), separated day from night (verses 14-15), and commanded the sun and moon to separate the light from the darkness (verse 18). What is the meaning of this word "separate," which the author introduces seven times in the verses 4 to 18, always using the same Hebrew term?<sup>4</sup>

In what follows I refer to two theories, namely those of G.F. Hasel and N.H. Ridderbos. Hasel, who here as elsewhere stresses the anti-mythical tendencies in the Genesis account, believes that with the emphasis on separation in Genesis 1 we have an indi-

rect reference to pagan stories about origins, which also speak of the making of heaven and earth as an act of separating. In the Babylonian story Marduk cuts up and divides Tiamat's body to make the heavens and (probably) the earth; in a Hurrian myth a cutting tool is used as well; Phoenician traditions speak of creation as the splitting of the world egg; and in Egyptian mythology heaven and earth come into existence when the air god pushes up the sky goddess from the earth god, with whom she was embraced. In short, Hasel concludes, there are analogies between the Genesis account and pagan traditions, and these analogies serve once again to bring out Yahweh's omnipotence. The waters which God separates are completely powerless, inanimate, inert, and their separation is simply a matter of God's fiat or decree. Notions of opposition, of combat and struggle, which predominate in the Babylonian story, are altogether absent in the account of Genesis 1. The biblical author therefore does not, as biblical critics assumed, "reflect in this act of creation the contemporary world-view, rather he overcomes it."<sup>5</sup>

In various places Ridderbos, like Hasel, draws attention to the anti-mythical element in Genesis 1, but he does not do so in connection with the principle of separation and division. He sees that principle as an indication of the orderliness of God's creation. Paul's statement that "God is not a God of disorder but of peace" (1 Cor 14:33 – NIV), has, he writes, deep roots in the Old Testament. The assurance that God

*Unlike the believers in the nature religions, the people of Israel knew that their God was always there; that He neither slumbered nor slept; that His providence was everlasting.*

is a God of order was not just a theoretical matter for the Israelites, a statement that happened to be part of their religious doctrine but could be ignored in practice. Like the people of the surrounding nations, they knew of the threat of disorder. What the creation account told them was that the orderliness and security they enjoyed were the work of God, and that among the means which God used to accomplish

and preserve this work was the act of “separating,” that is, of setting boundaries or limits, and of safeguarding them. Disorder, Israel had to learn, was a result of man’s crossing of the boundaries God had established, his transgressing of the laws that God had instituted. It was in the keeping of God’s laws that Israel would find its prosperity and peace.<sup>6</sup>

**Genesis 1 teaches us that “human life is lived within a network of created limits which cannot be transgressed without courting disaster.”**

God’s setting of boundaries and his establishing of order made possible the physical life of plant and animal and man. But Ridderbos reminds us that the principle of separation had implications also for Israel’s cultic and religious life. God made a separation not only between light and darkness, between waters and waters, between earth and sea and day and night, He established a boundary also between clean and unclean, holy and unholy, good and evil. The physical and moral world orders were often seen in the same perspective. We note this, for example, in Psalm 82:5, which states that because of the injustices of ruler and judges “all the foundations of the earth are shaken.”<sup>7</sup>

In addition to these physical and moral and cultic boundaries, there were the separations between and among living creatures. Genesis 1 tells us that God created plants and animals “according to their kinds,” and later the differences between animals and man are made clear as well. Ridderbos rejects the idea that the statement about the different “kinds” among plants and animals conveys scientific information about genera and species. It serves, he believes, to underline once again that God establishes distinctions and wants them to be observed. Genesis 1 teaches us, in short, that “human life is lived within a network of created limits which cannot be transgressed without courting disaster.”<sup>8</sup>

In a third and final article we will return to the topic of boundaries when we compare the creation of man in the Genesis account with that in the Babylonian myth.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> For this structure, see the note on Genesis 1:11 in the *NIV Study Bible*. Note that here the given chronological order of the days is upheld. In this respect the *NIV* explanation differs from that of the so-called framework hypothesis, which uses a similar structure but rejects the idea that the days are given in chronological order.

<sup>2</sup> The examples are taken from the Introduction to Genesis, “Literary Features,” in the *NIV Study Bible*. With respect to the role of the number seven in the creation account, see also U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, I, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1961), p. 12-15. Cassuto mentions various other places where the number seven occurs in the creation account and shows that the number is not only fundamental to the account’s main theme but that it serves to determine many of its details as well (p. 12).

<sup>3</sup> It is especially the people of the so-called framework hypothesis who have stressed the relationship between the six days and the Sabbath. See, for example, A. Noordtzij’s important work *God’s Woord en der eeuwen getuigenis: Het Oude Testament in het licht der oosterse opgravingen*, 2nd ed. (Kampen: Kok,

1931), pp. 116-20. It was Noordtzij who pioneered the modern version of the framework hypothesis. Other adherents of that hypothesis include Nic. H. Ridderbos, *Beschouwingen over Genesis 1*, 2nd ed. (Kampen: Kok, 1963); Mark E. Ross, “The Framework Hypothesis: An Interpretation of Genesis 1:1-2:3” in Joseph A. Pipa, Jr. and David W. Hall, eds., *Did God Create in Six Days?* (Taylors, SC: Southern Presbyterian Press, 1999), pp. 113-130; and Lee Irons with Meredith G. Kline, “The Framework View” in David G. Hagopian, ed., *The Genesis Debate* (Mission Viejo, Cal.: Crux Press, 2001), pp. 217-56, 279-303.

<sup>4</sup> Ridderbos, p. 96, n12.

<sup>5</sup> Hasel, “The Polemic Nature of Genesis 1,” pp. 87f.

<sup>6</sup> Ridderbos, pp. 87-90. See on this topic also Al Wolters, “Creation as Separation: A Proposed Link between Bible and Theory” in Jitse van der Meer, ed., *Facets of Faith & Science*, 4 (Pascal Centre/ University Press of America, 1996), pp. 347-52.

<sup>7</sup> See also Psalm 75:2, 3, 95:1, 5, 96:10.

<sup>8</sup> Wolters, p. 349.



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By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

*Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbour frankly so you will not share in his guilt. Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the LORD. Leviticus 19:17,18*

## Dear Brothers and Sisters:

“You shall not kill.” In this article we are now dealing with the sixth commandment. We are brought here to the beginning of all life which God created on the sixth day. “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen 1:27). Life belongs to God alone. He alone is the creator of life and who also takes it at his appointed time. After the fall into sin, man became corrupt and evil. In Genesis 4 we read of the first murder, when Cain killed Abel. God condemns murder! “And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man” (Gen 9:6). God will require each of us to account for our thoughts and actions. We may not harm or kill another human being without answering to God, for our God is also a just God.

By forbidding murder God teaches us that He hates the root of murder, such as envy, hatred, anger, and the desire of revenge, and that He regards all these as murder (Answer 106 from the Heidelberg Catechism).

In this selfish world that we live in, it is so easy to want to get revenge against those who have wronged us. Anger is also such a dangerous form of murder. For God regards anger as murder. Paul warns us in Galatians 5 that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

“This is the message you heard from the beginning: We should love one another. Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brothers’ were righteous. Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death. Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him” (1 John 3:11-15).

Each day anew we must pray for the Holy Spirit to guide our thoughts, deeds, and actions. We must crucify our sinful nature with its passions and desires. God continues to show us his boundless love and mercy to those who humbly confess their sins, and strive to live in his ways. Then we too will be able to show forth the fruits of the Spirit in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other” (Gal 5:25, 26).

With this command, God not only condemns murder, but also commands us to love our neighbour as our self. We must show patience, peace, gentleness, mercy and friendliness toward them. We must also protect our neighbour from harm as much as we can, and to do good even

to our enemies. If our enemy is hungry, we should feed him, and if he is thirsty, give something to drink. As Paul so beautifully wrote to the church at Rome in chapter 12, “Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”

Let us all remember that all our days are in God’s hand. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. Life may not always be easy because of our own sinfulness, but it still is and remains a gift of God. It is a sovereign gift which He is free to give and take. In this world of so much strife and hatred, let us encourage one another to love, and live at peace with each other. For love is the fulfillment of the law!

*O LORD my God, Thou searchest me;  
My heart and mind are known to Thee!  
No things are hidden from Thy eyes  
When I sit down and when I rise,  
And from afar Thou art discerning  
My thoughts and hopes, my secret yearning.*

*My unformed substance Thou didst see,  
And all the days allotted me –  
When of them there as yet was none –  
Thou hast recorded, every one.  
Their number, LORD, Thou hast decided  
And in the book for me provided.*

*Psalm 139:1,9*

## Birthdays in September:

**8: MARSHA MOESKER will turn 26**  
5600 MacDonald Road, Vernon, BC V1B 3L2

**11: MARY VANDE BURGT will be 47**  
c/o Fam. W Togeretz  
32570 Rossland Place, Abbotsford, BC V2T 1T7

**14: JERRY BONTEKOE will turn 39**  
Anchor Home, 361 Thirty Road, RR 2  
Beamsville, ON L0R 1B2

**29: PAUL DIELEMAN will be 34**  
3 Northampton Street, Brampton, ON L6S 3Z5

Congratulations to you all who are celebrating your birthday this month. We wish you a very happy birthday and God’s blessing for the new year. 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



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# Rev. Ed Dethan: Niagara's Missionary to West Timor

By Keith Sikkema

Indonesia consists in part of a string of tropical islands: Sumatra, Java, Bali, Lombok, Sumbawa, Sumba, Flores, Timor. . . The last three of these comprise the bulk of the province of Nusa Tenggara Timur (NTT). On West Timor, which straddles 10° South and 124° East, over 75% of the 1,500,000 population work as fishermen or subsistence farmers (rice, corn, coffee, fruit, soybeans, cassava, and beef).

## Material meagerness

West Timor's economy is affected by the political upheaval, military exploits, and influx of refugees around the recent independence of East Timor, as well as its poor clay – and coral-based soils, rough terrain, lack of ground water, lowland swamps, its climate, and transmigration. Winds frequently carry too little moisture to produce rain, even during the November to March rainy season. Occasional tropical downpours at this time also erode scanty good soil, cause flooding elsewhere, and hardly fill poorly constructed reservoirs in uphill regions. With temperatures averaging around 27°, much of the monthly of 200-400 mm of rain is also lost to evaporation. During the dry season (April to October), the only slightly cooler (25°) wind off the Australian interior generates just 0-50 mm of monthly rainfall.

Typically large Timorese families often need their children's labour before they finish grade six, and frequently lack the money to send them to high school or college. Even a high school graduate's likelihood of landing a secure government job is only about 10%, however, and prospects for other employment are equally slim: in the entire province there are fewer than a dozen companies that employ more

than 100 people. Unemployment is high, many graduates are disillusioned, and not a few return to farming – as their ancestors did. In a local brain-drain, several leave for better employment on other islands. At the same time, the national government's transmigration policies generate a net influx of people from other islands, annually increasing the available work force by another 3%, and claiming yet more marginal land for agricultural purposes. The presence of natural resources like eucalyptus, sandalwood, teak, bamboo, gold, silver, and oil has not benefited West Timor to its full potential. While some do put their hope in the Lord, many Timorese have little hope of progress. Unlike one might expect, however, Timorese are not generally stymied by their poverty, but are quite content.

## Spiritual destitution

West Timor's population has changed, to the disadvantage of Christians. Sizeable Roman Catholic and Protestant minorities make up a combined 80% or so of the island's population. There are also some Buddhists, Hindus, and Animists, but Muslim presence is increasing rapidly. Indonesian Islam has, in fact, become more militant in recent years, claiming an area as "Muslim" when as few as 100 adherents have settled in it. By *syaria* law evangelism is banned from such areas. Among the new Muslims are many transmigrates, including many farmers as well as educated people from other islands, who are favoured for government jobs. If they are unmarried, they look in Timor for a wife, and Christian girls are encouraged to marry a person with a job for the economic benefit – even if it is a non-Christian. At the same

time, it is telling about how weak the commitment is to marry in the Lord. In this light it is encouraging that Anak-anak Terang (Children of Light; see *Clarion*, 52 (12); June 6, 2003, pp. 284-286) is making it more feasible for children of Christian families to get a Christian education, and so to be better prepared to face a world dominated by Islam. May the Lord bless that work!

Some of the Timorese Christians have a Reformed heritage, as a result of former missionary work by Dutch churches. In some instances and in specific ways, they also experience persecution. This may not be as violent or pronounced as on some other Indonesian islands, but it means oppression just the same (see Yonson Dethan, as well as A. DeBoer in *Clarion* 52 (8); April 11, 2003, pp. 186-189). It is enlightening to read Rev. Dethan's assessment that "persecution brings double blessings for Christians," as it is "for the testing of our faith, for purification, for building us up, and for the glorification of God's name." Increasing evangelicalism in Timor's Reformed Pilgrim Churches (GGRM) contributed to the establishment of the Reformed Calvinist Churches (GGRC), and some of the oppression experienced by the latter came from the former, as well as from the government. Generally, the government has made it very difficult for foreign missionaries to receive visa for Indonesia as well, in particular if they intend to directly evangelize the people.

Reformed churches in Indonesia also have a dire need for Reformed literature. While perhaps 5% of religious literature available in the Indonesian language (Bahasa Indonesia) is Christian, it is estimated that only 1% is Reformed. Much work has been done in

the last several years to address this lack, among others through the efforts of our Dutch sister churches in the context of the Dutch *Litindo Project* (<http://www.litindo.org>.) Three former missionaries (i.e., Rev. J.P.D. Groen, Rev. G. Riemer, and Rev. H. Venema) have been dedicated to this project, but much work remains to be done.

The minority status of Protestant Christianity in Timor, the spiritual decline among Reformed churches, the significant influx of Islam, persecution, and the lack of Reformed literature and education form the backdrop for the justification of sending a missionary to West Timor. In addition, the people's general poverty makes it virtually impossible to support one themselves. For many Timorese, there is little hope of material progress, but, far more importantly, a critical need to hear the true Gospel of Jesus Christ which alone can bring eternal salvation.

### Brother Ed Dethan

Brother Ed Dethan, like his brother Yonson, came to the Theological College in Hamilton after studying theology for several years in Sumba, with Rev. A.J. Pol. He received a scholarship from our Dutch sister churches to continue his studies in Canada, and completed this in May, 2002. He obtained preaching consent from classis in the summer of 2002, and was so able to practise what he had learned at the College.

As he continued his practical training in preaching the Gospel, he also came in contact with the Church at Smithville. In this congregation he

taught catechism, and expressed his desire to go back to his home country to preach the Gospel to his own people. The Lord opened a door for him to work in God's kingdom as he had been trained to do. Brother Dethan sustained a preparatory examination at Classis Niagara, March 19, 2003, to be declared eligible for call. He received two calls for mission work in Indonesia: one for Bali from Australia, and one for Timor from Smithville. He accepted the latter, and subsequently sustained his peremptory examination at Classis Niagara, June 18, 2003.

The Lord has done great things for brother Dethan, for the Church at Smithville, and for the people in Indonesia. The congregation of Smithville has committed itself to taking the necessary steps to send him as their missionary to West Timor "with the purpose of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ, as revealed in his Holy Word, and in full agreement with the Three Forms of Unity. . . ." As a native Timorese, the visa issue would not be a problem for brother Dethan. As an Indonesian, he will have no trouble with language and culture barriers. As a member of the congregation of Smithville, he was becoming well known and appreciated, for his enthusiasm, his big smile, and his sincere dedication to the work of the Lord. The Reformed Calvinist Churches in Timor fully endorse the plans to send him to become a missionary on their island.

The Lord has blessed the steps taken. A mission board has been established in Smithville. Other churches in Classis Niagara have lent their support

for this work, and agreement is being sought with the sending church in Hamilton regarding the ongoing missionary work in Brazil.

### Ordination

June 29, 2003 was set as the date for Rev. Dethan's ordination and inaugural sermon. For the sermon, Rev. Souman took Scripture readings from John 20:19-22 and Ephesians 2:11-22, while his text was from John 20:21, "Again Jesus said, Peace be with you! As the father has sent me, I am sending you." Rev. Souman explained that real mission work does not aim to plant western civilization, and is not rooted in our society, or in our desire to share our joy with others, but in the command of Christ who sent his disciples into the world on the Great Commission. *The mission work of the church is rooted in the work of the Triune God.* This mission work 1) is the preaching of the Word of Christ; 2) bears the authority of Christ; and 3) is accompanied by the peace of Christ. God's words and Christ's words are trustworthy, just as John 1:1 proves God's trustworthiness in the fulfilment of Old Testament promises. Likewise, the message that Jesus Christ came to take away the sins of the world is trustworthy: the wall of hostility that separated Jews from Gentiles was taken away by Christ's completed work: all who accept him upon the preaching of "Christ and Him crucified" will be saved. Wherever that Word is preached the Spirit works and the Word will not return empty. The missionary's task is to preach God's Word, not his own, as it is in Christ only that we have salvation. Today, we have the inspired letters and instructions of the apostles on which the church must be built with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone. But only if the Word of Christ is brought with the authority of Him as Sender will it have its effect. It is the task of the congregation to support him whom God has called through them. Our whole life must be permeated with the peace of Christ, and He is with you when you speak his Word in a hostile environment, even to the end of the earth – even if that may mean death or opposition at the hands of enemies of the Gospel. "God gave his Son to save the world. He promised to guide you and be with you. Preach the Gospel with boldness, and call them all to acknowledge God and to praise Him."



*The tent provided shelter and enough space for congregation to be able to congratulate and speak to the Dethans during the coffee social held after the service.*



*Opportunity in the tent for guests and congregation members to congratulate Mrs. and Rev. Dethan.*

Following the sermon and the congregational singing of Psalm 117, Rev. Souman read the form for ordination. He and the six oldest elders laid their hands on brother Dethan's head, after which the congregation stood to sing Psalm 134. After the service, words of congratulations were conveyed for Reverend Dethan, his wife Femmie, and baby Moses, from Rev. Pol, who expressed gratitude that his former student could now return to bring God's Word to his own people. An e-mail was received from the Reformed Calvinist Churches in Indonesia, that they look forward to working with the new missionary, and that they pray for the Lord's blessing on his work. Tim Hudak, MPP (PC), sent a congratulatory letter, and John Maloney, MP (Lib) was present to express appreciation for the invitation and for the "much needed" congregational prayer for the government, and to wish Rev. Dethan God-speed on behalf of the Government of Canada. Brothers P. Feenstra (Grassie and Classis Niagara), E. Feenstra (Attercliffe), and G. Vanlperen (Lincoln) also extended congratulations and wishes for the Lord's wisdom, guidance, and blessing as he would now bring God's Word in his own tongue to his own people. During the speeches a thunderstorm started, briefly interrupting the flow of electricity, and some could not help but comment that it was like God confirming all that had just taken place. All were invited to the church annex and a large tent for a

coffee social and opportunity to personally congratulate Rev. Dethan.

#### **Inaugural sermon**

In the afternoon, Rev. Dethan preached his inaugural sermon on Romans 1:16-17, with Scripture reading from Romans 1:1-17. Although Rome is a city of philosophical, military, and political power, Paul is not ashamed of the Gospel of a crucified Saviour. *Together with Paul, we may continuously say, I am not ashamed of the Gospel:* 1) For it is the power of God for salvation; 2) For it reveals the righteousness of God. Even though Rome was hostile to the Gospel, Paul was not ashamed to bring it there, as he has

good tidings to bring: the power of God for salvation. This is more powerful than a nuclear bomb, as it derives power from God with the message of deliverance and salvation that changes people from darkness to light and sets them on fire for God. Of ourselves we are hopeless people, in the power of Satan, but God sets us free, regardless of what culture we live in. His deliverance is for all who believe as the Holy Spirit works faith through the preaching of the Gospel. Only if you listen will you hear it and receive its power: if you snore in church, you don't. Our God is righteous, and makes us righteous by faith in Christ, not by works, as Luther also discovered. Even if the righteous suffer oppression they can trust that their righteousness before God is not adversely affected by it. The Romans may have all sorts of power, and feel superior to Jews, but the Gospel is more powerful than the Romans. The Gospel needs no adjustment to the people in our culture just because people think Christianity is outdated. We need and should not be ashamed of what we believe and what we stand for (Mark 8:38).

Later in the summer of 2003, Rev. Dethan plans to return to Indonesia with his wife and family to take up his task there. May the Lord bless them and make them a blessing for the people of Timor and potentially beyond. C

*Mr. Keith Sikkema is a grade 8 teacher and vice-principal at John Calvin School in Smithville, Ontario.*  
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*Federal MP John Maloney, invited guest, speaking with Al Schutten during the coffee social.*

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# Reformed Missions and the Church Order

By W.L. Bredenhof

We live in times where many in our churches are becoming zealous for the work of mission. Nearly from the beginning of our federation, missionary work was considered important. But this tended to be defined in a rather narrow and artificial way: sending a missionary to lands far away, preferably to some foreign country with a Dutch connection. Today the scene is different: two Canadian Reformed missionaries and one unordained mission worker are working in our own country. If we look at the United Reformed Churches, we see a similar trend. They also have two ordained missionaries working on Canadian soil.

This new mission situation brings with it new problems. Among these problems is how and in what way the Church Order applies to the missionary and the work that he does. This problem can certainly exist on foreign mission fields as well, but proximity to the sending congregation can make the problem more acute – it is within this context that I approach the issue. In this article, I'd like to briefly look at the relevance of the Church Order for mission work, especially Article 18.

## Brief historical overview

Our current version of the Church Order only explicitly mentions missions and missionaries three times. Having said that, it should be realized that there are plenty of articles that implicitly apply to ordained missionaries – especially those dealing with the ministers of the Word (Articles 2-17). Missionaries were only explicitly mentioned once in the original Church Order of Dort, in Article 7 regarding “the assignment of a sphere of labour.” There reference was made to ministers who might be sent out “to do church extension work.”<sup>1</sup> Aside from this, the original Church Order was silent on missionaries as such. For the first few centuries, the Reformed churches were

satisfied that the original Church Order of Dort would suffice when it comes to missionaries and missions.

In 1902, Synod Amsterdam of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands adopted a so-called Mission Order. This was placed alongside the regular Church Order, but applied strictly to mission matters. Following the Liberation of 1944, this Mission Order was abandoned since it had caused innumerable problems.

*There was nothing explicit in our Church Order regarding missionaries and missions until our current version was adopted in 1983.*

As far as I can tell, the Canadian Reformed churches originally had no articles in their Church Order directly and explicitly dealing with mission. Article 7, which comes almost directly out of the original Church Order of Dort, can be construed as being mission oriented:

No one shall be called to the Ministry of the Word, without being stationed in a particular place, except he be sent to organize the church in a certain place.<sup>2</sup>

Aside from this one article, there was nothing explicit in our Church Order regarding missionaries and missions until our current version was adopted in 1983.

## What our present Church Order says

As mentioned, there are three places where our current version speaks about missions and missionaries. The first is in Article 6. This is an expanded version of the previous Article 7 that I quoted above. The point here

is that all ministers, including missionaries, must be affiliated with a local church. We may not have renegade ministers or missionaries. The last mention is in Article 51. This states:

The churches shall endeavour to fulfil their missionary task. When churches cooperate in this manner, they shall, as much as possible, observe the division into classes and regional synods.

In passing, I would note here that though the churches agree to do mission work, there is no statement made here as to *how* mission work is to be done. There is agreement here on the structure of support for mission work, but nothing explicit about how the missionary is to bring the gospel to those outside.

This is what we might expect to find with Article 18:

When ministers of the Word are sent out as missionaries, they shall be and remain subject to the Church Order. They shall report and give account of their labours to the church which sent them and shall at all times remain subject to its calling.

It shall be their task, in the specific region assigned to them or chosen by them in consultation with the church that sent them, to proclaim the Word of God, to administer the sacraments to those who have come to the profession of their faith, teaching them to observe all that Christ has commanded his church, and to ordain elders and deacons when this appears feasible, according to the rules given in the Word of God.

This entire article is very relevant for the missionary's task. Especially the second paragraph lays out his work. The question, however, may be asked whether the same applies to the first paragraph. What does it mean for the missionary to be subject to the Church

Order? Does that mean that missionary is responsible to follow the Church Order in his work in exactly the same manner that the ministers and elders do in the established churches of the home federation?

### Article 18 in practice

Article 18 was written in the recent history of the Canadian Reformed churches. Unlike the paragraphs in Scripture (which are not original but were added much later), the paragraph divisions in our Church Order must be understood as intentional and meaningful. In practical terms, this means that the first sentence of Article 18 should be read in strict connection with the second sentence. What does it mean for the missionary to be bound to the Church Order? It means that he shall first be diligent in his reporting to the sending church. Second, it means that he shall be bound for life to that sending church. In other words, the first paragraph speaks of the supervision and oversight of the missionary. The second paragraph speaks of how the missionary does his work. Reference to the standard Church Order commentaries will corroborate this interpretation as the correct one.<sup>3</sup>

### What does it mean for the missionary to be subject to the Church Order?

If this were not the case, we would have a strange situation, especially with those churches that employ or have employed unordained mission workers. If Article 18 means that the missionary has to strictly apply the Church Order to his evangelistic work, what do we do with the unordained mission worker? He is not covered by Article 18. He has not signed the Form of Subscription. The mission worker can therefore do as he pleases on the mission field. But the moment he becomes an ordained missionary, he is bound to implement all the stipulations of the Church Order. I think this example makes clear that the Church Order was not meant to be interpreted or used in this way.

### A brief case study

To make it even clearer, let's consider how or if the missionary should apply Article 55 regarding the psalms and hymns. Does Article 18 require

the missionary to use the *Book of Praise* in the mission congregation? Or how about Article 56 concerning the administration of the sacraments? Does Article 18 require the missionary to use the adopted forms in the worship services of the mission congregation?

My contention is that Article 18 does not apply in these cases or similar ones. In the end, these issues are not decided by appealing to the letter of the Church Order. The Church Order was not formulated for mission congregations. The history clearly bears this out. The Church Order clearly developed as an agreement among established churches living together in a federation. The issues of songs in the worship service and the forms for the sacraments on the mission field are better decided by asking the questions: what are we working towards? What is our goal in this mission work? If our goal is a Reformed church (as it should be), we will do our best to at least follow the principles of Reformed worship incorporated in our Church Order, or the spirit of the Church Order, if you want to put it that way. Practically speaking, we will place the emphasis on the psalms and use hymns that are properly (biblically) oriented. It will be both wise and beneficial to use a form of our *Book of Praise* (or the actual book itself), especially if a proper Canadian Reformed Church is the goal. With respect to the forms for the sacraments, the adopted forms have a long history and cover most of the important points in the relevant doctrines. We do well to incorporate some variant of these forms – but to insist on the exact form is not necessary. Mission congregations who are not familiar with the jargon of our churches may be better served by a “translation” into easier language. Though the language may change, the content remains the same.

If our goal is a Reformed church, then that will be demonstrated in how we resolve these practical issues. But to insist that Article 18 means that a mission congregation has to look exactly


the same as a regular church in the home federation – that is not only wrong, but also unwise. The Church Order does not directly apply to the mission congregation. It only applies directly to the supervision and oversight of the missionary, as well as the general manner in which he executes his task.

**But to insist that Article 18 means that a mission congregation has to look exactly the same as a regular church in the home federation – that is not only wrong, but also unwise.**

You will understand that none of this meant to detract from the value of our Reformed Church Order. For the most part, it functions in a God-glorifying capacity in our federation. All I am asking is that we recognize its limitations. As we look at the history, it becomes clear that mission was never emphasized as strongly as it is today. The original Church Order of Dort was written in a different milieu where mission was sometimes a footnote to the life of the church. If we keep that in mind, then we will have no difficulty living with the Church Order in our new day where missions, especially in our own country, are being zealously pursued.

<sup>1</sup> *Spiritual Order for the Church*, Clarence Bouwman, Premier, 2000, p.197.

<sup>2</sup> *Acts Synod 1968*, p.119. This was a draft translation of the CO in use from the beginning.

<sup>3</sup> *With Common Consent*, W.W.J. VanOene, Premier, 1990, p.89; *Decently and in Good Order*, G. VanRongen and K. Deddens, Premier, 1986, p.45. 

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By W.L. Bredenhof

***The Church Says Amen: An Exposition of the Belgic Confession*, J. van Bruggen, Inheritance Publications, 2003, soft cover, 230 pages, \$15.95 Can.**

It was about six years ago that I learned that Johanna VanderPlas was working on a translation of J. van Bruggen's *Het amen der kerk*. What a joy to finally see it in print! Originally published in 1964, one of the best Dutch commentaries on the Belgic Confession is now available in English for everybody to utilize and appreciate.

The late J. van Bruggen (father of the well-known Prof. Dr. J. van Bruggen) was a pastor in The Netherlands. He was also the author of another book on one of our confessions: *Annotations to the Heidelberg Catechism*. In much the same way as with the other volume, in *The Church Says Amen*, van Bruggen

is careful to lay out the Scriptural basis for our confession. He places the Belgic Confession soundly in its historical context of polemics against both the Roman Catholics and the Anabaptists.

Though it may surprise some, *The Church Says Amen* soundly retains its relevance for 21st century English readers. For instance, the name of Karl Barth is often mentioned in a positive way in many contemporary evangelical books. Van Bruggen shows clearly the dangers that were introduced by Barth and how they contradict the teaching of Scripture. Controversies such as the days of creation and the relationship between faith, works, and justification receive attention. Where the book has references to forgotten controversies, the translator is sure to help with detailed footnotes.

Occasionally, readers may find themselves in disagreement with van Bruggen. He is certainly not afraid to

take unpopular positions with respect to the Belgic Confession. For instance, he argues in favour of including the missing words of Article 36 (which appear in a footnote in our *Book of Praise*). At other times, he is sympathetically critical of the Confession. In one instance, he argues that Article 12 should have included a reference to the work of the Holy Spirit in creation. Whatever one might think of these arguments, this much can be said: van Bruggen is a helpful, orthodox guide to the Belgic Confession and he gets you thinking. This would be an excellent book for the use of study societies, for individual refreshment on the doctrines of the church, or as a textbook for preconfession or adult education. C

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Dear Editor:

Over the years I have been much impressed by the contribution Dr. Riemer Faber makes to the *Clarion* readership and in particular the writings about Psalms and Hymns used in the churches since the Reformation. In his first submission of the three part series he gives an historical presentation of Pietism and Puritanism which takes you through the ups and downs of lives of our forefathers in the low-lands of Europe.

I am already looking forward to the rest of the series.

An interesting explanation was that of Theologian William Ames (1576-1633) dealing with "the science of living with God." And singing is part of that. Recently I found a website named "The Ames Hymn

Collection" which can be found at <http://junior.apk.net/~bmames/hymns-sjs.htm>. While it may be a bit far-fetched to claim that this site was made by a distant relative of William Ames, our readers will not only find the text of 482 hymns, but also the music, which is available for personal use. In addition you may listen and download the tunes.

*Arie J. Hordyk  
Burlington, Ontario*

### Rev. R. Aasman,

After having read your article I came to the conclusion that I am a generation older than you. You wrote about the native land of your parents. I left The Netherlands as a young man almost fifty years ago. My wife and I were

the only ones who came to Canada. None of our brothers and sisters followed us. And they all (fifteen in total) were and are members of our sister churches (GKN). Most of my brothers and brothers-in-law (if not all) have served as office bearer. With most of them I do have contact by telephone. And from several I hear about the church life in their local church. And I hear that there is a lot of difference. Most of them are worried about how things are going in the churches, while some say it is as it always has been. And knowing who says what, I am worried about the direction our sister churches are going after the last two held synods.

*Harry Bouwman,  
Fergus, Ontario*