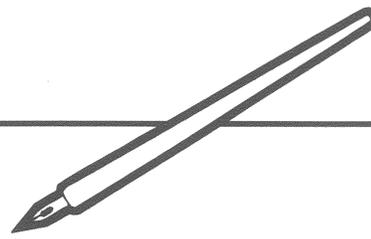


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By J. Geertsema



The Church in the Challenge of Church Union

The Book

For some time now I have on my desk the book *Challenge of Church Union*. It is a publication of the Burlington Reformed Study Centre and is edited by my colleague, Dr. C. Van Dam. The book contains the “speeches and discussions on Reformed identity and ecumenicity” as they were held in October 1992 in commemoration of the Union in 1892 between the Secession churches and Doleantie churches in The Netherlands. These two groups of churches had separated from the Netherlands Reformed Church in 1834 and 1886, respectively. A report on these speeches appeared in our magazine soon after October 1992. The book, however, not only contains the complete text of these speeches but also the “Discussion” – a more or less critical response to these speeches – at the meetings, as well as the answers to questions that were asked.

The book has three parts. The first part has the heading “The Union of 1892.” It starts with the speech of Dr. J. De Jong, professor at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches, on “Is There a Lesson in the Union of 1892 for Today?” It continues with the address of Rev. C. Pronk of the Free Reformed Church at St. Thomas, Ontario, on “The Union of 1892: A Free Reformed Evaluation.” The two speeches are followed by the “Discussion” and by the “Questions and Answers.” I will come back on Rev. Pronk’s address and what he says with regard to the doctrine of the church as taught by the people in the churches of the Secession.

This first section presents an effort to evaluate the Union of 1892 with regard to its meaning for us as Reformed confessors today. The evaluation comes from a Canadian Reformed and from a Free Reformed angle. Dr. De Jong stresses how the people of the Secession and of the Doleantie saw it as their calling from the Head of the church to unite on the basis of the Reformed Confession and with the Reformed Church Order. Rev. Pronk showed the reasons why part of the Secession churches said they could not, at that moment, join the Union. According to them, the declaration of confessional agreement was more of a formality than a matter of real contents.

This approach of 1892, seen from these two different angles, is not only informative but also works as a mirror. We meet the two different approaches again in today’s situation. They were heard during the meetings, too. On the one hand, there was the emphasis on the calling to unite on the basis of the common confession. On the other hand, there were words of caution, warning us not just to assume confessional unity, but also to make sure with regard to each other that we do confess the same things.

The second part presents to us the speeches of Rev. Cl. Stam, minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Hamilton, Ontario, and Dr. Th. Plantinga, professor at Redeemer College in Ancaster, Ontario. The common theme of this part is “How Close Are Concerned/Former Christian Reformed and Canadian Reformed?” Stam’s speech deals with the question “How Close Are We?” He tries to give honest answers showing both closeness and distance. The same is presented by Plantinga in his address, “Where do We Differ?” This part, too, is concluded with the “Discussion” and the “Questions and Answers.”

These two addresses help us by telling how Canadian Reformed and concerned Christian Reformed and Independent Christian Reformed see each other and what kind of difficulties are considered to be obstructing the way toward each other. This second section, a communication effort about relational problems between us, aims at solving those problems. Such an honest approach toward each other is healthy and will remain necessary. We have to learn to know each other and together examine the ways we see things and do things. Such examinations will have to be dominated by placing our views and ways of doing things in the light of Scripture, as well as in the light of our Reformed Confessions and the Reformed Church Order. In other words, Scripture is and remains the rule for faith and life. This is the foundation of all Reformed confessing. At the same time, it is also Reformed to reckon with and hold on to (or return to) what God has given to the Reformed Churches in their history since the Reformation. In the practice of life, the Reformed churches have learned time and again that the slogan “only the Bible” sounds nice but leads to a doctrinal freedom in which, in the end, everyone comes with his own interpretation of the Bible. To be truly Reformed is to be confessionally Reformed. It is maintaining the subscription form in which all officebearers declare in an honest way that, according to them, the Reformed Confessions agree in everything with the Word of God and that, therefore, they will not teach or promote anything that is in conflict with these Reformed standards.

This principle as well as more practical issues with regard to the question “Former Christian Reformed and Canadian Reformed: What Should Be Done?” are dealt with in the third part.

First Dr. C. P. Venema, professor at Mid-America Reformed Seminary in Iowa, and then Dr. J. Faber, emeritus professor of the Canadian Reformed Theological College in Hamilton, give their views in this respect. Many good directives are given. Also this part is concluded with the “Discussion” and the “Questions and Answers” section.

The text of the speech of Dr. Van Dam delivered at the Eighteenth Convocation and the Twenty-third Anniversary Meeting of the Theological College in Hamilton on "When Brothers Dwell in Unity" is added as an appendix. The book concludes with a general index which greatly increases the usefulness of the book. The index includes the matters that are dealt with, the names of persons who played a role in the history of the church and who are mentioned in the book, and the names of authors to whom the speakers refer.

We are happy with this book in the present situation in which God places the different Reformed churches in North America. The book is an effort to give guidance to us as Canadian Reformed people, to those who are struggling in the Christian Reformed Church and want to abide by Scripture and Confession, as well as to those who have left this church already and belong to the Orthodox or Independent Christian Reformed Churches and to the Free Reformed.

The doctrine about the church

Rev. Pronk's contribution is very enlightening and very instructive in a special way. It shows why not all the members of the Secession churches went along with the Union in 1892. They had "church-political" objections to the method of uniting, complaining that the union was pushed upon the churches by the synods instead of coming from the churches themselves. The local churches had hardly any input. Obviously, this was not seen as a true and valid ground by those who did unite.

Rev. Pronk also presents "historical" objections, related to the difference in the basis for the Secession and for the Doleantie. He illustrates this by placing the motivation of Dr. A. Kuyper and his followers for the Doleantie over against the motivation of the men of the Secession for their separation from the Netherlands Reformed Church. The difference is caused by a difference in their view on the church. Here follows an extensive quotation from pages 24-25:

In 1884 Kuyper wrote his *Tractaat van de Reformatie der Kerken* (Treatise on the Reformation of the Churches) in which he developed his strategy for church reformation. According to Kuyper the Netherlands Reformed Church was not a false church as the Secession churches claimed, but a true church as far as its essence was concerned. Important here is Kuyper's distinction between the church as *organism* and the church as *organization or institute*. As organism a church can be true while at the same time it can be false as an organization. As long as a church has true believers in it, even *potentially*, it is still a true church. Such was the case with the Netherlands Reformed Church, Kuyper believed. The only thing that was false about it was its *organization* due to certain *regulations* imposed upon it by the State since 1816. . . . Reformation, therefore, meant liberating the church from these illegally imposed regulations and this, according to Kuyper and his followers, was what took place at the Doleantie. They did not see the action of 1886 as a secession from the State church, similar to 1834, but as an attempt to *reorganize* that Church, bringing it back under the authority of Christ.

Thus, the Netherlands Reformed Church as a whole, as body, was not a false church, but only the hierarchical governing system of the church boards of practically permanent classes and synods. As long as the body of the church still contained some true believers or even some who were not confessing believers yet, but were part of God's elect, it is a true church. Pronk continues:



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This Doleantie approach was radically different from that of the Secession. The fathers of 1834 did not see the state church (Netherlands Reformed Church) as an essentially true church with only a false organization forced upon it, but as a false church in the corporate sense from which every true believer must separate himself in obedience to Scripture and the Reformed confession.

It is interesting to read how leaders of the Secession churches like Professors H. Bavinck and L. Lindeboom differed in approach, although both went along with the Union in the end, but I shall not pursue this point. I refer you to the book itself. I do want to mention, though, that most of the people of the Secession churches could go along with the Union in 1892 when the synod of the Doleantie churches agreed that their separation from the State church was a matter of obedience to the Word of God in accordance with the Reformed confession, and that it was not just a separation from the governing system, but from the State church "in a corporal and local" sense. The synod of the Doleantie accepted the confessionally Reformed way of speaking.

However this went, it is obvious that the different approach of Secession and Doleantie with respect to their separating from the Netherlands Reformed Church is related to a different teaching with regard to the church. Rev. Pronk makes this clear when he discusses the fourth objection to the union at that moment.

I do not deal here with the third objection, namely, "unbiblical teachings," consisting of Kuyper's ideas of immediate regeneration, that is, regeneration without the means of God's Word as this is preached and taught; and further presumptive regeneration, that is, the assumption that all in the congregation are regenerated from birth and that this is the basis for the baptism of infants. With the Free Reformed brothers we reject such teachings. But let us continue with the fourth objection which again has to do with the teaching about the church.

Pronk characterizes the fourth objection as the lack of real "confessional unity." He gives an illustration here with the doctrine concerning the church. Many people of the Secession were convinced that Dr. A. Kuyper did not speak the language of the Reformed confession regarding the church. Pronk cites from a brochure of F. M. Ten Hoor, *Afscheiding en Doleantie in verband met het Kerkbegrip* (Secession and Doleantie in connection with the concept of the Church). I again give an extensive quotation (p.29):

For the Secession, according to Ten Hoor, the church was essentially what Article 27 of the Belgic Confession says: a holy congregation of true Christian believers, i.e., the visible body of Christ confessors. For Kuyper, the leading spokesman for the Doleantie, the church in its essence is an *organism* which he called the invisible church which comes to expression in a visible *institute*. According to P.A. Van Leeuwen, Kuyper's view of the church as an organism had its origin in German philosophy rather than in Reformed theology.¹ Kuyper combined this philosophical idea of organism with the Biblical and Reformed doctrine of election. It was this emphasis on the invisible church as organism and the corresponding depreciation of the visible church as institute that forms the background of all Kuyper's thinking, including his theory of reforming the Netherlands Reformed Church. That Church as institute admittedly was false, but as organism it could still be regarded as true due to the presence of the elect with their increased potential for church formation.

In other words, Rev. Pronk shows that, on the one hand, the doctrine of the church as this was taught by the people of the Secession and forming the basis for their separation from the Netherlands Reformed Church, was strongly confessional. It was the language and teaching of the Reformed confession, following the teaching of God's Word. On the other hand, the teaching of Dr. A. Kuyper on the church, used as basis for the Doleantie, was very much founded upon a philosophical and theological construction. It was for this reason that those who did not go along with the Union in 1892 said that this union on the basis of the confession was a formal union rather than an essential one.

It is evident that those who did go along with the Union did not see Kuyper's personal opinion as a hindrance for the union. The synod of the Secession churches had the view that a union on the basis of the confession would present a ground for dealing with the Kuyper's views. The General Synod of 1905 did deal with some of Kuyper's ideas and a kind of compromise was reached. Certain views of Kuyper were gently rejected.

A conclusion

In conclusion, we can say that before and after 1944 (the Liberation) Dr. K. Schilder and others taught the same doctrine of the church as the men of the Secession did in 1892, again in opposition to the teaching of Kuyper and his followers. In other words, Canadian Reformed people teach the same with respect to the church as the people of the Secession did. We do not want to live by a philosophical and theological construction regarding the church. We want to abide by what we confess to be the teaching of the Scriptures as we summarize this in Articles 27-32 of the Belgic Confession. We are still of the opinion that Kuyper's view of the true church as invisible organism, consisting of the elect, which leads to the idea of the pluriformity of the church, brings us in conflict with the language and teaching of the Reformed confession and easily hinders us in our obedience of faith regarding the church. Part of this obedience is separating from those who are not of the church and maintaining the unity of the church in joining the true church wherever Christ gathers it (Art. 28).

It is clear, then, that the Canadian Reformed manner of speaking about the church is not new or odd, but is in line with the teaching of the Secession and is confessionally Reformed and Biblical. I hope that the reading of this book makes this more evident to many in and also outside the Canadian Reformed Churches.

Now I am also aware that wrong conclusions can be drawn. We do not say, just as the Secession people did not, that speaking the confessional language of true and false church means that only those who belong to a specific true church, as for instance the Canadian Reformed Church, will be saved and go to heaven. The very words of the confession do not permit us to say that all those who do not belong to such a specific true church are not and cannot be true Christian believers. Our confession itself rejects such a conclusion, for it speaks differently. In Art. 28 we confess with respect to the true church that

all and everyone are obliged to join it and unite with it, maintaining the unity of the church. They must submit themselves to its instruction and discipline, bend their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ, and serve the edification of the brothers and sisters, according to the talents which God has given them as members of the same body.

To observe this more effectively, it is the duty of all believers, according to the Word of God, to separate from those who do not belong to the Church and join this assembly wherever God has established it.

The "all and everyone" who "are obliged to join it" and the "They" who "must submit themselves to its instruction" are the same people as "all believers" in the second paragraph. To these believers belong those who have the duty "to separate from those who do not belong to the Church and to join this assembly." This formulation of the confession about the duty of "all believers" makes sense only if it implies the awareness that there are true Christian believers outside a true congregation or church.

Nor does the confession say that only one specific federation is the true church of Christ. The confession presents the marks of and norms for the true church. Where those

marks are found, there is the true church of Christ, Art. 29 B.C. But the duty to join and unite implies that such true churches are called to come to a visible federative unity to help each other as sisters to abide by the teaching of Scripture as this is confessed and so to keep bending their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ, and serve the edification of the brothers and sisters."

May the reading of this book promote the truly confessional Reformed unity in a visible, federative way of all truly Reformed Churches. You understand that I heartily recommend the reading of this book.

1. *Het Kerkbegrip in de Theologie van Abraham Kuyper* (The Concept of the Church in the Theology of Abraham Kuyper), (Franeker: Wever, 1946), p.118. 

Abuse₃

How do we look at Abuse?

By D.G.J. Agema

Abuse and power

"Abuse" is abuse of power. Power is misused in order to gain control over the other. Power is misused to keep the other in control. We will begin our evaluation then by looking at what the Bible says about power, or rather, authority. The Bible teaches us that all authority comes from God. This means that authority is never a purpose in itself and may never be used for selfish purposes. He who has authority has received it from the Lord and will have to give account to the Lord how he has used it.

In abusive situations this power is divorced from the Lord and seen as a tool to serve the abuser. Therefore abuse is in the first place an insult to God. The abusive husband who tells his wife that he is her head should first of all realize that he has Christ as Head. The parents who want to control their children should realize that their position is one given by the Lord. Ephesians 5 and 6 and Colossians 3 clearly speak of all relationships of authority as in the Lord.

Here we see then the difference between the way we look at abuse and the way this world does. This world operates from the idea that man is a power unto himself, man has rights which may not be infringed upon. Therefore the injustice and hurt of the victim

stands in the center, even runs the danger of being idolized. We acknowledge that all authority comes from God, is to be received from Him in faith and used in loving obedience to Him. His love, His justice and right stand in the center. Both abuser and victim will find their help in the Lord, that is, in God's saving love in Christ.

It is remarkable that Paul stresses in Ephesians 5:22-33 that the position of authority of the husband is to be ruled by Christian love. This love reflects the self-sacrificing love of Christ for His Bride. Therefore, the love of the Christian husband, his position of head of the family, may not be a matter of selfish domination. Rather, it is a matter of giving, sacrificing and caring love in which the wife and child is safe, can feel safe and is protected.

The same message we find in Colossians 3. The position of authority in the relations between husband and wife, between parents and children, and between masters and slaves, is placed under the theme of the loving and giving care of Christ. In the vv. 12-17 we read: "Put on. . . compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness and patience, . . . And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, . . . Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly." In this context children are admonished to "obey their par-



ents in everything, for this pleases the Lord." This context also leads to a warning for the fathers, "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged." Here is spoken of fathers who seek the spiritual, mental, and physical well-being of their children in the light of Christ's caring and self-sacrificing love.

Old and new

Is abuse something new of the 20th century? No, abuse is as old as sin is old. All through the centuries there has been abuse. For abuse is the abuse of power. Man has from the beginning rebelled against the authority of God. We all have abused His love. The consequences of this disobedience is also that human relationships can become abusive. Already in the O.T. we find references to and warnings against alco-

hol, abuse of power in marriage, sexual abuse and incest. The N.T. also warns against being filled with wine, instructs husbands to deal wisely with their wives, as their own body, and commands fathers not to provoke their children to anger. The Bible certainly warns for the abuse of power and also realizes that abuse can and does happen.

There is nothing new under the sun, also when it comes to abuse. What is new compared to 50 years ago, is our awareness of the effects of abuse, and that we are prepared to say that abuse cannot be tolerated. The husband who abuses his wife has broken his vows and his marriage, and the wife is justified to leave him if he makes it impossible for her to live a Christian life. The rule to be more obedient to God than to men also applies to marriage and the relationship parent-child.

Though this openness in itself is good, yet we should be aware of possible over-reaction as well. You see such an over-reaction in our society. In fact, because our society does not want to acknowledge that all authority comes from God it is unable to give the proper answer to abuse. This leads to contradictions and aberrations. For is not abortion a most terrible form of child abuse? Or, to give another example, a child can with one malicious allegation destroy the name and career of someone he does not like. And the media which highlight cases of abuse also feed society with violence, selfishness and sex. Similarly, our world wants to give the victim the feeling of self-worth. In doing this they replace the power of the "other" with the power of "self." But how can a person receive a proper self-worth, except before the face of God? In Father's eyes I am a person, for He calls me by name.

This contradictory reaction of our 20th century society is a result of not wanting to accept the authority of God. Abuse can only be dealt with from the perspective of God's will and His claim on man.

Sickness or sin

This brings me to a question we cannot escape, namely is abuse a matter of sickness or sin? Is the alcoholic, the wife beater, the sexual abuser a sick person, or do we regard his actions as sin? Some say it is a sickness, it is a condition not an act. Give medication and professional help and that should solve some of the problems, or perhaps it will never be solved. Others

say no it is sin. Confess and repent from your selfishness and you will be healed.

Abuse is sin. Abuse involves a wrong use of power, thus the person who abuses wants to take the place of God. The abuser has in his own view absolute power and imposes this on the other. This is sin. The Bible shows that every relationship is in the Lord. All authority we receive is delegated to us, and must be used in submission to God. The Bible also indicates that the body, also the victim's body, is a temple of the Holy Spirit. There is no excuse for abuse. Both victim and abuser must know this.

To see the sinfulness of abuse we can refer to the Ten Words of the covenant, the Law of God. The Lord introduces His law in proclaiming our redemption by His power. God's power is a power manifested in redemption. With regard to the first commandment we can say that the abuser has made power into an idol. The second commandment says that we must serve the Lord according to His will, not according to our own will. The abuser does it on his own terms. And does not God say in the fifth commandment that all authority comes from Him? In the sixth commandment the Lord forbids dishonoring and injuring others by thoughts, words, gestures much less by deed.

Does not the seventh commandment imply that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit? It is even remarkable that in the O.T. to steal, forbidden in the eighth commandment, also applies to stealing people. Deut 24:7 "If a man is found to have kidnapped a fellow Israelite, enslaving him or selling him, that kidnapper shall die; thus you will sweep out evil from your midst." (JPS transl.) See also Ex. 21:16. Abuse is evil in the eyes of God.

While maintaining that abuse is sin, we should not close our eyes either for the fact that the abuser himself has a distorted view on reality, or the possibility that the one who abuses has certain things in his life that may prevent him from seeing his sin clearly. There can be trouble or even abuse in childhood; there can be an inferiority complex; there can be many different things. Abusive behavior has a pattern and a history. This is important in dealing with the victim because the victim has put the blame on himself. The victim supposedly could have prevented the abuse. This is also of importance in dealing with the perpetrator. It may take much to make him see his sin.

I say this not to excuse the sin but to be able to focus on the repentance. The abuser must repent, but that repentance must not be outward or superficial. When you see that abusive behaviour as sickness, then part of the responsibility goes away. Can he help it that he is sick? The solution is then professional help, and as elders we can perhaps function as helpers who stand by the sideline. [Every professional method of treating abuse has a philosophical basis that should be scrutinized.] But if it is a sin for which repentance must be shown, then we have a function as elders. For then also the use of the keys of the kingdom comes into the picture.

How should we use these keys? They must be administered so that the sinner, by the power of the Holy Spirit, comes to repentance. He has to acknowledge his wrong and do his utmost to seek help. Not forgetting that the goal of all discipline is to reconcile the sinner to God.

Abuse and faith

Within our community the effects of abuse can be deepened by a misuse of what Scripture teaches us about authority. The abusive husband will point to the command that women must be submissive and abusive parents often use the commandment "Honour your father and your mother." The Bible is read with a view to what the other has to do. The name of the Lord is used to gain or maintain control over the life, the emotions or the body of someone else. Such use of the name of the Lord is abuse of His name. For it is used to condone or cover up sinful practices. In addition a tremendous burden is placed on the shoulders of the victim. For in the mind of the victim to oppose the abuse becomes equal to opposing God. In such circumstances we may tell the victim that God is a loving Father, who forbids abuse. The life of the victim is in His hand.

God reveals Himself to us as a Father. He uses a title that we are all familiar with. For this reason, abuse in the earthly relationship, e.g. of father and child, can have consequences for the victim's relationship with the Lord. If the earthly father is unpredictable and abusive, then it can become difficult to address God as Father. It is therefore important to keep in mind what we confess in Lord's Day 9, namely, that the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is for His sake my God and Father.

God's fatherhood cannot be separated from the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. This shows that Father in heaven is not a tyrant, but a loving Father who gives what is most dear to Him in His love for us. When the apostle Paul in Ephesians 6 says that the relationship between parents and children is one in the Lord then this element is certainly included. The calling of parents with regard to their children is to show this love. They may instill in them the understanding that their mutual relationship is one in the Lord. Not the parents gives the children their place, nor do children give their parents a place, but both receive their place from the Father in heaven through the Lord Jesus Christ. Abusive parents by their controlling attitude tend to obscure this grace of God and can thus seriously hurt the relationship of the victim with the heavenly Father.

I mentioned that at times Scriptural concepts are used to reinforce abuse or to ignore its effects. The abusive husband will tell his wife that she must be submissive to her husband, and an abusive parent will tell the child that children must honour their parents and have patience with their weaknesses and shortcomings. These statements are indeed true, only the situation in which they are used and the purpose for which they are used make them so "poisonous." For in the eye of the victim to go for help or even to go against the abusive husband and parent is nothing less but disobedience to God's command. It puts a tremendous burden of guilt on the victim and undermines a proper understanding of what forgiveness is. For in this way repentance means to be forced to do what the abuser wants you to do. This is a total caricature of the Biblical understanding of repentance and forgiveness.

The relationship between abuse and faith comes to the fore also in other ways. Many victims ask themselves the question, Where was God when this happened? If this is wrong why did He not stop it?

These questions are already difficult to deal with. It becomes, however, more difficult yet when the abuser comes to the victim to ask for forgiveness while the abuse continues. Not only can this lead to a warped understanding of the Lord forgiving our sins, it can even bring about hatred against the Lord. In addition, the feeling of guilt makes the victim feel that he or she has no "right" to the promises of God. There are vic-

tims who were able to endure much because of their faith, this is true, but it is equally true that abuse can distort one's view on the promises of God and destroy the certainty of faith.

Help and healing

Helping, of both the victim and the abuser, begins with taking abuse seriously. Helping begins with listening and being open for the thoughts and fears of the other. But it will not stay there. It must progress from there, though that may take a lot of time. For all the defenses which we mentioned above must first be broken down. The denial, the guilt, the fear need to be addressed. That can take a long time. For the victim these defenses give a measure of security. What they don't realize is how these defenses do not help but rather make it more difficult for the person. These defenses have also covered the main issue. Therefore what you will see once the defenses come down, is that the pain and the hurt comes up. That is to be expected. But it will make the victim say, "Why did I do this? Not telling and living with the lie is nicer than dealing with this pain." This is not true. To live with a lie is not life. The victim must become aware of what has to happen in him or her. Help is possible.

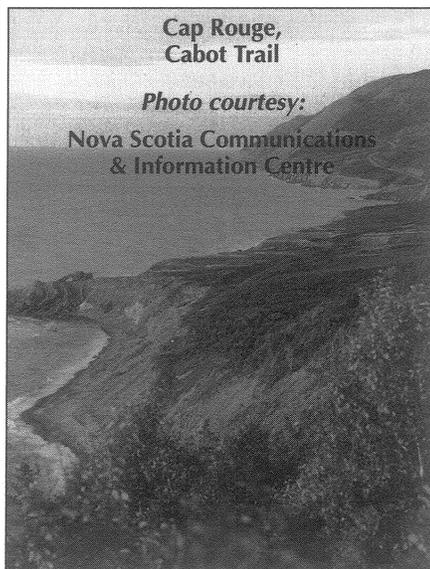
Who can help? Do you need to be an expert in order to help? There are two things I want to stress. In the first place know your own limitations. Abuse runs deep and is cunning. Wife

abuse is not just a marital disagreement, child abuse is not just a minor incident. Therefore we should not reject professional help off hand. Such help can be instrumental in dealing with the abuse. In the second place we should not think little of what we can do in being a hand and a foot to each other in the congregation. With the word of God we can be of help also in these situations. The grace of God is sufficient also for situations of abuse. A professional counsellor has only 1 hour in the three weeks, but we can deal with each other on a much more frequent basis. Certain scars may never go away, but we can help each other to live from the grace of God.

That brings us also to the question what task the office bearers in the church have. The office bearer is not a professional counselor. I would say he is more, he is charged to take care of the souls of the congregation. The minister is not a professional counselor either. His task is to be a pastor and teacher. As pastor he has to deal with the difficulties in the flock, including abuse. Office bearers also have to know their limitations and not be afraid to make use of professional services. On the other hand they should not relinquish their task to counsellors. For the office bearers have something that the counselors do not have, the keys to the kingdom of God. Abuse is a sin against God, it is God who forgives sins, who also heals and helps. He has given us His servants, the office bearers, who, with all shortcomings, are called to take care of the members. They may do this with the Word of God and the help of the Holy Spirit.

It is here that the difference in approach to abuse is very significant. I said that this society puts man and his hurts in the center. In order to solve the problems you need experts. We place the justice of God in the center, . . . (to solve) problems in this context (you need) and that gives the office bearers a place. The grace of God and the mercy of Christ come to us through them. Both victim and abuser must see their place before God, only then healing is possible. God's grace and Spirit are more powerful than the forces of darkness. And in this life that is seen in part, after this life it will be completed, for we are on the way to a kingdom without abuse. 

OUR COVER



Cap Rouge,
Cabot Trail

Photo courtesy:
Nova Scotia Communications
& Information Centre

REMEMBER YOUR CREATOR

By G.Ph. van Popta

Brothers and Sisters

In this column I have been writing some things about the different names used in the New Testament to describe believers. Another such name is “brother.” This title is used throughout the New Testament and throughout Church history until the present day. Don’t we often speak about one another as brothers and sisters?

The name brother indicates that we have the same Father. We are brothers and sisters because God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ adopted us to be His children. Because you and I are children of God, therefore we are brothers and sisters.

The New Testament was not the first to speak about “brotherhood.” Certain ancient philosophers spoke of human brotherhood – the brotherhood of all mankind. For centuries Greeks had divided the human race into Greeks and not-Greeks. Greeks described non-Greeks as barbarians, inferior to Greeks. Plato and Aristotle shared this view. However, Stoic philosophy, which began its five-hundred-year history as an organized movement around the year 300 B.C., began to make a different sound.

In his *Republic*, Zeno of Citium (on the island of Cyprus), the founder of Stoicism, spoke of a world-city in which all distinctions of earthly rank would be abolished. In this world city there would be neither Greek nor barbarian. Later Stoic philosophers furthered the thoughts of Zeno. The god Zeus was regarded as the father of all mankind. All men were, therefore, brothers. Epictetus said that a master must deal considerately with his slave because they are both “children of Zeus” (*Discourses* 1.15). When the apostle Paul spoke with the Stoic philosophers in Athens he showed that he was familiar with their poets who extolled the common childhood of mankind through father Zeus (Acts 27:28).

This stream of Greek philosophy proclaimed the universal brotherhood

of man. This idea has been alive ever since. It was glorified by the French Revolution whose slogan included “fraternity” (brotherhood) as one of its objectives. Beethoven, impressed by the French Revolution’s vision of the freedom and dignity of the individual, exalted this “fraternity” in his *Ninth, (Choral) Symphony*. In this symphony Beethoven included a prophecy of the time when “all men shall be brothers.”

So, it is not only the New Testament which speaks of the brotherhood of man. Greek philosophy, the French Revolution, brilliant composers do. What is the difference? When Paul said that there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, barbarian nor Scythian (Gal. 3:28; Col. 2:11) was he just echoing what Zeno had said 300 years earlier? When Paul told master Philemon to treat his slave Onesimus not as a slave but as a beloved brother (Philem. 16), was he simply parroting Epictetus? What is the difference? What does the New Testament say about brotherhood which is special?

The difference is that the philosophy of the Stoics, the French Revolution and Beethoven sees man as the measure of all things. This philosophy proclaims the universal brotherhood of man because of some supposed intrinsic value, a deep-rooted worth, which man has of and in himself. The New Testament, on the other hand, proclaims a brotherhood of man based upon the value, the worth of Jesus Christ.

Man is the son of God through Adam. As Luke 3:38 says, Seth was the son of Adam, the son of God. However, when man fell into sin, he broke that Father-son relationship between himself and God. Fallen men and women are *not* the children of God. They are the children of the devil. The Lord Jesus said this about the unbelieving Jews: “You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires” (John 8:44). That will alert us not to

speak of unbelievers as brothers and sisters. Do you want to be a brother to someone whose father is the devil? That will forewarn us not to become enthusiastic about slogans proclaiming universal brotherhood. If there are brothers, there has got to be a father. Who is the father? God or the devil?

Is there a universal brotherhood of man? Yes. All those whom God has included in His covenant of grace are His children. And these children are one another’s sisters and brothers. God has brought this about through His eternal Son Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the one who brings us into the family of God. He is the great leveller, the One who erases distinctions between people.

Christ abolished the most fundamental human distinction – the one that existed between Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:11-22). Christian Jews and Christian Gentiles are brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul told the Galatians that there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, not because of some innate value in man, but because they were all one in Christ Jesus. Paul told the Colossians that among them there could not be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free man not because he had read Zeno, which he probably had, but because Christ is all, and in all. Paul told Philemon to treat Onesimus his slave as a brother not because he was impressed by Epictetus but because Philemon and Onesimus were one in the Lord.

Christ is the new Man. He is the Founder of a new human race. Those who believe in Christ are members of that race. They become children of God. As John wrote: “But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12,13). Christ is the first-born among many brethren (Rom. 8:29). He is not ashamed to call

us brethren (Heb. 2:11ff). If we do the will of God we prove ourselves to be the brothers and sisters of Christ (Mark 3:35).

We confess these wonderful truths in the Heidelberg Catechism. In Lord's Day 9 we say: ". . . the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . is, for the sake of Christ His Son, my God and my Father." In Lord's Day 13 we confess that ". . . Christ alone is the eternal, natural Son of God. . . [and that we] are children of God by adoption, through grace, for Christ's sake."

Through Christ we are children of the Father. We are brothers and sisters of Christ. We are each other's brothers and sisters. The Lord Jesus brings about a profound reconciliation between people who once were enemies. In Damascus there was a disciple called Ananias. He called Saul of Tarsus, whom the Lord had struck with blindness as he was on his way to Damascus to round up Christians, "Brother Saul." This name for Christians speaks of love which believers are to have for one another (Rom. 9:10; 1 Pet. 3:8). Sadly, Christians do not always live

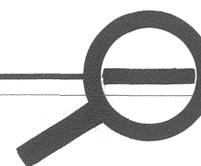
up to this obligation. Sometimes brothers drag brothers to court. Sometimes they wrong and defraud each other (1 Cor. 6:1-8).

Let us live up to the deep significance of this title. Let us prove ourselves faithful to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ. Let us show ourselves to be the brothers and sisters of Christ by doing the will of the Father in heaven.

Remember your Creator, the One who has recreated you to be His child and called you to be a brother, a sister, to His other children. **C**

PRESS REVIEW

By C. Van Dam



The Retirement of Professor H. M. Ohmann

Prof. H. M. Ohmann, well-known in our circles from his time as Prof. of Old Testament at our Theological College (1971-1981), has recently retired from teaching at the Theological University of our sister churches in Kampen. We would not want to miss this milestone in *Clarion*!

After teaching in Kampen from 1981, Prof. Ohmann gave his farewell lecture on December 6, 1993. The topic was Isaiah 65:17a: "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth," with the subtitle: "some comments with respect to the expectation of the future in the end of Isaiah."

What follows (including the headings) has been freely translated from an article by Drs. R. terBeek (*De Reformatie*, 11 December 1993) in his report on Prof. Ohmann's retirement. Rev. R. ter Beek noted how the choice of topic for this lecture fitted in beautifully with what Prof. Ohmann had been busy with as professor.

Creation, Isaiah, and a look ahead

In the first place, God speaks of Himself as Creator, also when He

promises and works redemption. That theme has become an important thread in the work of Prof. Ohmann. In many places he has articulated his praise of the Creator who spoke and created, and who spoke and bound Himself as it were for always to this creation. In all His words and deeds, God has remained true to this beginning.

In the second place, Prof. Ohmann has shown on several occasions how he was gripped by the book of Isaiah. His inaugural speech in Kampen dealt with it. For many years he lectured on Isaiah. While he was in Kampen, he wrote a book and articles about it. Precisely in this Bible book, God makes clear that He uses His power as Creator for the salvation of His people, and that the Saviour of Israel does not limit his salvation to Israel because He is Creator of heaven and earth.

In the third place, Prof. Ohmann has always been interested in what the Old Testament believer could know and expect. The Old Testament looks ahead to what lies be-

yond death, and through the prophets even further into the future. The people counted on the fact that their God would not forsake them, also not after dying. They expected something special from the Lord, something which they had never seen (see, e.g., Isa. 65:17b), to set everything which had become crooked in God's creation right again. Prof. Ohmann has tried to imagine what the Old Testament believer saw ahead of him.

A vivid representation

To imagine what the Old Testament believer experienced has been a strong point of Prof. Ohmann. He has always tried to stand in the sandals of the Old Testament person. That is often a problem for the twentieth century preacher and listener of the Old Testament. The Old Testament takes place in a world that is so different and hard to imagine. How do you bring the Old Testament close to God's people? This is a necessary question for although the Old Testament is an old book, it contains a message for today.



leagues and friends entitled *Een Spreken Begin* (literally: a speaking beginning, but which also means, a telling beginning) and a collection of Prof. Ohmann's own essays entitled *Een Levendige Voorstelling* (*A Lively Portrayal*). It is noteworthy that all the members of the Senate of our Theological College contributed to the *feestschrift*, – surely a fitting tribute and token of appreciation to one of the workers of the first hour at our training for the ministry. Without doubt this is a good reflection of the warm memories many still hold of Prof. and Mrs. Ohmann's stay in our midst.

In closing

In closing, permit me a personal note. I remember vividly as a student when Prof. F. Kouwenhoven was suddenly called from this life on October 4, 1969, after less than a month of teaching. The College community was left in a daze and Professors J. Faber and L. Selles took on Old Testament subjects besides their already full load and Rev. D. Van der Boom also assisted with teaching. What a joy when Prof. Ohmann accepted the appointment of Synod New Westminster 1971 and could begin his work in the Theological College in the fall of that year! At that time I was minister in Neerlandia where I first met Prof. and Mrs. Ohmann on their tour through the churches in 1972. His enthusiasm for the Hebrew language and the Old Testament world was obvious and delightful, a characteristic I could further discover and enjoy when we worked together (with the late Prof. L. Selles as chairman) on the Bible translation committee from 1974 to 1977.

In 1984 while working on my dissertation, the Lord suddenly called Prof. H. J. Schilder (under whom I was working) from his earthly task. It was a source of considerable relief and gratitude that Prof. Ohmann was willing to take up the task where Prof. Schilder had left off. This is not necessarily an automatic procedure and I remain grateful to him for his ready willingness to see the work through to completion.

In conclusion, also from this place, we extend Prof. and Mrs. Ohmann our congratulations on reaching this milestone. May the Lord our God be with them in their retirement and bless them also in the work that Prof. Ohmann is still able to do as an Old Testament scholar. May it all serve the praise of His glory! C

One must understand that the Lord communicated with ordinary people, with feelings and considerations that are much like ours. They walked on two feet, be in a somewhat different landscape and climate, but on the same earth. So you try as listener to imagine things as concretely as possible and as proclaimer you do your best to construct a vivid picture.

It is good to realize that in this sense Prof. Ohmann completes the circle. The first Old Testament scholar at the Theological school in Kampen was Maarten Noordzij. In a time when every self-respecting Old Testament scholar took care not to dirty his hands on things like archaeology of Palestine, he was the first in The Netherlands to be interested precisely in that. He also laboured for the study of the languages and history of Assyria, Babylonia, and Egypt. He found it worthwhile. . . . The famous Abraham Kuenen, Professor at Leiden, greeted Arie Noordzij (who later occupied the Old Testament chair

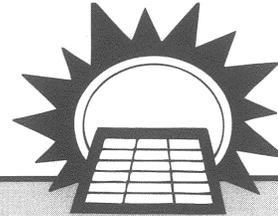
at the State University in Utrecht) with the words: "So you are son of that man in Kampen who believes in pots and pans?"

Characteristic

One can call it a characteristic of Reformed Old Testament scholarship that when explaining the text you take into consideration the environment, the language, the religious atmosphere, and the spiritual horizon of God's people in the time of the Old Testament. All this is important for understanding what is written and for determining God's specific message for his people in their world. One has to take into account the historical distance in order to read the Old Testament properly today. From this perspective, Prof. Ohmann fits with the "school" of Maarten Noordzij.

The above captures well some of the key features that have characterized Prof. Ohmann and his work and is thus an apt summary.

At the occasion of his final lecture, two books were presented to Prof. Ohmann; a *feestschrift* written by col-



By Mrs. R. Ravensbergen

*Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me,
bless His holy name. . . Psalm 103*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Psalm 103 is a psalm of David. David explains in this psalm that God is good and merciful. He forgives the sins of those who fear Him, and therefore we should always praise Him. Psalm 103 is a special psalm. David makes us count our blessings, and think about the miracle that we, sinners, still can praise the Lord with our praises and thanksgivings. It makes us think about our life, and of the many times that we failed the Lord. But it also encourages us to continue, because we know that with God's help we can do it. This psalm is often read at special times in our lives, like on birthdays, or on New Year's Eve.

David teaches us to give thanks to God for the fact that we are His children. He made His covenant with us, He adopted us as His children, and He gave us His law. God deals with us and our shortcomings not because we deserve it, but only out of mercy. We should show thankfulness for this, but too often we forget it. If we would not forget, and if our mind were not so full of other things, we could do this much better. Yet, with the help of the Holy Spirit, God leads us to praise Him.

We are so guilty of sins against the Lord, that we deserve death. But God delivers us. We cannot give ourselves any credit for that, it is only because God, in His mercy, surrounds with His love and care those who fear Him. When we read that God satisfies us with good, we know that we do not just only get a little bit. When we eat until we are satisfied, we are not hungry anymore, but we have had more than enough! So we will receive good things from the Lord as long as we live. And we don't have to worry that we will not be strong enough to enjoy those good things, and to praise the Lord for it, for He will continue to give us new, spiritual strength.

We know the Lord from the history of Israel. He made Himself known to Moses, and also to the Israelites at the mount of Sinai. Everyone trembled with fear when the Lord spoke to them from the mountain. He delivered the Israelites out of Egypt, and led them through the Red Sea. While they were in the desert, He showed them many signs and miracles. He did all that, not because the Israelites were so obedient (not at all, they often did not show any faith in the Lord!). No, He did all that, because the Israelites were His covenant people, His chosen ones.

Because of those stories in the Bible, we know the Lord today. "The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" (v.8). Those are the same words Moses used to describe the Lord in Ex.34:6. When we study the Bible, we learn to know the Lord, for He reveals Himself to us in His Word.

We can be assured that He forgives our sins. No matter how often we go against Him in sin, the Lord does not require payment for those sins. He forgives like a Father. And He is our Father, because He adopted us

as His children. He treats us as a loving Father, forgiving and merciful. Of those who fear Him, he does not even remember the sins, for He removes them "as far as the east is from the west" (v.12). This requires now also of us that in our daily life we devote ourselves to God, and submit to His word.

David tells us that in God's eyes we are only dust. God gave us our gifts, our talents to work with. However, we must not think that this is anything to boast of. We are like grass and flowers in the field. When we die, there is nothing left of us here on earth. But God, the fountain of life, supplies us with our daily needs. When we serve Him, through the Holy Spirit, our only hope is in the Lord. And we can boast of God's eternal salvation, which Christ Jesus has obtained for all those who keep His covenant. We can only be true worshippers if we obey God's word and remember His commandments.

God's majesty reaches up to the heavens. He has all kingdoms and nations under His control. Not only we on earth, but also the angels in heaven praise the Lord. And they do it as an example to us, so we recognize our shortcomings even in our praising and worshipping.

God's name is praised in "all places of his dominion." There is no corner in the heaven and on the earth where God's name is not praised. If the hosts of heaven do, if all things created do, then how can we keep silent? Of all of them we are the most blessed: Adopted as His children, the assurance that our sins are forgiven, and the promise of eternal life. Bless then the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name!

*God has His throne high in the heavens founded;
He governs all, by angel-hosts surrounded.
You mighty servants, all His ways extol!
O bless the Lord, created works in union,
Throughout all places of His vast dominion.
Extol the Lord and bless Him, O my soul.*

Psalm 103:8

Birthdays in February:

Conny Van Amerongen

Russ Rd, RR 1
Grimsby, ON, L3M 4E7
Conny will be 29 on the 12th.

Cora Schoonhoven

24 James Speight
Markham, ON, L3P 3G4
Cora will be 43 on the 18th.

Happy Birthday to both of you.
Until next month,

Mrs. R. Ravensbergen
7462 Hwy 20, RR 1
Smithville, ON L0R 2A0

From the Committee for Contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church

Mandate

Synod 1992 charged the Committee for Contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church to “maintain the contact with the OPC according to the rules for Ecclesiastical Contact as determined by Synod 1977.” It was Synod’s fervent wish that the way to ecclesiastical fellowship may be realized as a result of this continued contact.

Synod provided a mandate somewhat different from that provided by earlier Synods. First, Synod concluded that the divergencies evaluated in 1971 and 1986 have been sufficiently discussed to confirm that these are not impediments to ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC, but may be discussed within the framework of church unity.

Second, notwithstanding this conclusion, Synod charged the committee to continue the discussion of those divergencies to determine whether these stem from ecclesiological and/or historical differences, with the purpose of having these impediments removed.

Third, three matters which still require resolution were identified: (a) the matter of confessional membership, (b) the matter of supervision of the Lord’s Table, and (c) the matter of the relationship with the Christian Reformed Church.

Fourth, a number of more practical matters were included in the mandate of the committee as well: (a) request the OPC’s comment on the new rules of ecclesiastical fellowship; (b) respond to the problem of receiving ex-OPC congregations and ministers into the federation of Canadian Reformed Churches; and (c) to discuss the current third party relationships of the OPC.

All in all, quite a list of items for discussion over the three years before Synod 1995 hopes to meet.

Meeting with CEIR

The committee began its work immediately, and a meeting was scheduled with the brothers of the OPC for the

Spring of 1993. On April 14, 1993, we travelled to Rochester, NY, and met for a full day (9am-4pm) with a subcommittee of the Committee of Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations of the OPC (CEIR). Two main items formed the agenda for this meeting. First, the mandate as determined by Synod 1992, and second, the actions of Synod 1992 with respect to the Free Church of Scotland and the Presbyterian Church of Korea.

The CEIR expressed their appreciation that our discussions could continue, noting that not all within the Canadian Reformed Churches were in agreement with this contact. They provided helpful comments with respect to the new rules for ecclesiastical fellowship; these comments will be passed on to our Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad. Regarding the continued discussion of the divergencies, the CEIR raised the question why these divergencies remain impediments with respect to the OPC, and why these divergencies do not form impediments with respect to the Free Church of Scotland and the Presbyterian Church of Korea. They asked whether the Canadian Reformed Churches were dealing fairly and evenhandedly with the OPC.

As will be appreciated, particularly these latter issues took a major share of the meeting since they cut to the heart of the matter. Our response centered on two points. First, the current mandate ought to be considered within the historical context of the contact between the OPC and the CanRC. Second, the two sets of decisions appear not to run parallel and this needs to be resolved by a synod. We pointed out that the decisions of our Synods concerning the OPC and those concerning Korea and Scotland have different backgrounds; this fact should not be used to remove the need for a continued discussion of the issues identified by Synod.

The CEIR maintained that these issues cannot be discussed without bring-

ing the seemingly contradictory actions of the CanRC into the discussion. The question remains – aside from the OPC’s relation with the CRC – whether the OPC is acceptable to the CanRC and whether our differences ought to be tolerated. It is CEIR’s view that the existing differences can be discussed appropriately *within* a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship. CEIR finds it difficult, at this point, to clearly determine what needs to be resolved as a result of a discussion on ecclesiology.

Eventually, our two committees resolved that a following meeting is to deal with the question: Does a Biblical ecclesiology require that the differences (as defined in the Acts of Synod 1992, Article 72) must be resolved before a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship can be established?

Other matters of interest which were discussed at this meeting included the matter of receiving OPC congregations within the federation of CRC. The CEIR expressed appreciation for the frank comments made in this regard by Synod 1992 and pointed out that the main thrust of the OPC’s concerns in these matters regard good ecclesiastical order. We were able to assure them that the CanRC share this desire fully.

With respect to third party relationship, the CEIR stated that they believe that their responsibilities towards the Christian Reformed Church include brotherly warning and admonition where possible. On the other hand, the OPC is heading toward the “hour of decision” with respect to their relationship with the Christian Reformed Church. It was noted that the OPC will apply for membership in the ICRC and that we will support that application.

A further meeting between our two Committees is scheduled for January 1994. We hope to discuss the major question which emerged from the Rochester meeting.

OPC 1993 General Assembly

The second major activity of our committee involved a visit to the 1993 General Assembly of the OPC. Attending each other's major ecclesiastical assemblies is one of the ways in which ecclesiastical contact is maintained. This time, Rev. P.G. Feenstra and Dr. N.H. Gootjes were able to attend during the second week of June. Of particular interest to our delegates were the discussions regarding the OPC's relationships with the PCA, the CRC, and the CanRC. It is noted that the OPC seems to be moving away from joining with the PCA.

The relation with the CRC was discussed at some length, and eventually a letter was sent to the forthcoming Synod of the CRC. The CEIR had taken note of the decision of the CRC Synod 1992 concerning women in office. Gratitude was expressed that the decision of 1990 was not ratified, but also deep concern was voiced about the vagueness of the decision which seems to allow to women what it does not permit to men, namely exhorting or preaching (without using the terms) and shepherding, without being licensed or ordained to do so. CEIR expressed its concern about the disturbing development that despite the 1992 decision of the Christian Reformed Synod a number of churches have nevertheless proceeded to elect and ordain women to be ruling elders. We should note that the OPC's discussion took place before the most recent decision of the CRC Synod.

The CEIR has included in their report to their General Assembly a section dealing with the relationship with our churches, reporting on the combined meeting of our two committees on April 15, 1993. Our delegates did not think that CEIR's report fairly represented our views, and undoubtedly this matter will return during the next meeting with CEIR. Of special interest to us is the report to the General Assembly of the committee to study the method of admission to the Lord's Supper. In substance this report was identical to the CEIR's paper prepared for the discussion with our committee. Contrary to what was claimed in a recent issue of *New Horizon*, the dissolution of this committee was not caused by "the seeming double standard on the part of the Canadian Reformed Churches". The report itself stated,

From the outset the Committee has been uncertain as to how it ought to proceed, in particular as to how its work might advance and not simply repeat what is already being done by CEIR in its discussions with CCOPC Eventually we have decided that under the existing circumstances our work would be redundant. In our judgment, OPC responsibility to the Canadian Reformed Churches and their concerns is already being adequately discharged by the CEIR. As our report, then, we offer as information the following, brief statement prepared for CEIR discussions with the CCOPC, slightly modified. (From the report of the Committee to Study the Method of Admission to the Lord's Supper, submitted to the OPC's General Assembly, June 1993.)

The General Assembly adopted the committee's recommendation that it be dissolved. (Of course, this does not mean that the matter of confessional membership is no longer on the agenda of our two committees.)

Rev. Feenstra addressed the General Assembly on behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches, extending best wishes and fraternal greetings. He spoke about a variety of matters which are of importance to the Canadian Reformed Churches, such as Bible translations; the Theological College; the relations with other churches, particularly the committee for the promotion of church unity; the new rules for ecclesiastical fellowship, and the sister church relationship extended to the Presbyterian Church of Korea and the Free Church of Scotland; and finally the relations with the OPC. Rev. Feenstra concluded his address in this manner:

Forgive us if we have come across as being haughty and set in our ways. It is our sincere desire to be faithful to the Lord, to His Word, and to the Ecumenical Creeds and the Reformed Confessions which summarize what the Bible teaches. To continue to walk together we need to pull one and the same direction in doctrine and practice. What we desire is full ecclesiastical fellowship built upon a solidly biblical and confessional basis.

The CCOPC
December 15, 1993

Please note:

CanRC	Canadian Reformed Churches
CCOPC	Committee for Contact with the OPC of the CanRC
CEIR	Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations of the OPC
ICRC	International Conference of Reformed Churches- CRC
OPC	Orthodox Presbyterian Church



CHANGE OF PHONE NUMBER

Rev. D. Moes

Home: 604-545-3459

Study: 604-545-1536

The Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad informs the churches that, in keeping with its synodical mandate, the Canadian Reformed Churches have entered into Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Free Church of Scotland and the Presbyterian Church in Korea.

CALLLED and ACCEPTED
to Grand Rapids, MI

Rev. B.R. Hofford
of Laurel, MD

CALLLED to Edmonton (Immanuel), AB

Rev. D.G.J. Agema
of Attercliffe, ON

DECLINED to Neerlandia, AB

Rev. L.S.K. Hoogendoorn
of Waddinxveen, the Netherlands

... Sent to Serve

Installation of Rev. VanderVelde

Some months ago, I began to tell you such things that were beginning to happen in Yarrow due to our Father's providential care. This account will give further news.

The summer was full of activity. We called candidate VanderVelde. He was examined by Classis Pacific on October 5, 1993, and on Reformation Day, he could be ordained as a minister of the divine Word in Yarrow. It is the latter joyful occasion and the subsequent welcome evening on which this report will concentrate.

The passing of the mantle was ably taken care of by Rev. VanderWel who conducted the ordination and installation service. Rev. VanderWel chose as his text 2 Corinthians 5:20,21 which, he noted, shows the manner God has entrusted the ministry of reconciliation to His servants for Christ's sake. This ministry comes with authority, with passion and with effect. We saw that the authority of the gospel comes when the LORD speaks through His servants. They are His ambassadors – they can only speak for Him. This makes the message of reconciliation an official declaration from the LORD. It is not the bringer of the message that is important but the message. The message comes with authority because of the sender, not because of the servant who brings it. It is the LORD who admonishes, who comforts, who calls through His preachers.

But the message is not authoritarian. The ministry of reconciliation comes with passion or, better, compassion. God's servants cannot be puffed up with the function nor the position of their office but must come with humility and concern for those who are addressed. Ambassadors come with authority and compassion, following the example of their Master. The love of Christ must control His ambassadors.

The Gospel does not come without effect. The Good News is that Christ was made to be sin-loaded down with the sin of His people. The responsibility of the ambassador is to bring this gospel of reconciliation. There will be times when the Word seems not to make any difference, times when a pastor feels like a voice in the wilderness, but his preaching, consistent with the message of reconciliation, will never return empty. It is God's Word and to Him is all the glory.

With these words of encouragement and admonition, the brothers and sisters of Yarrow were prepared for their pastor and teacher and he for them. After the service, Br. H.F. Stoffels spoke some congratulatory words on behalf of the church at Hamilton.

In the afternoon service, Rev. VanderVelde delivered his inaugural sermon on 1 John 2: 20-27. In this text Rev. VanderVelde pointed out that we have been anointed by the Holy One. This anointing sets us apart, sets us straight and sets us free.

The churches of Asia Minor had experienced a very serious doctrinal crisis which had caused a split over some gnostic ideas. Those who had left had said that Christ was not really human. The divine Christ had entered the man Jesus at baptism.

But John encourages those who remain that they are different. They have been anointed by the Holy One. This anointing is the Holy Spirit coming and making His permanent residence in the hearts of His people. In the Old Testament, some were anointed to be prophets, some to be kings, and some to be priests (very seldom did they hold more than one of these offices) and all these were anointed by other men. After Pentecost we all are anointed by the Spirit to be prophets, priests and kings. The presence of this Spirit will

become evident in the way we act and react. We are indeed a Holy nation, a kingdom of priests.

Because we have been set apart by the anointing of the Holy Spirit, we are now set straight. The Spirit works with the Word in our hearts to confirm what we have believed from the beginning. The two never work apart from each other. The Holy Spirit tells us about the truth and the truth is the Word. We can count on Him to equip us with what we need. He makes us sensitive to the truth and makes us understand the Scriptures. The lie and the truth are opposites and our anointing sets us straight on the path of the truth.

When we realize the blessing that we have from this anointing of the Holy Spirit, this knowledge sets us free. At the time of the Reformation, the clergy said they would teach. John writes that we all know. We have no need of teachers of new teachings. There is no need of mediation between God and man through priests. Office-bearers are part of the congregation. Ministers can only bring the gospel. The minister is sent to serve and the one who serves is less than the one who receives. There will not be a new gospel preached. Therefore the congregation cannot waste the opportunity to let the Spirit work through the Word. The congregation is at the centre of the work of the Spirit.

After the worship service there was an opportunity to wish our new pastor the LORD's blessings in his new task. It is during a service such as this that the overwhelming goodness of our God is seen so well. He knows so well what we need and blesses us without us deserving it. We receive His providential care as we confess in Lord's Day 9 the last part – "He is able to do so as almighty God and willing also as a faithful Father." All praise to Him!

The welcome evening was opened by Br. R. Vane, who read to us from Ezekiel 33:1-6. After prayer Br. J. vanLaar, as chairman of the consistory, spoke a few words of welcome and encouragement. He also read letters of congratulations from the churches at Vernon and Abbotsford. Rev. Kampen, as delegate of Classis Pacific, spoke words of congratulations and encouragement. He also presented Rev. VanderVelde with a collection of maps so he would know how to find each of the churches. All the elementary school age children and the students of Grade 8 through 10 in the congregation as well as the Young People's Society, contributed in welcoming Rev. VanderVelde.

Rev. Wielenga represented the ministers in the Valley and presented Rev. VanderVelde with a cookbook.

Br. C. Onderwater, as delegate from the great-grandmother, Surrey – Maranatha, welcomed Rev. VanderVelde to the Valley and presented him with a map, marking the route from Yarrow to Surrey's church building. The Women's Society entertained everyone by having Rev. VanderVelde guess the names of his flock by the representation of their name in drawings. He did an excellent job of putting name and picture together. Sr. J. Janzen read a poem that explained the occupation and interests of the members – further introducing the congregation to our pastor. And if the poem and the pictures were not enough, the congregation also gave Rev. VanderVelde an album where each page introduced a member or family of the congregation by picture and text.

After a contribution from the Men's Society, Rev. VanderVelde thanked the congregation heartily for the welcome that he had received that evening and hoped that the good feeling that prevailed this evening would continue. Rev. VanderWel led in thanksgiving and prayer.

There was an overwhelming feeling of joy and gladness in every heart. We thank our heavenly Father for the great things He has done in Yarrow and pray that He will continue in the days and years to come, with His great providential care. May we boast in Him – always.

Yours for Christ's Church in Yarrow
John Siebenga



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor:

The article, entitled "Living Faith" by Professor VanDam struck me right away. I wholeheartedly agree with the points mentioned. This article reminds us of our responsibility to act like children of God. In our churches today, there is an increasing demand for this kind of message. We, young people, should remember that our lives should reflect what we believe. Our daily walk should win others for Christ. I would like to conclude that we should be happy that we are children of God. This happiness should be seen when we are with our fellow teenagers. Do we do this enough?

Rob Helder
Fonthill

Dear Editor:

It is with sadness of the heart that I read the "Press Review" in Clarion, Nov. 5/93.

The so called "grounds" which Synod Ommen used in their decision

to allow women voting, reeks with the same delusion that was presented in "Report 26" which opened the church offices to women in the CRC; in fact I believe Synod Ommen has done exactly this. The same texts and arguments will surface again in a few years to justify women in office. Would you believe for instance that Galastians 3:28 is also used to justify homosexuality? Synod Ommen has given a whole section which talks about "The spirit of the times." Despite their attempt to appease our consciences, I believe it is exactly the spirit of the times that has dictated their decision. Would our Church Fathers such as Luther and others who recognized all the heresies in the church not have had the insight to address this point if indeed women's rights were being suppressed? I suggest that Synod Ommen's decision undermines the institution of marriage. It promotes independentism (a real spirit of the times) rather than oneness as we read about in Genesis 2. Does a woman not indeed lord it over her husband

if she perhaps would vote differently than him?

Ezekiel 16 comes to mind when contemplating this whole situation

– Sister Churches in Holland, you are playing the harlot.

–Verse 44 – consider the proverb – "Like mother, like daughter."

–Verse 56 – was not your sister (the GKN) a byword in your mouth in the day of your pride, before your wickedness was uncovered? Now you have become like her. . . .

The Church of Christ must not tolerate the woman Jezebel in her midst. If we do, we can read what will happen in Revelation 2 (Church in Thyatira). Instead let us hold fast what we have – the pure teachings of Scripture.

As Church here in Canada we must admonish our sister Church in the Netherlands. Our church leaders must reconfirm our stand on this issue. We cannot sit back and see what the reaction of our people will be – this is too dangerous.

– for the purity of the Church
W. Reinink-Elora



News from the League of the Canadian Reformed School Societies

By M. Spithoff

Here follows the highlights of the league meetings held September 24 and November 26, 1993:

Curriculum Assistance for Reformed Education (C.A.R.E.)

C.A.R.E. is working on two major curriculum projects. The Geography writing team, which finalized the aims and objectives for Geography in grades 7 and 8, has committed itself to prepare eight complete units for these grades. For Church History, C.A.R.E. is in the initial stages of reviewing current outlines and gathering current inventory used in our schools. In its plans are to develop a new unit which would deal primarily with more recent church history in North America, "particularly recent developments in N.A. Reformed Churches." C.A.R.E. is planning a general teachers' meeting in the spring in preparation for a Church History "Summer '94" unit-writing workshop. Schools outside Ontario will be contacted for their input in this project. Within its own committee, C.A.R.E. is working on a guideline with the aim to arrive at a carefully researched but easy to implement guideline for curriculum writing?

The merits of having a "Central Resource Center" for Canadian Reformed Education has received positive response from the school boards. C.A.R.E. realizes that the concept has many additional implications which involves more than the work of C.A.R.E. itself. C.A.R.E. will need input and direction from the league as to the implementation of the first two stages of this Central Resource Center.

In the meantime, C.A.R.E. is seeking professional advice with respect to the set up of a library software system.

Assistance to the Special Child (ASC) Committee

ASC's plans for 1993-94 are proceeding on schedule. To raise the awareness of special needs children

within our community, this committee invited Dr. Dalton to speak on September 20th. He spoke on "Current Models of Meeting the Needs of Special Children in the Schools." There are plans to have two more meetings this year. The topic of the first is "The Special Child: Home, School and Church" and will involve a panel discussion followed by a small group discussion format.

To raise the level of the professional teacher's awareness, ASC will organize four Friday afternoon meetings for teachers involved with special education. The first meeting, planned for December 10th, will be an address by Nancy Prittie, a Speech and Language Pathologist, on "Speech and Language Problems in the Classroom."

Salary Committee Report

At its November meeting, the league received this report for each member to take back to his respective board. A member of the committee was present to indicate any changes made from the previous report and the rationale for these changes.

Government Contact Committee (G.C.C.)

The GCC informed the league that the Ontario Court of Appeal is reserving its decision on the government funding case until December. The Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools and the Canadian Jewish Congress have asked the Court of Appeal to set aside the decision of Mr. Justice Anderson and make two new orders concerning funding and School Health Support Services. This court action has incurred high legal expenses and the boards have responded favourably in contributing to help defray the costs.

At its meeting of November 9th, F.I.S.A. (Forum of Independent School Associations, Ontario) focussed its efforts on drafting a proposal to be sent

to the Ministry of Education regarding high school inspections. The proposal is "that current Ministry of High School inspections be replaced with a system that involves the Independent School Associations in the evaluation process and that independent schools not be subject to educational values imposed by the Ministry on the public school system." They hope to finalize this proposal in January.

Two committees, School Inspection and Staff Development, were initiated last year. The G.C.C. saw these as areas that needed development in order to have them in place, when confronting the Ministry of Education.

At the September league meeting, the staff development committee presented the "Integrated Model of Professional Educator Development a Proposal." This model attempts to offer an attainable design of staff development in the Canadian and American Reformed School System. Having encouraged all boards, principals (O.P.A.) and teachers (C.R.T.A.) to come with feed back, there was extensive discussion on this report at the November meeting. Since this was an initial report seeking input on its work thus far, it was recommended by the league that it drop the "minimum standard" aspect addressed in the report. While many school boards already submitted in writing their comments and concerns, the remaining boards were encouraged to do so.

The school inspection committee has been established and will have a report for the league in the spring of 1994.

Ontario Principal's Association

The study focus of this year's Principals Meetings is the Ministry of Education document, "The Common Curriculum." Having evaluated this report in terms of philosophy, change of direction and values, they have focused

on the "articulation of the learning, outcomes and the implicit values contained therein. Over against that, they have "wrestled with how our curriculum goals are stated and whether they are as clear as they should be."

They also discussed the report of the staff development and provided written input for this committee.

In the initial stages is the organizing of the National Principals' Con-

ference to be held, D.V. November 1994 in Ontario.

Canadian Reformed Teacher's Association

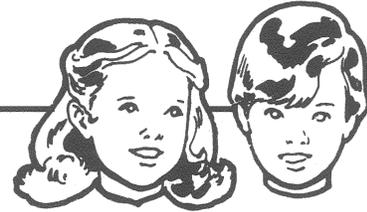
The C.R.T.A. briefly reported on their latest activities. They too provided input for the staff development committee. They are also in the process of organizing the teachers' convention to be held in Burlington, 1994.

Hiring Practices

Last spring ('93) the league passed a proposal that the advertising process be delayed by two months so that advertising commence the first of March each calendar year. Due to concerns from schools outside Ontario, the league, for 1994-95, will maintain the present situation. A school has been asked to take up contact with these schools to address their concerns. **C**

OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



Dear Busy Beavers,

Thank you for all your letters, pictures, puzzles, and lots of other "goodies" you sent me.

I enjoy all the different letters.

I enjoy hearing your news.

I get excited when you tell me about your holidays, or your trip to the mall far away.

I'm proud of your friendly letters.

I'm proud of your beautiful, interesting pictures you send.

I'm proud of you!

And I love you all!

Busy Beaver *Henrietta Breukelman* wrote to share some good ideas about being FRIENDS.

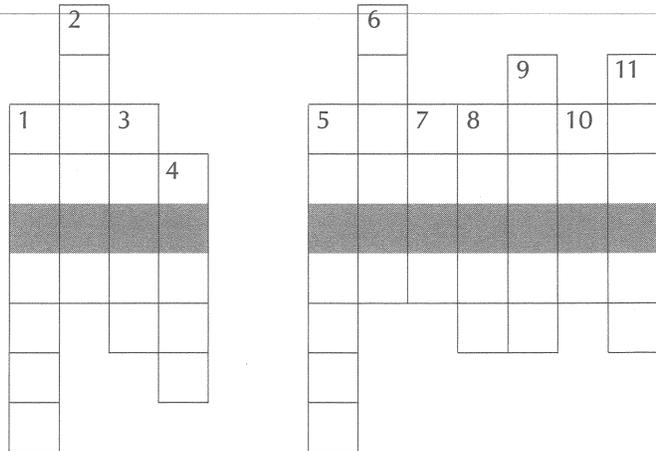


Quiz Time!

Bible Names

Secret message in the shaded boxes!

by Busy Beaver *Meghan Ludwig*



Here's a little saying from Busy Beaver *Tamara Dejong*
See if you can figure it out.

was a dodo that And landed first in a wedding

1. the wife of Isaac
2. took over leading Israel from Moses
3. sent to Pharaoh to tell him to let God's people go
4. this woman sold purple goods
5. told Mary that she was going to have a baby
6. Jacob's second wife
7. the first man
8. killed a giant
9. had a colourful coat
10. the mother of Jesus
11. a very strong man