



Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

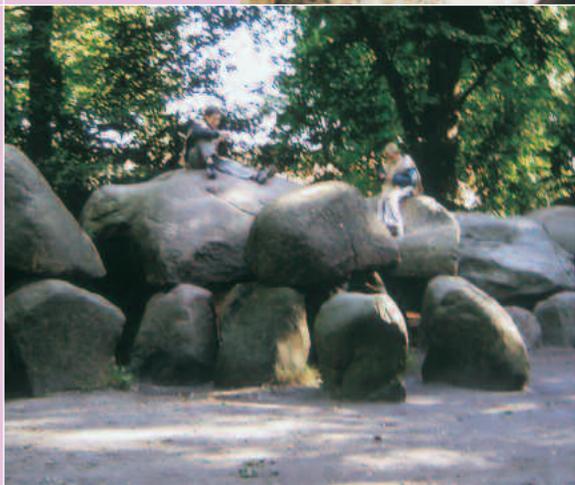
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*Textual
Preaching*

*Christ is our
Life!*

*Being
Reformed in
an Unchristian
World*

Our Pagan Past



*Prehistoric Burial
Monuments (The Netherlands)*



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Textual Preaching

Textual preaching is vital, for it always opens up fresh perspectives and deepens the knowledge of both the preacher and the listener

Textual Preaching

In a previous editorial I mentioned that I wanted to get back to the matter of “experiential preaching,” so dearly loved and espoused by our brothers of the Free Reformed Churches of North America (FRCNA). Thinking about that, however, I concluded that I have already written on the matter twice (in my books *The Covenant of Love* and *The Spirit and the Bride*), and I need not repeat myself for the third time. Interested readers can look up the related parts in those books, if they wish.

I want to focus instead on what I consider to be of greater importance: the matter of textual preaching. Preachers should not slavishly follow a certain (homiletical or dogmatical) system, for their task is to preach the Word as it comes to us in the text that the Lord has provided in the Holy Scriptures. Let the text speak for itself.

In the criticism which I have heard and do hear about preachers and sermons, the main element often seems to be a perceived lack of textual preaching. A minister may speak about all kinds of things, and repeat certain truths endlessly and eloquently, but has he preached the text? Has he opened the text to the listeners and applied it properly to their lives? Especially when serving for a long period of time in a congregation, textual preaching is vital, for it always opens up fresh perspectives and deepens the knowledge of both the preacher and the listener.

What is textual preaching?

Textual preaching, as the word indicates, means that in his sermon the preacher focuses exclusively on the text which he has before him. The text must be carefully chosen, and once

that choice is made, the preacher must stick to his text. It happens all too easily that a text is chosen and read but hardly referred to in the entire sermon.

A clear and strong focus on the text means that the text must be properly explained. The minister must use and develop all his skills of exegesis and interpretation. At the end of the sermon, the members of the congregation are supposed to be able to say, “Now we understand it even better than before.”

Every text has its own character and focus. The Bible contains an endless variety of passages. The style and content of each sermon thrives on that variety. If the text is an exhortation, the sermon will be exhortative. If the text contains assurance, the sermon will serve to reassure the listeners. If the text speaks of judgment, the preacher shall do the same in clear and unmistakable terms. The flow of the text determines the flow of the sermon. We do not make a sermon and then look for a fitting text, but we choose a text and then prepare a sermon on that text. This may sound simple and superfluous, but really it is not.

Textual preaching means that each and every word of the text is considered important and pertinent. Therefore it is good that the listeners are encouraged to have their Bibles open and to follow the preacher as he moves through the text. Certain words can be especially noted and underlined. Then, in the end, when all is said and done, the minister has not given his opinion, but the Word of God has been preached. A congregation never tires of textual preaching because every week there is something new to learn.

Understanding the context

Those who are involved in textual preaching know that every text is embedded in a certain context. There is the



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immediate context and there is the wider context, but every text forces us to examine the context in which it is placed.

The purpose of the introduction to a sermon is precisely to acquaint the listeners with the context. The purpose is not to bring the hearers closer to the text, but to bring the text closer to the hearers. I mention this because sometimes it is suggested that the listener must be attracted to the text by a user-friendly introduction. In practice this often means that the introduction is a “human interest story,” and the sermon itself pales in comparison.

Each and every word of the text is considered important and pertinent.

Only seasoned preachers can effectively use the introductory technique mentioned above. Sooner or later we have to make contextual comments, and in practice this leads to what may be termed a double introduction. It is best to get to the meat of the text right away. The opening line of most of my sermons is usually the same: “the text for this service...” and then follows a characterization of the contents of the text. It is at that point that the main contextual comments can be made.

All this stands under a specific awareness that must be part of the preacher’s profile at all times: preaching is the bringing of “glad tidings.” All preaching is to be Gospel preaching. All the Scriptures testify of Christ (Luke 24: 44; John 5:39; Acts 4: 12). As Paul put it, the ministry of the Word is before all things the “ministry of reconciliation.” We preach Christ and Him crucified. If we don’t, we have no business being on the pulpit.



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MATTHEW 13:52

Christ is our Life!

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“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”
Philippians 1:21

What is the most important thing in your life? What is continually on your radar screen as you fly through the clouds and storms and also the clear blue skies of life? What makes you excited about living? In all of life's hustle and bustle, what remains constant and gives you sure direction and solace? What gives life meaning?

The apostle Paul provides a clear answer to this question in his letter to the Philippians. When Paul writes this letter, he is being held as a prisoner; he is a man in chains (Phil 1:13). But Paul does not despair because of his unpleasant circumstances. Rather, he rejoices that his imprisonment has in fact even helped to spread the gospel. For now more people than ever are speaking about Christ (Phil 1:14).

In verse 21, Paul makes a very personal confession, as the “to me” indicates. Paul shares with the Philippians what is important to him as a believer in the Lord. For Paul, “to live is Christ.” What is really meant with this expression? It is a concentrated way of saying what he wrote in verse 20, namely, that Christ will be exalted in his body, whether by life or by death. “To live is Christ” means to let Christ determine one's life. Christ becomes the focal point of life and the very reason for living. In everything that Paul does and says, he seeks to exalt Christ. Only then will life

have fulfillment and meaning. For it is Christ who has given him life with God. Christ has brought about complete reconciliation with God the Father. Through Christ it is possible to begin to live life the way the Creator intended it, namely in communion with Him.

Christ is everything in the life of the believer, and the work that Christ has done on our behalf will also change the view that we have of death. Death is the last enemy and is feared and dreaded by all. But because of Christ, Paul is able to regard death as gain. The two phrases, “to live is Christ” and “to die is gain,” are connected by a vital “and.” Death can only be seen as gain in a life that has been dominated by Christ. Because Christ lives in the believer, when he dies he has nothing to fear but may instead look forward to tremendous gain, indeed even to things that are not present in this world.

Of ourselves we might have thought to switch the two phrases around, like this: to live is gain and to die is Christ. There are those who call themselves Christians who live like this. For them this earthly life with all its pleasures is what really counts and then they have Christ in their back pocket, as it were, to provide some relief when they are confronted with death.

But that is not how it is for those who truly belong to Christ. For them

this life already is full of a focus on Christ. Let us desire here and now to live for Him and to magnify Him in our lives. It is now already that He gives us peace through his sacrifice on the cross. It is now already that we experience the mercy and grace of God through his Son Jesus Christ. If we state for ourselves that this life itself is gain, then we have missed the seriousness of the call of the gospel. Then we live for ourselves and apart from Christ. If we regard this life as “the gain,” then we are faced with eternal death.

No, this life is not “the gain” but rather this life is the testing ground. It is the time that determines our eternal place. Those who realize their need for Jesus Christ and turn to Him will gain much in the life to come. But those who live only for the fleeting pleasures of this world will find every sorrow in the next life. They will exchange gain for pain if they reject Christ.

What do you live for? What gives your life meaning? May this confession of Paul “to live is Christ and to die is gain” also be our confession. We can be excited about living in this sinful and unstable world because of the firm confidence that we may have in the work of Christ on our behalf. In Him, we may now already have communion with God and so experience the deepest joy there is.



J. Wiskerke van Dooren

Lord's Day 32



Mrs. J. Wiskerke van Dooren published a Children's Catechism in Dutch. This has been translated with her permission.

You know for yourself that you do wrong things all the time. My question is: are you actually doing some good things? What do you think? I know the answer: Yes, you do!

When the Lord Jesus was on earth, he was willing to suffer on the cross. He did that also for you. Now you may ask God for forgiveness, for Jesus' sake. And if you really mean it, you will receive it. But that is not the only thing the Lord did for you. He also wanted to renew

you from the inside. That is why He sent his Holy Spirit.

What does "renewing you" mean? Does it mean you will look better? No, that is not it. You are changing from the inside. When you pray for this, you more and more look like Jesus. You want to do what the Lord Jesus likes, because you are glad and grateful.

It does not matter where you are. At home, in school, during the holidays, or when you are playing. In your whole

life it should be visible that you belong to Jesus.

Wouldn't that make you feel proud? You should watch out for that. Actually, you only received it. And by far not all you do is perfect. Thankfully God is willing to forgive the sins you continue to commit. The best thing to do is to show to the Lord that you love Him. It will make you happy, too. The more you like to do good things, the more you realize you are a believing child of God.

Missionaries often travel far to preach the gospel to people who do not believe.

Not everyone needs to become a missionary. But you are a kind of missionary if people can see that you want to be obedient to God. Those children in your neighbourhood who never go to church may even envy you.

What we do should be good. The Catechism calls that "good works." Good works should belong to your life. Pray often that you may do good works. There are people who would rather commit sins. They like to sin. If they continue sinning and do not turn to the Lord, there is no place for them in the kingdom of God. But when you begin to do good works, God helps you and welcomes you.



Being Reformed in an Unchristian World: The Legacy of Herman Bavinck for the Twenty-First Century (Part 2)

Secession, Doleantie, and union

While writing and publishing the *Reformed Dogmatics*, Bavinck was involved in church-political developments. In 1886 the tension between liberalism and orthodoxy in the State Church burst into conflict. Then Abraham Kuyper led the movement of dissidents (*dolerenden*) to form the *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerken*, and Bavinck was supportive. He did not follow Kuyper blindly, however, and he defended the actions that had led to the earlier formation of the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken*. Shortly after the Doleantie (as the movement in 1886 is called), Bavinck helped to unite the disaffected congregations with the churches that had seceded a generation earlier. Bavinck believed that the two groups should join because they grew out of a response to false trends in the Reformed Church, albeit at different times and in different ways. Thus, together with Kuyper, Bavinck became one of the 'founders' of the *Gereformeerde Kerken*, that is, the federation which emerged from the union of the churches that seceded from the State Church in 1834 and the churches of the Doleantie. Bavinck's writings about the biblical and confessional grounds for ecclesiastical unification are worthy of study today, especially since they were composed before the Ecumenical movement of the twentieth century.

Bavinck pleaded for the unification not only of the two federations of orthodox churches, but also of their theological colleges. In a requested report on theological training, Bavinck offered these arguments for a single seminary: to preserve the unity of doctrine; to strengthen the unification of the two federations; and, not least, to make the relevance of theology to other academic disciplines and to culture more explicit. He rightly foresaw that the segregation of theology as a distinct academic discipline would weaken the role of theology in intellectual pursuits and so in society generally. Consequently, he argued for the combination of two points that are often suppressed and separated today:

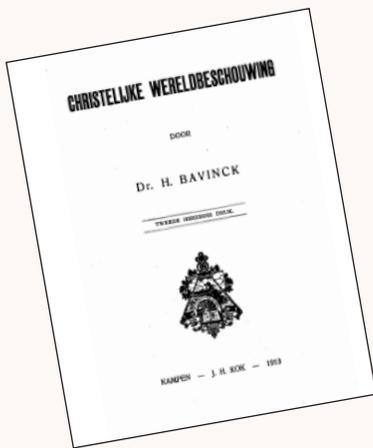
Bavinck rejects an orthodoxy that remains fixed in the past by merely restating well-rehearsed but obsolete ideas.

1. Since theological training derives from Scripture, and Scripture has been entrusted to the church, theological training should fall under the jurisdiction of the church;
2. Since theological training is academic training in which theology relates to all other sciences, it should be pursued with the same rigour that marks other disciplines.

In Bavinck's idealist view, the best elements of the Secession and the Doleantie would be incorporated in a union of the schools in Kampen and Amsterdam. His proposal was not accepted, however, in part because Bavinck did not account for the politicking that commonly undermines relations between church federations. Bavinck also did not anticipate that the planned alteration to the faculty of theology in Amsterdam would cause concern in some quarters; moreover, he did not realize that his confidence in the leaders of the two federations was not shared by fellow church people.

In 1893 the Synod of the newly-united *Gereformeerde Kerken* determined that the theological school in Kampen would not be joined to the Free University of Amsterdam. Bavinck was deeply disappointed. According to R.H. Bremmer, one of the finest interpreters of Bavinck and his career, this decision had an even more serious consequence: it halted the progress of the neo-calvinist movement, spearheaded by Kuyper and Bavinck, to combine religion and learning at the academic level.

It is to Bavinck's credit that despite the rejection of his proposal regarding theological training, he continued to promote the union of the so-called "A" and "B" churches by mediating between them. Throughout the 1890s Bavinck also strove to make the theological college in Kampen academically accountable. He did so not by subjecting it to the increasingly secular standards of the universities, but



by demonstrating how the basis for the right pursuit of knowledge is faith. However, since the union of the two federations was not cemented by the union of the theological schools, Bavinck grew less enthusiastic. Receiving yet another invitation from the Free University in 1902, Bavinck accepted a professorship in Amsterdam. In Kampen his departure created a strong sense of loss, even disillusion, for the brightest professor had left, and the complete union of the churches had failed.

Schools and confessions

It was noted at the outset that Bavinck's interests and activities included social life, politics, and education. Due to the limitations of space, we shall treat only his advancement of Christian education. Bavinck was an active member of the School Council (*Schoolraad*) from 1890 onward; he served the board of the Reformed school society (*Gereformeerde Schoolverband*), and was president of the association for Reformed pedagogy. In this capacity, and in his educational writings, Bavinck stressed the importance of the confessions as basis for Christian education: only the schools that have the same confessional basis, and consequently the same standards, demands, and calling, can truly cooperate. This emphasis on the value of the confessions marked not only his writing on education, but on all subjects. Anyone familiar with the recent trend in Reformed churches in the Netherlands and elsewhere knows that the value of these confessions is being undermined.

One of the challenges in the twenty-first century will be to maintain the authority, reputation, and application of the Three Forms of Unity in all areas of life.

In 1904 Bavinck published the *Pedagogical Principles* (*Paedagogische Beginselen*), which soon became the standard textbook for those training to be teachers. In it he explains the relationship between faith and culture, and the role of education in preparing the youth for their function in society. Bavinck also addressed the relationship between psychology and education, a very practical topic not only in Bavinck's day but now. While interacting with the latest findings of experts in child

The study of God's revelation in creation and the Bible requires and displays true faith in the inspired Word of God.

psychology, Bavinck refuted the idea that education should be based in the new discipline of psychology. Instead, he argued, Christian education is founded in God's revelation about humanity; what the Bible reveals about the creation of human beings in the image of God, about their fall into sin, and about their restoration through the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ, is fundamental to educational theory. Reformed teachers familiar with modern theories of pedagogy will recognize the relevance of Bavinck's correction of the assumptions of secular psychology and sociology.

Four conclusions

Four conclusions may be drawn from this appraisal of Bavinck's legacy.

First, Calvinism is forward-looking. In the introduction to the *Reformed Dogmatics*, Bavinck states that Reformed doctrine is rooted in the past but labours for the future. Thus while many of his writings appear dated because they interact with philosophical and social

issues of the late-nineteenth century, they convey principles for Reformed thinkers in the twenty-first century. Moreover, Bavinck hereby also rejects an orthodoxy that remains fixed in the past by merely restating well-rehearsed but obsolete ideas.

Second, Bavinck's synthetic approach, based upon Scripture and the Reformed confessions, is a model for devising new ideas in answer to the questions of today. As society changes and as values and norms alter, so the Reformed faith must develop. By increasing the awareness and understanding (but not appreciation) of the paradigms of our culture, we can formulate the most complete Reformed response – better yet, offer to others the opportunity to see the Christian way in an unchristian world.

Third, one of Augustine's famous statements is "I believe in order to understand." Bavinck applied this scriptural notion to scholarly exercise. The study of God's revelation in creation and the Bible is not an impersonal, strictly critical undertaking, but one that requires and displays true faith in the inspired Word of God. It requires the humility of Moses and a truly prophetic rather than purely academic disposition. These Christian characteristics, increasingly lacking to writings by Reformed authors, are concisely expressed by Bavinck as his earthly life draws to a close: "my scholarship is of no avail to me now, nor my dogmatics: it is only faith that can save me."

Fourth, in a speech published as *The Catholicity of Christianity and the Church*, Bavinck warns the isolated *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken* to beware of sectarianism. The catholic character of the Christian faith is not restricted to theology and the life of the church, but extends to social life, politics, culture, and education. Bavinck's warning applies also to our immigrant Reformed churches, which may be tempted to withdraw into a selfish pietism that ignores the world. The separation of Reformed religion from social life may appear attractive, but is disobedient to God's will.

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Our Pagan Past

Are we Jews?

Sometimes a view held in childhood is recalled later in life, and inspires a smile. Especially in matters of church and religion, children can have humorous and unusual views: misheard psalm lyrics, erroneous thoughts about the minister, mistaken notions of God, and so on. After a light laugh in retrospect, these juvenile impressions are dismissed for what they were.

There is one childhood view known to have been held by a few now sheepish adults that gives pause for a little further thought. What caused such a notion to be accepted? And how do I know better today? This idea is that we (Christians in the Canadian Reformed Churches) are actually Jews. When the Old or New Testament speaks of the Gentiles or foreign nations or heathen as distinguished from the people of God or Jews or Israel, we identify with and assume we are the latter.

For we read on many pages of Scripture that the Gentiles do not know or worship the one true God, while Israel does know and serve Him. In our churches we hear much about the covenant and law; sermons explain the importance of the tabernacle and temple, the Land and the promises to Abraham, and the kingship and Jerusalem. When we sing the Psalms we sometimes refer to ourselves as the “tribes,” to our hope being in “Zion,” and to all the other “nations” being defeated in battle. Furthermore, it is well known that Christ our Saviour was crucified with the title

over his head, “King of the Jews.” Yes, a child in the pew might be excused for being ethnically confused – it’s even said that we’re offspring of the Hebrew Abraham, after all!

But who are we? If we’re not ethnic Jews, then how did we come to be called God’s own people? And what were we before?

Our native land

As churches made up largely of people of Dutch or otherwise Western European descent, our land of origin is no mystery. For this article, we will focus on the territory that many of our ancestors called home, the area now known as The Netherlands. Yet any reader not of Jewish physical descent may certainly continue reading, for – unless you have Hebrew heritage – the point is that paganism is common to the past of every one of us, Dutch-Canadian or not.

*If we’re not ethnic Jews,
then how did we come to
be called God’s own
people?*

The Netherlands, in the opinion of one writer, is a place of spongy soil, humid air, and few attractions to invite people to make it their dwelling, except for the natural fortifications of rivers and ocean.¹ Yet there are a few traces of people who lived there, even from an

early time; in the north of the country one can find the so-called Giant’s Graves, huge rock memorials to the dead, dated to around 2000 BC. It is also believed that the Celts later lived in these lands.

For a couple centuries before the Christian era, the area seems to have been left unoccupied. A German tribe, finding it empty, claimed the land and called it *Betauw*, the “Good Meadow.” Slowly The Netherlands was inhabited again. The Germans took the centre, the Belgae settled to the south, and the Frisians claimed the north.

These Germanic tribes and their villages were invaded in 57 BC by Julius Caesar, and stubbornly fell under Roman domination. Some centuries later, after the slow fall of Roman rule, The Netherlands eventually became part of the Frankish empire.

The pagan ways

During these years, even leading up into the eighth century, our ancestors were decidedly non-Christian. The religion of The Netherlanders during the time before the arrival of the gospel can be compared to that of the Germanic peoples in general. While the evidence for the Germanic religion is scarce, and what is available is often provided by clerics who didn’t care to understand the heathen ways, we can still speak in broad terms about the pagan practices of our Western European forebears.

To our minds, the word “pagan” often suggests the worship of more than one god. And indeed, the Germanic peoples went to shrines in order to turn

to one or several of the gods of the pantheon with prayer and sacrifice. In looking to the gods in expectation of help, they – as pagans ancient and modern have always done – associated different gods with different and changing spheres of influence.

Wodan was a wily magician, and was often called upon as the god of war. Thor, Wodan's son, was seen as the god of the farmers. Also for purposes of human and agricultural fertility, these pagans turned to the goddess Frey, the wife of Wodan. Leading families among the tribes often claimed to be directly descended from particular gods, so as a family's political or military power waxed or waned, so did popular dedication to its god of choice.

"Lesser" gods and goddesses were worshiped as well. Many of these were not depicted physically with engravings or statues, but were thought to dwell invisibly in nature. Various minor spirits were believed to inhabit soil, water, spring, and forest. Sometimes trees (especially oaks) were considered to be sacred and were venerated.

Besides his offerings of prayer and sacrifice to the various gods, a pagan Netherlander could protect himself with charms and amulets. These trinkets warded off the dangerous evil spirits thought to wander the earth. Such spiritual defence was considered necessary for taking along on any major project, whether war or a hunting expedition or marriage. Sometimes these magical objects would even accompany a person into the grave.

The will of the gods was sought by means of various forms of divination. Casting lots, observing the flight of birds (especially storks) and the movement of horses, and inspecting the entrails of animals were common practice in the pagan desire to gain insight from beyond this realm. The prevalence of divination

in the culture of The Netherlands at this period is confirmed by archaeological finds of the bones of birds in human graves. In their unstable world of war and disease, such practices were thought to provide the pagans with some assurance of what was going to happen. It was a link to the unseen and powerful order of the gods.

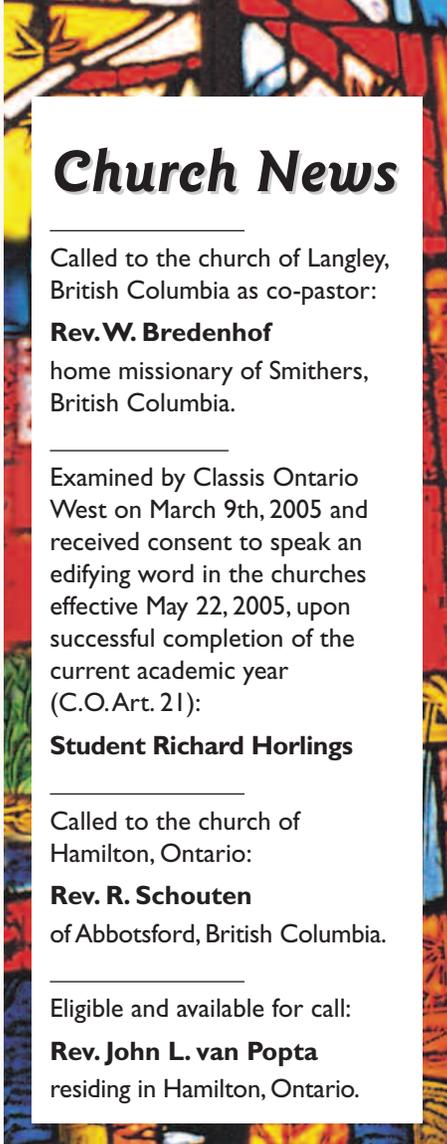
Our ancestors were decidedly non-Christian.

Paganism gave a sense of personal security, and also served to strengthen wider society. Some rituals were performed publicly, such as the eating of horseflesh, and it is known that religious community banquets were held, sometimes in cemeteries. Pagan worship was often based in the family unit, and was presided over by the leading male of a household. Such performance of ritual was also an outward show of unity among the tribes-people. It was required that all participated, for not conforming was seen as a challenge to everyone's security in a world of capricious gods.

A light for the Gentiles

The great distance between those old pagan ways and our lives today is apparent. Few of us have experienced firsthand polytheism, divination, amulets, and the like. Rather, we know the Scriptures' indictment of paganism as pure folly, such as in Isaiah 44:9-20, "All who make idols are nothing, and the things they treasure are worthless" (v 9).

Yet let us remember: these fools are our ancestors. As recently as 1300 years ago, the Germanic tribes from which many of us are descended were lost in the darkness of paganism. But thanks be to God, the light has shone in the darkness.



Church News

Called to the church of Langley, British Columbia as co-pastor:

Rev. W. Bredenhof

home missionary of Smithers, British Columbia.

Examined by Classis Ontario West on March 9th, 2005 and received consent to speak an edifying word in the churches effective May 22, 2005, upon successful completion of the current academic year (C.O.Art. 21):

Student Richard Horlings

Called to the church of Hamilton, Ontario:

Rev. R. Schouten

of Abbotsford, British Columbia.

Eligible and available for call:

Rev. John L. van Popta

residing in Hamilton, Ontario.

In the seventh century, the real frontiers in Europe did not so much mark nations as they marked those lands that were pagan, and those lands identified with Christianity. The Netherlander populations along the coast of the English Channel and the south of the Rhine, as well as pockets of people in what is now Germany, were considered the "unconverted" areas.

Though Christians at this time certainly thought of Christianity as universal, such that persons of all peoples could become believers, there was no strong missionary impulse. It was simply accepted there would always be a barbarian hinterland. The unruly peoples living on the fringes of Christianity did not need to be evangelized but could be left in ignorance.

But not everyone was content to leave the pagans in this state. The

borders between paganism and Christianity did not deter some men, such as the monks Willibrord (658-739) and Boniface (675-754), who were eager to wander strange lands as acts of religious devotion. With their supporters these men left the British Isles for the distant barbarian regions on the Continent.

Willibrord presented himself to Pippin, the Frankish ruler. Before this Christian king Willibrord stated his desire to save the souls of the pagans still scattered throughout the dominion. With Pippin's encouragement, Willibrord set to work among the Germanic peoples in Frisia, in the town of Utrecht. At Echternach, some 350 kilometres from Utrecht, he founded a monastery. As the work got underway, both he and Boniface quickly opposed the local pagan customs and religion. They even physically demolished the pagan places of worship and cult objects, in order to prove that the gods were nothing more than stones and pieces of wood.

However, it was very difficult for a pagan who desired to become a Christian to make the step of announcing allegiance to the Christian faith. As we have seen, the pagan religion was intricately connected to wider pagan society. Worship of only one God was seen to conflict with the religious peace of the community, where safe conformity was demanded. For this reason, permission for preaching or baptizing in the towns and villages was often sought by missionaries from the local tribal chiefs and kings. And it seems the Frisians initially did not accept the Christian faith; Boniface was murdered by hostile pagans in 754 near Dokkum in Friesland.

Yet even after the murder of Boniface, the work continued. The Frisians were probably one of the last major tribes on the European continent to be converted to Christianity, around 800 A.D. – but many were converted, and paganism was largely uprooted. In time, the work of Willibrord and others among the Frisians thrived; in the words of the Venerable Bede, an eighth century English church historian, “Aided by God’s grace, [Willibrord] converted many folk in a short while from idolatry to belief in Christ.”

Often we overlook what a privilege and blessing it is that the gospel has been preached also to us, descendants of Western Europeans.

In the spongy soil of the Netherlands, the gospel seed had been planted; it had sprouted, and by God’s grace it would continue to produce a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty, or thirty times what was sown.

The Israel of God

That childhood notion of Jewishness might be smiled at today, yet it raises good opportunity for thanksgiving. Often we overlook what a privilege and blessing it is that the gospel has been preached also to us, descendants of Western Europeans. But let us

remember that this “distribution of the gospel is not to be ascribed to the worthiness of one people above another... but to the sovereign good pleasure and undeserved love of God” (CD III/IV 7).

Like every tribe outside of Israel, when our Lord Jesus came to this earth we were pagans. Our ancestors lived without any saving knowledge of God. We stood not in the line of the covenant, but in the line of the ignorant and condemned, those who worshiped created things rather than the Creator. Let us be thankful that God wanted us, who were at one time pagans and “wild branches,” to be grafted in by faith to his people (Rom 11:17). He planted the gospel seed in Western Europe, that it might produce an abundant crop, even for export to North America.

In his letter to the church at Ephesus, a city proud of her grand pagan temple dedicated to the Roman fertility goddess Diana, Paul speaks words that also apply well to us descendants of Netherlander pagans, “Remember that... [you] are Gentiles by birth... Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ” (Eph 2:11-13).

¹ J.A. Wylie, *The History of Protestantism*, vol. 3 (Edmonton, AB: Still Waters Revival Books, n.d.), p. 2.



J. Moesker

Properly Dressed!

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The first part this time is actually a press review of a press review. It's a review of an article in the *Mededelingsblad van die Vrye Gereformeerde Kerk Pretoria* (Information Bulletin of the Free Reformed Church of Pretoria) dated September 5, 2004. This church bulletin took it from *Gereformeerde Kerkbla*, year 57, issues 6 and 8 (March 20 and April 17, 2004). So you get this "second hand." But it's timely! It's entitled: "Properly Dressed." The translation from Afrikaans, which is a translation from the Dutch, is mine.

Clothing is a sensitive issue.

Whereas in the past a certain standard of attire for public gatherings could be expected, this has changed into a spirit of "anything goes." There are some who wish for a "dress code" for public gatherings. Others, though, figure that you can't make rules for everything.

These days, especially on warm days, you see young women wearing daring and suggestive clothing: navel-revealing tops, low-necked T-shirts, and short skirts. This is not to say that the young men always look so fantastic. However, the clothing some young women wear doesn't leave a lot to the imagination. Our society tries to dictate how we should dress. The marketing experts have discovered that young people today have a fair bit of money. They spend this money freely to buy clothes which are "in" and which are acceptable for that age group. Unfortunately, the flaunting of sexuality has become the basis of many girls' and women's fashions.

Happily there are many young women who still dress tastefully and attractively without being old-fashioned.

It isn't difficult to find the reason for this suggestive clothing. Those clothes are fashionable and so many girls think they're nice. The question could be asked, though, how taste for clothing comes into being. On the one hand, it's personal. You like something or you don't. On the other hand, society also has a big influence. The advertising world constantly displays scantily clad women to sell products. The music world makes use of imagery which doesn't hide a lot. We and our children are often exposed to seductive images.

Good clothes are proper clothes that heighten your Christian identity.

When nude beaches were under discussion (in The Netherlands), a Christian member of parliament was assailed for speaking against them. "Why not? Are you too holy for that?" he was asked. "No, I'm too sinful," was his reply. That also applies to the discussion about clothing. Are men, youth, teachers, ministers too holy? No, they're too sinful!

The answer to this issue can be found, among other places, in Genesis 3. After the fall of man into sin, it says in verse 7 that the eyes of the man and his wife were opened, and they realized they were naked. They couldn't look at each other just like that anymore, so they made clothes from fig leaves. Their nakedness now caused shame, and asked for covering. That's the very first reaction of man to the fall! And what did the Lord God do? He replaced those temporary fig leaves (which withered) with durable clothes, namely with garments of skin (v 21). We receive clothes from the Lord to cover our nakedness. Clothes protect us from the elements, but also from lustful eyes. The New Testament is also clear about that. Think, for instance, about 1 Corinthians 6:12-20. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and we are called to glorify God with our bodies. And Paul says women should dress modestly, with decency and propriety (1 Tim 2:9).

Good clothes are proper clothes. They heighten your Christian identity. Clothes make the woman and protect the man. Think about where you're going, and make sure your clothes are suitable for that occasion.

The classroom isn't the beach. And the church isn't the campground, so dress differently when you're going to go there. Also on hot days we need to be properly dressed. It's truly disgraceful if catechism students have to be sent home with the message: "Please dress properly first!" As a Christian and as a young person, it's a struggle to dress properly. Let's help each other, young and old, in that struggle. It's a struggle which has a glorious conclusion. After all, we're on the way to the wedding feast of the Lamb. And wedding guests are suitably dressed and happy on the way to that feast.

Now a press review of a press review of a press review. I know I'm getting sort of far away from the original source, but it's relevant to the article above. I read this in *Nader Bekeken* (a periodical in our Dutch sister churches), July-August 2004

issue. It was taken from the June 5, 2004 issue of *Woord en Dienst* (a Dutch protestant periodical). They in turn quoted a parent named Liesbeth Wytzes, who wrote this in an unknown magazine. It's sobering! What follows is my translation from the Dutch:

In my daughter's class there are girls who only wear g-strings. The nice, big, white underwear is passé. Children's bodies in sexy underwear, bare bellies just above, very short skirts and shoes with heels – those were once the dress-up clothes for a rainy Sunday. Many of the girls are crazy about Britney Spears who – as every clip of her in tight latex or undersized black leather shows – has really lost her innocence long ago already. Then those dear children sing her hits, phrases full of sexual insinuations and double meanings. Or sometimes blatantly and clearly

("Oops, I did it again!"). Are pop starlets like Spears, Christina Aguilera, and Pink really good role models for such young children? It's never about reading good books. The age at which children become sexually active is slowly going down. And they do it more often and with more and more different partners before settling down – if they ever can settle down! For some or other reason we keep giving them the message that it's completely normal to engage in sex and offer your body for that as attractively and sensually as possible.

This makes us all think, I hope! After all, we confess in Lord's Day 41 that since we are temples of the Holy Spirit, God "forbids all unchaste acts, gestures, words, thoughts, desires, and whatever may entice us to unchastity." That includes dress too!



Press Release for Classes Northern Ontario, convened on December 17, 2004 and January 21, 2005 at the Orangeville Canadian Reformed Church

Upon the request of the convening church at Orangeville, Rev. B.J. Berends opened the meeting. He requested the singing of Hymn 40:1 and read Ephesians 4:1-16. He then led in prayer. The delegates and a guest were welcomed.

The credentials, as examined by the church at Guelph, were found to be in good order. Classis was constituted. The following officers were appointed to serve Classis: chairman, Rev. Van Woudenberg; vice-chairman, Rev. Feenstra; clerk, Rev. Louwse. Rev. Van Woudenberg thanked the convening

church for the work done in preparation for Classis. He noted with thankfulness that candidate Geurts was called and had accepted the call to the church at Fergus North. He expressed the wish that the Lord bless brother Geurts as he prepares to take up his task. The chairman also mentioned that the church at Orangeville remains vacant and Fergus South will soon be vacant. He expressed the hope that these vacancies will soon be filled.

After a number of items were added, the agenda was adopted.

Requests: a letter from the church at Fergus South requesting the reconvening of Classis on January 21, 2005 for the release of Rev. Louwse and a letter from the church at Fergus North requesting that Classis be reconvened on January 21, 2005 for the peremptory

examination of candidate Geurts. Classis acceded to these requests.

Classis went into closed session to deal with four appeals.

Question period according to Article 44 of the Church Order was held. The church at Owen Sound requested advice regarding a family who requested membership. Favourable advice was given.

The convening church was mandated to invite an observer from Classis Southern Ontario of the United Reformed Churches.

Question period was held.

The church at Owen Sound was appointed convening church for the next Classis to be convened April 1, 2004 at 9:00 a.m. The suggested officers for the next Classis: chairman, Rev. C. Vermeulen;

vice-chairman, Rev. P.G. Feenstra; clerk, Rev. J. Van Woudenberg.

Censure According to Article 34 of the Church Order was not necessary.

The Acts were adopted and the Press Release was approved.

The members of Classis were requested to sing Hymn 15:1-4, after which the chairman closed in prayer.

Reconvening of Classis

On January 21, 2005 Classis was reconvened. The chairman, Rev. Van Woudenberg, re-opened the meeting by reading 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11. He requested the singing of Psalm 135:1 and 6 and led in prayer. He especially welcomed brother Walter Geurts who was present to be examined by Classis. He also welcomed Rev. A. Merwin from the United Reformed Churches, Rev. R. Pot and Rev. G. Nederveen (deputies of Regional Synod), and the many guests who were present for the examination of candidate Geurts. The chairman congratulated Rev. Louwse on the recent birth of a son.

Roll call was held.

Since the documentation needed to proceed with the pre-emptory examination was in order Classis proceeded with the examination. Brother Geurts was given opportunity to deliver his sermon on Luke 12:35-40. In closed session classis decided to continue with the examination. Brother Geurts was then examined in the following areas: exegesis Old and New Testament, knowledge of Scripture, doctrine and creeds, church history, ethics, church polity, and diaconology.

In closed session classis decided to admit brother W. Geurts to the ministry in the churches. The deputies of Regional Synod concurred. In open session

brother Geurts was informed of this decision. The chairman asked brother Geurts to express his agreement with what is stated in the Subscription Form by adding his signature. The chairman requested the singing of Hymn 64:1 and led in a prayer of thanksgiving.

Upon presentation of the required documents Classis approbated the call of brother Geurts to the church at Fergus North. The church at Fergus South was appointed to represent Classis at the ordination of brother Geurts.

On behalf of Classis Southern Ontario of the United Reformed Churches, Rev. Merwin brought greetings to classis. He expressed appreciation for the interaction between the United Reformed Churches and the Canadian Reformed Churches, especially on a local level. He wished the churches of Classis the blessing of the Lord. The chairman responded with some appropriate words.

The church at Fergus North requested that Rev. Louwse be released from classis. Since the necessary documentation was in place, Classis decided

1. To most honourably release Rev. J. Louwse from his ministerial duties in the classical district of Classis Northern Ontario on the same date and time his release from the church at Fergus South will take effect;
2. To declare concerning Rev. Louwse that during the years of his ministry in this area he was faithful and diligent in his ministry, Christian and God-fearing in his confession and conduct;
3. To grant Rev. Louwse this Certificate of Release and provide him with sufficient copies in order that this document may serve him in

the church at Neerlandia and the churches in the classical district of Alberta as legitimate testimony of his release from the church at Fergus South and from Classis Northern Ontario, and a proper ecclesiastical attestation regarding his doctrine and conduct, in accordance with Articles 5 and 9 of the Church Order.

4. To commend Rev. Louwse to the Lord and the Word of his grace, with sincere gratitude for the work which this brother has faithfully carried out in this Classis, and with the prayer that it may please the Lord to confirm the fruit of his labour and cause his ministry to be a blessing for many also in the church at Neerlandia and in the churches of the federation.

Rev. Louwse was provided with a certificate of release stating the above. The chairman addressed Rev. Louwse expressing appreciation for the work done by him in the classical region. Rev. Louwse responded with some appropriate words. The church at Owen Sound was delegated to be present at the farewell evening. The church at Fergus South requested that Rev. J. Van Woudenberg be appointed as their counsellor and that they be granted pulpit supply. These requests were granted. Question period was held.

The chairman ruled that censure according to Article 34 of the Church Order was not necessary. The Acts were adopted and the press release was approved for publication.

After the singing of Hymn 35:1 and 5 the vice-chairman led in prayer and the chairman declared the meeting closed.

Arthur Kingma

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Book Review

Leading the Teacher Induction and Mentoring Program by Barry Sweeny



Mr. Sweeny has published more books on professional development topics, but this one caught my eye because it deals with an area of teacher training that we have recognized as an area of weakness in our Canadian Reformed school system.

“What system, and what weakness?” you may ask. In our educational system in Canada, teachers-to-be receive three, four, or five years of training, receive a diploma or a degree, and are then off to the school to do their job, sink or swim. If they swim, we declare them a winner; if they sink, they are a loser.

We are not that harsh, are we? Do not principals visit new teachers four to six times per year? Other colleagues will assist and coach new teachers too, because they know what it is like to be new on the job. Yet we know that “new” teachers need to work at all the variables of teaching by themselves and need to learn to manage by hook or by crook – the colleague teacher perhaps being the hook, and the principal being the helpful crook.

Mr. Sweeny offers a real solution. He suggests very strongly that we need to link beginning teachers to *mentor* teachers for an ideal period of three years. A mentor is one who assumes primary responsibility of guiding a beginning teacher through necessary transitions and steps to be a successful career teacher.

Mentoring, however, is only a part of the whole *induction* program that a school or a school system should adopt. Induction includes orientation, mentoring, staff development specific to the beginning teacher’s needs, observation, and peer group support. So, according to Sweeny, induction is the term to use when talking about the whole program, while mentoring is the word to use when talking about the “meat and potatoes” of the program. Sweeny cites that twenty-nine states have gone to a formal induction/mentoring program, funded by the government in most states.

How is mentoring implemented? Teachers who apply for a mentoring position can be full or part-time mentors. In most cases however, lack of funds and time do not allow for the mentoring process to work practically, so principals will hire substitutes for the mentor and the beginning teacher, or will grant them release from other regular non-curricular or extra-curricular duties in the school. Sweeny stresses that paying subs is a small price for schools to pay in leading beginning teachers to success and to long term careers. If the mentor does not teach at the same school as the beginning teacher, Sweeny urges his readers to make no excuses: driving over to the other school, using email, or using chat rooms are the way to go.

Mentoring is different from peer coaching and from supervisory evaluation. Peer coaching is a term that should be used for the coaching that occurs between two veteran teachers who want to assist one another, share their differing skills, and seek best practices. A supervisory visit, no matter how wonderful the principal or vice is, simply evaluates the teacher according to “master teacher practices,” and the purpose is to evaluate or judge. Mentoring is connecting one teacher of like grade or subject area with a beginning teacher, so that the beginning teacher has an ear, a means for reflection and self evaluation, a person to guide them to use a wider variety of teaching styles, someone to trust, and a professional confidante.

How is an induction program developed? The goals of the program are to accelerate learning into the job, to reduce stresses, to improve performance, to develop a school collaborative sub-culture, and ultimately for student success. Once the needs of a beginning teacher have been identified, personal professional goals, tasks, supports, time, and costs are all mapped

out. This plan is written out, adopted by the “powers that be,” and off you are.

Sweeny thoroughly and systematically, with the aid of charts and graphs, goes through the steps and hurdles of mentoring. He provides guidelines and samples, and he urges the use of technology including e-journals, audio-video distance learning, virtual meetings, etc. He also explains how the mentoring program can relate to and include other teacher development initiatives like staff development, personal professional development, assessment, supervision, portfolios, and upgrading from a temporary certificate to a permanent professional certificate (needed in many states or several provinces).

In this 157 page (plus appendices) soft cover book, Sweeny does an admirable job presenting the missing link between the student at a university or teachers college and a professional teacher who should know it all. Especially the more seasoned teachers among us, who could and should be mentor teachers for our beginning colleagues, should read this book and take up the challenge to discuss and improve the coaching and mentoring practices in our own schools. The principal, because of his supervisory task, is not the ideal mentor, but is the ideal person to consult. He will include board and education committee members into the discussion to improve the process.

Sweeny, Barry W, *Leading the Teacher Induction and Mentoring Program*, (Arlington Heights, IL: Skylight Professional Development, 2001).
info@skylightedu.com
www.pearsoned.ca/professionallearning
\$40.50

The Education Matters column is sponsored by the Canadian Reformed Teachers' Association East. Anyone willing to respond or interact to an article or anyone willing to write an article for us is kindly asked to send materials to Clarion or to Otto Bouwman (bouwman@surepost.net).



Dear Busy Beavers:

At this time of year we may celebrate the feast of Easter, when we remember that Jesus died for our sins but rose again from the dead. On the morning that this happened people could hardly believe that it was true, but they soon could say to each other, "Christ has risen!" Today we still believe this and may read and sing about it. Is your school having a special Easter program or assembly?

I hope you are all doing well. Have you seen any signs of spring yet where you live? Do you enjoy making word puzzles? If you do, send me one and I can put it in the *Clarion* for other boys and girls to solve! Until next time.

Love, Aunt Betty



Puzzles

What Is It?

Decode the clue words below to discover the name of a well-known thing in the Bible.

— — — — — — — — — —
K F T V T C S B O D I F T

— — — — — — — — — —
G B S N F S Q S V O F

— — — — — — — — — —
G S V J U H S B Q F T

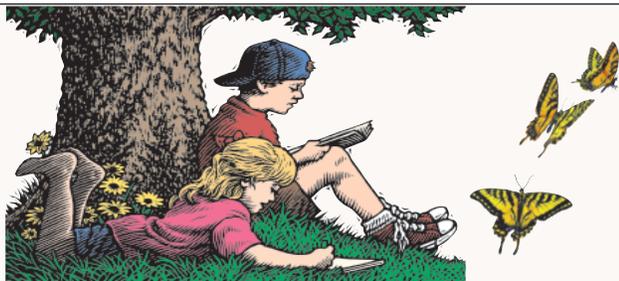
— — — — —
B C J E F

CODE:

A in the code = Z in the answer. B in the code = A in the answer. C in the code = B in the answer. . . and so forth.

To get the answer, decode the word below.

— — — — —
W J O F



Friends of Jesus

Fill in the blank with the names of some of Jesus friends.

1. _____, _____, and _____ were the only witnesses at both the transfiguration, Matthew 17:1-13, and the prayer at Gethsemane, Matthew 26:36-46.
2. _____ sat at Jesus' feet and listened to Him, Luke 10:39.
3. Jesus raised _____ from the dead, John 11:24-27.
4. _____ expressed her belief in Jesus, John 11:24-27.
5. _____ helped bury Jesus, John 19:39-40.
6. The tomb Jesus was buried in belonged to _____ Matthew 27: 57-60.
7. _____ pointed his followers to Jesus, John 3:25-36.
8. Jesus befriended _____, Luke 19:5.
9. _____ spoke to Jesus in the garden, thinking Him to be the gardener, John 20:15.
10. Jesus shared a meal with friends at the home of _____, Matthew 26:6.



He Has Risen!

Matthew 28: 1-7 tells us what happened on the third day after Jesus was crucified.

Find the words highlighted in capital letters in the word search.

After the **SABBATH**, at **DAWN** on the first day of the **WEEK**, Mary **MAGDALENE** and the other **MARY** went to look at the **TOMB**. There was a violent **EARTHQUAKE**, for an **ANGEL** of the Lord came down from **HEAVEN** and, going to the tomb, **ROLLED** back the **STONE** and sat on it. His **APPEARANCE** was like **LIGHTNING**, and his **CLOTHES** were **WHITE** as **SNOW**. The **GUARDS** were so afraid of him that they **SHOOK** and became like dead men. The angel said to the **WOMEN**, "Do not be **AFRAID**, for I know that you are looking for **JESUS**, who was **CRUCIFIED**. He is not here; he has **RISEN**, just as he said. Come and see the **PLACE** where he lay. Then go **QUICKLY** and tell his **DISCIPLES**: "He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into **GALILEE**. There you will see him. Now I have **TOLD** you."

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| K | F | U | U | G | V | D | H | B | V | I | U | N | M | K | W | H |
| L | G | A | L | I | L | E | E | T | A | S | E | O | B | R | B | F |
| I | R | P | O | O | G | J | I | D | F | I | H | Z | K | R | R | O |
| B | L | P | T | W | Y | U | R | C | R | U | C | I | F | I | E | D |
| N | U | E | G | N | T | U | A | V | A | I | V | T | R | S | K | I |
| Z | Q | A | N | Z | J | O | P | R | I | L | Y | V | O | E | Q | S |
| W | N | R | T | O | F | I | M | L | D | R | V | D | L | N | U | C |
| O | O | A | J | H | T | A | B | B | A | S | B | F | L | O | I | I |
| M | F | N | L | Z | U | S | F | M | W | C | O | H | E | K | C | P |
| E | K | C | S | W | E | S | T | A | N | E | E | N | D | J | K | L |
| N | I | E | P | H | O | P | S | A | N | G | E | L | M | O | L | E |
| L | I | U | T | I | Q | U | F | Q | W | L | S | K | O | P | Y | S |
| F | M | O | Q | T | S | J | E | K | A | U | Q | H | T | R | A | E |
| Y | L | B | J | E | E | G | B | D | R | A | S | Q | B | D | U | Y |
| C | B | W | J | K | L | I | G | H | T | N | I | N | G | Z | J | T |
| K | U | G | B | H | E | A | V | E | N | R | P | T | V | P | U | I |
| X | Z | Q | L | B | M | B | J | M | V | S | Z | D | H | P | F | Q |



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