

# Clarion

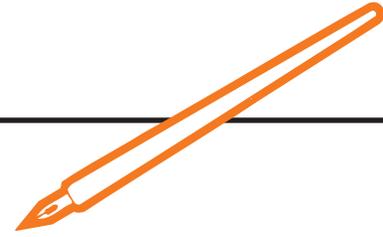
THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE  
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*To Whom Belongs the Child?*

Numbers

10:1-10



## The Head or the Tail

### Introduction

If I am not mistaken in my observations, we are entering a period in which we can observe new waves of enthusiasm for various activities among our younger members. People just want to get out and do things. My guess is that this in part results from increased awareness of what others in evangelical circles are doing. And perhaps it is connected with a certain amount of dissatisfaction with respect to our regular routines in worship and Christian living. We have fixed routines in worship, and as far as Christian living is concerned, we place a lot of emphasis on support for our schools and other Reformed organizations. Somehow I sense that these “old ways” are coming under closer scrutiny today, if not under increased fire.

One barometer of these sorts of sentiments is the increased attention given to the Reformed liturgy, and the possibilities of changing the liturgy. Younger people are not only questioning why we do things in certain ways; they are also asking if it is necessary to keep doing them this way. And there are churches which for one reason or other have decided to implement some changes with respect to the standard Reformed liturgy. In the Netherlands, too, the liturgy has become the subject of renewed interest.

Now in themselves changes are not bad things. But the question remains whether changes are for the better. Sometimes it seems as if the enthusiasm for new approaches outweighs the understanding of the reasons we have for doing things in certain established ways. We can all easily climb aboard the wagon of liturgical and ecclesiastical change. In fact, it even seems to be somewhat of a fashion today. But do we know where the wagon is headed?

### A look at the past

In some respects today's situation has parallels to the period of the 1920s in Holland. This period was characterized by the increasing presence in the churches of what was called the *Youth Movement*.<sup>1</sup> At that time the younger generation harboured a good deal of criticism against the mainstream thinking in the churches, and also felt estranged from many of its customs and practices. For example, they opposed what they saw as the introverted and narrow minded mentality of church members. They saw the Reformed churches of the day as unduly preoccupied with an attitude of self-defense and self-perpetuation. They suggested that we must cultivate a broader view: attention to the world and its needs!

At the same time, the Youth Movement suggested removing some commonly accepted barriers. More attention had to be given to the idea of cooperation with other Christians in various fields of endeavour. The church had to adopt a new ecumenical attitude, promoting cooperation with other Reformed bodies around the world.

Besides this there were increased difficulties with the liturgy of the Reformed churches, which many in this

movement found dull, uninspiring, and totally bereft of any aesthetic qualities. They also felt that more attention had to be given to the mystical element in the life of faith. In short, the youth of the day were afraid of a dead and stifling orthodoxy, a religiosity of going through motions without any attention to those elements that for them showed the true and meaningful character of the Christian religion.<sup>2</sup>

Somehow I sense that these are familiar tones today. In discussions with younger members, one notes that there is a general and increasingly sharper criticism against what is seen as complacency, and a church harbouring a spirit of materialism and luxury.

### K. Schilder and the Youth Movement

In this climate K. Schilder began his work as columnist and commentator in the weekly church paper *De Reformatie*.<sup>3</sup> What was his attitude to the concerns of the younger members? C. Trimp – rightly, I believe – says that he shared many of their concerns.<sup>4</sup> The churches had fallen victim to a sense of having arrived, and a sense of self-satisfaction with respect to certain aims and goals that had been reached. There was a climate dominated by the legacy of A. Kuyper: some felt that he was the end of all discussion, and that beyond Kuyper there was nothing new to discover, and no new goals for which to strive.

Exactly how Schilder saw himself *vis-à-vis* the Youth Movement is not our primary concern. It is perhaps more instructive for us to be aware of the specific proposals and insights he introduced in order to provide leadership to the churches in an increasingly diffuse climate. The point is not to slavishly follow one opinion, or canonize one approach, but to learn from the leaders of the past, all in accord with what the writer of the letter to the Hebrews says: “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the Word of God” (Hebrews 13:7).

### Head or Tail?

The course Schilder charted for the churches was outlined in a speech for the Youth held in Haarlem in 1922, with the title *Head or Tail?* The title draws on the metaphor found in Isaiah 9:14, where the LORD says that because of the apostasy in Jerusalem and Judah both the “head and tail” of the church will be destroyed. The head identified the leading rulers and elders in the church; the tail: the false prophets who exerted themselves only in echoing the will of the rulers or those who filled their coffers.

The gist of this speech is that the many cries for renewal need to be tempered by the clear message of the Word of God. The “false prophets” in his day were identified as those who followed the fashion of the day with little attention to the past or to the demands of the LORD. In applying the passage to his day, Schilder alludes to the fact that there was a multiplicity of prophetic voices, but not all practiced the restraint and moderation characteristic of true prophesy. He notes that the times reflected a good deal of looking over

the fence, with the clear sentiment that the grass was greener on the other side. There were calls for renewal, but they were mixed with sentiments which suggested that Christians of a different stripe, whether Lutheran, Baptist or Pentecostal, had so much more to offer than did the Reformed.

In this context Schilder suggests that the church must go forward. The building is not finished, and no one can appease his conscience with a sense of having arrived or having finished his task. Build we must! But how? Schilder says:

But if we then . . . review our approach and rethink our position, then we must not do this – never do this – because someone else wants it this way, but because God desires this of us. Then we must not bring an “addition” to our spiritual house which is added to the house as a “new wing” and does not rest with the whole building on its foundation. We must not plant flowers in our garden which do not grow out of our own soil. But we must live out of our own principle, operate from out of our own thought efforts, build on our own foundation; then we will not mechanically import things from the outside, but let them grow organically out of our own spiritual inheritance.<sup>5</sup>

Schilder then stresses that this is not to be interpreted as arrogance but as: survival! It was for him a matter of following through on Reformed principles.<sup>6</sup> If we wish to make progress we can only do one thing: prophesy, prophesy!

### Hold to the Word!

There are several aspects of this speech about which one could raise questions. One might question whether the images of the building and garden adequately cover the situation in the Reformed churches.<sup>7</sup> One might also question whether a speech like this can be readily applied to our church life today. Given all these provisos, I do think we should draw out the lesson for our own situation.

I noted at the outset that one can observe a resurgence of enthusiasm among younger people (and younger couples) in many areas: evangelism, liturgy, mission, outreach, and so on. And I can only applaud enthusiasm for the Lord’s work. Who can be against the enthusiasm of youth? But the key issue that Schilder raised in his 1922 speech is: in what way is the enthusiasm directed? And from where does it derive its fodder? On that point we can learn from Schilder. For the tragedy was

that many in the *Youth Movement* left the Reformed churches because they were caught up in the false ecumenicity of the day. Today as well we increasingly read and hear about people who are critical of the Reformed churches, and who intimate that the experience of faith is so much richer in other “fellowships.” Some churches with the Reformed name today are really not much different than the mainstream evangelical churches.

Schilder’s point was: build out of your own principle, and build on your own foundation. Only then are you sure that you are not the tail but the head. His warning bears repeating in our day. And for us – perhaps even more than in Schilder’s day – it is not a matter of arrogance or self-defense. It is simply a matter of *survival*, and of remaining what we are called to be: Reformed believers testifying to the grace, mercy and love of God in an apostate and self-directed world.

<sup>5</sup>I am referring to what is called the “Beweging der jongeren” cf H. Veldman, “De twintiger jaren. Gereformeerden tussen verstarren, verwatering en vernieuwing” appendix to *De Reformatie* Vol 68, #48 (September 18, 1993) 1-16

<sup>6</sup>For a characterization of the movement see C. Trimp “‘Ontwikkeling’ in het Gereformeerde leven” in *Bevindingen. Verzamelde Opstellen* (Franeker: Van Wijnen, 1991) 134-137. According to W.G. de Vries, the movement was

open to the ideas of the ethical theology of the day, as well as to the (then) new ideas of K. Barth, see W.G. De Vries, *Calvinisten op de tweesprong* (Groningen: de Vuurbaak, 1974), 108. The movement also absorbed influences from the upsurge in missionary interest and activity following the formation of the International Missionary Council in Edinburgh, 1910.

<sup>3</sup>*De Reformatie* was specifically set up to meet the needs of the younger generation, see W.G. De Vries, 109.

<sup>4</sup>J.J.C. Dee takes a different approach and insists on Schilder’s independence from the *Youth Movement*, see J.J.C. Dee, *K. Schilder. Zijn leven en werk*, Vol 1 (Goes: Oosterbaan en Le Cointre, 1990), 112ff. See also J. Faber “Schilder’s Life and Work” in J. Geertsema (ed.) *Always Obedient. Essays on the Teachings of Dr. Klaas Schilder* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1995), 4. Faber also intimates a greater distance between Schilder and the leading spokesmen of the *Youth Movement*.

<sup>5</sup>K. Schilder “Kop of Staart” in C. Veenhof, (ed.) *Om Woord en kerk. Preeken, lezingen, studiën en kerkbode artikelen van Prof. Dr. K. Schilder* Vol 1, (Goes: Oosterbaan en Le Cointre, 1948) 158, [my translation].

<sup>6</sup>In the speech he also wants to clear away the misunderstanding as if he promotes withdrawal from the world in a disposition of passivity, i.e. from the world of politics, science and art, see *Om Woord en kerk*, 153. He promotes the application of distinctly Reformed principles to these and other areas of life.

<sup>7</sup>The images show that at this point Schilder was in many ways a disciple of A. Kuyper. It was not until the thirties that the contours of a more critical approach began to develop.



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By H.J.J. Feenstra

## BE WISE WITH WISDOM!

### Wisdom: The Blessings

Originally published as  
*Wees wijs met de wijsheid*,  
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Translated by T.M.P. VanderVen

Searching for the treasures of wisdom will be blessed. You discover that you grow in insight and wisdom, in the art of living and in piety. You will be overjoyed when you notice that growth, when you are able to deal with problems in ways which were at first beyond you. It is, indeed, a wonderful experience when you discover that you understand things and that you are not easily led by others. Let us have a closer look at the blessings which are promised in Proverbs 2:5-8 to the treasure hunters for wisdom.

*... then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding; He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity, guarding the paths of justice and preserving the way of His saints*

We become living, practical christians who through wisdom receive help and protection. We learn to be just and loyal to God in the middle of our every day activities. *To live* means to go along a certain course, along *the way*. Confident in the confession: *My LORD and my God, Thy faithfulness is my shield and buckler.*

The next passage:

*Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path; for wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; discretion will watch over you; understanding will guard you. . . .*

We begin to experience the joys of a life in God's covenant – responding to His expectations, doing the right thing, acting as we ought to. We become cautious and sensible, and we learn to consider things in a fruitful, mature manner. We become christian personalities, not easily confused. We become at ease.

Yet there is more.

*... delivering you from the way of evil, from men of perverted speech, who forsake the paths of uprightness*

*to walk in the ways of darkness, who rejoice in doing evil and delight in the perverseness of evil; men whose paths are crooked, and who are devious in their ways.*

When we take hold of wisdom, we also have a better defense against evil people with wrong ideas. The Israelite was warned against false prophets and wrong teachings. Today we undergo the bombardment of the constant stream of information in the media. We are exposed to all sorts of things, including clearly evil things which we should not follow but oppose. How do you distinguish? Through wisdom which protects us against the evil way, the crooked path, the dark alleys of false teachings. Wisdom prevents us from walking the erratic course of those who have no direction, fluttering from one philosophy to another and tasting all sorts of ideologies and movements which claim to show the way, but not THE way.

Another area in which we urgently need the blessings of wisdom is the area of sexuality. We read on.

*You will be saved from the loose woman from the adventuress with her smooth words,*

## What's inside?

In the editorial, Dr. De Jong writes about a wind of change in the churches affecting ideas about liturgy and Christian living. He applauds the enthusiasm but pleads that we not, in our excitement, step off the old foundation. A worthy exhortation. Let us build upon what we have received.

Undersigned recently had the privilege of addressing a very special group of people – teachers of our children. (You will find the speech in this issue.) To stand five days per week in front of a score of our children to impart to them some knowledge and skills is a difficult job. Rewarding, but difficult. Soon the teachers will be on their well-deserved summer break. Enjoy it!

Some think that to speak about “a personal relationship with Jesus Christ” and “the covenant of grace” are mutually exclusive. The Rev. J. VanRietschoten shows how wrong that thinking is in “Personal Relationship Covenantally.”

Dr. Van Dam updates us on the Dutch Synod Berkel en Rodenrijs.

GvP

*who forsakes the companion of her youth  
and forgets the covenant of her God;  
for her house sinks down to death,  
and her paths to the shades;  
none who go to her come back  
nor do they regain the paths of life.*

If one thing is clear it is this: sexuality is too strong for fallen man. Who can control it? History tells us the story of imbalance, of extremes which follow each other: either a prudishness which hides everything, or a shameless openness which allows the most perverse actions. Who will be able to cope with sexuality in a way which is balanced, controlled, with proper enjoyment. The following chapters of Proverbs will deal with it in even greater detail.

Sex is not a key to paradise; sex is not the end – the end point is the new heaven and the new earth. The many magazines and the recipe books for the bedroom clearly demonstrate the needs

and the distress, but offer no solutions. Indeed, how necessary is the instruction of true wisdom; an affair leads to death. These verses sound an urgent warning against this. He who thinks to reach out for life, is tragically mistaken.

*So you will walk in the way of good men  
and keep to the paths of the righteous.  
For the upright will inhabit the land,  
and men of integrity will remain in it;  
but the wicked will be cut off from the land,  
and the treacherous will be rooted out of it.*

Concern yourself therefore with wisdom. Your efforts will be richly rewarded: you will find the right way – the way, the truth, and life. You will find the kingdom of the Son of God's love. That kingdom has the future, it promises the land to the believers and the earth to the meek. Already today we may look

around us and say, "People, this land is our land; indeed this very earth will be cleansed from all that does not belong there. That is the promise we have for eternity."

Therefore, get to work. Search for the sources of the wisdom that saves. Without any doubt you will find it and gain understanding. And at the same time you are living towards the future of Christ. Paul puts it in these words:

*And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruits of righteousness which come through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.*

From Scripture

Proverbs 2  
Psalm 37:27-29

Psalm 91:4  
Matthew 5:5  
Philippians 1:9-10

## To Whom Belongs the Child?

By G.Ph. van Popta

*Speech delivered at the CRTA – West Teachers' Convention in Coaldale, AB, March 22, 1996 (slightly modified).*

We are interested in children. Teachers are interested in children. If there were no children, you would be out of your present jobs. Those of us who are parents are interested in children.

The question I would put to you today is: *To whom belongs the child?* The children in your classrooms – to whom do they belong?

When I ask that question, I don't mean, of course, in the sense of chattel. What I do mean is: Who must care for the child? Who has authority over the child? Who bears responsibility for the child? These are important questions.

Who must care for the child, for its food, clothing, health, development,

education, preparation for job in life? Who must give the child leadership in this? Help him make choices? Pay for the costs?

Who has *authority* over the child? Who decides the direction in which he shall be brought up? The school he goes to? The church to which he will belong? Whom must the child obey? Whom must he acknowledge as his master? Who has the right to control the child's life, even by force – the force of a stern word or even the rod?

Who is *responsible* for the child: over against the child himself, society, and God?

How we answer these questions has great significance for the present and the future of the child as well as for society and the church. We also know that many different answers are given.

### Does the child belong to the state?

Preparing for this speech made me crack for the first time a book I've owned for many years.<sup>1</sup> I read through a number of the essays and was not surprised to read that many people really believe that the child belongs to the state. This, as you know, is not a recent belief. It is very old. It goes back to Ancient Greece. But let me not go that far back to show that this is so.

In an essay entitled "John Swett: The Self-Preservation of the State," we read that Mr. Swett<sup>2</sup> spoke of "the children of the State." He said that ". . . children . . . belong, not to the parents, but to the State, to society, to the country" (Rushdoony, p. 79). By this opinion:

Schools are thus not extensions of parental authority, but "wards of

the State," extensions of state sovereignty, and so to be respected. Children accordingly become wards of the school on entry therein, and parental rights are forfeited, except, as Swett noted, in private schools. In recognition of this fact, an antipathy to and assault on private schools was not lacking or long in developing (Rushdoony, p. 81).

In another essay, "The Divine Child in the Divine State," we learn that this idea that the child belongs to the state is not unique to late 19th century USA. We are reminded of Adolf Hitler's position: "German youth belongs to the Fuehrer" (Rushdoony, p. 109).

At the same time Hitler was expressing his opinion in Germany, the White House made a similar declaration. President Hoover, who presided over the USA during the depression years, issued "The Children's Charter" of the White House Conference on Child Health and Protection. Rushdoony says:

The Charter is a children's "bill of rights" which in effect makes the child both the concern and ward of the State. Pre-natal care, love, understanding, "health protection from birth to adolescence," and "for every child the right to grow up in a family with an adequate standard of living and the security of a stable income as the surest safe guard against social handicaps," these and more were pledged by the Conference (Rushdoony, p. 217).

These notions, that the child belongs to the state, have become well entrenched, as we can learn from something as "kitchen variety" as an article in *Western Report*.<sup>3</sup> Verburg quotes Thomas Fleming, an analyst of culture, who says that "... unlike a century ago, parents and families are no longer responsible for their children." In the context of discussing how the state (society) handles delinquent adolescents, Fleming notes that the standard method is to pass a law:

Too many kids drinking? Let's pass a law. Too many kids doing drugs? Let's pass a law. Too many kids cutting school? Let's pass a law. Through our laws we have said that kids belong to the state.

Verburg continues:

Prior to the late 1800s, it was an assumption in common law that family members are responsible for each other, explains Mr. Fleming. . . .

[P]arents answered for their child's torts and misdemeanours. If a child stole or broke a window, the father made restitution. The assumption was that he knew or should have known it would happen and could have stopped it (Verburg, p. 31).

But now, the government has become a surrogate parent. As western society turned ever more from the Word of God, which speaks about these things, children more and more became wards of the state. In 1904, American psychologist G. Stanley Hall published a two-volume work called *Adolescence*. Social historian Kett (quoted in Verburg's article) says that Hall defined the teen years in Darwinian terms as a distinct state in life that begins at puberty and is marked by inner turmoil. Adolescence "was essentially a conception of behaviour imposed on youth," recounts Mr. Kett, "rather than an empirical assessment of the way in which young people actually behaved." The result was that teens were put into a very special category needing, according to theory, very special treatment – from professionals. The influence of parents became less and less appreciated. The state would take care of the education and upbringing of the children (Verburg, pp. 31-32).

The Shapiro report,<sup>4</sup> well-known in school circles in Ontario, is informed by the same philosophy. Shapiro's first "Matter of Principle" is:

That [public] elementary and secondary schools are important institutions whose goal is to develop, nurture and enhance the intellectual and moral autonomy of the young. This goal and attendant responsibilities are shared with parents and other societal agencies.

And so we find ourselves today living in a society which largely believes that the child belongs to the state.

But what does the Bible say?

Let us go to the Scriptures to see what the Word of God has to say about this question. We all believe that the Scriptures are holy and canonical, for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith. We believe without any doubt all things contained in them (*Belgic Confession*, art. 5), also the things it has to teach us about the question: *To whom belongs the child?*

### **The child belongs to the parents**

There is only one correct answer to the question. And that answer is: *To*

*the parents!* God gives children to the parents. The parents are responsible under God to care for their children in every way. I strongly suspect that I won't find any disagreement with that position. But, do we actually (still) make that answer function?

### **Parents must care for the physical well-being of their children**

Every parent will agree that it is his/her responsibility to feed and clothe his children. That is clear, self-evident. It's so natural that we don't need a command of God. Even unbelievers take care of their children. In 1 Tim. 5:8, Paul said: "*If any one does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*" Human instinct powerfully tells us that we must care for our families, our children. It would seem redundant for there to be a command of God in this regard.

There are sad exceptions. There are those who abuse their children, physically, sexually, mentally. There are parents who do not give their children the food and drink they require. Even unbelievers say that such people are worse than animals. For animals instinctually care for their offspring. Even without the Bible expressly commanding parents to feed and clothe their children, we all understand that it is their task and responsibility to do so.

Scripture treats it as self-evident. And so we read of Hagar who feels it to be her responsibility to find water for her son, Ishmael. The Lord Jesus treats it as self-evident. In Lk. 11:11-12 he said: "*What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; {12} or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?*" The apostle Paul treats it as self-evident. In 2 Cor. 12:14 he said: "... *children ought not to lay up for their parents, but parents for their children.*" And if we page back and forth through Scripture, we come across a mother beseeching Elisha for the life of her son; a father pleading to the Lord Jesus on behalf of his son; a Canaanite woman begging the Lord to heal her daughter.

Although there is no explicit command in Scripture, it is completely clear to everyone that the bodily care of children is the (divine) obligation of the parents. It is wrong and it goes completely against nature if the parents begin to feel this responsibility less, if they begin



to download it on to others – for instance, the school (state) providing food for the students.

### Parents must care for the spiritual well-being of their children

Who is responsible for the spiritual, intellectual, and moral development of the child and for his religious upbringing? In answer to this question, the Scriptures speak very clearly. Even if we were to say that it was a matter of course, natural, and completely in line with the above that the parents must also look after their children's spiritual, intellectual, and moral development, yet the LORD found it necessary to impress this upon the parents, so that there would be no doubt; so that no matter how strong the inclination may be to download it on to the state or society or some other organization, we would remain convinced that it remains the duty of the parents to look after the spiritual growth of their children.

In the Bible, the fathers are called to teach their children about the great things God has done for His people. At the Passover celebration, the fathers were to teach the children about how the lamb was "... the sacrifice of the LORD's passover, for He passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when He slew the Egyptians but spared our houses" (Ex. 12:27). As you read through the book of Joshua, you

come across a number of monuments made of piles of stones. One example: When Joshua led the people across the Jordan River, then he set up a monument of twelve stones.

*"And he said to the people of Israel, 'When your children ask their fathers in time to come, "What do these stones mean?" [22] then you shall let your children know, 'Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground.' [23] For the LORD your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you passed over, as the LORD your God did to the Red Sea, which He dried up for us until we passed over, [24] so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the LORD is mighty; that you may fear the LORD your God for ever" (Josh. 4:21-24).*

The fathers of Israel were to indoctrinate their children in the great deeds God had done for their salvation.<sup>5</sup> This task still falls to parents, as the NT teaches us. Timothy's mother taught him to know the Scriptures from when he was very young. Paul says in Eph. 6:4 that fathers are to bring their children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.

All of this is nicely gathered together in LD 39 of the catechism where we summarize what God requires of us in the fifth commandment. Among other things we say that children are to submit

themselves to the good instruction and discipline of their parents. If children must do that, then parents must give good instruction and discipline.

Woe to the father who lets his children walk in self-chosen ways – ways which invariably are the ways of sin! Think of Eli who let his sons do as they pleased and the curse which fell on the house of Eli because of it. Fathers and mothers will have to answer to God with respect to what they have done with the children God gave them. And it will be terrible if they hear from the throne the words: *You took My children and made them pass through the fire* (Ezek. 16:20,21).

Let these few examples from the Bible suffice to underline in our minds that parents are responsible for the spiritual, religious and moral development of the child. The child belongs to the parents. Let us not be led astray by the notion that we must let the child make up his own mind. Let us not be taken in by those who say that we may not use force to interfere with the spiritual progress of the child, but must, rather, just give the opportunities so that what is hidden in them will come out. Don't be fooled by those who say that we are not to indoctrinate the children. Parents *must* indoctrinate their children. They must get the doctrine in. They promise that when they present their children for baptism. They promise (third question) to instruct their child in the doctrine of the Holy Scriptures. Doctrine is not a dirty word. Let us not believe those who would have us believe that the children belong to the community, or the state.

We must consciously maintain the teaching of Scripture that the child belongs to the parents. The parents must care not only for the *physical* well-being of the children God gives them; they must also be busy with the *spiritual* development of their children. For children are a heritage from the LORD. The LORD gives the children to the parents. Before the LORD, parents are responsible to raise their children in the fear and knowledge of God. It is the task of parents to lead their children to Christ. Parents may not abrogate this responsibility.

### Parental responsibility not absolute

This does not mean that the say which the parents have in the lives of their children is absolute. No earthly authority or concern is absolute. All



earthly authorities and concerns have boundaries, both vertical and horizontal. Vertical, for every authority is under that of God. He alone has absolute authority. Parental authority is bound to the law of God. Further, the exercise of this authority must show itself to be God working through parents. As LD 39 says, it is God's will to govern children by the hand of their parents.

Parental responsibility also has horizontal boundaries. There are others, other people, other spheres of people, who have something to say about the child and who have responsibility towards the child. The state does, for instance. If parents abuse their children, then the state has the duty to intervene. The state must even remove the children from the parental home if they are put at risk by being left there. Rom. 13 teaches us that the government is "God's servant for your good." It is also God's servant for the good of the child. The state has been ordained by God and has a divine calling towards the children and may, at times, need to intervene to protect the life of a child. We could also think of compulsory immunization programs or com-

pulsory education until age 15. The state makes these laws for the good of its young citizens.

### **The responsibility of the church towards the child**

The church also has something to say about the child and has a responsibility towards the child. For the children belong to the church. As we confess in LD 27, infants as well as adults belong to God's covenant and congregation. When a child is born, it is born in the parental home; however, it is also born in Zion (Ps. 87:5). From birth a covenant child is a member of the church.

In John 10, the Lord used the image of a sheepfold to describe the congregation. A sheepfold will also have lambs. Those lambs belong to the sheepfold just as much as the older sheep do. In the spring when lambs were born, then the shepherd did not wonder what to do with them. He understood perfectly well that those lambs were also his responsibility. They often needed special care. The shepherd would have to carry them in his arms.

Just as a lamb belongs to the flock from birth, so a child born to members of the church belongs to the church from birth. They are lambs of the flock of Christ, the Good Shepherd. What a privilege for the lambs. They do not need first to make a decision for Christ before they can be numbered among the members of Christ's flock. They are by birth. And this is guaranteed to them by baptism.

Peter (in 1 Pet. 5:1ff) exhorts the elders of the church who labour under Christ, the Chief Shepherd, to tend the flock of God. When the elders grant the request for a child to be baptized, then the elders, the under shepherds, take upon themselves a certain responsibility for that child. They must give the same care and attention to the lambs of the flock as they do to the older members – of course, in a gentler way. They must do so in obedience to the command of Christ: "Feed my lambs!" (John 21:15). They must do so in obedience to the command of the apostle Paul to the elders of Ephesus and so to all elders every where: "Take heed . . . to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God which He obtained with the blood of His own Son" (Acts 20:28). All the flock, also the lambs.

The third question directed towards parents having their children baptized comes again into view here. Parents are not only asked whether they will instruct their children in the doctrine of Holy Scripture; they are also asked whether they promise to *have* them instructed therein to the utmost of their power. This question implies the responsibility which the church has for the youngsters.

What is this responsibility? The Scriptures show us this. E.g., when Joshua led the first worship service in the Promised Land, then he assembled the whole congregation, infants included. Joshua read the law in the presence of all Israel including, as Joshua 8:35 makes emphatically clear, "the little ones." When Joel called together the congregation of God's people of Israel in a time of disaster to lead the people in repentance, then he said: "Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; {16} gather the people. Sanctify the congregation; assemble the elders; gather the children, even nursing infants. . . ." (Joel 2:15-16).

And then think of the care which the Lord Jesus extended to the children. He took them in His arms and blessed them (Mk. 10:16). He admonished those who would keep them away from Him (Mk. 10:13-14). He threatens with eternal punishment those who would cause a little one to stumble (Mt. 18:6). He said that their angels are always looking upon the face of their Father in heaven (Mt. 18:10). He sticks up for them when the priests and scribes complain about them (Mt. 21:15-16). His heart was filled with compassion for them when He thought about how they too would suffer in the destruction of Jerusalem (Lk. 19:41-44).

He is the Good Shepherd who takes His lambs up in His arms. Following Him, the church must do likewise.

How must the church do that? We must be brief. The ministers must make sure that their preaching reaches the children and the youth as well as the more mature members. Mr. Pieter Torenvliet said in 1993 in an article in the CRTA Magazine: “. . . most ministers do very little to make a church service or a sermon meaningful or understanding (sic) for the children in the church.”<sup>6</sup> Mr. Torenvliet is probably overstating things somewhat, but the point should be taken by ministers. If we hold that the children belong in the worship service, then it is the task of ministers to make the church service and sermon meaningful and understandable for the children in the church. I heard once that Dr. A. Kuyper would keep two pictures on his desk: one of a young member of the congregation and one of an old member. As he wrote his sermons, he would often glance at the pictures remembering that his sermons needed to reach both. The story may be apocryphal, but it's a nice story. And it illustrates well the audience for which ministers prepare their sermons.

Further, the church must call the children as well to the worship service. We must resist any movement towards during-church-Sunday Schools. If the children belong, they must be there, in the worship service, worshipping God and hearing the preaching of the Word. Some people say that children should not be subjected to the sermon because they don't understand it. Such people do not understand how God also works in the hearts of the



lambs by the preaching of the Word. As Richard Bacon said:

(T)he things of the LORD are spiritual in nature, and not necessarily apprehended by the reason. As a result, God often hides the things of His kingdom from the wise and prudent and reveals them instead to speechless babes.<sup>7</sup>

The words of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 28:19,20 underline the task of the church towards those who have been baptized. The Lord Jesus commanded the apostles, and in them the church of all ages, to teach those who have been baptized to observe the commandments of Christ. The order of words is instructive. After baptism comes further instruction in the things of God. The Reformed churches have taken this seriously. And so we have catechism instruction in which the youth of the church are further instructed in the Word of God and the true faith.

### **The responsibility of the school towards the child**

On the horizontal level mentioned above, another institution comes into view when discussing the various spheres of responsibility with which the child comes into contact, and that is the school. The school has no inherent responsibility or authority, but only that which it is given to it by the parents. What is the responsibility of the school towards the child?

When I accepted the gracious invitation to speak at this convention, then I asked your secretary to send me some

articles to get me up to speed on various topics addressed at past conventions. In response to my request I received five years of CRTA Magazines plus a book. You teachers know how to assign homework! I began to feel some sympathy for the complaints of my children.

I found an interesting chain of articles – articles which had been delivered to you as speeches. In March of 1991, the late Rev. J.D. Wielenga spoke to you about the now near infamous “Profile of the school graduate” (22:3). A year later, the Rev. K. Jonker spoke on the topic of “The relationship between church and school” (23:1). He was, here and there, critical of Wielenga. Then in 1993, Mr. Henk van Beelen summarized the views of Wielenga and Jonker, assessed them, and came to his own conclusions in “The place of the school in reformed education” (24:1/2). In between, Mr. Torenvliet responded to some aspects of Wielenga’s speech in “The profile of a grade 12 student revisited” (23:3). As well, the topic of the relationship between church, home and school has also been addressed in conventions in the East.

I am not going to recapitulate the articles and criticize them. They are there for you to read. And you can form your own opinions.

I do, however, want to make some comments about the place of the school in light of the biblical principle that the child belongs to the parents. And if I am going to hook into a speech which has

touched this point, it would be the last one, the speech of Mr. Henk van Beelen.

I greatly appreciate many of the positions which Mr. Van Beelen took in his speech. I am not going to critique it; rather, I want to extract from his speech (article) some of the things I agree with.

Van Beelen makes the point that we ought not to identify Reformed education with Reformed schools. Reformed education is bigger than the Reformed school. If Reformed parents leave all the education of their children to the Reformed schools, the children, the families, the churches, and the schools are headed for disaster. The Reformed school is part of the picture, but not the total picture. And the parents' role must remain primary, also in the instruction of their children.

Van Beelen also makes the point that while the family and the church (and I would add, the state) are divine institutions, the school is not. The Bible does not demand the establishment of a Christian school. You will hunt in vain for such a commandment. However, it is only a matter of consistency for Reformed believers to want to establish and have their children attend a confessionally Reformed school. I gladly work with the well-known "triangle" paradigm, as long as each point of the triangle knows its place and the place of the other two points. The late Rev. J.D. Wielenga spoke against the triangle paradigm which he saw had, in the views of many and often in practice, become a trinity. If we change the triangle into a trinity, then we are headed down the wrong road. And inasmuch as the triangle has become a trinity, I fully endorse Rev. Wielenga's concerns. Then the school ends up being a divine institution alongside the family and the church with the goal to "lead the children to Christ." That is not the task of the school. It is the task of the parents and the church to lead their children, who at the same time are lambs of the flock, to Jesus Christ. Let us not change the triangle into a trinity. God has ordained the family and the church. Reformed families of a Reformed church will organize a Reformed school. The school is, thus, "a parentally 'ordained' institute" (Van Beelen, p. 6). Let each of the three, church home and school, know what they are about and what the other two

are about. Then the potential for problems will be greatly decreased.

Van Beelen also asks what "covenantal education" is. I've had that question too, for years. Does "covenantal" function as an adjective of "education?" Does it describe the students ("covenant children")? Does it mean that the teacher must instruct the children in the ways of God's covenant? In other words, is the school a mission post? Must the teacher attempt to evoke a covenantal response to God from the students (in the sense of bringing the student from his baptism to a profession of faith)? I don't think anyone really knows what it means. Van Beelen suggests: "Let us just continue to call the education engaged in at the school either Christian, or reformed, or even confessional."

Van Beelen makes the point that teaching is not neutral. He is correct. Nothing in life is neutral. However, while it is not the school's goal to either evoke a covenantal response to God or to lead the students to Christ, this cannot but help function at times as an attending effect or outcome. The stated purpose and goal of the school ought to be to teach the students, to impart to them knowledge and help them develop skills. The Reformed teacher will, however, teach in such a way that he will touch the hearts of the children. His stated goal will not be to shape the soul of the child (to turn the child into a Christian); however, the *person* he is, the *way* he teaches and *what* he teaches will, of course, touch the soul of the child.<sup>8</sup> It is the goal of Reformed *education* to mold the child's soul and to impart faith to the child; however, that is not the stated goal or aim of the Reformed *school*. The objective of the Reformed school is to impart to the student a comprehensive body of knowledge and skills (Van Beelen, p. 10). If we are going to expect the school to impart faith and shape the soul of the child, we are going to have frustrated teachers, parents and children.

And I think that there are some frustrated teachers, parents and children in our schools. I believe that the frustration has several causes: In some instances, parents are neglecting their divine calling to train their children in the ways of the Lord. They believe that training their children in the ways of the Lord is the task of the Christian school – *that's what we've got a Christian school for!*

The teachers are frustrated because they end up picking up the slack. Other parents become frustrated by this since they feel that the school is then encroaching upon their turf.

### A survey

To help me prepare this speech, I posted two sets of questions on the RefNet (an electronic mailing list), one set to parents,<sup>9</sup> another to teachers.<sup>10</sup> The responses were enlightening.

Some parents said that they wanted the school to teach their children to live Christianly, to be godly, and to show the fruits of the Spirit. These parents put more emphasis on the development of their children as Christians than on academic development. Other parents put academics first – academics in a Reformed and Christian framework and context. Some expressed frustration that some teachers seem to think it their goal to "lead the children to Christ." One mother expressed as her greatest concern that some teachers ". . . are attempting to pour 10 kg of flour (read: faith) into 2 kg bags (read: my children)." Other parents expressed thanks that the schools were teaching their children the academic disciplines in the light of Scripture and the Reformed confession.

The responses of the teachers were also interesting. According to the teachers, some parents send their children out of tradition or peer pressure; others want a "safe" school for the children away from the world; yet others do so out of a sense of covenantal responsibility. According to one teacher, not many parents are very concerned about the integration of faith and learning. He says: "Christian schools are about bringing Christ into every aspect of your studies and I think few parents have thought that one through."

According to one teacher, parents today are much more demanding of top-notch educational standards than parents of a generation ago. This is seen as a positive; however, it has a negative side in that along with this demand has come a waning in loyalty for "our own school."

All the teachers who responded to the question about what their task towards the student is answered along the lines of teaching the students skills and knowledge in a Christian context which they will use in their service of God and neighbour.

## My position (Conclusion)

It is only fair that I answer the questions I asked.

I send my children to a (Reformed) Christian school in order for them to receive good academic instruction in all the necessary disciplines by well-trained teachers who are fully committed to the Reformed faith and will strive to teach the students from within the framework of a Biblical (i.e., Reformed) view of God, man, and creation. Further, I send my children to a confessionally circumscribed school because, as a Reformed confessor, I want, if at all possible, the education my children receive and the teachers who have my children from 8:30 a.m. - 3:00 p.m., five days a week, to be firmly founded upon the Confessions I love and to which the church holds.<sup>11</sup>

I do *not* send my children there for them to be led to Christ nor for the school to attempt to evoke a covenantal response from them. That is not the task of the school; that is my task as a parent and the task of the church. God calls parents to take care of every aspect of their children's lives – physical, spiritual, moral, ethical, social, educational. This is the divine calling of parents. Parents need to be reminded of this and, perhaps, called back to this divine mandate. The church also has a divine

calling towards the children. The children are lambs of the flock. The church must care for them and teach them. Parents and church must bring the children, the lambs, from their baptisms to the point where they can make a profession of faith.

The goal of the *school* ought to be to impart to the student knowledge and skills within the framework of a consistently Reformed view of God, man and creation. I want the school to train my children to live in this world able to use their God-given talents to the glory of God and the well-being of the neighbour.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Rousas John Rushdoony, *The Messianic Character of American Education: Studies in the History of the Philosophy of Education* (Nutley, NJ: The Craig Press, 1963).

<sup>2</sup>State superintendent for public education for the state of California from 1863-1868.

<sup>3</sup>Peter Verburg, "The Age of Exile," *Western Report*, March 27, 1995, 30-33.

<sup>4</sup>*The report of the commission on private schools in Ontario*, Bernard J. Shapiro, Commissioner, Ministry of Education, 1985.

<sup>5</sup>See also Deut. 6:6,7; Ps. 78:1-8.

<sup>6</sup>Pieter H. Torenvliet, "The profile of a grade 12 student - revisited," *CRTA Magazine* Vol. 23:3 (March 1993): 6.

<sup>7</sup>Richard Bacon, *Revealed to Babes: Children in the Worship of God* (Audubon, NJ: Old Paths Publications, 1993), 55.

<sup>8</sup>I refer the reader to "Reformed teacher as prophet, priest and king" by Allard Gunnink,

*CRTA Magazine* Vol. 23:1 (Sept., 1992): 10-15.

<sup>9</sup>1. Why do you send your children to a Christian school? 2. What do you think the task/goal/objective of the Christian school ought to be? 3. What do you want the school to do with your child? 4. Please comment on the relationship you have with the teacher(s) of your child(ren).

<sup>10</sup>1. In your view, why do parents send their children to a (Reformed) Christian school? 2. I believe it safe to say that parents today are largely the heirs of the hard work of the previous generation who established and built the schools. Is there any indication that parents today send their children for a reason different than their parents? 3. Please comment on the relationship your school (or you as a teacher) have with the parents of your students. 4. What do you believe the goal of Christian education is (what is your task relative to the student)? 5. If your school has a Mission Statement, what is it?

<sup>11</sup>See J.L. Van Popta, "The need for a confessional basis for our children's education," *Clarion* 44:13, p. 300-04.

<sup>12</sup>Jan Waterink, with the Dutch penchant for single-sentence definitions, has defined the aim of education as follows: "The forming of man into an independent personality serving God according to his Word, able and willing to employ all his God-given talents to the honor of God and for the well-being of his fellow-creatures, in every area of life in which man is placed by God." *Basic Concepts in Christian Pedagogy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954; rpt., St. Catharines, ON: Paideia Press, 1980), p. 41.



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# Personal Relationship Covenantally

By J. VanRietschoten

## Stereotype terms

Words and phrases easily become stereotypes. The terms *personal relationship* and *covenant* do not escape the danger of being used by us as stereotypes. A stereotype phrase or term is a term which fits all and is a catch all. We think that we have said a lot when we speak of "personal relationship with Christ" and of "covenantally." In reality we have left people guessing as to what we mean. Not every one

who uses the terms *personal relationship* and *covenant* means the same by them. The one person may mean by "personal relationship with Christ" a relationship which is established by the action of the person "deciding for Christ." Another person may mean by it a relationship which has been established by God.

The same holds true for the term *covenant*. The one person holds that this is a relationship with God established by both God and the person

him- or herself. The other person holds that the covenantal relationship between God and man is exclusively initiated by God and continues by the grace of God.

## What to do with these terms

We have two options: we can either scrap them or reform them. There are those who favour the phrase *personal relationship* but who object to the word *covenant*. They consider the first to be warm and the latter to be cold.

There are others who favor the word covenant and object to the phrase personal relationship. They consider the word covenant more biblical and the phrase personal relationship too individualistic, even Arminian. This makes it impossible to do away with either of these two terms. The terms will continue to be used in separation.

### **Reform them and combine them**

My proposal is that we reform both expressions. We must rescue them from being stereotypes by reforming both. Mind you, not form them but reform them. Reform them, taking our cues from the Bible. Reform them and combine them: *personal relationship with Christ covenantally*.

When we begin doing that we notice that the two expressions are not far apart from each other. On the contrary, they are relatives of each other. Personal relationship with Christ takes into account that both Christ and the believer are persons. Although both are persons there is a distinction. Christ is Person and the believer is person. They are persons in relationship. Christ the Person is in relation with believer the person, and the person with the Person.

We begin with Christ. We do not begin with ourselves. Christ is God, I am created man. The personal relationship which Christ establishes with me is the personal relationship with God. There is a depth and height and width to this relationship which surpasses our understanding. It is awesome. Christ is the shepherd who found me and led me to God. I did not find Him; He found me. I did not pull His Spirit down from heaven into my life. On the contrary: God sent the Spirit of His Son into my heart (Gal. 4:6). It is by the power of Christ that I come to faith in God. It is Christ who enables me to be in relationship with God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

The first thing that I must do in this relationship is *believe, trust*. I must believe that Christ is the only one who can bring me into a peace relationship with God. The Bible tells me so and I must simply believe. I must honour Christ as the originator of this relationship. I must be thankful to God for it and love Him for it. I must thank and ask Him for His Spirit to live in me so that the relationship remains and remains alive.

Since God has entered into this gracious relationship with me through

Christ, and through Christ's Spirit, I am enabled by Him to be in a responsive relationship with God. I *must* be in the person to Person relationship. I must find in Him my all. I must walk with Him and before Him. I must make known to Him all my needs for body and soul. I must always trust and obey Him. I must be a living Christian. Since God in Christ does not hold back in His relationship to me, the person, I may not hold back on God in my relationship to Him, the Person.

### **Surprise**

Let us now go on to the word covenant to receive a surprise: All that belongs to the relationship from the Person to the person belongs to the word covenant. God establishes His covenant with us, not we with God (Gen. 17:1-2; Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 10:15-18).

God gave Jesus Christ as the Mediator of the covenant (1 Tim. 2:5-6; Heb. 9:15).

In His covenant the Lord God binds Himself to take away sins (Rom. 11:27). Our inheritance comes to us from God who secured it for us by covenant in Christ the Mediator of the covenant (Gal. 3:15-18). The blood of Christ, which alone washes sins away, is the blood of the New Covenant (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25).

Binding Himself to us through Christ, the Mediator of the covenant, we are now bound to live in covenant with God by faith through Christ the Mediator. Having had our sins washed away through the blood of the New Covenant we must trust and obey. The blood of the covenant cleanses us, makes us holy to God, sets us apart for Him. If we "spurn the Son of God, and profane the blood of the covenant by which we are sanctified and outrage the Spirit of grace we are judged by" the "vengeance" of God (Heb. 10:26-31).

A covenant always consists of more than one person. The Covenant of God is the covenant between the Person and the person. The covenant of God is a living relationship from the Person to the person. The covenant of God may never be reduced to a stereotype. That God enters into a living covenant relationship with His believers through Jesus Christ is a miracle that should constantly amaze us and evoke in us love, trust and obedience to the God of our life.

### **Personal relationship covenantally prevents individualism**

We often speak of the worldly culture of our day as the "me" culture. Everything centers around "me." As long as I am happy and filled things are all right. Never mind the needs of the neighbour. The Christian who cares for the neighbour generously can nevertheless be prone to have a "me" attitude. I, Christian and Christ. "I-Christians" have a personal relationship with Christ. Never mind about other believers. Or: the personal relationship which I have with Christ is better, richer, than the relationship which others have with Christ. All other believers actually should have the same relationship with Christ as I have. Misuse of the phrase "relationship with Christ" leads to rating, classifying believers in layers of more or less close relationship with Christ.

### **We must remedy this wrong**

Joining the phrase "personal relationship with Christ" with the word "covenantally" remedies this wrong. A personal relationship can be taken individualistically. It is impossible to live in God's covenant individualistically. In God's covenant I am never without the fellow believer. In God's covenant I am commanded to "love the Lord our God" and "the neighbour as myself."

In God's covenant I, together with my fellow believers, enjoy the personal relationship which God has with us through the Mediator Jesus Christ. Together we have been made into members of His body. His Spirit dwells in the church as in His temple and in every believer as His temple (Eph. 2:19-22).

### **We have not scrapped anything but reformed both**

What a joy to live with this God through Christ and His Spirit in this personal, covenantal relationship. By His grace we now look to Him by day and by night with faith, love and obedience. In our weakness He is our strength. When we stumble and cry in repentance to Him He forgives and raises us up; and we raise one another up (Gal. 6:1-5). And we are never alone for He has come to make His home with us (Jn. 14:21-24).

*Rev. VanRietschoten is minister-emeritus of the church at Chatham, ON. Together with his wife, he lives in Garman, MB.*



## News from our Dutch sister churches

### SYNOD BERKEL EN RODENRIJS

A synod of our Dutch sister churches started in the second week of April in Berkel en Rodenrijs, a community just to the north of Rotterdam.

#### Theological University in Kampen

Synod decided to appoint, as of September 1, Drs. W. H. Rose to teach old Semitic philology and the history of the culture of the ancient Near East and Drs. I. D. Haarsma to teach the history of philosophy (part time). Drs. Rose is a graduate of Kampen and Leiden and is currently working on a dissertation in Oxford. Drs. Haarsma teaches at several Reformed schools, including the Greijdanus College. Synod remembered with gratitude the work of Drs. M. A. Blok-Systemsma and Dr. K. Veling who were succeeded by Rose and Haarsma respectively.

#### The “blessing elder”

The previous synod had decided that elders could pronounce the benediction in reading services. This decision had met with a mixed response in the churches. Some churches agreed with the decision and let the elders act accordingly; however other churches have appealed it. Indeed the synod meeting in Berkel en Rodenrijs has received many (at least 61) letters from regional synods, classes, churches and individuals, most of which ask the synod either to withdraw the decision of the previous synod, or to revise it, or to appoint a study committee to take a second look at the whole matter. After quite some debate, this divisive issue was resolved with the decision to appoint a committee to evaluate and test (“toetsen”) the decision of the previous synod.

### Preaching from the confessions

Synod turned down an overture from the Regional Synod of Gelderland to allow the churches to have sermons based on the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dordt for a trial period. In the discussion it was noted that the Church Order already allows for this and to grant such a request would be superfluous. After all Art. 66 (our article 52) states that the Catechism is to be used in the preaching “as a rule.” Exceptions are therefore possible and one should not read the Church Order too rigidly. It was clear from the discussion that there was considerable sympathy at synod for the idea of allowing the minister to preach from the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dordt. It can be very edifying and comforting for the congregation.

### A federation of Church federations?

In a supplementary report to Synod, Deputies for Ecumenicity stated that if the current round of talks with the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken (sister churches of the Free Reformed Churches in Canada) goes well and can be brought to a good conclusion, there is every reason for the churches to put forward the possibility of an ecclesiastical federation (to be further defined) with these churches and to ask these churches for their reaction. The previous synod of Ommen had asked the deputies to consider the possibility of a national ecclesiastical federation of different churches.

Deputies wanted to avoid a “hotel church,” an umbrella organization without any unity of the faith. Churches within such an inter-ecclesiastical federation must be able to recognize each other as true churches and therefore also open their pulpits and Lord’s Supper Tables to each other. Such a federation

should be based on the Scriptures and the Reformed Confessions and Church Order, but it might also be good to have a consensus agreement on topics such as the appropriation of salvation (“de toeëigening van het heil”). One must however be careful not to organize everything so well that there is no longer any room left for moving forward in faith in ecumenical endeavours.

The goal of such a federation must be to eventually come to a unity of churches which stand on the same foundation. Opening the pulpits and Lord’s Supper Tables to each other must be conducive to that end. Other forms of getting to know each other better could be to send observers to each others’ major assemblies, office bearers conferences and similar meetings.

With respect to other churches which could be included in such a federation (besides the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken), Deputies see no possibility with the Nederlands Gereformeerde (what used to be the so-called “Buiten verband”), because they have a new and looser subscription formula. Deputies however do see some possibilities with the congregations in the Nederlands Hervormde Kerk who do not want to go along with the ecumenical plan called “Together on the Way” (“Samen Op Weg”). This option should be explored together with the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken.

We look forward to reading about the discussion at Synod on this point and an eventual decision. Perhaps such a federation could serve as a model for ecumenical endeavour among the Free Reformed Churches in North America, the churches that have left the Christian Reformed Church, and the Canadian Reformed Churches.

source: *Nederlands Dagblad*





## Press Release of Classis Alberta/Manitoba, April 23,24 held in Immanuel Canadian Reformed Church building at Edmonton, AB

1. On behalf of the Providence church at Edmonton, the Rev. R. Aasman calls the meeting to order. He requests the singing of Ps. 16:1,3,5 and reads 1 Peter 1:1-12. In elaborating on the passage which speaks of our unfading inheritance through the death and resurrection of Christ, he speaks of how our brother and colleague, the Rev. J.D. Wielenga has departed to receive his inheritance with the Lord. Rev. Aasman then leads in prayer.

Rev. Aasman makes mention of the fact that the churches at Calgary and Coaldale are vacant. The church at Calgary called the Rev. P. Aasman but he declined this call. Of late, the Rev. P. DeBoer received a call from the church at Bedforddale, Australia. Condolences are extended to the Rev. DeBoer with the recent passing away of his father.
2. The Providence delegates examine the credentials and find them to be in good order. All the brothers present are primi delegates with the exception br. F. DeWitt of Carman who is the secundi delegate. There are eight instructions.
3. Classis is declared constituted with these officers: chairman, Rev. G. van Popta; vice-chairman, Rev. E. Tiggelaar; clerk, Rev. K. Jonker. The chairman thanks the Providence Church for preparing this meeting and the Immanuel Church for the use of their facilities.
4. The agenda is adopted after some additions.
5. – Classis Treasurer Report. A statement of income and expenses for the year 1995 ending Feb. 29/96 is presented. This report is received with gratitude.
  - The Church for the Inspection of the Books of the Treasurer reports that the books were found to be “thoroughly in good order.” This report is received with thankfulness.
  - The Church for the inspection of the Classical archives reports that the archives were properly filed and in good order. This report is received with thankfulness.
  - The Committee for Aid to Needy Churches submits its report. They report that the church at Denver requests that they might receive financial support at the beginning of each quarter instead of at the end. The Committee will be requested to implement this in cooperation with the churches.
  - The Ad Hoc Committee re: Classis expenses recommends –
    - a. that Classis advise the treasurer to pay full wages lost as claimed by (non ministerial) delegates to Regional Synod to a maximum of \$175.00 per day. Classis adopts this proposal.
    - b. that all travel expenses for Classical preaching assignments to vacant churches will be paid by Classis. Classis decides not to adopt this recommendation but to leave it as it currently stands.
6. The churches at Barrhead, Coaldale and Taber inform classis of their decisions not to receive as settled and binding the decision of Synod Abbotsford, Art. 115 and as such not to recognize at this time, the church at Denver as sister church in our federation. These churches will approach Synod 1998. A motion was made with regard to this: that classis takes note of the stated stand of the church at Barrhead, Coaldale and Taber in the matter of Art. 115, Synod Abbotsford 1995. This motion is carried.

The church at Barrhead requests information as to the assessed amount for the support of the church at Denver so that Barrhead can support Denver directly. This request is granted.

The church at Coaldale requests pulpit supply for one Sunday a month with consideration of their position regarding non recognition of the church at Denver.
7. The Rev. Thomas Reid of the Free Church of Scotland congregation in Edmonton is introduced as guest to our meeting. Words of welcome are extended to this brother.
8. The church at Coaldale appeals to Classis: to rescind Art. 21 of the Acts of Classis AB/MB, Oct. 17, 18 - Dec. 18, 19, 1995. This is declared inadmissible according to Art. 33 C.O.

The church at Taber appeals to Classis: to rescind Art. 21 of the Acts of Classis AB/MB, Oct. 17, 18 - Dec. 18, 19, 1995. This is declared inadmissible according to Art. 33 C.O.
9. A letter is received from the POD of the OPC in which they respond to questions presented to them by the previous Classis meeting. Quote:
  1. (EJT) “The presbytery has considered your communication and the three recommendations with which your communication concludes; namely
    - (1) To pass on this report to the Presbytery of the Dakotas and request clarification on the points which were not addressed in their first response.
    - (2) To extend to presbytery our sincere apology for not being more careful in engaging in official consultations which presbytery requested.
    - (3) To pass on this report and the communication of the POD of October 9, 1995 to the Committee for Contact with the OPC.
  2. Brethren, the apology expressed in point (2) is welcome, deeply appreciated and accepted with gratitude to the Lord.
  3. With respect to (1), presbytery erased Mr. Pollock’s name from the roll according to BD. V.2.b.1 because his conscience would not allow him to stay and he desired to be erased (see Pollock’s letter dated 28 October 1991). BD.V.2.b.1 is a form of discipline for people who do not leave the church decently and in good order.

It is the conviction of the POD that further exchanges of

what amounts to sharply different interpretations of the OPC Book of Discipline will accomplish nothing. We therefore decline to make any further effort to persuade Classis Alberta/Manitoba that our understanding of our own system of Government is correct. Had there been official consultations such as we requested before Mr. Pollock was received into your federation, we might have been able to agree.

4. In the body of your communication (p. 9, last paragraph) you say: "The fact that Presbytery calls this sin of which Classis needs to repent is inordinate." We are willing to rescind that terminology because we decide to accept your apology, rather than continue this dispute.
5. It is our hope that this will terminate the matter from your side, as it does from ours. May the Lord enable us both to walk more carefully in the future. Your communication to the POD and our response to it and the future relationship of the OPC to the Canadian Reformed Churches will be discussed by the General Assembly's Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations."

Classis decides to receive the letter of the POD of the OPC dated April 12, 1996 and Classis AB/MB

1. notes with gratitude that the POD of the OPC has accepted our apology;

2. Upon the request of the POD of the OPC, Classis AB/MB is willing to terminate "the matter" with the understanding that the POD of the OPC recognizes that we have received the Church at Denver and Rev. M.A. Pollock as a faithful church and minister.
3. Does Classis AB/MB correctly understand that by the POD's acceptance of our apology the POD no longer charges Rev. M.A. Pollock with breaking vows? If that charge still remains, then Classis would still appreciate if the POD of the OPC would be willing to convince us of our alleged error(s) by answering the questions of our previous letters.
4. Send a copy of this decision to the POD of the OPC and to the committee of Contact with the OPC.
10. An appeal from a brother is dealt with in closed session.
11. An appeal from a brother and sister is declared inadmissible according to Art. 30 C.O.
12. Question period as per Art. 44 C.O. is made use of.
12. Appointments
  - Convening church for the next meeting of Classis is the church at Neerlandia.
  - Suggested executive for the next meeting: Rev. P. DeBoer, chairman; Rev. G. Van Popta, vice-chairman; Rev. E. Tiggelaar, clerk.
  - date and place of next meeting: June 11, 1996 with October 15, 1996 as alternate date. The

meeting will be in the Providence Church of Edmonton.

- In connection with the passing away of Rev. J.D. Wielenga the following appointments are made: Rev. R. Aasman is appointed as a church visitor with Rev. Snip as alternate. Rev. W. Slomp is appointed to make up the roster for pulpit supply.
  - Examinations: Rev. K. Jonker is added to the Committee for examination and sermon proposal. Rev. W. Slomp is appointed to examine doctrine and creeds. Rev. M. Pollock is appointed to examine diaconological subjects.
  - Observe OPC: Rev. W. Slomp, alternate: Rev. G. Snip
  - Committee for Needy Churches: Br. P. Groenwold from Neerlandia is appointed to replace Br. J. Harthoorn. Br. Harthoorn will be thanked for his services.
14. Personal question period is made use of.
  15. The chairman concludes that brotherly censure as per Art. 33 C.O. is not necessary.
  16. The Acts are read and adopted. The Press Release is read and approved.
  17. The chairman thanks the sisters for the meals. He extends best wishes to the delegates and their churches; requests the singing of Ps. 121:1,4 and leads in prayer. Classis is declared closed.

For Classis Alberta/Manitoba  
of April 23,24, 1996:  
Rev. E.J. Tiggelaar,  
vice-chairman, e.t. 

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

### Dear Editor:

It was with much interest that I attended the series of speeches regarding "The Challenge of Being Reformed Today" in November of 1995. The Burlington Study Centre organizers certainly need to be commended on the choice of this timely topic. The Rev. G.H. Visscher gave an introduction on "The Attraction of Evangelism" while Dr. J.

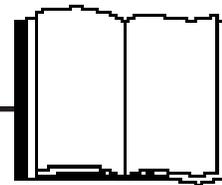
Faber addressed "the Privilege of Being Reformed."

Personally, I felt enriched to hear about the richness of the Reformed faith, which is under much attack today. Our forefathers endured many struggles and were well aware of the attacks upon the Reformed church (Arminianism, infant baptism, experiencing in oneself, etc.). Out of these struggles the confessions were born, which serve as an anchor to

the Scripture and are a source of consolation. May they keep us in the unity of the faith and in obedience, in this individualistic and confusing age.

The closing remarks of Prof. J. Geertsema were well chosen, and will be taken to heart. These were words of conviction.

Sincerely,  
A. Vanderwoude   
Waterdown, ON



# This gospel preached in all the world

By W.H. Chase

A recent contribution to *Clarion*, while recognizing the fact that Christ, in Matthew 24, instructs His disciples about Jerusalem's imminent destruction, nevertheless finds a number of passages which necessitate understanding an allusion to a second "end times" period of fulfilment. One of these rather frequently cited passages is Matthew 24.14. Here our Lord announces, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come." Now it is perfectly clear that missionaries of the Canadian Reformed churches labor in foreign mission fields in part, because there are people on this globe who have not yet heard the good message of God's grace in the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus it is argued, this passage in Matthew cannot possibly be a reference to the days prior to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 A.D. But such a conclusion should not too quickly be made. It is unwise to casually isolate this single passage from the several Scriptural passages addressing this particular "sign," and the broader context of the "end time." For Scripture is perfectly clear. This gospel of the kingdom has been proclaimed to the entire world already.

The beginning of this "sign is of course rooted in the great apostolic commission (Mt. 28.18f). The book of Acts records that very work of the apostles (in opposition to the false church, national Israel), who with great power and authority proclaimed the gospel first to Jews in Jerusalem. The focus of Acts 2 - 4 is in particular that of the apostolic ministry among Jews from all nations of the world. Great emphasis, indeed, is placed upon the national and linguistic diversity of those who heard the preaching of the apostles. But it is especially the Apostle Paul, who in acknowledging the opposition of Jewish nationalism, is directed by the Holy Spirit to proclaim this gospel throughout the far-flung Mediterranean world, always first to the Jew, and then to the Gentiles.

It is the Apostle Paul himself, who, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, ascribes to this very apostolic ministry of preaching a unique cosmic-character in several of his letters to the early churches. We note in the first place, Colossians 1. 5 and 6. Here the Apostle in no uncertain terms speaks of the "word of the truth of the gospel, which has come to you, as it has also in all the world. . . ." Again, in the same chapter, Paul speaks of ". . . the gospel which you heard which was preached to every creature under heaven." (Col. 1.23) It must be clear that the Apostle refers in these passages to the scope of the first century apostolic ministry.

Furthermore, as the disciples have inquired as to the "signs" of Christ's coming, Christ dismisses as true signs such events as wars and rumors of wars, but places great significance upon the sign of the apostolic ministry. As such, Paul's characterization of the apostolic ministry, recorded in Romans 10.18, is even more to the point. For here, he writes, speaking with explicit reference to Israel, "But I say, have they (Israel) not heard? Yes, indeed: 'Their sound has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.'" Indeed, Paul writes in Romans 1.8, "First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. Now it is certain that no single Greek word has been translated "world" in the above texts. Several different words are employed, all with varying nuances of meaning. Paul for example, uses "kosmos" in Romans 1.8, the same word used in Matthew 24.14. Still Paul uses other words to convey the idea of earth, or nations. Nevertheless, it is certain that Christ in Matthew 24 does not have in mind here the third planet from the sun, the globe, the "world" which Twentieth century New Agers would have us save. No, of course, he has in mind the world of Pax Romana, and the world of the Jewish dispersion. For it

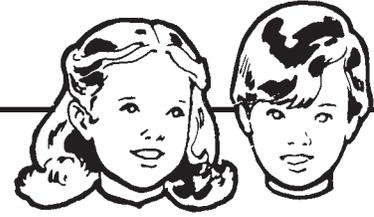
was precisely the far ends of this world, the covenant world of the Jewish dispersion with her scattered Jewish communities which were called to the annual celebration of Passover and Pentecost in Jerusalem. Christ instructed His disciples to proclaim the gospel first in Jerusalem, then in Judea and Samaria, and then to the ends of the earth. It is this sign which is the genuine sign, the sign of the end age in which Israel as a nation remains the covenant people of God. In light of the above Pauline passages, it seems tenuous at best to insist that Matthew 24.14 alludes to the world in any sense other than that way in which it was commonly understood in other parts of the New Testament.

There will then be those who will object that such an historic interpretation of Matthew 24 seems to strip this chapter of any relevant meaning for themselves. If Matthew 24 is about the destruction of Jerusalem (remember, verse 34, not verse 14, is the key to dating the events of this passage), then what can it mean for us? But this question is surely equivalent to that of asking how the events in Exodus are relevant to us today. Obviously, we did not personally go through the plagues upon Egypt, pass through the sea, and come to the mount of God. Is the book of Exodus then any less Scriptural, or any less relevant to us. Surely, a series of redemptive historical sermons would rectify such a misconception. Should this be any less so when we handle the New Testament? Contemporary exegesis in the New Testament is sorely in need of a redemptive-historical methodology.

The views expressed in Reader's Forum are not necessarily those of the editorial committee or the publisher. Submissions should not exceed 900 words. Those published may be edited for style or length.

# OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



## Dear Busy Beavers,

Here's a fun summer activity you might like to try.

### Glass Gardens

Do you think it matters which way you plant a seed? You want the stem to grow up, and the roots to go down. What will happen if you plant the seed upside down?

You will need:

- 10 fresh bean seeds (any kind)
- two wide mouthed jars or glasses
- paper towels

1. Soak the beans in water overnight (rainwater if you can get it)
2. Cut a piece of paper towel to fit snugly around the inside of each jar.
3. Stuff the middle of the jars with crumpled paper towels, then fill them with water, and let the paper soak it up. Pour off remaining water.
4. Push five of the soaked seeds between the jar and the paper towel, spacing them out evenly and keeping them near the top of the jars. Place the seeds in different positions, horizontal, vertical and diagonal.
5. Put the jars where you can watch them for several days, but keep them out of direct sunlight. The paper towels must be kept moist. Over the next few days, you can watch the seeds germinate.  
Roots will grow from one end of the seed, and a stem from the other, but no matter which way you put the seeds, the roots will turn down and the stems up. In less than a week, the seeds will have little green leaves.
6. After the seedlings have grown an inch above the top of the jars, lay one of the jars on its side. In a few days you'll see the stems growing upward again, and the roots have bent to keep growing down!

### How does it work?

There are growth hormones in plants that feel gravity, and these make the roots grow down and the stems up. This is called **geotropism** and that's why you don't have to worry about planting seeds right side up. God, the Creator, has made little seeds able to grow into big (and small) plants.



## Quiz Time!

It's almost Father's Day. Here are some sons and fathers from the Bible. Can you match them?

### SONS

1. Hosea
2. Benjamin
3. Seth
4. John
5. Josiah
6. David
7. Isaac
8. James
9. Solomon
10. Jonah
11. Isaiah
12. Jeremiah

### FATHERS

- a. Amon
- b. Beerli
- c. David
- d. Zebedee
- e. Amoz
- f. Hilkiah
- g. Jacob
- h. Abraham
- i. Adam
- j. Jesse
- k. Amittai
- l. Zechariah

(answers at the end)

### KINGS

Can you match the names of the kings to the lands they ruled?

1. Ahab
2. Sennacherib
3. Hiram
4. Nebuchadnezzar
5. Hezekiah
6. Darius
7. Agrippa
8. Pharaoh
9. Balak
10. Og
11. Ben-hadad
12. Jabin

- a. Syria
- b. Persia
- c. Judea
- d. Canaan
- e. Moab
- f. Israel
- g. Tyre
- h. Assyria
- i. Babylon
- j. Judah
- k. Egypt
- l. Bashan

(answers at the end)

### ANIMAL WORD SEARCH

by Busy Beaver *Jonathan Kingma*

turkey	<input type="checkbox"/>	T A I H E C W X B R S
pheasant	<input type="checkbox"/>	C U J D K A O L L T F
chicken	<input type="checkbox"/>	A B R G P N O U U Q C
penguin	<input type="checkbox"/>	R C W K H A D P E P H
robin	<input type="checkbox"/>	D X R V E R P Q J E I
bluejay	<input type="checkbox"/>	I C O F A Y E G A N C
cardinal	<input type="checkbox"/>	N B B Y S L C P Y G K
canary	<input type="checkbox"/>	A D I E A K K N S U E
woodpecker	<input type="checkbox"/>	L A N I N M E O T I N
		F H G J T N R M U N Z

### WHEEL CODE

by Busy Beaver *Felicia Oosterhoff*

Find each number on the wheel.

Write the correct letter on the line.

11 14 15 23    20 8 1 20    20 8 5    12 15 18 4

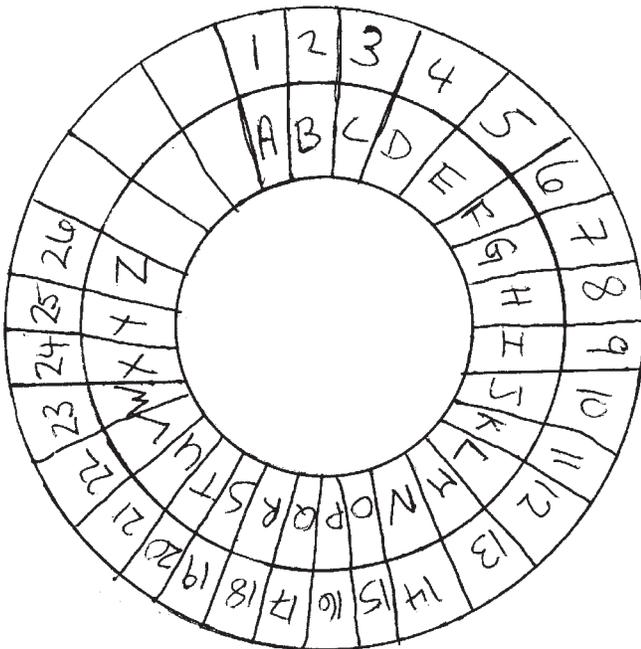
9 19    7 15 15 4    9 20    9 19    8 5    23 8 15

13 1 4 5    21 19    1 14 4    23 5    1 18 5

8 9 19    23 5    1 18 5    8 9 19

16 5 15 16 12 5    20 8 5    19 8 5 5 16    15 6

8 9 19    16 1 19 20 21 18 5



### GRID CODE

by Busy Beaver *Natasha Oosterhoff*

Use the grid to find the coded text.

	1	2	3	4	5
a	A	B	C	D	S
b	E	G	H	I	W
c	L	M	N	O	F
d	R	T	U	Y	Z

d2 b1 a1 a3 b3    d3 a5    d2 c4    c3 d3 c2 a2 b1 d1

c4 d3 d1    a4 a1 d4 a5    d2 b3 a1 d2    b5 b1

c2 a1 d4    b2 a1 b4 c3    a1    b3 b1 a1 d1 d2

c4 c5    b5 b4 a5 a4 c4 c2



### FROM THE MAILBOX

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Kaitlin Hordyk*. What kinds of things do you learn to do in skipping lessons? I hope you have a fun summer vacation. Bye, Kaitlin.

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Jodi Hordyk*. I hope you enjoy being a member. How is the new baby in your family doing? Bye, Jodi.

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Stephanie Post*. Do you like doing Bible puzzles and different activities? Then you'll enjoy being a member. Bye, Stephanie.

Hi, *Richard Oosterhoff*. Glad to hear that you liked your prize. What do you do with your finished oil paintings? Have a good summer, Richard. Bye.

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Natasha Oosterhoff*. Thanks for the pretty letter, too. Have fun doing the puzzles! Bye, Natasha.

Hi, *Felicia Oosterhoff*. How's your dollhouse coming along? I did wonder what you make kitchen utensils out of! And about your book – could you send a chapter of it for me to read and maybe put in this column? Hope to hear from you soon! Bye, Felicia.

Answers

*Fathers in the Bible*

1.b. 2.g. 3.i. 4.l. 5.a. 6.j. 7.h. 8.d. 9.c. 10.k. 11.e. 12.f.

*Kings*

1.f. 2.h. 3.g. 4.i. 5.j. 6.b. 7.c. 8.k. 9.e. 10.l. 11.a. 12.d.

That's all for this time,

Love to you all,  
Aunt Betty