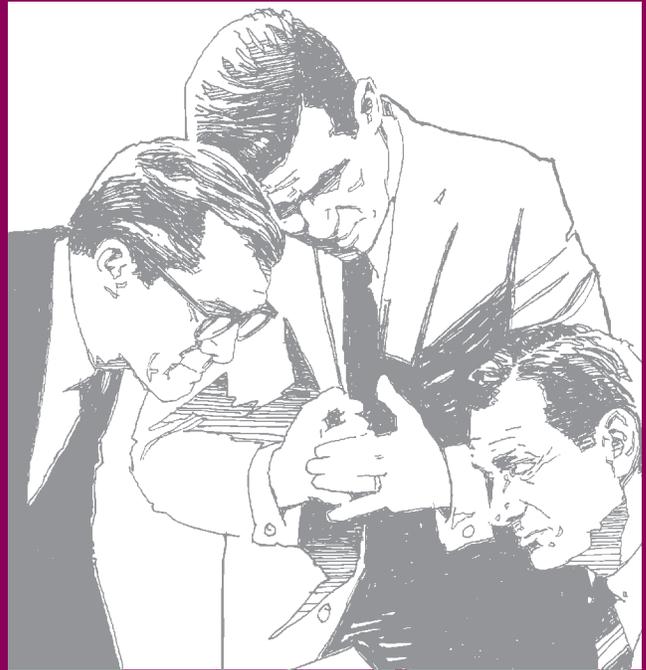


Clarion

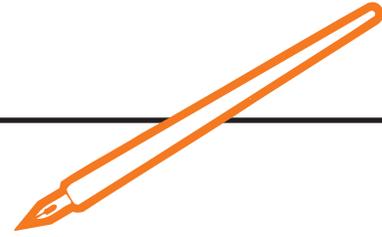
THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE
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*The Task of
Officebearers as Leaders*

Numbers

10:1-10



In our own right line

The title above is not original, but is a translation of the title of an article on church government published in 1931 by Dr. J. Van Lonkhuyzen, who was the minister of the First CRC in Chicago in the early 1900s. In 1928 he returned to Holland, and became the minister at Zierikzee in Zeeland.¹ Yet he continued to influence both the American and Dutch Reformed churches, and his name figured prominently in the ecclesiastical disputes of the twenties and thirties.²

Some readers may recall that I mentioned the name of Dr. Van Lonkhuyzen at the meeting of the synod of the United Reformed Churches last fall. My aim was to draw the attention of the brothers to one of their own leaders who is of primary significance not only for the United Reformed Churches, but for all Reformed churches that wish to retain sound Biblical approaches to church government. Van Lonkhuyzen was an astute defender of the church polity of the *Doleantie*, a polity which in his view had old roots, and he championed this polity during the turbulent times of the rising tide of hierarchy in both the CRC in the United States and the *Gereformeerde Kerken* in Holland.

One might say that Van Lonkhuyzen is one of the few proponents of the *Doleantie* polity in the first part of the twentieth century in America and Holland. Tirelessly he reminded the churches first in America and later in Holland of the first principles on which their church order was based: the autonomy of the local churches, and the free and voluntary cooperation of the churches in one federation. Yet for him this was not specifically the polity of one particular reformation, the reformation of 1886. In defending the right and freedom of the local church, he went back to the principles of the Secession in 1834, and from there to the roots of Dutch Reformed church polity as it was set forth in the early synods of these churches. It was here, in the earliest days of the reformation in Holland, during a period of persecution and struggle, that the brotherhood saw the Scriptural obligation and requirement to provide help and assistance to each other as churches in one federation. That help was also needed!

The setting

Van Lonkhuyzen began to write on issues of church polity after the Hoeksema affair rocked the Christian Reformed Church in 1924. While Hoeksema himself was not deposed, Rev. H. Danhoff was suspended by Classis Grand Rapids West with his entire consistory, (Kalamazoo) as was Rev. G.M. Ophoff and the consistory of Hope (Riverbend). This immediately raised the issue of whether a classis had the right to depose a consistory. Van Lonkhuyzen rightly considered this a hierarchical act, one which was outside the bounds of Reformed Church polity. A classis can *assist* in the suspension and deposition of an office bearer, and especially must do so

in the case of a minister, but it may not execute the suspension or deposition itself. That is the task of the consistory.

Two years later, in Holland, the synod of Assen suspended Rev. Geelkerken and the consistory in Amsterdam because of statements he made in a sermon with regard to the speaking of the serpent in paradise. In a sermon on Lord's Day 3, Geelkerken had stated that it was historically questionable whether the serpent actually spoke in the garden, or whether there was actually a tree of life, or a tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Although the synod rightly defended the historicity of Genesis 1-3, the methods employed in this defence in the area of church polity were not in accordance with Reformed church government. In a series of articles in the *Reformed Theological Journal*,³ Van Lonkhuyzen began a long debate with Prof. H.H. Kuyper, the promoter and defender of this new polity at the Free University, as well as other spokesmen of these new views, condemning the turn to hierarchy as one that put the churches on a track which deviated from the time-honoured, established course.⁴

In the article mentioned above,⁵ Van Lonkhuyzen defended the independence of the local church, opposing the yoke of hierarchy. Yet he did not fall into the other extreme of independentism. He insisted that when the broader assemblies become involved in a matter of discipline in the orderly ecclesiastical way, through approbation and advice, and when the decisions thus taken are accepted as settled and binding this should not be seen as a hierarchical interference in the matters of the local church. For the local church solicits and engages the help of the other churches in the region in resolving its matters of discipline in a fair and equitable matter. It is only in cases when the input of the broader assemblies is imposed without being solicited that one can speak of an unwanted intrusion in the affairs of the local church.

The role of the federation is a modest one in the life of the local church. At the same time, it is an essential role, one which serves to protect the local church from the dangers of dominocracy and the local abuse of power by an office bearer or a number of office bearers. The federation comes with authority, it exercises authority (Dutch: *gezag*) over the churches. Yet the congregations must carry out this authority.

When a classis becomes involved in a case of discipline in accordance with the provisions of the church order, this is not to be seen as a hierarchical interference in the affairs of the local church. On the contrary, in assenting to the provisions of the church order, the local church has agreed to solicit the help of the classis. A local church can make a mistake. Therefore in essential matters, and especially in matters of discipline, it solicits the help of the neighbouring church, and if necessary the classis. It willingly grants authority to the neighbouring church (stage 1) or churches (of the classical region) in order to expedite the case as fairly

and judiciously as possible. This is all part of the free and voluntary decision or agreement made by the churches together to voluntarily submit themselves to decisions of major assemblies properly taken, for their own good, and for the preservation of the unity of faith.

The source of the problem

Why did Van Lonkhuyzen in this situation call this a holding to “our own proper line” in church government? In analyzing the background of the new church polity he noticed that many of its proponents found their arguments in early *Presbyterian* polity. For example, Dr. M. Bouwman, the proponent of the new church polity earmarked by H.H. Kuyper to defend it for the next generation of *Gereformeerden*, found support in English Presbyterianism to justify the right of a classis to depose a whole consistory. Bouwman attempted to demonstrate that Gijsbertus Voetius, the leading exponent of Reformed church polity in the 16th Century, was largely influenced by the Presbyterians in his approach, and that this Presbyterian influence was a healthy antidote to his original congregationalist and independency leanings.⁶ Van Lonkhuyzen carefully shows that this is a misreading of Voetius, and a misunderstanding of the principles of church government as established by the earliest Dutch synods.

What were the elements of Presbyterianism that Van Lonkhuyzen had difficulty with? Several elements of this polity were of concern to him, but chiefly he mentions the following: the subject of ecclesiastical power, the view of the assemblies, the view of the church, and the relationship of various local parishes or wards to the presbytery. In this context, we can only briefly summarize his objections on these points.

Van Lonkhuyzen disputed the tendency of Presbyterianism to limit church power and its exercise to the office bearers. He questioned Presbyterianism’s tendency to posit a ranking of authority in the relation between the assemblies, that is, that lower (or inferior) assemblies were subject to the authority and power of higher (or superior) assemblies. Also, Presbyterianism sees the local churches as parts of the “general visible church.” In the local situation, various wards or sections of a church were seen as independent local churches placed under the authority of a presbytery, which was then seen as a permanent governing body of a “super”-church composed of several local churches in any given area.

Now it was not Van Lonkhuyzen’s concern to criticize the Presbyterian system as such. He did note – correctly in my view – that the arguments used to defend the power of the (classical) presbytery above that of the session were weak and difficult to defend on Scriptural grounds. He correctly noted that the system has an inherent bias to hierarchy, even though its stated intention is to avoid these leanings. However, his central concern was not a critique of Presbyterianism, but with the direction of his own churches! He deplored the way in which appeals were made to Presbyterianism in order to defend abuses in Reformed church polity. He was alarmed at how easily elements from Presbyterianism which did not accord with the first principles of the Reformed system of government were held to be superior to the Reformed approach.

His defence of the Reformed system took him back to the fundamental principles of church polity as established at the earliest synods of the Reformed churches in the 16th century. Here he said: We must stay in our own right line. The hallmark of the Reformed church polity is the equality of the offices and the equality of the churches in one federation. No office bearer can

lord it over another office bearer, and no church over other churches. We are not to think of the church as a general visible body, of which the local churches are branches or manifestations; rather, we are to think of the church as a bond of local churches bound together in heart and will by the same confession, the same conduct and life of faith.

History’s lesson

In this short overview it is not possible to treat extensively all the arguments Van Lonkhuyzen introduces. Yet he brings forward a point of view that we do well to consider. Among some of the churches that have broken away from the CRC one notices a more open attitude to other traditions, specifically the Presbyterian tradition, but at the same time a growing lack of confidence in the Reformed tradition itself. People who have recently come from hierarchical abuses easily begin to see the Reformed system of classes and synods as burdened with inherent tendency to hierarchy, which a system like the Presbyterian one is then said not to have. But this is caricature. In fact, there are biases in the Presbyterian system which have a greater tendency to hierarchy than in the Reformed system. Both the



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“superior” court system as well as the relation of the presbytery to the session demonstrate this. And a closer look at the relation between the ministers and elders in this system only confirms Van Lonkhuyzen’s fears.

To be sure, classical Presbyterianism has changed in the course of the centuries, and it can hardly be judged strictly by its original papers.⁷ Yet through its long evolution around the world its essential contours have remained intact. And although these contours can be understood in the context of their own place and time, it becomes a different matter when they are regarded as superior to the Reformed principles, or when elements of the Presbyterian approach are contemplated as suitable to be grafted into a Reformed plant. Attempting such a graft will not avoid hierarchy, but may even have the undesired result of creating a greater potential of hierarchy than before!

Our role

We live in a time in which the discussions concerning church unity and confessional convergence with other traditions is growing. Among some independent and former independent churches, there is greater openness to the Presbyterian traditions. Some splinter churches have federated with Presbyterian bodies. In the early nineties, confessional conferences were held with like-minded churches from both Reformed and Presbyterian backgrounds, dealing with the possibility of a common confession.

The Canadian Reformed Churches share this openness to the Presbyterian tradition. We have fraternal relations with the Free Church of Scotland and with the Korean Presbyterian Church. We have opened a door to further contact and fellowship in the context of the work in the ICRC. And we have a continued relationship of contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Our contact with the OPC will likely be intensified, since they have recently taken steps to break their tie with the Christian Reformed Church. There is thus every reason for us to continue to pursue greater understanding and cooperation with faithful Presbyterian churches.

Yet we do well to carry on these contacts fully cognizant of the heritage we have received. It will not do to make the issues of church polity matters of lesser importance, or of overall insignificance. The equality among the ministers is a confessional matter, and the equality of all the offices is implicit in the confession of Art. 30, BC. Implicit in this confession is the equality of all the churches in one federation. We confess that the ministers together with the elders and deacons form the council of the church, and this

body, or more specifically the consistory, is the only permanent governing body recognized in the Reformed system.

The consistent line of our synods has been that Presbyterian churches cannot be rejected out of hand because of their system of church government. But Van Lonkhuyzen was correct in pointing out that with regard to polity Reformed and Presbyterian are *two different things*. And the recognition that God can lead His church in various traditions should not lead us to an equal or causal and indifferent substitution of one approach with another.

Van Lonkhuyzen’s motto is well worth noting: We should continue to follow *our own right line*. This does not imply the Reformed system to be perfect. But it does suggest that, taking stock of the Biblical data, it has developed a system in which the root elements of Christian freedom and voluntary submission are honoured and practised. Therefore, churches of Reformed background should hold to their own system, and rediscover their own roots. For it is only with a thorough understanding of one’s own heritage that one can develop proper forms of cooperation and fellowship with churches from other backgrounds and traditions.

Notes:

¹Van Lonkhuyzen spent only ten years in Chicago, but had a marked influence in the development of the CRC in this period. Henry Stob recalls his unique Dutch brogue, and his characteristic way of addressing the congregation as “brethren and cistern,” cf. H. Stob, *Summoning Up Remembrance* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 53.

²H. Hoeksema says that there were two parties in the CRC with regard to church polity during this period, one formed around Van Lonkhuyzen which defended the autonomy of the local church, and the other around Prof. W. Heyns, which defended the right of unilateral intervention on the part of classis in the disciplinary affairs of the local church, see H. Hoeksema, *The Protestant Reformed Churches in America, Their Origin, Early History and Doctrine*, (Grand Rapids, 1936) 134. Hoeksema himself stood in the camp of Van Lonkhuyzen, *Ibid*, 42, 122. It is questionable whether the PRC still maintain this standpoint.

³The Dutch journal *Gereformeerde Theologisch Tijdschrift*.

⁴Our brother J. De Haas (Langley) says (my translation): “His return to the Netherlands was undoubtedly connected with the church-political decisions of the synod of Assen 1926, against which he had serious objections,” cf. Joh. De Haas, *Gedenkt uw voorgangers*, Vol. 3, (Haarlem: Vijlbrief, 1984) 165

⁵The original title is: “In eigen rechte lijn” *G.T.T.* Vol. 32, No. 7 (November, 1931) 257-288

⁶M. Bouwman, *Voetius over het gezag der synoden*, (Amsterdam: Bakker, 1937) 185f.

⁷Van Lonkhuyzen used the text *The Divine Right of Church Government*, as published by the ministers of London in 1646. A reprint of his volume has recently been issued by Naphthali Press in Dallas, TX.

What’s inside?

This time of the year is typical for new elders and deacons to be ordained in the churches. God gives men to the congregations to guide, care for, defend, discipline, encourage and comfort His people. One aspect of the multi-faceted task of ministers, elders and deacons is *leadership*. As Rev. Peter Feenstra writes in the feature article, all three offices must work together as a *team* of leaders. When that team is functioning well, a congregation will be well led.

In the meditation, Rev. John Vanwoudenberg writes about our task to be the salt of the earth and light in the world.

You can often read complaints about how education systems are failing Canadian youth. More than just a few young people make it through secondary school and yet are functionally illiterate when they get handed their diploma. Is it a “. . . conspiracy against [God’s] holy Word” (LD 48)? If they cannot read, the Bible is off limits. In his column, Mr. Vanderven writes about debates surrounding the methods used in teaching children to read.

In addition to an Editorial, Ray of Sunshine and Hiliter, you’ll find a press review, release, and letters. We hope you enjoy this issue.

GvP

By J. Vanwoudenberg

Salting and lighting the world

Matthew 5:13-16

One of the main themes in the gospel of Matthew is “the kingdom of heaven,” that special kingdom sent by God (from heaven) in order to rescue people from the kingdom of darkness. This kingdom is not something “natural” to this world of darkness. Hence it will face resistance in it (Matt. 5:10-12). That being the case, we can ask, “How should we as kingdom citizens act and function in this world?” Christ answers this question in the sermon on the mount in Matt. 5:13-16. He does so using two word pictures that His audience could readily identify with. One is about salt, and the other about light.

“You are the salt of the earth” Even though we live in the age of refrigerators and freezers, we can yet appreciate the household usage of salt. Salt was and still is an important preservative and even disinfectant.¹ One of the first things we do with fresh meat is to sprinkle salt on it. Besides preservation, salt is also one of the most important seasoning agents. When the soup is “bland” we reach for the salt shaker.

Christ then paints a picture of the everyday usages of light. Men put a lamp on a stand and it gives light to the whole house. We should picture in our minds a one room house of those days. When a lamp is lit, people in the house see where they are going and are able to function in the house. Think of a propane lamp at a secluded campsite on a dark night. With the lamp lit we can walk around without stumbling over the fire wood and without tripping over the tent ropes. We can read a book, play some games, or whatever.

Now, says Christ: “You are the salt of the earth;” “You are the light of the world.” Such says a lot about the state of the world in which we live. The world is in need of salt: that means that the world is rotting. The world, which itself claims to be evolving and becoming better and more wholesome all the time, is in fact rotting away and becoming putrid. The world, under the power of sin, is bland and without taste. In spite of all the attractions and entertainments in this world, it is at bottom bland.

The world is in need of light. That means that contra the idea that we today live in an enlightened world and in an enlightened society, the world is really in a state of darkness. The world is in need of guidance and direction. In Scripture light is often used as a symbol of hope and salvation, whereas the concept of darkness is used to depict hopelessness and death.² Says Christ, “In spite of outward appearances, the world outside the kingdom of Christ is in a state of darkness. It is in a state of hopelessness, of death, and on its way to utter death.”

That state of the world apart from Christ is something that we should realize, especially when we get down and frustrated with life in the kingdom. In spite of all appearances, the grass simply is not greener on the other side of the fence. The world is filled with the dazzling lights of entertainment centres, but really it is all darkness – deep darkness. There is no direction in life and no hope for the future. Life may seem so full of pizzazz outside the kingdom: there are so many things that we could do if we only turned our back on the kingdom of Christ. We would have much more money available and much more freedom to satisfy our cravings and desires. But in fact life apart from the kingdom of heaven is bland and tasteless. It is not satisfying. Those who leave the kingdom can be guaranteed only one thing, namely bitter disappointment.

. . . life apart from the kingdom of heaven is bland and tasteless.

The word pictures also say a lot about the state of citizens of the kingdom of heaven. Says Christ, “You are completely distinct from this dark and rotting world. Whereas the world is rotting, you are salt. Whereas the world is plunged in darkness, you are light.”

That too is something we should understand and accept. So often we try to keep up with the world in all its latest fads – its latest crazes, its latest video releases, its latest music, its latest fashions. We try to minimize our distinct-

ness from the world. We don’t want to appear different. Of course it is true that we don’t have to be different just for the sake of being different. But the fact of the matter is this: as kingdom citizens we are essentially different – as different as light is different from darkness. There is simply no way we can be the same as the world in all respects, especially not in the important and basic matters of life – in our priorities and in our motives – and that will inevitably come out!

If we look at the beatitudes we see what characterizes kingdom citizens. They are poor in spirit, mourners, and meek people before God. Painfully aware of the fact that they are sinners who can in no way come before God on their own merits, they hunger and thirst for righteousness. They come before God as beggars, begging for the forgiveness of sins (5:3-6). Receiving this forgiveness, they, from a purified heart and with true motives, engage in acts of mercy and in peace making (5:7-9). All these kingdom characteristics will make us as different from the world as light is different from darkness. It will come out in how we relate to each other, in what motivates us at work, in how we bring up our children, in how we respect those in authority over us, in how we treat our spouse, in how we use our free time – and the list goes on and on.

“Hence,” says Christ, “as kingdom citizens you are not at all of the world.” This truth has led many in the history of the church to flee from the world – to set up cloisters and communes and monasteries. That, however, is not what Christ instructs kingdom citizens to do. Rather, He says, “not of the world, and yet in the world.” “You are salt, you are light: as salt is meant to act as a preservative and to season, and as light is meant to shine in the dark, so you are called upon to have an effect *in this world*. God calls you to act as a preservative in a rotting world, to give taste and depth of life in a bland world, to give light and direction and hope in a dark world.”

How? Christ answers that in verse 16: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works”

Keeping the context of the beatitudes in mind, good works stem from humility before God. They are performed not to earn praise for oneself. Kingdom citizens do them in thankfulness for that imputed righteousness of God. They stem from a pure heart or pure motives. They are works of mercy and Biblical peace making (5:7-9).

It is true that Christ spoke these words in the first place to the disciples, the future apostles, who were sitting at the front of the crowd. However, Christ speaks very generally about good works. He does not specify only the work of preaching, the primary task of the apostles. Hence this mandate is also for the rest of the crowd – and for all kingdom citizens today too, whether men or women, adults or children, brick layers or mechanics, farmers or framers, service men or secretaries, students or seniors, mothers or fathers, husbands or wives, managers or labourers. As it says in that song, “In this world of darkness, we must shine: you in your small corner, and I in mine.”

When we consider this broad mandate, and when we consider how short we fall in carrying out this mandate, then our hearts may fill with fear, especially when we consider the strong warning of Christ: “If salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trodden under foot by men.”³ Christ, however, does not mean to make us question whether or not we are truly kingdom citizens, but to spur us on. “No, don’t panic, but get to work!”⁴

Notice how Christ does not say, “You must become salt of the earth,” or “You must become the light of the world.” No, but “you are the salt of the earth,” and “you are the light of the world.” The original Greek makes very clear that Christ is stating a fact.⁵ You can just see Christ pointing to the crowd and saying, “You are the salt of the earth;” “You are the light of the world.”

*...not of the world, and yet in the world ...
...you are called upon to
have an effect in this world.*

Just think of the audience for a moment. Up front are the disciples: fishermen, despised Galileans. Behind them are the crowds, also mainly Galileans, people despised by the elite of Israel. Think of the audience today too, including ourselves. As Paul says in 1 Cor. 1:26, “For consider your call, brethren; not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. . . .”

To such people Christ says, “You are the salt of the earth.” In other words, if there is any hope for preservation of this world, it is you – kingdom citizens – citizens who know the righteousness of God, who have hearts purified by the Spirit. If there is anyone who can change the bland life in this world – it is not the great educators of our day, nor the great scientists, nor the mighty politicians, but you, citizens of my kingdom!”

To such people Christ says, “You are the light of the world.” Scripture often calls Christ the light of the world. Think of Matt. 4:16: “The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned.” “Now,” says Christ to His kingdom citizens: “you are the light of the world. My light, my hope – the only hope of life – my light now shines in this dark world through you.” If there is any hope for people of this world, it lies with us, with the members of the kingdom of heaven who know the gospel of life and who are filled with the Spirit of life. If there is any people in this world equipped to give true guidance in the midst of darkness and sin, it is us! We can shine the path with the light of Christ – the light of reconciliation with God.

That is our glorious position as kingdom citizens in this world.⁶ No, we don’t have to earn this position by evangelizing. Rather, we have it all in Christ. He truly was and is the light, giving us true hope and the fullness of life in all its depth. Now in Him we are the salt and the light of the world. Just listen to our king once again: “You are the salt of the earth.” “You are the light of the world.”

Understanding that, and in thankfulness for that, let us resolve to be what we are. In the power of the Spirit let us salt and light up this corrupt and dark world – you in your small corner, and I in mine.

The Rev. J. Vanwoudenberg is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church in Watford, ON.

Notes

¹Cf. Ezel. 16:4.

²Hell is often called the place of “utter darkness,” Cf. Matt. 22:13, 25:30, 27:45.

³Without getting into detail, utterly rejecting our status as salt and light by persistently refusing to act as salt and light amounts to nothing less than the unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit.

⁴Verse 16 can be translated, “So let your light shine . . .”

⁵So in verse 16 Christ speaks of God as Father, not as potentially your Father. No, but you, as kingdom citizens, have God as your Father.

⁶Note also that we are the salt and the light of all the world.

An Ancient Morning Hymn

*O Splendor Of God’s glory bright,
O Thou who bringest light from light,
O Light of light, light’s living spring,
O Day, all days illumining!*

*O Thou true Sun, on us Thy glance
Let fall in royal radiance;
The Spirit’s sanctifying beam
Upon our earthly senses stream.*

*The Father, too, our prayers implore,
Father of glory evermore,
The Father of all grace and might,
To banish sin from our delight.*

*To guide whate’er we nobly do,
With love all envy to subdue,
To make ill-fortune turn to fair,
And give us grace our wrongs to bear.*

*Rejoicing may this day go hence;
Like virgin dawn our innocence,
Like fiery noon our faith appear,
Nor know the gloom of twilight drear.*

*Morn in her rosy car¹ is borne:
Let Him come forth, our perfect morn,
The Word in God the Father one,
The Father perfect in the Son.*

*All laud to God the Father be;
All praise eternal Son to Thee;
All glory, as is ever meet,
To God the holy Paraclete.*

Ambrose, 340-97

Tr. Robert Bridges, 1844-1930

¹Poetic for a solemn and majestic vehicle of procession used to usher in heavenly bodies as the sun or moon, or vehicles of time, the day, or night.

E.E. Ryden. *The Story of Christian Hymnody*. Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern, 1959.

Being in the lead: The task of officebearers as leaders¹

By P.G. Feenstra

If you were to ask around in your congregation, "Who is supposed to give leadership in your church?" I am sure that ninety-nine percent of the people would respond, "The minister!" Not all that long ago I heard someone say, "You certainly hope they (referring to a vacant congregation) get a minister soon because they need leadership." When we turn our attention to Holy Scripture, however, we get a different picture. All office-bearers are called to lead and govern the church of Christ according to the specifics of their task. The minister is called to lead but he is not the only one who has this responsibility. In fact, it would be wrong for the minister to take this upon himself or for elders and deacons to demand this of him. Deacons, elders and ministers must work together as equals and as a team of leaders. Being in the lead is indeed a task of every office-bearer.

Importance of leadership

The task of leadership cannot be shrugged off or taken lightly. Leadership is vital to the life and well-being of the church. Many problems develop where leadership is lacking or misdirected. Without proper leadership the body of Christ loses its co-ordination and will not function properly. Leaders who fear the Lord must offer guidance to the people they serve.

Wise leaders seek to honour God by fostering and furthering the upbuilding of the congregation. If that ingredient is lacking the people will not fair well. Take the time of the judges as an example. There was no king in Israel, no person to lead and guide, and the people did what was evil in the sight of the Lord. Later, Israel received kings but when they failed to give direction, Israel went astray and was sent into exile. Wise guides keep the people they lead on one course: to fear God and to keep His commandments.

In the development of the early Christian church the overseers and dea-

cons are acknowledged as the leaders appointed by the Lord. Thus Paul writes to the Philippians, "*Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons.*" Paul's usage of these terms indicates an accepted recognition of official designations for church leadership positions (offices).

Office-bearers as leaders must set goals, give direction, correct, affect change, and motivate people so that the congregation seeks the honour of God and the furtherance of His kingdom.

Characteristics of wise and godly leaders

Although this is not an exhaustive list, the following characteristics must be found in those who are called to be in the lead.

First of all, **prayer is a priority for wise leaders.** It is a good practice and custom that meetings of council and consistory are opened and closed with prayer but that's not where it should end. Leaders are men steeped in prayer. The needs of the congregation are brought before the Lord in their personal prayers. Faithful leaders ask the LORD for direction and guidance so that they are given the wisdom, strength and insight to equip the members of the congregation for service. Prayer is absolutely essential in the life of a leader. Yet it can easily slip to the backburner. If you are called to leadership pray for direction, for the wisdom to speak the right words, to solace those in need of consolation, to be firm with those who need rebuke. If you have difficulty relating to an individual, take the problem to the Lord in prayer. As an office-bearer you must turn to the Lord for the simple reason that no one but the Lord can accomplish what needs to be done.

Secondly, **office-bearers as leaders follow the right policies.** They do not govern by the general insights of man

but they follow good principles, that is, Scriptural norms. Their policy is built on righteousness, justice and equity.

Those who lead and guide must keep in mind the purpose and goal of their ministry in the congregation. Christ commissions them to govern the church in submission to His will and way; to see to it that all things are done in peace and good order. They are Christ's servants. Leaders in the church are first and foremost followers. They sit at Christ's feet and listen to Him before they go out and serve. No human "mission statement" can or may replace Christ's instructions to His officebearers. They are to lead the congregation down the right path by walking that path themselves. If you are not taking the right path, every step you take just gets you to the wrong place faster. You may be very busy, efficient, and get new things implemented in the congregation but what does it mean if you do not keep in mind why you are doing your work?

Following the right policies, leaders in the church are to base their actions on the doctrines of Scripture. These doctrines have been summarized for us in our confessions. The doctrines of the Word of God are the basis for the actions of the office-bearers but also for the life of the congregation because, by definition, the church of Christ is a confessing church. Anything contrary to the policy of Scripture must be refuted.

The third characteristic of God-fearing leaders is closely related to the previous one: **they do not compromise on principles.** It is so easy to give in and to make concessions just for the sake of keeping the peace. There are areas in which we can make compromises to come to an agreement but there is always a temptation for an office-bearer to take that one step farther and stray from what the Bible teaches. Yet if he is serious about his task he will want to see the congregation stay on the course directed by Christ.

A wise and godly leader has prayer as a priority, works with the scriptural norms, does not compromise on important things, leads with authority, is trustworthy, and guides with enthusiasm.

In the fourth place, **a wise office-bearer leads with authority.** That's not the same as thinking you have all the answers or that everything has to go your way but you point the congregation to the will of the Lord for their lives. A person with authority knows what he is talking about and means what he says. What kind of authority, leadership and guidance can deacons, elders and preachers give if all they can do is suggest? The Lord leads His people by command because He wants us to find everything in Him. You know the expression: "If God would not want to be obeyed He would have given us the ten suggestions and not the ten commandments."

Office-bearers shouldn't be unsure and indecisive about what they are doing. Paul instructs Timothy, "*Command and teach these things*" (1 Timothy 4:11); teach and urge these duties. Leaders are not dictators. Rather than dictate they direct. They do not bind the consciences but they appeal to the members to follow God's Word which

is given to them for their good. "*For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope*" (Romans 15:4).

The fifth characteristic of a godly leader is that **he is trustworthy.** The apostle Paul writes, "*Moreover it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy*" (1 Corinthians 4:2). An officebearer gains the confidence of the people he leads by giving evidence that he has their best interest at heart. This takes time and effort. You will be hard pressed to develop a relationship of trust if you have very little contact with the members in your ward or the young people of your congregation.

In his book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey compares a relation of trust to a bank account. He writes:

We all know what a financial bank account is. We make deposits into it and build up a reserve from which we can make withdrawals when we need to. An Emotional Bank Account is a metaphor that describes the amount of trust that's been built up in a relationship. It's the feeling of safeness you have with another human being.

If I make deposits into an Emotional Bank Account with you through courtesy, kindness, honesty, and keeping my commitments to you, I build up a reserve. Your trust toward me becomes higher, and I can call upon that trust many

times if I need to. . . . But if I have a habit of showing discourtesy, disrespect, cutting you off, overreacting, ignoring you, becoming arbitrary, betraying your trust, threatening you . . . eventually my Emotional Bank Account is overdrawn. The trust level gets very low" (188).

Covey suggests six major deposits that build the Emotional Bank Account and build relationships of trust: Understand the individual, attend to the little things, keep commitments, clarify expectations, show personal integrity, apologize sincerely when you make a withdrawal.

Once leadership starts meaning that you are on an ego trip, people will stop trusting you. Leaders must be trusted. It's shattering for people to find out that those whom they thought cared for them, didn't; that those whom they confided in have breached their trust.

Finally, **a god-fearing leader also guides with enthusiasm.** The origin of the word enthusiasm is in God. Leaders who fear the Lord are filled with the Spirit of the Lord and that reflects in their zeal. Their work is not done for personal gain or glory but for the Lord and that will reflect in how they do their work. If you guide with enthusiasm those whom you serve will want to have what you have.

(To be continued and concluded in the next issue.)

The Rev. P.G. Feenstra is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church of Owen Sound, ON.

PRESS REVIEW

By J. De Jong



Telling Winks

Under the title "The Triumph of the Spirit," Bruce Crumley, a correspondent for *Time* magazine working in Paris, writes a moving article about the life and death of the flamboyant and celebrated French journalist Jean-Dominique Bauby. Bauby, who died earlier this year at 45 years of age, was on a meteoric rise to international fame when in December, 1995, he was suddenly cut down by a debilitating stroke

that left him in a state of total paralysis, without the possibility to move so much as a muscle in his body. Yet, miraculously, his brain remained untouched by the accident, and he still retained the movement of just one muscle, the left eyelid, which allowed him to wink to hospital staff. Crumley tells the story:

A career journalist whose wit, flair and savoir vivre became personal trademarks, Bauby saw his

fast-paced life come to an abrupt end on Dec. 8, 1995, with the stroke that left him paralyzed. Though Bauby was dependent on hospital staff and machinery for all his bodily functions, his brain remained unscathed. He soon discovered that the only muscle still under his control was his left eyelid. By telegraphing a series of blinks, Bauby let his nurses know that his mind was alive and

well inside its immobile frame. They responded by reciting a special alphabet to him with the understanding that Bauby would blink at letters he wanted written down. Repeating the process resulted in words, sentences and entire discussions.

By June 1996, Bauby blinked out a letter to some 60 friends and associates to reassure them that his state was not vegetative. Editors at French publisher Robert Laffont, who had worked with Bauby before his stroke, were so impressed that they proposed he use the method to write a book about his condition, Bauby accepted and, composing and editing his prose before dawn, dictated entire sections of the book from memory, letter by letter, to Laffont employee Claude Mendibil.

The result is a remarkable 137 page account of the tedium, trials and travails – and sometimes even joys – of the locked-in life. Bemoaning his fruitless “physical rehabilitation” sessions, for example Bauby writes, “I would be the happiest man in the world if I could just properly swallow the saliva that permanently invades my mouth.” He lets his readers know that his celebrated wit survived the stroke by pointing out the ironic aspects of his condition. Bauby recalls a contract he signed before his illness to write an updated version of the Alexander Dumas classic *The Count of Monte Cristo* – a tale involving a paralyzed protagonist who communicates by blinking. “The gods of literature and neurology decided otherwise,” Bauby laments, adding a twist. “To reverse the decrees of fate, I now have in mind a story whose main character is a runner instead of a paralytic. Who knows? It might work.”

Bauby’s wit and colourful style obviously remained unaffected by his accident. He could still look at life with a good sense of comic relief. His body had become locked in a bubble, but as the title of his book indicates [The Bubble and the Butterfly, JDJ] his mind was still the butterfly, challenging what he calls “the decrees of fate.” Yet Crumley goes on to point out that even the comical side of this accident has its limits:

The book is not, of course, all playful ruminations. Bauby writes movingly of the suffering and depression his condition induced. He describes painful bedsores, and flies walking with impunity across his face. He tells of his 93-year-old father’s phone calls to “a son he knows too well will not reply.” Most

agonizing are the moments when Bauby realizes that his loved ones will never feel his affection again. During one Father’s Day visit from his children, he relates the unbearable feeling of being sealed in his bubble: “Theophile, my son, is calmly sitting there, his face 50 cm from my own, and I, his father do not have the simple right to touch his thick hair . . . to hold tight his warm little body . . . Suddenly, that fact begins killing me.”

But Le Scaphandre et le Papillon [The Bubble and the Butterfly, JDJ] underlines Bauby’s determination to deny locked in syndrome total victory. His condition may have defined the rules, but he was still able to play the game. And play he did. Not content to wink out one book, he proposed other book projects before his death, founded an association for victims of locked-in syndrome and their families and participated in a film aired on French TV last week about his struggle. “He loved life, and he lived it intensely – both before and after his accident,” says Susanna Lea, a spokeswoman for Laffont who worked with Bauby. “He has left a legacy that will not be soon forgotten.”

. . . In the end, Bauby’s spirit proved stronger than his heart. He died as he lived: with dignity, on his own terms and in accord with his own words. “Is there a key out in the cosmos that can unlock my bubble?” Bauby asks at the end of his book. “A currency valuable enough to buy my freedom? I have to look elsewhere. I’m going there.”

Crumley’s account presents us with the remarkable strength and inner resolve of the human spirit. But it also presents us with the true extent of the misery of the human condition outside of God. For we read of the supposed triumph of the spirit, but this is the triumph of the spirit of *humanism*, the spirit that asserts its own mastery of the universe outside of God and his providential guidance and care. It seems as if the credo of Descartes, “I think therefore I am” – the false prophesy of humanism – has never come to a starker and more poignant fulfilment than seen in this last year of Bauby’s life: a mind dancing playfully with words, concepts, thoughts and ideas, and yet there is not a world in which to express them.

The Christian knows that all things do not happen by fate or chance (Lord’s

Day 10). God laid this tragedy upon this striking figure of the post-modern age in France. God left him with just one remaining voluntary bodily function: the wink. But a telling wink it is! It is almost as if the whole tradition of French humanism, with all its radical proponents, is wrapped up in Bauby’s wink! The whole stream of the philosophy of the modern age, from Descartes and Rousseau, and Voltaire to Satre, is expressed in those few telling words painstakingly jotted down by Bauby’s editor: “. . . and I his father, do not have the simple right to touch his hair. . . .”

The Christian knows that even the right to stroke your son’s hair, the simple gesture of touch, is not a right, but a *gift* to be received in the context of pure grace and divine favour! The Christian knows that you are not a father except under the providential care and creative kindness of the almighty Father, and you cannot be an earthly father without the underlying favour of a heavenly Father who shapes this task as a possibility bounded by His counsel of grace.

That is why we cannot see this death as a “triumph of the spirit.” It does represent the triumph of the spirit of defiance. Bauby dies, as Crumley says “on his own terms,” and “in accord with his own words.” He became the center of his own world, and so in his departure he simply says that he was going “elsewhere.”

Elsewhere – that term seeks to veil but rather tellingly describes the root meaning of the what we confess with the word “misery” in Lord’s Day 2 of the Heidelberg Catechism. Misery means: uprooted man is a vagabond, voluntarily leaving his home, lost in a state of permanent exile and homelessness, estranged from the divine source of his existence. Misery (the German term *elend*) literally means: estrangement from God. Bauby chooses the term “elsewhere,” but we know what he means.

Even winks can still show humour, laughter, and *joi de vivre*, and the triumph of the human spirit. They can also show the triumph of the Holy Spirit! But here the last wink points to misery, indeed an almost excruciating sadness. For here true and lasting freedom was summarily thrown overboard. And from such an act there is no possibility for escape.

Qui non fleret?



RAY OF SUNSHINE



By Mrs. R. Ravensbergen

"God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord." (1 Cor. 1:9)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

When the Lord Jesus ascended into heaven, He left the disciples with a big empty place in their midst. Their lives and their actions had been very Christ-centered; they had always been able to go to Him for help and support. Now, suddenly, He was gone and far beyond their reach. They sat together, and talked about all the things Jesus had said and done. That lasted for ten days, and then came the day of Pentecost, the day when they received the Holy Spirit. After that, the disciples, or the Apostles as they would be called from now on, saw that there was a new task for them.

The Lord Jesus had returned to His Father in heaven, but He did not leave the disciples helpless. The Holy Spirit was their Guide, and their new task was to preach the Gospel. The Lord had also left them with the promise that He would come back on the clouds.

The task for the Apostles was now to preach the Gospel and to establish churches all over the world. By preaching the Gospel they would prepare for the return of the Lord. The people who would belong to the Church of Jesus Christ, would be waiting and praying for the Day in which the Lord would come to gather His Church.

That same Church that was there in the days of the Apostles is still here today. And we are allowed to be members of that Church. It is not because we are such good people that we belong to the Church of the Lord; it is only out of grace that He chose us to belong to Him. He made His covenant with us, and the Lord gave us His Word. Through His Holy Spirit He works the willingness into our hearts to serve Him. He also gave us the opportunity to communicate with Him through our prayers and in our songs.

Even though we received all those means to serve the Lord, it is often still very difficult for us to do so. We sometimes forget all about the Lord when we are very busy. Sometimes we may even be a little a bit ashamed of Him, when we are with people who do not serve the Lord and who may be abusing His name, or mocking Him.

The Lord understands those difficulties, because He knows that we are sinners. That is why it is so important that He established His Church for us, and that there is a Sunday every week. Every Sunday the Lord calls us to go to His House and to gather with His people. It is the day set apart to serve the Lord together with His congregation. When the minister reads the ten commandments, we are reminded again of all the things the Lord expects us to do and not to do. We read from the Bible, and the minister explains from the Bible what a privilege it is for us, being allowed to serve Him. He tells us every week again, that we can go to the Lord and ask for forgiveness for all our sins, and that the Lord *will* forgive if we repent. He also tells us of the promises of eternal life for all God's children. All those who belong to the Church of Jesus Christ may know for sure that they belong to the Lord, and that the Lord will help them and protect them in all circumstances. In return for all the things the Lord (through the minister) tells us in Church, we bring our praises to Him, and we thank Him for all His

goodness when we sing the beautiful psalms out of our *Book of Praise*. We also pray to Him with the whole congregation. We ask the Lord to help us all, and to be especially with those who are sick, or who have other difficulties.

Besides all the things we *hear* and *do* in Church, we sometimes also can *see* what the Lord has promised to us, in the Sacraments. That happens when a baby (or sometimes an older person) is baptized, and when we celebrate the Lord's Supper. The water that is used at Baptism shows how the Lord has washed away all our sins. When we see that happen, we can be the more sure that also our sins are washed away. At the Lord's Supper we use bread and wine. They remind us that Jesus paid with His body and blood for our sins. When we see or taste the bread and the wine, we are reminded that He gave His life for *all of us*. Those Sacraments are gifts from the Lord to His Church, so that we never have to doubt His promises.

And does going to Church on Sundays help us to serve the Lord all the other days of the week? Yes, it does. For when we know what we are doing on Sundays, and we do it with a happy and thankful heart, then we look forward to it the whole week. We remember the things the minister explained to us, and that helps us to live like that every day. Even when we still sometimes forget and do things wrong, we know that we can go to the Lord and ask Him for forgiveness any time we want. When we are sad, or depressed and disappointed, when we are unhappy because we cannot do what we would like to do, then we can also remember the beautiful promises that the Lord has given to us. Those things can even comfort us when we are *unable* to go to Church. Because we still belong, out of grace, to the Church of Jesus Christ even if we are never able to go there (any more)! All the promises are ours, when that is our sincere desire. When we can never witness the administration of the sacraments that are there to strengthen our faith, then we still have the Holy Spirit. He will make us strong in our faith, and He will help us in our weak moments.

As members of the Church we confess our faith in the Lord with the words of the Apostles' Creed, The last Articles read:

*I believe in the Holy Spirit;
I believe a holy catholic Christian church, the
communion of saints;
the forgiveness of sins;
and resurrection of the body;
and the life everlasting."*

So then, why should we fear?

*The Church's one foundation
Is Jesus Christ her Lord;
She is His new creation
By water and the Word:
From heav'n He came and sought her
to be His holy bride;
With His own blood He bought her
And for her life He died.*

Hymn 40:1

Birthdays in May:

4: Debbie Veenstra

RR 1, Sherkston, ON L0S 1R0

10: Rob De Haan

"ANCHOR HOME," 361 30 Road, RR 2
Beamsville, ON L0R 1B0

30: Bernie DeVos

"ANCHOR HOME," 361 30 Road, RR 2
Beamsville, ON L0R 1B0

A happy birthday to all three of you.

I received a request to mention the name of a young member who has been ill for quite a length of time. I will quote a part of this letter:

"Greg Aikema is 8 years old and has not been able to attend church or school for over a year. He struggles with severe allergies and asthma and often feels very uncomfortable. Greg would really appreciate some cards to brighten his days at home. Also, please remember Greg and his family in your prayers."

Thank you for this letter, and here is Greg's address:

Greg Aikema
7118 - 192 St., RR#9
Surrey, BC V4N 3G6

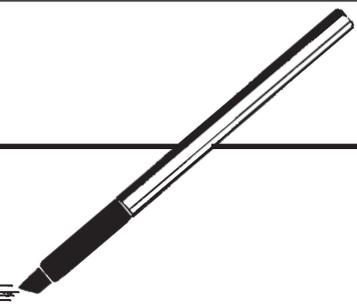
Until next month,

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

THE HI-LITER

News from Here and There

By C. Van Spronsen



In Australia the new season of activities has started again. Students are informed about the schedule for the catechism classes and the requirements. In Byford they are also informed about a dress code. "We expect that the youth will attend the classes in decent clothes and appearance. This means for the girls: dress/skirt with a reasonable length; blouses/t-shirts without bad slogans; for the boys: reasonable pants/shirts/t-shirts without bad slogans; normal hair length and no earrings etc." Some guidelines certainly seem in place!

The worship services in Launceston, Tasmania, will see some changes. The congregation will sing its 'Amen' to the salutation and the final blessing as soon as a suitable setting has been selected. The congregation is also encouraged to say its 'Amen' after the prayers. Antiphonal singing, with the appropriate psalms, will be arranged and announced. In the morning service a short prayer for the forgiveness of sins will follow the reading of the Law. After the proclamation of the forgiveness of sins through the reading of a Scripture passage, the congregation will express its gratitude in song.

In Southern Alberta the congregations make full use of the opportunities given to participate in the process of electing officebearers. The Coaldale congregation received no less than twenty letters while the consistory of the Taber congregation also expressed their pleasure that quite a number of brothers and sisters submitted names. A good example to follow. This is one opportunity where male and female members have equal input.

In Edmonton, AB they can enjoy some of the fruits of having ecclesiastical fellowship with the Free Church of Scotland. This Church received a new minister, Rev. Kent Compton, who is licensed but not yet ordained as is the practice in these Churches. This means he cannot administer baptism. Since a child had just been born in the congregation the Rev. R. Aasman of the Canadian Reformed Church was asked to come to an evening service and administer infant baptism.

Presently two students from Timor, Indonesia, are studying at the Theological College in Hamilton: Yonson and Edwer Dethan. They intend to return to Timor. The Church of Burlington South has decided to establish a Library Fund to assist these brothers to build up a library of reformed material before they return so they can better serve the Indonesian Churches.

"Camp JAM (The Lord Jesus and Me) is an organization conceived by a group of young Christians from a number of our local churches in Southern Ontario." They seek to reach out to children by organizing week-long summer camps. "The first week will be for children from our churches and their friends, while the second week is designed as an outreach to inner-city children."

The Hamilton congregation will be sharing its facilities with the Rehoboth United Reformed Church of Hamilton starting on March 16th. It underlines the good relationship which has developed between these two congregations.

Mr. Pila Njuka, an assistant-minister from Churches in Sumba is presently studying English in the Armadale, WA area. If all goes well, the Australian Churches will sponsor him for further theological studies at the College in Hamilton.

The Church at Legana (Tasmania) advises their sister churches in Australia "that, after having heard the responses of the various churches, they have decided not to pursue the matter of individual (church) membership of the ICRC."

The Bibles for Missions Thrift Stores seem to be quite successful in raising funds for Bible distribution. In Chatham they report that they have been able to send another \$ 10,000.00 to the Bible League. In their first two years of operation they have been able to send \$ 117,000.00 which provide 39,000 Bibles for the people of China.

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.

To the Editor:

Your editorial of February 21, 1997, stated that Pope John II, in a letter to the Pontifical Academy of Science, Oct. 22, 1996, has "sold out to Darwinism," and that the Vatican "makes peace with Darwinism."

These statements are not true.

1. The Pope did not make any statement referring directly or specifically to Darwin's Theory of Evolution. Instead he stated the fact that evolution is more than a hypothesis. He did not rule theories of evolution either in or out. How the universe and life on earth developed is still an open scientific question. Many respected modern scientists dispute Darwin's theory. An excellent modern text about evolution is *Darwin's Black Box* (ref. 1).

2. Theories of evolution which, in accordance with the philosophies that in-

spire them, (e.g. Materialism) consider the human spirit as emerging from the forces of living matter are incompatible with the truth about man. The truth about man is that it is by virtue of his soul, immediately created by God, that man is a person and has grandeur and dignity even in his body. It is by virtue of this grandeur and dignity that man is "called to enter a relationship of knowledge and love with God Himself, a relationship which will find its complete fulfillment beyond time, in eternity." (ref. 2)

Materialistic theories of evolution are therefore condemned by the Church. Those which do not contradict God's revelation are not condemned.

References:

- 1) *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution*. Michael Behe. 1996. The Free Press. Distributed by Simon and Shuster Inc.

- 2) John Paul II. Address to the Pontifical Academy of Sciences, Oct. 22, 1996.

John B. Shea, M.D. FRCP(L)
Associate Editor
Catholic Insight

Dear Mr. Editor:

Having read the articles by Rev. P. Aasman with interest and, for by far the larger part, with agreement, I must express disagreement with one statement.

To my recollection the "Abbreviated Form" for the celebration of the Lord's Supper was not inserted into the *Book of Praise* for churches that wanted to have a more frequent celebration but to accommodate churches that celebrated the sacrament in both services and felt obligated again to read the whole form in the afternoon service.

W.W. J. VanOene
Abbotsford, BC

NURTURE & INSTRUCTION

By T.M.P. Vanderven



How do our children learn to read? Debates about teaching methods.

Recently, the public debate about the best method to teach reading to young children lit up again as fiercely as ever. You may have noticed this in your local newspaper. An educational psychologist reported the result of her study in which she compared the relative merits of the phonics and the whole language methods of learning to read; the results strongly favoured a phonics-first approach to the teaching of reading. The newspaper article reported that this study has been billed as the first hard scientific comparison. Parents were so impressed with the results that they moved their children to those schools

that are using the phonics program. Even the venerable *The Globe and Mail* found this topic worthy of an editorial.

Of course, advocates of phonics-first and those of whole language have their supporters and claim their irrefutable evidence, as has become clear from a series of letters-to-the-editor, some signed by university professors, respected researchers in their own rights. It is not my purpose to settle the phonics vs. whole language debate; in my view this debate is pointless for reasons that will become clear, I trust. My purpose is to speak about the place and use of methods within Reformed education.

As Reformed people we are very much aware of the importance of reading a point that needs re-emphasis when the world around us has become so strongly visual in TV and advertisements, for example. By conviction, we are people of The Book, and therefore reading instruction ought to take pride of place on the curriculum of our Christian schools. I sincerely hope that society's rate of illiteracy, reportedly at 25%, does not apply to our church communities. What would be left of our Christian faith if the Bible would become a closed book to one out of every four children? I realize that there may

be alternatives, yet it remains a tremendously important goal of Christian education to teach the youngsters to read so that personal Bible reading and family devotions around an open Bible is indeed possible. (Do invite your children to read along with you at meal times, from as early an age as possible.) Therefore, we ought to be interested when recommendations are made by researchers, recommendations which may improve the effectiveness of our teaching. We ought to be open to new methods, or perhaps revisions of old methods, in order to help our students as well as possible.

There are at least three aspects to the recent reading method debate that are of interest to me. First, as a reading instructor, I am always on the look out for new ideas to help provide my students with the best possible background to their own work as future teachers. Reading research studies is not the most exciting pastime, I can assure you, but it is my professional responsibility to scrutinize new findings, and, if convincing, to include them in my own teaching. College instructors must be up to date with the latest . . . always keeping a sober mind since the latest is not necessarily the best. Those who attempt to teach others ought to spend considerable time studying themselves. This is not a search for the cure-all of the best method with the implied promise that in the future there will be no learning problems. Continued study provides the teacher with an increasing understanding of the complexity of the learning processes, as well as with additional tools with which to help individual students.

Second, if you have seen the newspaper articles on this subject, you will, no doubt, have been struck by the strong political overtones of the debate around reading methods. Stakeholders become fiercely vocal and, if possible, force action. As results of the study became known, parents started to move their children to the schools with the "better" program. No doubt, all this will bring further submissions to local educational authorities to force teachers to use those "best" methods. *The Globe and Mail* editorial illustrates this political element quite well in its concluding comments:

When parents reward the best methods and educators who yield the best results by moving their children into those programs, those positive outcomes spread and are reinforced. Are provincial governments doing enough to put such information in the hands of students and

parents? The answer, at this point, is no. (Feb 25, 1997).

Our Christian schools also know about political pressure. I do not mean this derogatorily, but I simply want to note that school decisions always involve people with different interests and views. Therefore, such decisions require much discussion, negotiation, and, if possible, consensus. If there is no clear consensus, than someone must decide, always with the risk of criticism. Often such criticism centres around questions of authority and control. I do hope, though, that our schools do not suffer from the kind of suspicion alluded to in this editorial. There must be at all times an open and honest discussion, without hidden agendas. It is not the particular method that is important; of importance is the learning of our students. Throughout our deliberations we must be well aware of the danger to lock ourselves into one method at the exclusion of all other reasonable options the one recommended to use as, the best of course. We must not lose sight of the instructional and personal needs of our individual students. Although it is most valuable to learn about instructional methods in a general manner, and although there are general learning principles, it remains true that we do not all learn in the same manner, and that the usefulness of each method depends on how well it can be and actually is applied with real children. Simplistically demanding that teachers use the best methods may not help the students at all.

A third aspect I want to point out is a generally strong belief that scientific research can and will provide us with methods of instruction which will really work, guaranteed. Note how it is reported that the Houston study is the first scientific comparison of reading methods. This implies that this reading experiment can be repeated many times by many others, always with the same results providing the conditions are kept the same. Thus, a scientifically-sound teaching method applied in a Texas classroom would be equally effective when applied by a different teacher in a different classroom with different children. The problem sits in how to keep the conditions the same. One classroom full of children is never the same as another classroom full of children; there will always be many variables and many differences.

This is not to say that careful scientific study of the learning process would be useless. On the contrary, it can help us to describe human learning in valid and useful ways. Yet, as with the rest of

creation, science can never claim to say everything there is to say about human action or human learning, and therefore we ought to acknowledge the limitations of such scientific studies. Although we share many traits with each other, not one person is quite like another and not one person leans quite like another. In my view, it is not the particular method employed that is of first importance in teaching, but the relationship between adult and child and how they interact with each other. The Bible tells us to speak to our children, to model for them, to counsel, to comfort, to be compassionate, to love them in short, to be teacher-fathers and teacher-mothers, as Dr. van Dam exhorted us some time ago. That ingredient cannot be captured in a scientific formula and it makes teaching much larger than an application of the best method.

The teacher in her classroom work must consider her students as persons with their unique traits and needs. She has to make sensible instructional decisions and make effective use of the various activities and resources offered by the textbooks she uses in her reading classes (basal readers, phonics books, comprehension activities, vocabulary exercises). She has to monitor the progress of her students, and take effective measures when things do not quite develop in the manner desired. In order to do all these things, she must have a sound understanding of the reading process, that is, the necessary theoretical background, and a wide repertoire of teaching techniques, that is, a toolbox full of sound instructional methods. Teachers have to make many decisions, and therefore they need to understand the problem situation as well as possible, and have available the tools to implement their decisions. Studies like those referred to above can help teachers to extend their instructional toolbox. Rather than spend energy in controversy about what is the best method, as parents and teachers we do well to strive to understand the unique qualities of each of the tools that are in our toolbox.

What are the essential tools to help our children learn to read, you ask? Just some examples:

Parents,

- read to your children (indeed, both mom and dad). Show them that reading is important to you.
- make your home a place that values The Book as well as many other books: books open worlds and minds.

- show the wonderful world of letters and sounds, of concepts and words, of ideas and sentences; language itself is such a tremendously fascinating gift.
- take your children to the local library; help them to broaden their reading horizon.
- most importantly, help them to discern between what is valuable and wasteful.
- talk to your children about interesting topics they have read about.
- prepare your vacation spots with some advance reading about interesting things to see and learn about.
- practise what you preach.

The internet provides much information about and many resources for reading and the teaching of reading. Check out, for example, the website of The Council of Exceptional Children at <http://www.cec.sped.org/eric/ptips.htm> for tips to parents. Replace ptips by ttips, and you'll find tips for teachers.

Teachers,

- inform yourselves as fully as possible about that wonderful and awesome ability to read: how letters and sounds relate, how words and sentences are formed, how paragraphs connect, how stories work
- make your classroom a place where reading is valued as a source of information as well as enjoyment, as a means by which we may be persuaded to another point of view.
- make quality books readily available not just one hour per week during library period; textbooks are usually not the most exciting reading fare: use real books to learn about things.
- read to your students on a daily basis, fiction as well as nonfiction; why not read out loud an article from *Popular Science* to your Grade 8 students?
- practice what you preach.

Young people,

- discover the marvellous world of books; become world travellers in your own home.

- develop your own thinking abilities by reading; books contain the thoughts and experiences of other people and reading them brings you into contact with their authors; you can argue, debate, agree, disagree, even cry and swoon . . . you might discover something about yourself.
- make use of the many resources available to you; never in the history of the world have so many different books been available.
- learn to discern: not every book or article is equally wholesome; read at least one article from each issue of *Reformed Perspective* and *Clarion*.
- talk about a good book with your friends; give them a good book for their birthday.

* * *

Please address questions directly to:
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PRESS RELEASE



Press Release of Classis Alberta-Manitoba, on March 11,12, 1997 in the Immanuel Canadian Reformed Church building at Edmonton.

1. On behalf of the convening Church at Taber, Rev. G. Ph. VanPopta opens the meeting. He reads Hebrews 2, after which he requests the meeting to sing Hymn 33:1,3,5,6. After this, he leads in prayer. He welcomes the delegates and the guests. He mentions that Rev. C. Stam declined the call of the Church at Coaldale and that Rev. W. Huizinga did the same. The Church at Carman became vacant because Rev. P.K.A. DeBoer left us for Australia. Rev. P.G. Feenstra declined the call of the Church at Carman. The Church at Calgary received a minister in the person of Rev. R.J. Eikelboom.
2. The Churches are duly represented by their primi-delegates. The Church at Coaldale has an instruction.
3. Rev. G. Ph. VanPopta declares Classis constituted.
4. The following officers are appointed: Rev. R. Aasman – chairman, Rev. G.A. Snip – vice-chairman, Rev. G. Ph. VanPopta – clerk. The chairman, Rev. R. Aasman, thanks the convening church and the hosting church for their preparatory work.
5. The agenda is adopted.
6. A report of the classical treasurer, br. R. Smit, consisting of a statement of income and expenses for 1996, is received with thankfulness.
7. The Providence Canadian Reformed Church at Edmonton reports on the inspection of the books of the classical treasurer. These were found to be in good order as well.
8. The Immanuel Canadian Reformed Church at Edmonton reports on the inspection of the classical archives. These were found to be in good order as well.
9. Rev. E.J. Tiggelaar reports on the contact with the Alberta Provincial Government. Received with gratitude.
10. The Providence Canadian Reformed Church at Edmonton proposes to invite representatives of the Free Church of Scotland Session at Edmonton to attend Classis Alberta-Manitoba as observers based on the relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with the Free Church of Scotland. Is adopted.
11. Classis discusses a letter of the Presbytery of the Dakotas (OPC), being a response to a letter of Classis, dated April 29, 1996. Because of the late hour the evening session is closed. Rev. G.A. Snip leads in closing prayer. On March 12, the meeting is reopened. The chairman, Rev. R. Aasman, asks the meeting to sing Hymn 10:1,9,10, after which he leads in prayer. Classis continues to discuss the aforementioned letter and decides “to communicate to the POD that Classis recognizes that the POD maintains the charge against Rev.

M. Pollock. Classis regrets that on the one hand the POD states it no longer has a dispute with Classis AB/MB and on the other hand wants to leave the matter of censure unresolved. In light of this, Classis sincerely regrets that the POD does not give a definitive answer to the communications of Classis Oct./Dec. 1995, Article 21 and Classis April 1996, Article 14. Since Classis cannot, in good conscience, let the matter rest until it is resolved, Classis has struck a committee to meet with the POD to attempt as yet to resolve this serious matter." Classis appoints an ad hoc committee, consisting of Rev. R. Aasman and Rev. G.A. Snip with Rev. K. Jonker as alternate.

12. Church visitor reports are read in closed session concerning the Churches at Calgary, Coaldale,

Taber and Denver. Are received with gratitude.

13. An appeal against a decision of Classis AB/MB October 15, 16, 1996 is dealt with in closed session.
14. The Church at Coaldale requests as per instruction pulpit supply. This request is granted.
15. Question Period as per Art. 44 is held.
16. The Church at Winnipeg is appointed as convening Church of the next Classis which will be held, D.V., on June 10, 1997 (alternate date: October 21, 1997) at 8:00 p.m. in the Providence Canadian Reformed Church building at Edmonton. The suggested officers for the next Classis are: Rev. W.B. Slomp – chairman, Rev. R. Aasman – vice-chairman, Rev. G.A. Snip – clerk.
17. Because of the departure of Rev. P.K.A. DeBoer, Classis makes the following appointments: church

visitor – Rev. G.A. Snip; deputy for contact with the Manitoba Provincial Government – Rev. K. Jonker; examination committee and sermon proposal – Rev. G. Ph. Van-Popta; examiner Ethics – Rev. R.J. Eikelboom.

18. Classis appoints Rev. W.B. Slomp as observer of the POD (OPC). Rev. G.A. Snip is appointed as alternate.
19. Personal Question Period is held
20. There is no need to exercise the brotherly censure according to Art. 34 C.O.
21. The Acts are read and adopted. The Press Release is read and approved.
22. The chairman, Rev. R. Aasman, asks the meeting to sing Hymn 40: 1,2, after which he leads in prayer of thanksgiving. Classis is closed.

For Classis AB/MB,
G.A. Snip, vice-chairman
at that time. 

CLARION

ADVERTISEMENTS

Births

I praise Thee, for Thou art fearful and wonderful. Wonderful are Thy works! Psalm 139:14a

With great joy and thanksgiving to our heavenly Father, who has blessed us with another covenant child, we announce the birth of our daughter

KIMBERLEY BROOKE

Born March 3, 1997

A sister for *Cason*

Ken and Pauline Bulthuis (nee Van Driel)

10945 84 Avenue, Delta, BC V4C 2L5

Children are a gift from the LORD; they are a reward from Him.

Psalm 127:3

The Lord once again blessed us richly. We are pleased to announce the birth of our third child

DARREN JONATHAN

Born February 22, 1997

A brother for *Justin* and *Cassandra*

Gerald and Lisa Huinink (nee Van Yken)

901 Garth Street, Hamilton, ON L9C 4L1

With great thankfulness to our heavenly Father who has entrusted into our care one of His covenant children, and made all things well, we joyfully announce the birth of our first born, a daughter,

KIRSTEN MIRANDA

Born March 18, 1997

Rob and Joanne VanSydenborgh (nee Kottelenberg)

First grandchild for Ben and Joan Kottelenberg

Fifth grandchild for Albert and Nelly VanSydenborgh

23 Cannon Court, Orangeville, ON L9W 3M6

Thanks be to God for His inexpressible gift. 2 Corinthians 9:15

With joy and thankfulness to our heavenly Father, we announce that He has entrusted to our care another of His children

SEAN MATTHEW

February 19, 1997

Harry and Gail Jans (nee Lof)

Kaitlyn and *Darren*

558 Reg. Rd. 66, Caledonia, ON N3W 1P1

O give thanks to the God of heaven, for His steadfast love endures forever.

Psalm 136:26

With thankfulness to the Lord we announce the birth of

LAURA MONIQUE

Born March 19, 1997

Kelvin and Chris Vanderveen (nee Koster)

Kent, Richard, Jordan, Dawn, Nathan, Drew

Box 957, Carman, MB R0G 0J0

We thank the Lord for again richly blessing our family with the birth of a son

REUBEN CORNELIS

Born January 10, 1997

A brother for *Christopher*

John and Janina Jongs (nee Barendregt)

41540 Yarrow Central Road, Chilliwack, BC V2R 5G4

With thankfulness to the Lord who has granted us a child and made all things well, we announce the birth of our daughter

ALISON MARIE

Born February 25th, 1997

James and Cathy Lof (nee Ludwig)

383 East 28th Street, Hamilton, ON L8V 3S9