

# Clarion

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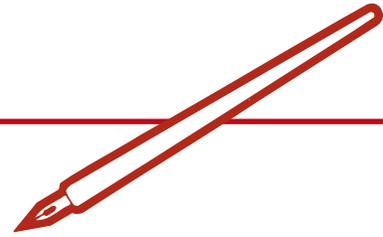


Numbers

10:1-10

*Defending  
our freedom*

INSIDE!



By J. De Jong



## Defending our freedom

In 1945, just after the second World War, a significant two-volume work appeared in the English-speaking world written by an Austrian professor, Karl Popper, who was teaching in New Zealand at the time. He entitled his work: *The Open Society and its Enemies*.<sup>1</sup> For Popper, the open society was the free democratic world in which he sought a haven, having witnessed the terror of Nazism close by. He took the influence of the empiricism and positivism of Vienna with him as he taught first in New Zealand, and later in London, and used his energies to defend the principles of the free society that Britain and America had espoused. In Popper's opinion, the enemies of this open society were especially the Marxists and Communists who, with a rigid paradigm describing the forces of history, interpreted all of reality in the light of that self-imposed rational system. For Popper, the mind cannot read its theories onto reality, but must build its theories on the basis of the observations of reality. And he blamed the bondage of the closed societies on the rise of the social democrats and the members of the communist party, who as he saw it, sought to force and bend the world to suit their own systems.

*Especially in the last decade we have a world with a new group of enemies of the open society: the radical, apocalyptic wing of Islam.*

The world has changed a lot since Popper's books appeared, and especially in the last decade we have a world with a new group of enemies of the open society: the radical, apocalyptic wing of Islam. The extremist wing of the Moslem world has been increasing its attacks with greater intensity against Israel and America, and all the international supporters of Israel and its interests. Popper's books, once classics, have been completely outdated by the new wheels turning modern history: the forces of religious apocalyptic thought. His enemies were Plato and two modern day spin-offs of Plato's essential social philosophy: Hegel and Marx. Today those icons are long dead, with the statues of Marx and Lenin lying broken and full of rust in the streets of countless cities in eastern Europe and beyond. But where the old menace is gone, a new one has surfaced: the Moslem extremists who believe that Allah's patience is over and the hour of judgement against the "infidels" has come.

Then came September 11 last year, introducing a dimension of horror and grief which the younger generation had not experienced in that kind of a measure before. Some older people said to me that the younger generation could now get a small idea of what the bombing of Rotterdam was like: a blitz destroying the lives of thousands of innocent people. The events at "ground zero" have forever changed the world. The slumbering giant suffered a deep wound!

*Can God fulfill his promises in a world where there is little or no recognition of his demands in public life?*

### The weaknesses

The success of the September 11 attacks laid bare the weaknesses inherent in the current state of what Popper called the "open society." First of all, there is a weakness in *airport security*. Although the weapons in themselves were small, the number of terrorists and their common background should have singled them out in the security process. Airport security was drastically increased immediately after the event, but that only proves how deep the gap was: people getting through security lines with little or no restraint, yet harbouring the vilest of intentions.

Second, the attack exposed a serious weakness in *immigration policy*. The open society not only allowed these committed extremists to roam freely in the country, but they were also able to enroll in courses so that besides the sacrifices of their own lives, *all* of the cost, training and tools of their terrifying deeds came from what they saw as the "evil society" of the "infidels." None of their own "holy" tools were used in this war against the "unholy and godless nation." They could strike and kill with weapons readily found on "enemy" soil.

Third, related to the above, the attack points to a serious deficiency in *intelligence gathering*. The files on the terrorist networks may have been expanding, but the events seemed to catch everyone off guard, even those who were supposed to be aware of the threats and how imminent the dangers were. The goal of intelligence is to have one's defence systems in place for even the most bizarre forms of attack. Here, however, the ruthless "men of blood" discovered a country sleeping at the wheel.

The authorities have moved quickly to close these gaps. But the damage done cannot so quickly be undone. Through indolence, a breach was made into the city; through a lapse of alertness and readiness, the defences were broken.

### The problem

Behind all these weaknesses we see the essential problem we face in the open society. When God and his Word are relegated as a secondary matter, or to people's private lives, and when the abiding norm of God for social and civil life is ignored, and people are determined to set their own rules and live as they please, even at the expense of the lives of the unborn, the weak and failing, then society develops deeply rooted internal moral decay. The principle of the essential goodness of man, the essential freedom to live as one pleases in moral behaviour, and particularly in sexual relations, creates a society pre-occupied with luxury, worldly pleasure, entertainment and carnal pursuits. This humanist principle allows people (even those with the most malicious intent) from all backgrounds, cultures and religions to find a home in the prosperous world of today's liberal democracy of the "enlightened man." Precisely this humanist principle allows the enemy of the open society to enter and inflict the force of his devastating blow *from within*.

### What's inside?

The editorial of Dr. J. DeJong reflects once again on the events of September 11, 2001. He examines how it is possible that the enemy struck such a devastating blow from within. The problem lies within North American society itself: God and his Word are ignored; people live by their own rules; the unborn are ruthlessly murdered; hedonism rules the day. It is this inner moral decay which has ripened society for the kind of attack which it experienced on September 11. What is the only solution? It is a return to God and his Word! Dr. DeJong's continuing remarks on the dawn of a new millennium, as well as Rev. G. Ph. van Popta's *Observations* column, reinforce the editorial.

In his column, *Living by the Doctrines of Scripture*, Rev. P.G. Feenstra writes about the significance of baptism. It is a lifelong confirmation of the tremendous blessings of God, and it is also a call to walk in a new obedience.

Rev. J. Ludwig of London, Ontario, interacts with an editorial of Rev. Cl. Stam regarding Campfire! and other evangelistic works. This article of Rev. Ludwig is followed by a response by Rev. Stam. Both brothers seem to appreciate having an open dialogue on this topic, to air their concerns as well as to clarify certain matters. We hope that the readers are well served by this discussion.

This issue also contains the columns, *Treasures New and Old* and *Ray of Sunshine*. We have a letter to the editor, and a memorial of brother T.M.P. Vanderven whom the Lord recently took to himself in glory.

RA



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## The hand that governs

Nothing happens by chance in this world, and that includes last year's day of infamy. When Jerusalem turned away from God in decadence and apostasy He sent his prophet Jeremiah to tell the city: "The Chaldeans who are fighting against this city shall come, set it on fire and burn it, with the houses on whose roofs offering have been made to Baal and libations have been poured out to other gods, to provoke me to anger" (Jer 32: 29). Events of the kind we saw on September 11 are also judgements in the righteous permission of God, who calls people to repentance through his Word and through the adversities that He sends.

*Ultimately the terror of communism and socialism was driven by fundamental religious motives.*

## The way back

Tightening the governmental cords in the open society has been a natural reaction since September 11. When you are stung, you react with building defences and preventive measures. But a jump into fear or into a closed and over-regulated society is not the solution that will bring peace and happiness in life. The solution? It begins with a recognition of God's Word and the norms He has set for human life. "God bless America!" – it was the catch word of the speakers one by one after the terrifying ordeals surrounding the attacks. But can God bless people when they do not turn to Him in true obedience? Can God fulfill his promises in a world where there is little or no recognition of his demands in public life? Does not *his* patience come to an end with the loss of so many lives of the unborn?

The humanist principle of the essential goodness of man ignores, and fundamentally opposes the division or enmity God has set between peoples in the world. The gospel of the universal brotherhood of man is one that fails to recognize the essential distinction God has placed in the world. "Why do they hate us so much?" asked one perplexed Pennsylvania farmer as he looked at the wreckage of the aircraft that crashed into the ground not far from his home. "Why so much?" *Why?* We need to be reminded that this enmity is set by God himself, and that it will drive the nations forward in hostility until the day of his return in Christ the Saviour.

A true understanding of the events of the day will not be gained by looking strictly at the philosophical and sociological differences that underlie the various social orders of the modern era, as Popper did. He rejected the claim that God's hand governs history with the statement that this view amounts to superstition and idolatry, and includes abdicating one's responsibility for the social order. And he rejected the idea that God has chosen a certain people for himself as a primitive form of historicism that grew out of tribalism.

However, the last decades have proven the shallow and limited scope of Popper's supposedly "scientific" conclusions. Ultimately, the terror of communism and socialism

was driven by fundamental *religious motives*. The stark and rabid atheism, and the ensuing hatred of all things Christian, the rise of the reign of terror and bloodshed in Stalin's day, were all driven at bottom by a fundamentally *anti-Christian* motive. That will need to be understood not only by the leaders of our day but by all citizens if peace and prosperity and harmony is to be preserved. A city divided against itself will not stand.

## The way ahead

The dawn of a new year invites us to reflect not only on how far we have come, but where we are going. After September 11 the churches were filled, but was there a real return to God? Is his will and the call of his Word foremost in the minds of the legislators and policy makers of the western nations? Or is the relentless drive to eliminate God and every reference to Christ and the Christian faith still the primary agenda in the nation's capitals?

There is only one road to peace, prosperity and "the pursuit of happiness." That is a complete return from hedonism, self interest and worldly pride, a return to the Creator who in Christ is also the Redeemer of this world. He calls us all to the worship of his name, and to a life of faithful obedience and gratitude.

## The certainty

The forces of evil need to be contained, but they can never be stopped. In a world in which Satan roams free, (Rev 12: 12) our sovereign God can always find his instruments of chastisement and punishment. The evil workers will be present, and even more prominent as the days become darker. But one rule dominates the life of the Christian: *Christ reigns!* Whatever the bomb makers and human sacrificers want to do, they cannot break his governor's hold. And the psalmist asks: why do they rage, (Ps 2)? He will dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel!

Therefore we can proceed in humility and certainty, doing the task to which we are called *coram Deo* also in the year 2002, knowing that the God who promised long ago remains faithful, and He will preserve his children through every trial and adversity, to the glory of his new day.

<sup>1</sup>K. Popper *The Open Society and its Enemies*. (Vol. I/II, 4th edition, Harper and Row, New York, 1962). C

## CORRECTION

In the Press Review entitled "OCRC Disappointed" (*Clarion*, November 23, 2001) I misquoted Rev. D. Van Dyken as stating, "They hold to non-literal positions." He actually said (see p 583): "They allow non-literal positions." My apologies for the error. However, I do not think this affects the argument in any way. From the point of view of exegesis, I would suspect the churches would allow a *metaphorical or poetic aspect* to enter the picture in the interpretation of Genesis 1, but not at the expense of its historical and literal character.

*J. De Jong*

By E. Kampen

## Holiness, Sinfulness, Grace and Service

*"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." (Isaiah 6:3)*

A well-known passage in the book of Isaiah is Isaiah's vision of the LORD. What was the purpose of the LORD thus revealing himself to Isaiah? What can we learn from it? It comes down to this: In the way the LORD prepared Isaiah for service as his prophet through this vision we are shown how the LORD prepares all his children for serving Him in thankfulness. A pattern is suggested of holiness, sinfulness, grace and then service.

What exactly did Isaiah see? He says he saw the LORD God himself sitting upon a throne. The language reminds us of other occasions when people "saw God" (Exod 24:10; Ezek 1). Actually no one has ever seen God in the fullness of his glory. Not even the angels in his presence are able to do so! Isaiah says that he saw seraphs, six-winged angels. But even these sinless creatures who lived so close to God could not look directly upon the LORD, for with two wings they had to cover their faces. And no wonder, for Paul says that God dwells in unapproachable light (1 Tim 6:16). Further, with two they covered their feet. That suggests that they had to hide their creatureliness from the LORD. With the other two they flew.

As all this leaves a tremendous impression, there is also the calling of the seraphs to one another, "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." This made quite an impression on Isaiah, for throughout his prophesy, Isaiah referred repeatedly to the holiness of the LORD.

When he saw the LORD in his splendour and heard the seraphs testify to God's holiness, Isaiah was impressed by his own sinfulness. That threefold call "holy, holy, holy" by the seraphs

made it clear that God is "most holy." Furthermore, the very word "holy" places the LORD in sharp contrast to man, who is the exact opposite of holy, that is, he is a sinner. For holiness points to the sinlessness of God. But it is impossible for a sinful man to stand in the presence of the sinless God. No wonder that Isaiah said, "Woe to me! . . . I am ruined." Isaiah was convinced of his own worthlessness, not by a detailed list of his sins but simply by seeing the LORD in his royal splendour. His holiness magnifies our sinfulness.

Isaiah felt totally disqualified to serve the LORD. But a remarkable thing happened. One of the seraphs came to him with a burning coal taken from the altar and touched Isaiah on the lips, declaring that his guilt was taken away, his sins atoned for. Here we see God's sovereign grace in Christ.

First of all, we see sovereign grace because this simply happened. Isaiah did not ask for it. He thought all was lost. Secondly, God's grace that came to him was "in Christ." That is clear because the coals came from the altar. As New Testament believers when we hear of an altar then we think of our Lord Jesus Christ, for He was the fulfillment of the Old Testament sacrifices.

The mention of the purifying fire makes us think of the effect of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, as it purifies us from all our sins.

Notice what effect this had on Isaiah. One moment he exclaims "Woe to me!" But once his sins had been taken away, and he heard the question, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" he stepped forward and volunteered himself. The removal of guilt emboldened Isaiah! At the same time, his experience of the holiness of God would always keep him humble. Nevertheless, it was because Isaiah had first been confronted by God's holiness (to expose his sinfulness) and then by his grace that he was ready for the service the LORD had in mind for him.

Notice that pattern: holiness, sinfulness, grace, service. It reminds us of the pattern of the Catechism. What Isaiah's vision impresses upon us is that this threefold knowledge really begins with a sense of the holiness of God.

We need to reflect more often on the holiness of God. We need to think more about God, and less about ourselves. For, it is only the church overwhelmed by God's holiness that will be ready to say, "LORD, here we are, ready to serve you." 



# The Significance of Baptism

By P.G. Feenstra

The sacraments were created by God to picture before our eyes the gospel truth proclaimed to us through the preaching. They strengthen the faith the Holy Spirit has kindled in believers. The Lord has given us the sacraments in order that He might “more fully declare and seal to us the promise of the gospel” that “God graciously grants us forgiveness of sins and everlasting life because of the one sacrifice of Christ accomplished on the cross.” To help us in our weakness, baptism which is the first of the sacraments, is a visual aid confirming that what we have been told in the gospel is true and sure.

## Baptism admonishes and confirms

The Heidelberg Catechism devotes two entire Lord’s Days to the doctrine of baptism. These Lord’s Days draw our attention to how baptism directs us to the benefit of Christ’s one sacrifice accomplished on the cross. Question 69 asks, “How does holy baptism signify and seal to you that the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross benefits you?” The German and Latin texts of the Catechism are worded somewhat differently. They read, “How does holy baptism admonish you and confirm to you that the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross benefits you?”

Baptism *admonishes* you. The verb to “admonish” should not be read in an unfavourable sense. Admonition today has a negative connotation but for the writers of the catechism “to admonish” meant “to bring to remembrance.” Baptism brings to remembrance how, in Jesus Christ, we can have communion with the living God. We can hold fast to God’s Word and trust the reliability of God’s covenant promises. This is highlighted by the prayer that precedes the administration of baptism which brings to remembrance the Lord’s redemptive acts:

Almighty, eternal God, in thy righteous judgment, thou hast punished the unbelieving and unrepentant world with the flood, but in thy great mercy hast saved and protected the believer Noah and his family. Thou hast drowned the obstinate Pharaoh and all his host in the Red Sea, but led thy people Israel through the midst of the sea on dry ground – by which baptism was signified.

Part of this prayer finds its basis in 1 Peter 3:20,21. The Lord did not save Noah and his family from the waters of the flood because they were better or less sinful than others, but because of his covenant mercy. God led Israel through the Red Sea to maintain the promises He had sworn to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. For this reason the prayer adds, “by which baptism was signified.” Baptism directs us to the

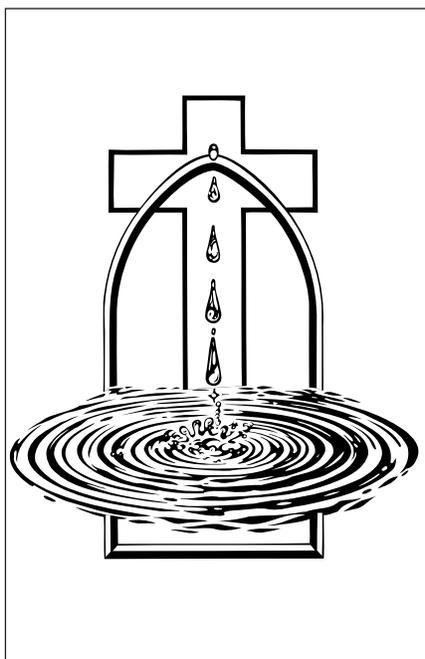
faithfulness, mercy and grace of the Lord but also to his judgement (the drowning of unbelievers during the flood and at the Red Sea).

*Baptism brings to remembrance how, in Jesus Christ, we can have communion with the living God.*

The water of baptism does not save us. In fact, it will drown us without faith. We are made clean through the precious blood of the Son of God. The shedding of his blood on the cross is “our Red Sea, through which we must pass to escape the tyranny of Pharaoh, that is, the devil, and enter into the spiritual land of Canaan” (Belgic Confession Article 34). Baptism confirms the promise of the Lord’s salvation and liberation. Just as the people of Israel shared in a common deliverance at the Red Sea, the sacrament of baptism displays the church’s common redemption in Christ.

## Baptism as a sign and seal

Baptism brings to remembrance God’s covenant acts in Jesus Christ by being a sign and seal of the promises. We are familiar with all sorts of signs. Road signs indicate where we are going and how far we are away from our destination. Baptism is a sign which keeps us on the road of God’s promises proclaimed to us in the preaching. A seal is a guarantee of authenticity. A document is sealed so that we know the contents are not forged and what is contained in it has not been written by another. In ancient times kings would seal documents and proclamations with their signet ring. When Joseph be-



came the Egyptian governor he received from Pharaoh the royal seal, which enabled him to issue authoritative commands. Seals were also used for the ratification of a covenant. Baptism, as a seal, guarantees the trustworthiness of what God promises to you. He adopts you to be his children and heirs and promises (guarantees) to provide you with all good, avert all evil, or turn it to your benefit.

### *Christ signs it in His own blood.*

Baptism is a lifetime guarantee. The Lord promises that He will never fail you. He will be faithful to you from your youth to old age. Thus you can always fall back on your baptism to receive strength when you are struggling, frustrated or depressed. The Lord's promises do not change when you feel useless, hopeless, helpless or insignificant. Mountains may shake and the earth may be in turmoil but God's promises of forgiveness of sins and renewal of life are unshakeably firm. He makes good on his promises. Christ signs it in his own blood.

### **Washing away of sins through union with Christ**

The sacrament of baptism externalizes what Christ does internally. As surely as water washes away dirt from the body, so certainly his blood and Spirit wash away the impurity of our souls, that is all my sins (Lord's Day 26). Each baptism is the sharing of one common baptism, which unites the church with Christ the Head. *"For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with Christ"* (Gal 3:27). Thus we acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins (Nicene Creed; see also Calvin's Commentary on Ephesians 4:5).

In the Old Testament the sign and seal of the washing away of sin was blood. The atoning blood of Christ put an end to the need for any further bloodshed.

We believe and confess that Jesus Christ, who is the end of the law (Rom 10:4), has by his shed blood put an end to every other shedding of blood that one could or would make as an expiation or satisfaction for sins. He has abolished circumcision, which involved blood, and has instituted in its place the

sacrament of baptism (Belgic Confession Article 34).

Christ institutes baptism to uncover the rich contents of what He does for us and in us. Baptism teaches how blood *had* to be shed to make atonement for our sins. Baptism pictures before our eyes how all the riches of redemption and the blessings of salvation are granted to us in Christ Jesus our Lord. He shed his blood as our substitute and paid the price we owed. He covered our sin and guilt. Christ *"loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word . . ."* (Ephesians 5:25, 26)

### **Walking in the new obedience**

The sacrament of baptism may not be used out of custom or superstition. Washed with Christ's blood, we are called and obliged by the Lord to a new obedience. What we are promised in our baptism must be received in faith. As John Calvin wrote, "But from this sacrament, as from all others, we obtain only as much as we receive in faith. If we lack faith, this will be evidence of our ungratefulness, which renders us chargeable before God, because we have not believed the promises given there" (Institutes 4.15.15).

### *Baptism is burial with Christ.*

Baptism teaches us to humble ourselves before God, to deny ourselves and confess our Saviour. We seek our cleansing and salvation outside of ourselves in Christ Jesus. We must cry out to the Lord for mercy. John preached, "Repent and do works which befit repentance." This is also the message which our baptism accents and underlines. Saved by grace is not a license to continue living in sin. Baptism is burial with Christ. Romans 6 reminds us that we have been baptized into the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Having been baptized we must count ourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ. This requires constant self-denial. We do not belong to the world but we belong to Christ. Baptism is the outward sign of an inward change that is taking place in our lives. We are washed with the Spirit so that we become dead to sin and lead a holy and blameless life (Lord's Day 26, Answer 70).



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• • •

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of Orangeville, Ontario.

### **Baptism in view of God's Name**

Every baptism reminds us that we are placed in communion with the Triune God. After Christ laid the foundation of our salvation by his death and resurrection He commissioned his apostles to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matt 28:18,19).

To be baptized in the name of the Triune God means that the Lord God has claimed us. In every situation we are under the authority of God. Being under the authority of the triune God we are placed in communion with Him. We belong to Him as the branches of the vine, as the children of the Father, as the sheep of the good Shepherd and as the bride of Christ.

Through baptism we have the signature of the Triune God written upon us. We have the sign and seal of the Father's never-ending care, of the washing away of all our sins through Christ's blood, and the daily renewal of our life through the Holy Spirit. If we do not use our baptism, the very water which was sprinkled on our foreheads will testify against us. May this never happen to us! Having been admonished by baptism let us walk in communion with the Triune God, whose name we are to praise and adore.



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# What's Next? Some Remarks at the Dawn of the New Millennium (Part 2)<sup>1</sup>

By J. DeJong

## The Post Reformation period

Let's take one more step on the path of the church's history, this time after the period of the Reformation. After the Reformation took root in Germany and Switzerland, and later in France and Holland, a radical movement arose, sometimes (quite erroneously) called the "radical reformation." It was not a reformation at all, as later events have clearly shown. The movement became known as Anabaptism, and was also associated with a host of millenarian ideas.

The Anabaptist movement is very complex, and for the sake of brevity we can only draw some brief and cursory lines. Finding its beginnings in Switzerland, it developed different manifestations in different regions. The name of this movement appears to indicate that baptism is the chief issue at stake in the doctrinal stance of the Anabaptist. But this is really a misnomer. The practice of adult baptism is only symptomatic of the essential issues underlying the movement, and not the key point. If you look closer, you see that this movement too is millenarian, and combines all the elements that we found in Montanus and Joachim: spiritual elitism, legalism, and an accompanying radicalism.

The sharpest contrasts in Anabaptist thought were seen in Holland and Germany where it really developed. The father of the Dutch Anabaptist movement was Melchior Hoffman, a tanner by trade, who began preaching the Lutheran doctrines in Northern Germany and Denmark shortly after Luther's famous fallout with the Pope in 1520. Later he ended up in Strassburg, and there developed his visionary ideas. Strassburg was going to be the new Jerusalem, and Christ would institute his millennial reign beginning in 1533. He proclaimed himself a "witness of the Most High," and he announced the coming of the two apocalyptic wit-

nesses, Elijah and Enoch, of whom he was the former. He began to write provocative letters to the city authorities about the coming end time, with the result that he was arrested and imprisoned, and he remained in prison for the rest of his life. The mode of response he enjoined on his followers was pacifism and quietism. Condemning the civil authorities as agents of the antichrist, he maintained that the kingdom of Christ was coming and one must quietly wait for it. One must let himself be imprisoned for Christ's sake.<sup>2</sup>

*It seems that as the church rediscovered the riches of the Biblical message, the devil did his worst to undermine it by sending forth ambassadors of revolutionary excess.*

Here all the features found in Montanus and Joachim resurface, but in a new context and under new conditions. Fundamentally, the dualistic spirit is even much more radical here, in the light of the rejection of the reformatory thrust of the gospel (Calvin!). This was not only a complete misrepresentation of prophecy, but also a failure to respect the limits of prophecy. It seems that as the church rediscovered the riches of the Biblical message, the devil did his worst to undermine it by sending forth ambassadors of revolutionary excess. A spirit of radicalism rules the day similar to that promoted by the Montanists. The end time is pulled into the present, and the division between the wheat and the tares must be manifest right now. There can be no waiting, and no patience with infirmities.

## A reign of terror

This radicalism flips over into an activist and revolutionary Anabaptist thinking in Holland a short time later. Hoffman was a pacifist, and preached the passive and quiet waiting for the new kingdom to arrive. But an impatience with the existing world order and the existing structures was already implicit in his thought. It was only for others to take the next step. Where waiting no longer brings results, you take matters in your own hand. Here the same old spiritualist-gnostic heresy attacks the church. Apocalypticism and world flight go together. One abdicates his duties of everyday life, and begins preaching the imminent end of the world, claiming to share divine visions and revelations exceeding those revealed in Scripture.<sup>3</sup>

The new leader of the Melchiorites (as Hoffman's followers were called) was Jan Matthys, the baker of Haarlem. He said that there can be no more waiting; one must take up arms and realize the kingdom of God himself through his own actions. No longer was Strassburg the centre of the arrival of the final kingdom. God had rejected it because of disobedience (worldly passivity), and so now Münster in Westphalia became the new candidate for this dubious honour.<sup>4</sup> In 1533, Matthys, with his partner Jan of Leiden, managed to take control of the city and institute a new order. Attacked by the forces of the bishop, they engaged in what they saw as a "holy war" in 1534, a war in which Matthys lost his life.

After the fall of John Matthys, his partner Jan of Leiden came on board and took control of the leadership in Münster. Born in 1509 as an illegitimate son, Jan quickly rose to influence through his oratorical skills. Once in control in Münster, he called himself the king of the whole world.

Community of goods was introduced with an appeal to the Old Testament (Abraham and David). He sent apostles out in every direction to proclaim the arrival of the heavenly Jerusalem. A wild rampage of murder, bloodshed and polygamy followed.

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worship.*

Indeed, many Anabaptists of a later period shuddered at the horrible abuses practiced at Münster and other places. Later, the polygamy, the shameless nakedness in Amsterdam, and so on, all disappeared after this early stage of revolutionary Anabaptism. But in principle the ideological and religious perspectives of the later Anabaptist and Mennonites really do not differ that much from these earlier figures of excess. The same spiritualist-gnostic dualism lies behind the one as well as the other, and there is one line from Hoffman to the Anabaptists and Mennonites of our day. The one tends to pacifism and escapism as a weapon to negate the existing forms and structures of society, and the other tends to revolutionary activism. But both have essentially a contrary and revolutionary position over against the real world. There is a love for what they called the "holy congregation" but a rejection of historical patterns as they have unfolded in a specific historical context. The old Gnostic and Montanist error shows itself again, influenced by revolutionary thinking. Not the deliverance from sin stands out but the deliverance from the supposed shackles of the material world.

The central issue in Anabaptist thought concerns the extent of reform and the view on the existing world. Luther and Calvin championed deliverance from the bondage of Rome, which was for them the deliverance from sin and the deliverance from false worship. But behind the thinking of the Anabaptist was the idea of deliverance from the creational ordinances that God has placed on human life, a rejection of natural ties and relationships. Essentially this represents the ancient dualism

of Gnosticism, the dualism between nature and grace, and the same principles of world flight that they espoused. And because of this basic misreading of Scripture, the Anabaptist rule was: we can no longer wait! Hoffman's taught: "Now is the last time! The hour of judgement has come. The witnesses have arrived, and we stand at the dawn of the 1000 year reign."

### **Back to the present**

Since the time of the Anabaptists there have been many more radical millenarian movements traversing the church's history. Especially in England and the United States they have many interesting names like the Ranters, the Shakers, the Quakers and the Seekers. We cannot go into them all.<sup>5</sup> Even among the Baptists, a very influential group in America today, one finds links to the Anabaptist of the sixteenth century. And among the later sects like the

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Taborites you find links to socialist and Marxist thinking. In every age people want to escape the shackles of the real world with its divinely given norms and create a utopian world of peace and bliss for themselves, apart from God, but definitely with a god of their own making, whether a pseudo-religious one, or an entire secular or materialist one.

In the United States, millenarian ideas are found among many extreme Pentecostal sects, and also among the more deviant sects like the Jehovah Witnesses, the Seventh Day Adventists, and the Mormons. And of course, America as the "land of promise" has for years been the foddering ground for various forms of millenarian notions which people try to import into Christian doctrine: the premillennialists, the postmillennialists, and another noteworthy variant, the dispensationalists who normally also add a 1000 year reign to their scheme of dispensations into which they have divided the history of the world.

In all this, despite many variations and forms, we can trace a recurring theme: people promoting their own prophecies, visions and dreams, and giving them a divine authorship above and beyond what God's Word teaches. Ultimately it means claiming that the spirit of the divine lies in you, and by virtue of the divine spark in you, you may make absolutely binding statements that go beyond what God has revealed. It becomes the devil's ruse to turn one away from the concrete place and task God has given to the church in the world.

The church needs to be on guard against movements of this kind. And you can expect that around the change of the millennium this way of thinking explodes exponentially, and more proponents of it are appearing all the time.<sup>6</sup> The marked increase in social and political unrest also adds fuel to the fire, giving us a greater number of prophets of doom and gloom. But the church must not easily be led astray by false prophets. We have quite enough by looking to the Scriptures themselves.

### **The sign of the times**

If one judges his time with an open Bible then we can see that the signs of which Christ spoke concerning the close of the age are being fulfilled. In his so called "farewell discourse" of Matthew 24, Christ speaks of wars and rumours of wars, of widespread apostasy and unbelief, excessive opulence and luxury, and a spirit of revolution far exceeding anything appearing in previous generations. All of those signs manifest themselves with increasing intensity in the day and age in which we

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his lordship.*

live. However, on this basis we cannot point to any year or decade in which Christ may return. For although we can read the signs with greater clarity every day, the intensity of those signs needs to be compounded much more, and we can expect greater and more

dramatic cosmic signs and wonders to appear before the age draws to a close. In all this the church's stand is marked by patient waiting, humble submission, and faithful loyalty to one's duty and task.

The signs recorded in Scripture give us no cause for alarm even as we stand today at the dawn of new millennium. The church enters the third millennium under the sure conviction that all the times and seasons are known by Christ and that He has all the dispensations and ages subsumed under his lordship. And he has promised: "I am with you always to the close of the age" (Matt 28:18-20). For the believer who has his heart set above, where Christ lives, and who lives close to his living words, these promises are enough. He can live and work in peace, knowing God will usher in the final hour in his time and way, when He is truly ready, and when all things will be led to glory.

Scripture also points out that many false prophets will come claiming to be representing the Messiah, but they are not to be followed (see Matt 24:23-31). Paul warns against collective hysteria that can detract people from their basic Christian duties, (1 Thess 5:1-11, 2 Thess 2). We must not be looking forward to or promoting a future golden age that will bring escape from what we see as the drudgery and emptiness of everyday existence. Rather, we must see our times as times of refreshing and redemption in which the victory of Christ is already manifest. Despite sin's power we can and may labour faithfully for Him through changing years, centuries and even in a new millennium.

### Our calendar

One of the most significant things those promoting millenarian theories fail to do is observe our common calendar. They are always promoting a golden age in one way or another discontinuous to, or remote from, our own time and space world. But Christ lives and works in this world and already today, He is Lord of the times. The new millennium on our calendars belongs to Him!

The calendar by which we live is the so-called Julian calendar, named after the emperor Julius Caesar who reigned during the period in which Christ was born. He dropped the existing lunar calendar and introduced a solar calendar of 365 1/4 days. This calendar was adopted by the synod of Nicea 325 as the calendar of the church, except that the beginning of

the era was now marked by the birth of Christ, 1 A.D. In 1582, Pope Gregory XIII brought in some corrections in order to retain the proper link to vernal equinox. But for the most part, this is the calendar we live by, and it is used in most areas of the world as the calendar of international business and diplomacy. In other words, the world's calendar is essentially one finalized by the church and universalized in the Constantinian era.

*It is remarkable how much the church has been involved throughout history in fine tuning and regulating our calendar.*

All this was accented by the modifications made by a monk in the sixth century A.D. by the name of Dionysius Exiguus.<sup>7</sup> On the basis of the day adopted as Christ's birthday, December 25, he set the beginning of the New Year as March 25, the date of the feast of the annunciation, marking the day the angel came and announced the coming birth of a Son to Mary. His modifications on this point did not stick, since Pope Gregory's revisions as referred to above also included putting New Year's Day back on January 1. However, since the time of Dionysius the church has adopted the expressions A.D. and B.C., and so the decisions of Nicea received universal recognition.

Through additional research, we know today that both Dionysius' and Gregory's calculations with regard to Christ's birth were somewhat in error, and the birth of Christ is now commonly estimated at about 4 B.C. But the point of both Dionysius and Nicea is to be underscored: the Roman leadership may have introduced the calendar, but lordship over this calendar falls to Christ! His work of reconciliation in the context of our everyday calendar has also ended up renaming this calendar and claiming it for his work!

### Lord of the times

Therefore, January 1, 2000 was an ordinary day set and determined by the commonly adopted Roman calendar with all its modifications and amendments. Yet it is for us A.D. 2000, the "year of our Lord" And it is remarkable how much the church has been in-

involved throughout history in fine tuning and regulating this calendar. The fact that almost the whole known world conducts its affairs according to this Christian calendar is another testimony that, whether it is recognized or not, Christ reigns in this world! Since the beginning of time the days and the seasons were appointed by divine determination (Gen 1:14). Both the lunar and solar cycles contribute to the establishment of the church's feasts, so marking Christ as the Redeemer of this creation. The times and seasons are in his hand!

Therefore in a world of increased disorientation, sailing as it does into tailspins of shock and disarray, we have an abiding hope which will keep us secure in another millennium:

The earth may shake in great commotion,

The mountains plunge into the ocean,  
The seas may roar and rock the hills,  
The LORD is near; our fears He stills.

(Psalm 46:1, *Book of Praise*)

<sup>1</sup>This is the second part of a revised version of an address given to the churches of Alberta-Manitoba in the spring of 1999. It has been adapted to a post-millennium setting.

<sup>2</sup>M.J. St. Clair, *Millenarian Movements in Historical Context*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992) 170-172.

<sup>3</sup>See Kamphuis, 41-60.

<sup>4</sup>Cohn, 261ff.

<sup>5</sup>See Cohn 307ff. See for a more popular survey, D. Thompson, *The End of Time. Faith and Fear in the Shadow of the Millennium* (London, Sinclair-Stevenson, 1996).

<sup>6</sup>One of the more interesting features of the modern day prophets is a revival of interest in the sixteenth century French mystic prophet Nostradamus. His "prophetic utterances" have recently been republished, and he is enjoying increased popularity with the coming of a new millennium. One of the reasons for this is his well known prediction regarding the year 1999: "The year 1999, seven months, From the sky will come a great king of terror, to resuscitate the great Angoulmois; Before, after, Mars will reign by good luck." See H.C. Roberts (ed.) *The Complete Prophecies of Nostradamus*, (New York: Nostradamus Co, 1969) 336 (C X, Q 72). On Nostradamus, see K. Schilder, *Bezit Bezit*, (Oosterbaan en Le Cointre, 1945) 170ff. The prophecies of Nostradamus were also exploited by the Nazis to announce what they saw as the imminent German victory, (cf C III, Q 57). They failed to note that he was a Jew!

<sup>7</sup>On Dionysius, see N.T.Wright, 3ff., 19. 

# In Memoriam

## TEUNIS MAARTEN PIETER VANDERVEN

June 4, 1942 – November 13, 2001

By H. Homan

On behalf of the Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers' College

Our friend, colleague and founding principal was taken home by the Lord. The Lord has given him rest after a difficult struggle with cancer. Mr. Vanderven, affectionately called "Tony," arrived in Canada with his family in January 1981. As founding principal of Covenant Teachers' College, he was truly a pioneer, as well as a perfectionist, a tireless worker, a man of vision with many gifts. What had been a vision for the League of Canadian Reformed School Societies was made a reality by Tony and his colleagues through the establishment of the programs of Covenant College.

Mr. Vanderven's vision and dedication seemed to demand of him more than just teaching. In the *Clarion*, *C.R.T.A. Magazine* and *Reformed Perspective* he wrote about that elusive mandate of Reformed schools and about other educational matters. He worked on "distance education" for in-service teachers in Western Canada and Australia; he completed a Master's Degree and worked on a second Master's Degree, desiring to do a doctorate as well. There was so much to do.

Covenant has operated now for twenty years. Over a hundred teachers have graduated, many of whom are still teaching and find themselves in many of our Reformed schools. The last two years saw Tony as principal of Timothy Christian School while still maintaining some part-time teaching at Covenant. This September that was not possible anymore.

Even until his last days it remained a joy to speak with Tony. With some trepidation one would visit. With much interest he enquired about the work of the church, of schools, of individuals. He fretted about not being useful. One was strengthened by a visit with our brother.

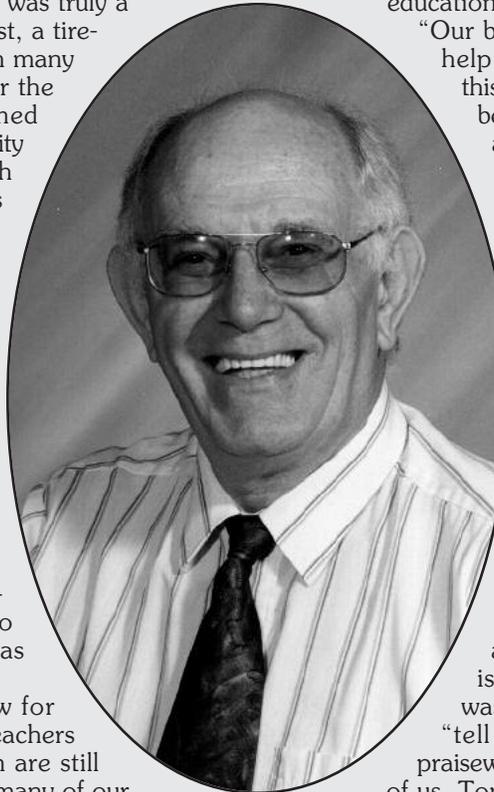
Our perception of this colleague, friend, and brother in the Lord can best be understood by his own words. Several weeks ago he was asked, "What made you go to Tasmania, then to Armadale and later to Canada?"

His understanding of the importance of Reformed education for covenant children rang clear.

"Our brothers in Tasmania asked me to help set up a Reformed school. I saw this as a task and calling the Lord put before me and therefore I was to use all my abilities with dedication and enthusiasm." The same was true when seven years later he felt called to work in Armadale, Western Australia. Seven years later came pioneering work in Canada in establishing and developing the teacher education program at Covenant College. Throughout all this time, his focus remained on the vision and goal of providing Reformed education for covenant children. It was a privileged and honourable task. There was so much to be done and the labourers seemed so few.

It is easy to look back and see all the tasks that were left unfinished. But there was so much that was done too. We have been able to "tell the next generation about the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD." Like all of us, Tony was a sojourner, a pilgrim who could look ahead to God's eternal blessing, and who took comfort in the fact that without the Father's will, not one hair could fall from his head. His comfort was that in life and death he belonged to his faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. Though a labourer has left, we also know that God will and already has provided others. What a comfort.

We are thankful for what the Lord has given in Mr. Vanderven. May He continue to comfort and strengthen Mr. Vanderven's wife and family.



# RAY OF SUNSHINE



By Mrs. Corinne Gelms and Mrs. Erna Nordeman

*The Lord Almighty is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our fortress.*

Psalm 46:7

## Dear Brothers and Sisters:

Once again we are standing at the beginning of another new year of our Lord, 2002. As we reflect on the past year, we can only give God all praise and thanks for what He has done and given through His providential care. For some of us, the trials and difficulties were faced; whereas for others, much joy and happiness has been placed in our lives. But above all, God's divine will has been and continues to be fulfilled.

As Psalm 46 says, we may seek our refuge and strength in God, an ever-present help in trouble. For whatever we have to face in this new year again, we may and must turn to God in humble prayer for help and guidance.

In the world around us, we may be concerned of what tomorrow will bring, for we hear of tragedies and wars. Indeed, the events that have happened surrounding September 11, have made many people worried and scared. But as children of God, we have no need to be afraid.

We must never forget the spiritual war that we daily must fight: to fight against sin, the devil and our own flesh. For we will not live on this earth forever. We will one day be taken up into our heavenly dwelling in the presence of God's glory where we may live in peace, and perfect harmony, praising God.

How are we then to continue our life here on earth? In humble submission to Him alone, believing in Christ as the only ground for our salvation. As the Heidelberg Catechism says in Answer 28, "We can be patient in adversity, thankful in prosperity, and with a view to the future we can have a firm confidence in our faithful God and Father that no creature shall separate us from His Love."

*God is our refuge; He will shield us  
And to our foes He will not yield us.  
He is our strength, in troubles nigh;  
Our help is He, the Lord Most High.  
The earth may shake in great commotion,  
The mountains plunge into the ocean,  
The seas may roar and rock the hills,  
The LORD is near; our fears He stills.*

*"Be still and know, all you who bide Me,  
That I am God, and none beside Me.  
I am exalted, and My might  
Makes haughty nations flee in fright.  
In all the earth I am exalted;  
By Me your enemies are halted!"  
The LORD of hosts is on our side:  
With Jacob's God we safely hide.*

Psalm 46:1, 5



## February Birthdays

**12: Connie Van Amerongen will be 37.**

35 Bredin Pkwy. #102,  
Orangeville, ON L9X 3X1  
Tel.: 519-941-6195  
E-mail: [connie\\_evl@hotmail.com](mailto:connie_evl@hotmail.com)

**18: Corrie Schoonhoven will turn 51.**

Box 1312, Coaldale, AB T0K 0L0  
180 Valleysmede Road  
Richmond Hill, ON L4B 3J4

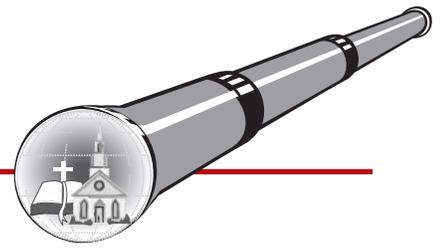
Congratulations to you all on this your special day, your birthday. May our Heavenly Father bless you in this new year with much health and happiness. May you also have an enjoyable day together with your family and friends.

Till next month,

**Mrs. C. Gelms and Mrs. E. Nordeman**

Mailing Correspondence:  
548 Kemp Road East  
RR 2 Beamsville ON LOR 1B2  
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# Observations

## Postmodernism Discredited

By G.Ph. van Popta

The September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon have discredited the world view known as “postmodernism.” Its soft underbelly has been exposed and it has been gutted. The emperor has no clothes. As a world view it is laughable.

As we read the post-September 11 newspapers, especially the editorials, we could conclude that even the media is starting to awaken to the impossibility of postmodernism. By way of reminder, postmodernism is a general and wide-ranging term applied to the fields of architecture, literature, art, philosophy, and religion, among others. It rejects the belief that there is an objective way to explain reality.

### No ultimate principles

Postmodernism denies the existence of any ultimate principles. It says there is no scientific, philosophical, or religious truth that will explain everything for everybody. As a world view, it is highly skeptical of explanations that claim to be valid for all groups, cultures, traditions, or races. Instead, it says that truth is relative for each individual person. What is true for you may not be true for me. It all depends upon your and my interpretations of our experiences. All truth is fallible and relative; no truth is certain and universal.

*The secular media, perhaps unwittingly, disemboweled the postmodern world view.*

Basically, that’s postmodernism. As Dr. F.G. Oosterhoff has taught us, postmodernism has a positive side to it. As Christians we have a little more room than we used to have to speak about our faith in the university and the marketplace. We ought to take advantage of that. But, as Dr. Oosterhoff has also taught us, the negative side to it is that the postmodern climate in which we live will not let us say that the Christian truth is universally true for all people everywhere and always (*Postmodernism*, 1999).

Postmodernism has also been applied to ethics. For example, postmodernism says that if you disagree with abortion then it’s wrong for you, but if you have no problem with abortion then it’s morally right for you. That’s the postmodern religious, cultural and ethical atmosphere in which we live and breathe. It is the dominant world view today. The events of September 11 have stripped it naked for all who have eyes to see.

### End of postmodernism?

Some *Christian* authors speak about the beginning of the end of postmodernism. Tony Carnes (“Bush’s Defin-

ing Moment,” *Christianity Today*, November 12, 2001, pp 38-42) writes:

Since the terrorist attacks and the subsequent military action in Afghanistan, the change in national mood is unmistakable.

Relativism seems obsolete, or at least on the decline. A culture columnist at the *Chicago Tribune* recently declared that postmodernism, which rejects objective truth and traditional morality, has expired. “What lies in the mess in lower Manhattan and in the black gash in the Pentagon and in a field in southern Pennsylvania may be this,” Julia Keller wrote, “the end of postmodernism and its chokehold on the late twentieth century cultural imagination.” Praying and going to a religious service seems a natural, normal thing to do. As *Wall Street Journal* columnist Peggy Noonan put it, “God is back.”

Ian Hunter (“From the rubble of the World Trade Center a better culture might very well emerge,” *Report Magazine*, November 5, 2001, p. 21) suggests the same. He says:

When President Mr. Bush repeatedly referred to the upcoming struggle as one between good and evil, I thought I heard the death knell of postmodernism – a worldview which denies the existence of both. Perhaps *Time* magazine’s famous 1960s cover proclaiming that “God is dead” will turn out to have been a tad premature. Perhaps we shall now be less likely to see best-sellers with titles like “Beyond good and evil.”

The *secular* media, perhaps unwittingly, disembowelled the postmodern world view. The secular media spoke of evil, dark forces, malevolence. Those are rather strong and objective categories. The typical categories used to judge something like, say, abortion (which, by the way, kills many more people worldwide every year than terrorism – not to minimize terrorism) could not be applied to the September 11 attack. What were they going to say? “If slamming hijacked jets into skyscrapers is good for you, then for you it’s the right thing to do.” It does not work. It is the world view of foolishness. The newspapers even quote negatively parts of the Qur’an, the Muslim holy book. Unheard of pre-September 11!

If there is evil and darkness, then there must also be good and light. If militant Islam and terrorism have been labelled evil and dark, what is “the good” and “the light?” What are the media and the leaders of Western society calling good and light? Secularism. The secular, worldly, values to which our society wants tenaciously to hang. What was the first thing our prime minister spoke about after the September 11 attack? He went on about how we were not going to let this affect our most cherished institutions. The example he gave of our most cherished institution was multiculturalism. State-sponsored and funded multiculturalism.

The memorial service in Ottawa confirmed the valueless world view our leaders want to foster. There was no prayer. Although it was held in the shadow of the Peace Tower which has two texts of Scripture inscribed for all to see – one text from Psalm 72 that says, “He will have dominion from sea to sea”; another from Proverbs 16 that says, “Without a vision [i.e., revelation from God] a people perish” – there could be no prayer to the God of our fathers. No prayer in the Name of Jesus Christ. You might offend someone.

*From the prime minister down, they try to cover up the Emperor’s nakedness with his tattered underwear, but the postmodern world view does not work.*

### Consistent with the idiocy

This is completely consistent with the idiocy to which our leaders have been subjecting us of late. Christian prayers were not allowed at the Swissair memorial at Peggy’s Cove. Public schools prohibit the singing of Christmas carols. You can go to Remembrance Day memorial services in Canada and not hear the name of God mentioned.

Lisa Corbella, writing in the *Calgary Sun* (Nov. 18, 2001) reports:

As Canadian troops prepare to head off to Afghanistan to protect our liberty, the Canadian military brass has dreamed up a new way to chip away at those very freedoms and rights.

In what is being described, politely in my view, as an “unprecedented” move, the Canadian military is directing its chaplains to avoid all specific references to Christianity during public services.

The policy change, which came down from the so-called chaplain general in Ottawa on July 24, has left Canadian Forces chaplains unable to use such phrases like “Father, Son and Holy Spirit,” the name of Christ and even the Lord’s Prayer.

The reason given, of course, is to be sensitive to other minority religions by offending the majority. Our country’s leadership is desperately trying to hang on to a world view that has been eviscerated. From the prime minister down, they try to cover up the Emperor’s nakedness with his tattered underwear, but the postmodern world view does not work.

Two cultures have clashed: the cultures of secularism and maniac Islam. The militant East has slammed up against the corrupt West. Where is the church? Where are we? Stuck in between.

It may become a dangerous time for us who hold to the fundamentals of the Christian faith. It is not a big step to transfer antipathy towards Muslims and the Qur’an to hostility towards Christians and the Bible. The church, stuck in between.

*The militant East has slammed up against the corrupt West.*

Yet our Lord reigns. Jesus Christ is God and Lord. He comes to judge every world view. He comes to discredit every man who stands against Him. He comes to wreak the vengeance of God upon all who love violence. He comes to establish a new world order. He says, “*The old order of things has passed away. I am making everything new! Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.*” 



Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

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# Distinguished from the Children of Unbelievers

By J. Ludwig

## The issue

Rev. Cl. Stam ended his editorial "Distinction and/or Separation?" with the statement, "To be in the world and yet not of the world is something that needs more discussion and attention among us." Hopefully this contribution to *Clarion* will lead toward an open and edifying discussion on that important and timely topic.

Rev. Cl. Stam wrote about Campfire! and the criticism that one consistory, or rather council, had with this organization. Whether his article was provoked by what the Council of the Pilgrim Canadian Reformed Church at London had written I cannot say with one-hundred percent certainty, but that particular council did write a "pastoral letter" and did publish it in its bulletin. The same council also corresponded by letter with Campfire! and with the consistory of Hamilton under whose supervision and direction Campfire! is run. One of the comparisons with which Rev. Cl. Stam interacts in the editorial of October 26, 2001, namely, Vacation Bible Schools, was not mentioned in the public notice to the congregation but was included in a subsequent letter to the Cornerstone consistory. It is possible, of course, that his editorial was in reaction to another council's decision with respect to Campfire!, but since so much appears to be an interaction with the arguments raised by the Pilgrim council, and since the issues are the same, it is not out of place to give the readership of *Clarion* a broader picture.

## Pastoral letter

In the opening paragraph Rev. Cl. Stam remarks that "In one instance there was even a 'pastoral letter' written to the congregation in which participation

in Campfire was declared wrong." A categorical declaration like that was not made, at least not in the *Pilgrim's Voice* (Vol. XL, no.46). Parents who send their children to Campfire! as campers or counsellors are not admonished. What was made known to the congregation was that council via letters to the Campfire! committee expressed its "hesitancy to *officially* (emphasis added) support this organization through congregational prayer, bulletin announcements, and financial contributions." Why? Because a letter from Campfire! to the churches requested precisely that type of support and involvement. The "pastoral letter" neither stated nor insinuated that the consistory of a sister church should not engage in such evangelistic endeavours. That is the prerogative of the local church, in this case Hamilton. Since Campfire! asked for congregational support we felt obliged to examine the organization, as we do for every institution that requests funds or prayers, and came to the conclusion that at this point in time we could not support it.

## Some discrepancies

Before delving into some of the reasons as to why that conclusion was reached, allow me to point out that there are some discrepancies between what the editorial says and the information that Council received about Campfire!. Rev. Stam notes that "The numbers ratio always favours the children of believers by ten to one." In a letter from Cornerstone's Council, however, we were told that "Usually two . . . inner city children are placed in a cabin pack with a Counsellor, CIT, and 3-4 Canadian Reformed children." The editorial maintains that the counsellors are "all communicant members of one of

our churches." The director of Campfire!, in response to one of our inquiries, informed us that "over ninety percent of the seventy-six counsellors who will participate in our program this summer are members of Canadian Reformed Churches." This was one of the concerns that the council in question had, triggered for the most part by the fact that a person who had withdrawn himself from the Canadian Reformed Churches was accepted as a counsellor. It brought to the fore questions such as: Can someone in a teaching position at this camp promote the creeds and confessions of the church from which he withdrew? What sort of example does this set for our own children who are attending and who question his church affiliation? With respect to inner city kids who do not belong to any church community, would such a counsellor speak positively of the Canadian Reformed churches? Would that be the direction in which he would steer them if they expressed the desire to attend a church? Although the majority of counsellors are Canadian Reformed, not all of them are. Campfire!'s *Statement of Organization* allows for members of other churches to be counsellors. With that council had a concern.

## The main issue

The main issue, as Rev. Cl. Stam correctly discerns, was the necessity to maintain the distinction between the children of believers and unbelievers. The following paragraph was printed in *Pilgrim's* bulletin, "Council has difficulty with the fact that a camp is run in which Canadian Reformed children are integrated with the children of unbelievers. The mingling and comradery which takes place in a camp setting, in our estimation, is contrary to what is

confessed in Lord's Day 27, namely, that the children of believers are distinguished (set apart) from the children of unbelievers, many of which . . . come from families where there is much pain and misery caused by abuse, alcoholism, etc . . . . That this distinction is being blurred is evident in that all the children are referred to as 'God's children' and 'His people'" (cf. *Clarion*, Jan 21, 2000, p 39). The theme for the camp in 1998 was "The Children of God." This way of approaching and addressing children from unbelieving families is not Scriptural. God's children are those who have received the sign and seal of the covenant and are grafted into the Christian church.

What is meant by "distinguished" in Lord's day 27? Rev. Cl. Stam's definition is more negative than positive: distinction is not separation. Article 34 of the *Belgic Confession*, however, explains, "By baptism we are received into the church of God and *set apart* from all other peoples and false religions, to be entirely committed to him whose mark and emblem we bear." We are baptized into the name of, into the communion of, the Triune God. This sacrament signifies and seals that we are the possession of the Father, the Son and Spirit. We bear the "emblem" of God and of his covenant. The word "emblem" is a military one. We are God's soldiers who fight the good fight of faith. That element also comes out in the prayer after the administration of baptism, "Grant that this child . . . may valiantly fight against and overcome sin, the devil and his whole dominion." Baptism, then, constantly reminds us of, and urges us to maintain, the antithesis or enmity that God has set between the seed of the woman and the seed of the Serpent, between the church and the world. That the children of believers are distinguished (set apart) from the children of unbelievers has to be seen in the Messianic light of Genesis 3:15.

### Covenantal distinction

There are other texts that highlight this divinely ordained, covenantal distinction. In Numbers 33:51 the Lord commands, "When you have crossed the Jordan into the land of Canaan, then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, destroy all their engraved stones, destroy all their molded images, and demolish all their high places . . ." Similar injunctions can be found in Exodus

34:11, 12, Deuteronomy 7:1-6, and Joshua 11:12. The entire book of Judges shows the awful consequences of Israel's refusal to carry out this radical demand of the Lord. The Canaanites, if they remained in the land, if Israel formed friendships with them, would eventually draw God's people into idolatry because they served other gods. God abhors idolatry and warns his children to avoid and flee from it for the sake of their very salvation. Hence the command to drive out the Canaanites.

The church today is no longer a nation living in its own geographically defined boundaries. Christ has come, and as a result of his atoning work the new Israel of God is living *among* all the nations. Nevertheless, through the bond of faith and in the unity of the Spirit we are a "royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own special people" (1 Pet 2:9). Just as God through the covenant people of the Old Testament worked toward the advent of Christ, so He works through the covenant people of the New Testament toward the second advent of Christ, toward his coming in the fullness of power and glory. We can only be his coworkers if we remain holy as He is holy, if we keep ourselves from sin, if we do not conform to the idolatrous practices of the people among whom we live.

### Abiding principle

The way in which we do that is different from the way Israel did. They had to drive out the world. We have to live in the world. They had to physically remove the ungodly from the land. We coexist with them. But *the principle* behind that Old Testament law remains for us today, as article 25 of the Belgic Confession puts it, "In the meantime we still use the testimonies taken from the law and the prophets, both to confirm us in the doctrine of the gospel and to order our life in all honour, according to God's will and to His glory." God will not have us conform to the idolatrous ways of the world. How do we prevent that? How do we not lead ourselves into the temptation of idolatry? By not establishing friendships with people from the world. The apostle James writes, "Whoever . . . wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God" (4:4). Campfire! encourages our children to do exactly that. In a general explanatory letter dated March 7, 1998 the executive for Campfire wrote, "We hope to host four

different groups of children at each of our weeks of camp this year: a teen Leadership Camp, two sets of children from the Canadian Reformed community (*along with neighbourhood friends* – emphasis added; see also "Campfire 1998" in *Clarion* Year End Issue, p 630). In an article written by the assistant director of the camp it was stated, "We were also very excited to see the number of 'neighbours' grow again, as more and more children from our church community are inviting next-door friends along with them for a week of Christian camping" (*Clarion*, Jan 21, 2000, p 38). Fostering friendships with children from the world runs contrary to our calling to maintain the antithesis and to follow the principle of separation defined in texts like Numbers 33:51. Obeying those clear words of Scripture does not lead to "misguided Anabaptism" nor to "total seclusion," one of the "hallmarks of a sect."

### Forming friendships?

Someone might reply, "If that's the way we have to live, then we cannot work with worldly people either." The point, however, is not about making a living in the world, but about forming friendships with the world. Solomon did not restrict the building of the temple to Israelites. He enlisted the help of construction workers from Tyre in Syria (1 Kg 5:18). A friend, however, is a person who is close to you. You share your interests, hobbies, entertainment, joys, trials, goals and aspirations with each other. You get along great together. Can someone from the world truly be a friend? He or she might be the nicest, most courteous or generous individual, but what marks us is our union with Christ. There you have the significance of our baptism again! That reality determines and shapes everything in our life: our finances, family, entertainment, education, friends.

The argument has been raised in conversations on this topic, "My worldly friend is considerate. He doesn't try to prevent me from going to church or anything like that. He's not in the least bit offended by my faith." If that really is the case, then one is probably not practicing the faith as demanded in the Scriptures. For the gospel is "to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness" (1 Cor 2:23). Besides, the Lord Jesus declared that there is no neutral zone, "Whoever is not with me is against me, and he who does

not gather with me scatters abroad" (Matt 12:30). A kind, sociable neighbour who does not believe in Christ is still "against" Christ. And those neighbours who say they believe in God but do not *show* it in thankful obedience to his commandments are also "against" Christ. Both we and our children, therefore, instead of socializing with them ought to evangelize them. The description that the apostle Paul gave the Corinthians should also fit us, "You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men" (2 Cor 2:3). As living members of Christ open the Scriptures with unbelieving neighbours. Invite them to church, not to camp, for in Zion God has commanded the blessing – life forevermore (Ps 133:3). Tell them that true and lasting friendship can only be based on a loving service that you and they should have for God and his Anointed. If they reject that message, they reject Christ. Then we may not seek their companionship, having fun with them, attending their parties, having their children for sleep overs, camping out with them, etc.

### Comparing apples and oranges

Rev. Cl. Stam notes that comparing our schools to evangelism (Campfire!) is like comparing apples and oranges. The school is a means to "instruct our children in the way of God's covenant." VBS and Campfire! are "evangelism tools, and thus directed to a different goal." I can see some validity in that argument. However, the comparison is perhaps not between apples and oranges, but between Golden Delicious and Granny Smith apples. Indeed, the school is for instructing God's children in every subject so that his glory and wisdom are extolled. But with that not everything is said. The reason our parents and grandparents insisted on erecting Reformed schools was not only because of the humanism being promulgated in the public school system, but also because of the negative effect that worldly children would have upon the children of the covenant while learning, eating and playing together.

Connected to this is the difficulty that council had with the purpose of Campfire! It appears to be more than just a means of evangelizing children of unbelievers. Its mission statement includes "reaching out to children both *within the Canadian Reformed Church community*, as well as within the various inner city communities with which

we have become involved." From this statement it is clear that they also evangelize covenant children. This purpose was confirmed in a director's Report, "the children from our church community were confronted with questions that are sometimes left unasked in an established church community, such as, 'Why did Jesus have to die? How do you know if you are saved or not? What is salvation?'" (*Clarion* Year End Issue 1998, p 630). This is not true. These questions are asked of and explained to every child of Canadian Reformed parents. All are required to study and memorize the *Heidelberg Catechism* which explains very clearly and succinctly why Jesus had to die in Lord's Days 5 and 6. Salvation is explained in Lord's Days 11-19. The awareness that we are saved is dealt with, among other places, in the opening Lord's Day ("What is your only comfort in life and death?"), and in Lord's Day 7 on true faith. If questions as delineated above are not being answered in our community, then it is not the responsibility of a Children's Bible Camp to provide the answers. It is the task of the parents, the minister and elders.

### The material

Another consideration in not promoting Campfire! as *Council* was the material that was being taught at Camp. At the time only one sample was available of the type of instruction provided there. That was the program "Welcome to TeenWeek!" After reading it through, Council came to this conclusion, which was also published in the pastoral letter:

The program, "Welcome to TeenWeek" . . . contains an individualistic thrust and an emphasis on the personal commitment to Jesus without an eye for the covenant promises of God and the communion of saints. That does not mean there are no good elements in this program, but its style is more in the evangelical mould of Billy Graham. To quote from the opening lines of one devotional, "I have decided I'm gonna live like a believer, turn my back on the deceiver, I'm gonna live what I believe . . . Have you decided?"

Let me conclude with the final paragraph of the "pastoral letter" written to the congregation, "These comments are not intended to dampen enthusiasm for witnessing about "the Saviour of the world" to others. Rather, they are raised

in a spirit of brotherly love and in the hope that the enthusiasm for witnessing can be channeled into a course that is in accordance with the Word of God as summarized in our confessions."

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<sup>1</sup>Z. Ursinus in his *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, remarks that in denying infant baptism the Anabaptists "set aside the solemn obligation by which God will have the offspring of his people consecrated to Him from their very infancy, distinguished, and separated from the world . . ." (emphasis added) p, 367.

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## Response to J. Ludwig

By Cl. Stam

My editorial did not mention any specific congregation or consistory, because I wanted to deal only with the matter itself, without prompting others who might feel accused to write a lengthy rebuttal. I had not even read the pastoral letter from the consistory at London when I wrote the editorial. Perhaps it's just as well.

It is not difficult to scrutinize a new endeavour and find it severely lacking. Campfire! is an organization that made a beginning with a form of evangelism, and it is very easy to point to some of the early inconsistencies and problem areas. The council of Hamilton has tried to address these and is still doing so, working with the young people to come to a better understanding and methodology. We try to offer solutions and give direction. Give the youth some encouragement, direction, and trust.

Exceptions should not be presented as a rule. The rule is that counsellors must be communicant members of the Canadian Reformed Churches. It has happened that others have also functioned in this capacity. But that is not the rule. Perhaps with a few good counsellors from the Church at London, the quality of care would suddenly improve significantly, but things have to grow in the right direction. If errors are made, the whole concept does not need to be discarded.

Let's not hide behind words as "hesitancy *officially* to support this organization" as if this still leaves it up to the members. The reality is that if one publishes a public letter emphatically not endorsing

but elaborately critiquing an organization and its efforts, he, in fact, tells the members also not to participate. I imagine that a consistory does not publish a pastoral letter unless there is reason for great alarm. A pastoral letter does have the imprimatur, "thus says the Lord . . ."

Be that as it may, I still have a problem with the main suggestion that distinction does mean separation. The example of Israel in Canaan can hardly be used to undergird the notion of separation. The redemptive historical character of Israel's place in Canaan must be kept in mind. Quoting from Article 25 of the Belgic Confession does not prove anything, for that article deals with the *ceremonial laws* that were a part of the old dispensation functioning within Israel. We do not confess there that we must treat our neighbours today as Canaanites. We ourselves have been ingrafted as wild olive shoots into the olive tree that is the spiritual Israel, and we must consider the kindness of God "provided that you continue in his kindness" (Rom 9:22).

The distinction between covenant children and children of the world is *spiritual*, and should not be externalized. Campfire! does not encourage our children to be friends of the world. I find that conclusion unfounded and

hurtful. Our children know other children in their neighbourhood, sometimes have "friendships" with them, and these children may be invited to camp so that they may see how our children are taught and motivated. In that process Campfire! does ask of our children to show that they are different, i.e., covenant children of God.

The theme "Children of God" did not suggest that every child at the camp, baptized or not, is a child of God, and thus negated the antithesis, but explained what it means to be a child of God, in the hope that the children of the world would desire to be God's children also. Campfire! maintains the distinction that God has laid, and brings that out through Scriptural teaching.

Evangelism always stresses the call to repent and believe, to receive and acknowledge the Lord, and hence evangelism is very personally directed to individuals, but does this merit a likening to the style of Billy Graham with all the attendant Arminian undertones? I regret this association, for it leaves a lasting but false impression. Casual name-dropping should not be done in the church.

Contrary to Rev. Ludwig, I also understand that in a camp setting some of our own children find it easier to

open up and share some of their questions and concerns with others than they would sometimes in the home (church) setting. The home (church) setting does not necessarily foster discussion and openness, but can stifle a youth because he fears rejection. Not every youth can talk easily and openly with the minister, whose views are perhaps well-known in the congregation on most issues.

The relative openness at camp is not a threat to the parents, elders, and ministers, but may be helpful in ways that were hitherto unavailable. Besides, all parents and office bearers may visit the camp, observe and participate, and also discuss with their children what they have learned at camp. They might be pleasantly surprised.

The consistory at London raises its concerns "in the hope that the enthusiasm for witnessing can be channeled into a course that is in accordance with the Word of God as summarized in our confessions." This is a very pious wish, which I am willing to acknowledge, but then I'd like to see some concrete, positive guidance from this consistory and others who disagree with Campfire! So far, I have read only how we should not do it. What do these churches regard as proper evangelism? Please enlighten us. 

## 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. Please include address and phone number.

### Dear Editor:

Thank you for your timely articles concerning the events of September 11 and our Christian response. "The Possibility of Evil" by Mark Slomp (Clarion, Nov 9, 2001) noted that evil lies in the "heart of every human who draws a breath" but that Christians cling to the sure hope that "evil will not prevail." Mr. Slomp applauded President George Bush's September 14 Prayer Service address to the American people, where he quoted from Romans 8:38. I also listened to

that speech and was much encouraged at the openness of the President's faith, until I realized that he left out a couple of crucial words, in fact, the most important ones of all. President Bush ended his quote as follows, ". . . nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God . . ." and left out "that is in Christ Jesus our Lord." This was likely done with intent so as not to offend Muslims, Jews, and other non-Christians. It is perhaps understandable that a President of a

multi-faith country would choose to do that, but therein lies the challenge for all Christians. Do we stand for the full message of the gospel if we choose to omit the name of Him who makes it possible to be reconciled to God, and fully loved by Him? "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

Sincerely,  
Sarah Vandergugten  
Cloverdale, B.C.

