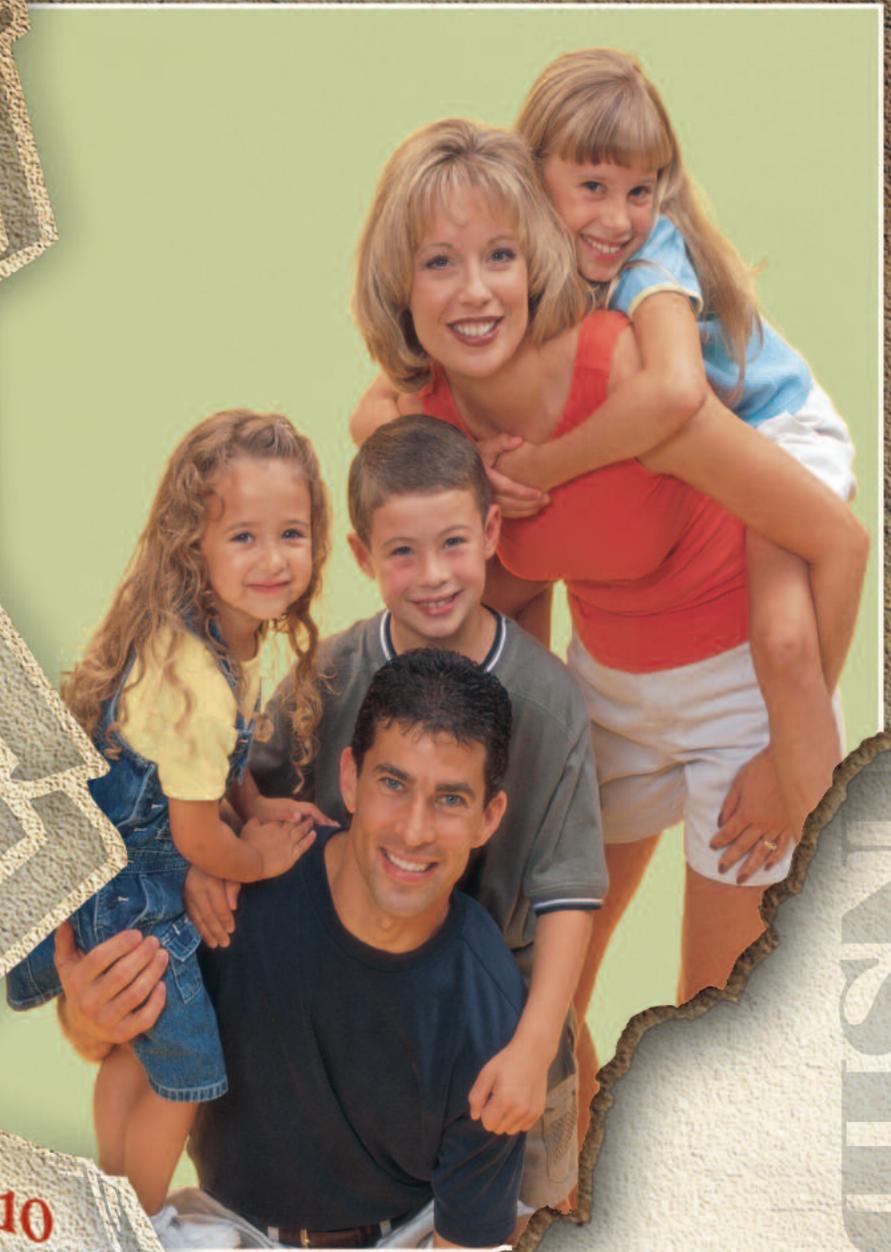


# Clarion

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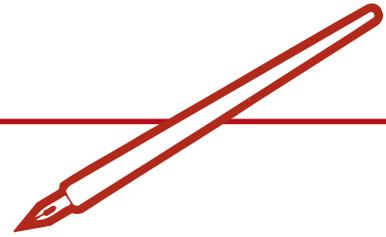


*Numbers*

*10:1-10*

*Pulling Out  
the Cornerstone  
of Society*

INSIDERS!



By R. Aasman



## Pulling Out the Cornerstone of Society

### The family

A family consisting of a husband and wife with their children has long been regarded as the cornerstone to a stable and flourishing society. Those who hold the Bible as the infallible rule of God know that marriage and family find their origin in God's creation. God created man male and female, and He officiated at the very first marriage in Paradise. Moreover, He gave the command to be fruitful and multiply. Western culture and society has also accepted and promoted this basic family unit. In North America, the original laws of Canada and the United States have been favourable to marriage and families. Even the tax systems favoured the marriage of a man and woman, as well as the procreation of children.

*The basic family is the cornerstone to a stable and flourishing society.*

In the landmark case for gay couples where Jim Egan sought the same allowances for his gay partner as commonly found among married couples, Justice Gerard La Forest of the Supreme Court of Canada argued:

Marriage has from time immemorial been firmly grounded in our legal tradition, one that is itself a reflection of long-standing philosophical and religious traditions. But its ultimate *raison d'être* transcends all of these and is firmly anchored in the biological and social realities that heterosexual couples have the unique ability to procreate, that most children are the product of these relationships, and they are generally cared for and nurtured by those who live in that relationship. In this sense marriage is by nature heterosexual . . . because of its importance, legal marriage may properly be viewed as fundamental to the stability and well-being of the family and, as such, parliament may quite properly give special support to the institution of marriage.

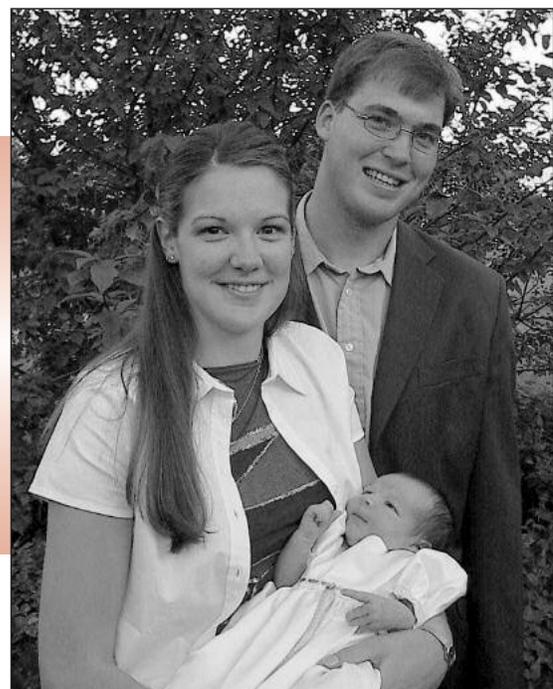
This was 1995. Clearly, within Canadian society there is still a high regard for marriage and the basic family structure. It is acknowledged that there is a religious tradition behind this, but also biological and social realities. As Christians we read here between the lines: what God instituted at the

time of creation was incredibly wise, beautiful and beneficial. Even an unbeliever can see the glory of God in this.

We know from such Scripture passages as Deuteronomy 6, Psalm 78 and Psalm 128, that it is within the safety and nourishment of the traditional family that the kingdom of God is promoted. Moreover, society receives the benefit. As we have said, the basic family is the cornerstone to a stable and flourishing society.

### But the times, they are a changin'

Sadly, in recent decades there have been tremendous changes in Western culture to the basic family unit. The 60s brought "easy" divorce laws. The 70s and 80s brought common law relationships. The 90s brought gay relationships. Here is the startling part of all this: these things are not just happening, but they have the support of the government and courts. Most recently, we have seen a court ruling which is opening the door to gay marriages. This past July, three Ontario Superior Court judges ruled that the federal



government's definition of a male and female marriage to the exclusion of all other relationships violated the charter. They said that there is no pressing societal need that justified the discrimination against same sex couples who want to marry. Thankfully the federal government has decided to appeal this decision. Nevertheless, it is an appalling development, a fact underlined by a poll taken shortly after the Ontario Superior Court decision where almost half of all Canadians polled expressed their favour for gay marriages.

*Divorce has been oversold as a way of dealing with marriage difficulties.*

Times are changing. Even those who are in a position of respect and government in our society are prepared to pull out the very cornerstone of society. What will happen to a society where marriage and family are being shredded by divorce, common law relationships, and gay relationships? Do we not have plenty evidence right now where this is leading? Look at the moral decay of our culture, a rudderless youth, and ever increasing narcissism or egocentric people!

### *What's inside?*

The editorial examines some recent developments in our society with respect to same sex marriages. Thankfully our government is balking at agreeing with these developments and is asking for societal input. As Christians we need to speak up loudly and clearly.

The story of Rev. A.C. Van Raalte's ministry in both the Netherlands and North America is a riveting one. Although he was a man with shortcomings and weaknesses, he was a very special servant of the Lord. Dr. J. De Jong gives a short account of this in his press review.

We have another series of articles by Dr. F.G. Oosterhoff. This time she examines the powerful nineteenth-century assault upon the Scriptures by higher criticism. But as she points out, "the radical critics never monopolized the field. There were at all times scholars who defended the Bible's historicity and trustworthiness, and who even progressed from a defensive to an offensive position on the issue. Prominent among these scholars in Reformed circles was the Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck."

In *Education Matters*, teacher Derek Stoffels examines the value of electronic learning in the classroom. There are some definite benefits to electronic learning. This is not designed to replace the traditional classroom, but to work in conjunction with it.

We have our regular column *Treasurers, New and Old*, and we have a reader's forum and a letter to the editor.

RA



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## A brave new world?

The dramatic changes to marriage and family have taken place fairly recently – less than four decades. That means assessments are currently being made as well. Since divorce was one of the first things to buffet the institution of marriage, the effects of divorce have been much studied in recent years. One organization, the Institute of American Values in New York, a non-partisan think-tank that specializes in family issues, has published its research on divorce. Basically, what they discovered is that divorce has been oversold as a way of dealing with marriage difficulties. What the Institute discovered is that couples who dealt with their difficulties and stayed married were more likely to be happy than those who divorced. Surprise, surprise. Actually this is no surprise at all. When human beings flee from their problems and refuse to honour the commitment of marriage, they are more than likely to continue experiencing failure in their lives. It is people who face their problems, work on them, and resolve them through forgiveness and humility who flourish in their relationships.

I have no doubt that honest evaluation will demonstrate similar findings that society has been oversold and defrauded by the so-called benefits of a brave new world of common law marriages and gay marriages.

## What can we do?

It is clear that there are people in the land, from the man in the street to Members of Parliament, who have deep concerns about what is happening to the family unit in this modern age. As Christians who have the rich knowledge of what God reveals in his Word, we need to speak up. There are organizations such as the Canada Family Action Coalition ([www.familyaction.org](http://www.familyaction.org)) which keep us apprised of what is going on in government and courts. We can also contact

the Justice Minister or our local Member of Parliament<sup>1</sup> and let them know our concerns. We might think that a single phone call or email from any one of us cannot make much of a difference. The opposite is true. As more and more individuals step forward and voice their concerns, governing officials do listen. That is the nature of politics.

We should also keep in mind that being a light in the world does not end with political and social activism. Above all else, it means being an example to the world around us. How important it is that we refrain from divorce, premarital sex, common law relationships, and homosexual lifestyle. Some readers might wonder: does this actually have to be stated among Reformed people? The answer is, yes. What happens in the world creeps into the church. Through preaching and discipline the church must be clear where it stands on these matters and apply discipline as necessary.

Above all else, our neighbour must see in our lives a flourishing relationship between husband and wife, parents and children. That is a star attraction which makes others around us desire to share the same thing. And that gives the wonderful opportunity to show the greatest miracle of all: that a flourishing marriage is God's gift of grace, made possible in the blood of Christ, and nourished by his Word and Spirit.

<sup>1</sup> – Liberal Justice Minister Martin Cauchon. Phone (613) 992-462 Fax (613) 990-7255 E-Mail [CauchM@parl.gc.ca](mailto:CauchM@parl.gc.ca)

– To find contact info for your MP click:

<http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/about/people/house/PostalCode.asp?Source=SM>



*Rev. R. Aasman is minister of the Providence Canadian Reformed Church in Edmonton, Alberta.*



*Photo courtesy Cor Lodder*

By J.G. Slaa

## A Banner Day

*“Moses built an altar and called it The LORD is my Banner. He said, ‘For hands were lifted up to the throne of the LORD. The LORD will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation.’”*

Exodus 17:15, 16

Two months after their glorious departure from Egypt, the Amalekites attacked the Israelites near Rephidim. It is another obstacle along the way. The obstacles did not present themselves just like that. God sent them, often to discipline his people for their rebellion. He sent them to test their loyalty and trust.

The attack is brutal. From Deuteronomy 25:17ff, we learn more details. Moses at that time asks the Israelites to recall what Amalek did along the way. The people were to remember “when you were weary and worn out, they met you on your journey and cut off all who were lagging behind; they had no fear of God.” The Amalekites drove a wedge between the people in the front of the group and those who were tagging behind. They separated the strong from the weak. We don’t read what happens after that. We can certainly imagine. At the least, it was enough to drive the encouragement out and the fear deeply into the people.

Moses, who was facing rejection, stepped in. He gathered his fighting men, led by his young aide Joshua, and rallied them to fight. He announced his intention to climb a nearby hill and to raise his staff to the LORD. The staff was the same staff which turned into a snake before Pharaoh. It ushered in the ten plagues. It separated the waters at the Red Sea. It brought the water from the Rock. It was the staff of God. It is the symbol of his power. When Moses climbed the nearby hill, he raised the staff with his two arms. “For hands were lifted up to the throne of the LORD.” It was a prayer to the covenant LORD. In this prayer, Moses the mediator for Israel, called upon the LORD to remem-

ber his steadfast covenant promises and to uphold his power.

Every time Moses raised his arms, holding the staff up high, the Israelites would advance. Every time Moses lowered his arms as they became weary, the Amalekites prevailed. Aaron and Hur held up the arms to ensure the victory. The strength and success of Israel’s army did not lay with Joshua and his soldiers. It lay with Moses’ mediation, and therefore ultimately with the LORD, to whom Moses appealed. Therefore the Israelites overcame the Amalekites that day. The LORD saves.

It was Israel’s first encounter with the enemy, after her departure from Egypt. It represents every enemy that Israel would face as they entered and conquered the promised land. Small wonder it is the Amalekites who attack. The Amalekites were the descendants of Amalek, the grandson of Esau. In this battle we have the age-old antithesis. Two nations in Rebekah’s womb fighting, and the elder will serve the younger. At first, it appeared that this prophecy would not hold true, that the elder would prevail. However, through the mediation of Moses, the promises and prophecies of God are fulfilled. It is the age-old antithesis between good and evil, between the church and the world. We understand from this passage that the elder still serves the younger. The LORD uses Amalek to humble his nation, to drive them to repentance, and to lead them to trust and salvation. In this passage we receive the promise that the church will prevail. It prevails because of her Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ. With uplifted arms He was placed on the cross, to die for all our sins. Through his

suffering and death the LORD leads us to victory. As Hebrews 7:25 states, Christ “always lives to intercede for them.” Christ is always there, including today, appealing to the Father’s love and pleading for Him to remember his mercy. Moses, as a human, became tired. His mediation was not perfect. Christ’s mediation is perfect. In Christ, the victory is certain.

When the battle was won, Moses built an altar and called it “The LORD is my Banner.” It served to give thanks to God and to remind the people constantly that as a people their identity was found in the LORD. He would lead the people in victory procession. As an army held up a banner to identify itself as it rallied into battle position, so the people of Israel held up the LORD, and his promises, and his Word, as their banner of identity.

It was a banner day. On this day the LORD once again demonstrated that He rules and leads his people to victory. This day near Rephidim proclaimed the coming Saviour and perfect Mediator Jesus Christ, who also leads us to victory. Eternal victory. Even though we face many enemies today, even though there are many obstacles, we will overcome them. Let us trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Let his cross be our banner. In his cross do we find all the promises and words of God encapsulated and fulfilled. Trust in the Lord. Follow Him. Appeal to Him. He helps us to overcome all our enemies.



Rev. J.G. Slaa is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Kerwood, Ontario.

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# Herman Bavinck on Old Testament Criticism (1)

By F.G. Oosterhoff

The attacks upon the historicity of the Bible began in the early modern age. Although they were influential already in the eighteenth century, their effect upon the body of believers did not become fully apparent until the nineteenth. In the course of that century western Christendom witnessed an assault upon the Bible's trustworthiness which would affect not only scholars, but increasingly also the men and women in the pew. The nineteenth-century assault was the work of the so-called higher biblical criticism, which was especially strong at German universities and spread from there to the rest of the western world. It continues in our own days.

The reason why many accepted the movement's conclusions was not simply their scholarly persuasiveness. In fact, there was considerable disagreement among the critics, and their theories were in constant need of revision. The influence of the higher criticism was first of all a result of the fact that the methods it used were presented as scientific ones, and that throughout the modern period the scientific approach was held to yield fully objective knowledge. The critics' statements on the Bible were therefore to be accepted without questioning, just as one accepted without questioning the conclusions of mathematics and physics and any of the other sciences. One did not argue with the pronouncements of science, one simply believed them.

But if the nineteenth-century assault upon the Scriptures was powerful, the radical critics never monopolized the field. There were at all times scholars who defended the Bible's historicity and trustworthiness, and who even progressed from a defensive to an offensive position on the issue. Prominent among these scholars in Reformed cir-

cles was the Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck (1854-1921), to whose work we have given attention on a previous occasion.<sup>i</sup>

At that time we looked at two aspects of his response to the nineteenth-century wave of attacks. The first was his critique of the work of Julius Wellhausen and his followers, who explained the Old Testament in evolutionary terms.

*The critics' statements on the Bible were to be accepted without questioning, just as one accepted without questioning the conclusions of mathematics and physics. One did not argue with the pronouncements of science, one simply believed them.*

The second was his reply to the school of the history of religions, which taught that the Gospel accounts in the New Testament were derived, in part or in full, from ancient mythical traditions, Jewish and pagan. Bavinck's response, we saw, was effective not only because he pointed to factual errors in the critical theories, but also because he showed the groundlessness of the belief that the scientific method necessarily leads to fully objective truth.

The history of religion and related schools concerned themselves with both the New Testament and the Old, and their work in the latter area also had Bavinck's attention. It is here, in fact, that he concentrated his counter-attack.<sup>ii</sup> Because his work also in this area continues to be of relevance for

today, we will give an outline of it in this two-part series. We will begin with a brief account of the rise and background of the nineteenth-century critical movement.

## The higher criticism

In biblical studies one meets with two kinds of criticism, namely the textual and the so-called higher criticism. The former concerns itself with attempts to recover the most accurate biblical text. This is done by means of a careful study of the existing manuscripts and of whatever other reliable evidence is available. Textual criticism is not concerned with challenging the divine origin of the biblical text and is applied by believing scholars as much as by unbelieving ones. The higher criticism, on the other hand, proceeds not from a belief in the Bible's divine inspiration but approaches the text of Scripture in the same manner as scholars approach secular historical documents.

Important in the higher criticism from the very beginning was the so-called historical-critical method of explaining the Bible, a method that was inspired by the attempt of nineteenth-century historians to make the interpretation of historical documents truly "scientific." In biblical studies the quest for scientific objectivity means, among other things, that the supernatural elements in Scripture are denied, or at least seriously questioned. This applies to statements about direct divine intervention, to accounts of miracles, and also to predictive prophecy. It accounts for the fact that prophetic books are often assigned a very late date, so that they can be explained not as predicting future events, but as describing events that had already happened when the book was written.

Initially, many higher critics believed that religion was subject to laws of evolution, but this view, although it has certainly not been abandoned, was soon widely questioned. Evolutionism assumes that what is earliest is necessarily the most primitive. For Old Testament critics this meant that accounts of advanced societies in very early times, such as the society of the Hebrew patriarchs, must be non-historical and the product of legend. Before the end of the nineteenth century, however, historical studies and archaeological discoveries demonstrated that well before the time of Abraham advanced civilizations had existed in the Middle East. With the help of such data as similarities in names and customs, the studies also showed that the patriarchs had been in contact with these civilizations. Scientific evidence, in other words, supported the biblical account of the patriarchs' society.

It was this development which contributed to the rise of newer critical movements, such as that of the history of religions. The critics belonging to these schools did not concern themselves with the origin of religion as such, but tried by means of comparative studies to determine whether, and if so to what extent, existing religions had influenced each other. In practice this approach meant that the Old Testament faith was explained, in part or in whole, with reference to traditions of the higher civilizations surrounding Israel.

Not all historians went to the same source. Earlier scholars had looked for influences from Persia, India, and especially Egypt. After the spate of archaeological discoveries in Mesopotamia in the 1870s and following decades, the direction changed. Scholars now decided that the Old Testament faith must have been derived in large part from the traditions of Semitic nations like Babylonia and Assyria. Because this Mesopotamian school was the most influential one in Bavinck's days, it was on its teachings that he concentrated in challenging the movement.

### **"Babel and Bible"**

When describing the rise of the newer schools, Bavinck stated that the old historical-critical approach had lost credibility not only because of factual errors, but also because of its failure to explain the "problem" of Israel's religion and, in the process, to deny its uniqueness. That had been one of the

goals. But what use, he asked, is all the sifting and splitting of sources if behind them Israel's religion itself continues to stand as an enigma? It was this failure which the newer critical schools also recognized as fatal, and which they attempted to correct by turning to other religious traditions, such as the Babylonian ones, as source and explanation of the Old Testament faith.

*After the spate of archaeological discoveries in Mesopotamia, scholars decided that the Old Testament faith must have been derived in large part from the traditions of Semitic nations like Babylonia and Assyria.*

There were indeed parallels between Babylonian traditions and some of the Old Testament teachings. Babylon had ancient writings – many of them more ancient than the Old Testament itself – with stories about creation and a flood that had similarities with the Genesis accounts. There were differences as well, but as Bavinck writes, people found the parallels so striking that they believed there must either have been a common source, or Israel had derived much of its religion from the Babylonians. The second conclusion was generally accepted. Nor, it should be added, was it believed that Babylonia's influence was restricted to Israel. In time a Pan-Babylonian school arose, which saw the ancient Mesopotamian civilizations as the source of civilized life throughout the world.

Our concern is not with these cultural similarities but with the critics' ideas regarding Mesopotamian influences on the Old Testament faith. Here some very radical views were promoted. In the heydays of Babylonianism a movement arose which fully equated *Babel und Bibel* (to use the German terminology). According to this movement, the Old Testament derived not only its accounts of creation and flood from Babylonia, but also practically every other aspect of its religion – including the belief in monotheism, the name Yahweh, the account of the Fall, the institution of the Sabbath, the Ten Commandments, and indeed the bulk of the Mosaic law.

This radical movement did not last. Before long even unbelieving scholars rejected its extreme conclusions as speculative and unproven. The movement came also under attack for giving insufficient attention to Israel's relations with Egypt and with various other ethnic groups, such as Hittites and Phoenicians, the peoples of the Syrian-Arabian desert and of other neighbouring Semitic countries, and the population of Canaan itself. The Canaanite connection would be stressed especially when, a decade or so after the First World War, important archaeological discoveries were made at Ugarit, a city located on the Syrian coast just north of Palestine, which had flourished between 1400 and 1200 B.C. and had enjoyed an advanced culture. The excavations at Ugarit yielded many data about ancient Canaanite traditions, and also about strong links between Israel and Canaanite culture. Important, among other things, was the information on the religion of Baal and Astarte, which, as we can learn from the Bible, influenced Israel more strongly than any Babylonian cult. At the same time it became clear, however, that although it had developed a distinct culture of its own, Ugarit had been influenced by Mesopotamia.

Bavinck, who had died before the discoveries at Ugarit, mentioned Canaanite sources but concentrated on the original Babylonian theory. He admitted that this theory contained elements of truth. There was a good deal of evidence, also extra-biblical evidence, suggesting that the cradle of humanity had been in the Middle East, that Babylonia had been a major influence on surrounding and succeeding civilizations, and that Israel's culture also had been strongly affected by that of its powerful eastern neighbour. But this did not make Babylonia the source of all subsequent accomplishments. Nor did it prove that the Old Testament religion was derived from Babylonian traditions. One of the major weaknesses of the Babylonian theory, Bavinck pointed out, was that it all but ignored the differences which existed between the Babylonian religious traditions and those of the Bible, differences that were no less striking than the similarities. Another problem was that it failed to do what the comparative approach to religion had in fact intended to do, namely describe and explain the unique character of the biblical religion.

In what follows we will have a closer look at the Babylonian theory and at Bavinck's challenge. We will first deal with the matter of similarities and dissimilarities, then look at an evaluation of the Babylonian school as provided by Bavinck and other critics of radical Babylonianism, and finally turn to the question regarding the difference between Babylonian religious traditions and the religion of the Bible.

### The myth of creation

Civilization in Mesopotamia began with the non-Semitic Sumerians. Well before the time of Abraham, however, these nations had been overrun by various Semitic tribes. Among them were the people who would later be known as Chaldeans or Babylonians, a group to which Abraham belonged. The Babylonians, and also the neighbouring Assyrians, inherited creation myths and other religious traditions from the Sumerians, but in course of time made a number of changes in them. Most biblical critics concentrated on the Babylonian version of the creation myth.

*A comparison of the creation accounts of Babylonia and the Old Testament serves only to bring out the uniqueness and glory of the biblical Gospel.*

This version speaks of the birth and accomplishments of Marduk, king of the gods and ruler of the universe, who reaches his supreme position by overcoming the forces of chaos. The latter are represented by Tiamat, the ancient mother goddess, who represents the untamed ocean, and whose destructive force is often portrayed in the form of a variety of "monsters of the deep," such as the primeval serpent, the ancient dragon, and the many-headed leviathan. Having killed Tiamat and the monsters she has spawned, Marduk splits her body in two, placing half of it above the earth to form the sky, and perhaps using the other half to form the earth, although the myth does not state this in so many words. He proceeds to establish (or re-establish) order out of the existing chaos, appoints the celestial bodies, and creates Babylon. Finally, he makes man, whom he fashions from

the blood of one of Tiamat's supporters, and on whom he imposes the toil of the gods, so that these can enjoy their leisure.

Among the parallels which the critics found in the accounts of Babylonia and the Old Testament are the emergence of the world out of water and the establishment of order out of a pre-existing disorder. Their assertions, as Bavinck observes, are not altogether groundless. The Genesis account does speak of the earth as originally empty and formless, of the Holy Spirit's hovering over the waters that covered the earth, and of the subsequent establishment of an ordered cosmos. The similarities are few, however, and insufficiently striking to convince the unbiased observer of the Old Testament's dependence on the Babylonian myth. Furthermore, the similarities are greatly outnumbered by the differences.

### Dissimilarities

The most important difference is of course that between Marduk and the God of Israel. Himself the descendent of more ancient gods, Marduk lacks eternity. He reaches supreme power only when, after a violent struggle and with the help of other gods, he has destroyed Tiamat and the monsters she has produced. Even after his victory he is not omnipotent but only the first among equals; and rather than being able to create out of nothing, he requires pre-existing material to form an orderly universe. Nor is he able to destroy his opponent once and for all. Tiamat continues to threaten the cosmos and must again and again be overcome. Marduk's battle against the forces of chaos never ends.

If we compare this account with the biblical one, the differences leap to the eye. The Bible does not know of theogonies (accounts of the begetting and birth of gods), nor does it know of a multiplicity of deities. Yahweh, the God of Israel, is uncreated and eternal and reveals Himself as the one, omnipotent and all-knowing God. Beside Him there is none. Also, Babylonian deities are personifications of natural forces, and Tiamat, the primeval chaos, is not the creation of the gods but, somehow, their ancestress. Yahweh, however, is transcendent and a personal and spiritual being, separate from a nature that is not his maker but his handiwork, and which He created out of nothing, simply by speaking the

Word. Nor is He only the Creator of the world and mankind, He is also their Redeemer. The religion of Israel is from the very beginning a religion of salvation. In short, a comparison of the creation accounts serves only to bring out the uniqueness and glory of the biblical Gospel.

*The religion of Israel is from the very beginning a religion of salvation.*

The creation myth by itself, then, provides no support for the contention that the Genesis account is dependent upon Babylonian sources. The members of the Babylonian school had additional arguments, however. They drew attention to the fact that in various places in the Old Testament (in Job, some of the Psalms, Isaiah, Ezekiel, and elsewhere) we meet statements that parallel aspects of the Babylonian myth more closely. Most important among them are references to Yahweh's struggle with and defeat of hostile natural forces, such as his setting bounds to the mighty ocean, his crushing of the heads of serpents and sea monsters, his smiting of the many-headed leviathan, and his slaying of the dragon of the deep. In these cases, the critics argued, the similarities with the Babylonian myth were too clear to be ignored. They showed at the very least that Israel was familiar with the stories of gods struggling with the forces of chaos, and they strongly suggested that it had made use of these stories in the creation of its own orthodox Yahwist religion.

It was specially these arguments that Bavinck dealt with. In the following article we will look at his response.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>"Faith and Reason in Reformed Thought," parts 3, 4, 5; *Clarion*, March 1, 15, 29, 2002.

<sup>2</sup>For that counter-attack see especially Bavinck's *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, II, 4th ed. (Kampen: Kok, 1928), pp. 434-39, and his *Wijsbegeerte der Openbaring* (Kok: Kampen, 1908), pp. 144-170.



*Dr. F.G. Oosterhoff is a historian in Hamilton, Ontario.*

By J. De Jong



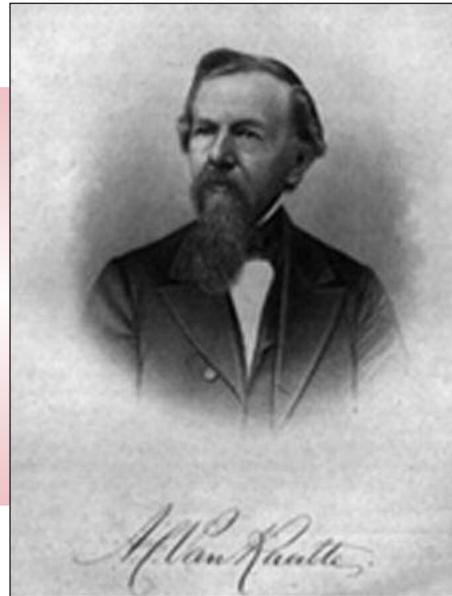
## Van Raalte's Legacy

The story of the early settlers of the secessionist church in Michigan is always engaging. For us who live with all the comforts of the twenty-first century, the ordeals that these people went through almost makes one shudder. Rev. Michael De Vries, who formerly was a pastor at the Pillar Church (Van Raalte's church building in Holland, MI) wrote a commemorative article on Rev. A.C. Van Raalte recently in *The Banner*, the official publication of the CRC. Here follows his article:

On the east side of Centennial Park in the city of Holland, Mich., stands a 9-foot-tall statue of Rev. Albertus Christiaan Van Raalte. In real life he was a little man – 5 foot 3 inches to be exact. Peter H. Huizenga and family donated this sculpture to Hope College in conjunction with Holland's sesquicentennial celebrations of 1997. This impressive statue stands on city property and faces Pillar Church and Hope College. How fitting! Van Raalte is the founder of the city of Holland, the driving force behind the college, and the first pastor of Pillar Church.

Though this pioneer preacher died Nov. 7, 1876, a little more than 125 years ago, we would do well to take note of Van Raalte and his legacy. A prophecy was made in the 19th century that has been fulfilled: "A hundred years hence his name will stand out in bolder relief than it does today."

While I was pastor of Pillar Church, I often looked at Van Raalte's portrait on the wall of the consistory room, and I grew curious to learn all I could about this preacher. While I have only just begun to delve into the early records, it is already becoming quite clear to me that this man truly deserves what the memorial plaque on the front wall of the sanctuary says about him. It reads (in translation): "In memory of Dr. A.C. Van Raalte, D.D., first



minister of this congregation and the father of our settlement. A servant of the Lord, mighty in words and deeds."

The same description that Stephen gave concerning Moses (see Acts 7:22) fits Van Raalte too: he was "mighty in words and deeds" as he courageously led his people of the *Afscheiding* from the Netherlands to this land of liberty in the fall of 1846.

***Despite fines and the threat of imprisonment, Van Raalte kept on preaching in the province of Overijssel.***

### Man of Courage

It took courage to become a pastor of the *Afgescheidenen*, or Separatists. The Separatists were of the conviction that the national church of the Netherlands – *De Hervormde Kerk* (the Reformed Church) – was influenced by the Enlightenment and becoming far too liberal, that it was,

in fact, turning away from the true faith of the Reformation.

Harassed and ostracized, the Separatists were called by many pejorative terms such as *onruststokers* (fomenters of unrest). Despite fines and the threat of imprisonment, Van Raalte kept on preaching in the province of Overijssel. He was jailed in Zwolle between February 27 and March 7, 1837.

On one occasion when Van Raalte was preaching, the local mayor and his constable arrived in the middle of the worship service. Pressing close to the preacher, the mayor raised his voice and shouted, "Van Raalte, in the name of the king I order you to dismiss this assembly!"

Van Raalte, barely 26 years old and only one year into the ministry, replied: "Mr. Mayor, I stand here in the name of the King of kings to preach the gospel, and I may not stop."

Preaching the gospel was Van Raalte's driving passion ever since he was "grasped by God" during the cholera epidemic of 1832. Nothing could possibly deter him

from proclaiming the good news wherever he went, be it in the open air, barns, or crowded living rooms.

### **Momentous Decisions**

During the summer of 1846, Van Raalte became seriously ill. He suffered from a severe case of typhus, and the prognosis was bad. He did recover, however, and it was during his time of recovery that Van Raalte made a momentous decision.

*Van Raalte chose the uninhabited forests where the unskilled Dutch emigrants had to start from scratch while lacking even the basic know-how for clearing the land.*

Two major questions had plagued him, and he answered them himself: Who will accompany the Separatists to America? And who will provide all the leadership skills and courage for them in a strange land? After much prayer, he decided to become their Moses.

Quite characteristic of Van Raalte, his word and his deed were one and the same. By Sept. 24 1846, he was ready to board a three-masted ship, the *Southerner*, in the Rotterdam harbor, accompanied by his wife, Christina, his five young children, a servant, plus 53 Separatists. It took a lot of courage to leave the land he loved and to face an unknown future in America, which was at that time considered by almost everyone he knew as an uninhabited and savage land, good for and desired by only the riffraff of the nation.

Arriving in New York on Nov. 17 after a long and harrowing voyage across the Atlantic, Van Raalte planned to settle in Alto Township, WI, where some of the Dutch emigrants he knew had gone. But encouraged by Michigan political leaders and Judge John Kellogg of Allegan County, in particular, he scouted out Ottawa County near Black Lake instead.

On Feb. 9, 1847, Van Raalte and six people of his party arrived at the Old Wing Mission, located in

northern Allegan County's Fillmore Township, to begin the Herculean task of transforming the wilderness into a thriving "city set on a hill" (see Matt 5:14).

How much easier it would have been if Van Raalte and his followers had settled in a city such as Grand Rapids, Kalamazoo, or Muskegon, Mich. Instead, Van Raalte chose the uninhabited forests where the unskilled Dutch emigrants had to start from scratch while lacking even the basic know-how for clearing the land.

Moreover, the people had come with meagre financial resources, and none of them had learned the language of their newly adopted country. Was it reckless and foolish, or a manifestation of great faith? The dark and dismal days that soon followed would require all the leadership skills and courage that the *dominie*, as he was then called, could muster.

### **Man of Conviction**

Generally speaking, the three defining characteristics of leadership often mentioned are courage, character, and conviction. Van Raalte embodied all three. He certainly showed his convictions during the sometimes stormy days of transforming a diverse group of stubborn people into a colony of cooperative Christian citizens. It wasn't easy. The familiar aphorism came true: "One Dutchman a Christian, two Dutchmen a church, three Dutchmen a secession."

In 1850, Van Raalte was most responsible for getting Classis Holland to join the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, which became the Reformed Church in America in 1867. It was his deep-felt conviction that the Separatists should unite with the RCA and become one with a denomination that upheld the same confessional and doctrinal positions of the *Afscheiding* and that had been in the United States since 1628.

Within seven years, however, four congregations broke away from the denomination to form the True Reformed Church – what we know today as the Christian Reformed Church – on April 8, 1857. This secession caused Van Raalte much grief, and he lamented this church split for the rest of his life.

In 1871 two events nearly led Van Raalte to despair. On June 30, 1871, his wife, Christina, passed away at 56 years of age. Soon after this, a second catastrophe visited the Holland community and its aging pastor.

On Oct. 9, 1871, a devastating fire wiped out much of the flourishing city in a matter of hours. *De Hope*, a college newspaper, printed as its headline, "*God wilde het*" (God willed it). Van Raalte expressed a similar attitude, interpreting the disaster as "God's judgment." He said, "What a lesson, what a text for a preacher. No earthly good is safe. Sword, hunger, plague, and flood are terrible in God's hands. Now we perceive what we are up against: God's fire."

Yet the pious community also believed that God works together for good to those who love God (see Rom 8:28). Van Raalte spoke with conviction to the distraught people and encouraged them by saying, "Let us remember, God lives."

Privately, however, Van Raalte wondered what to do in the midst of such tragedy. He confided in his friend Philip Phelps, who was the president of Hope College, that he didn't know how he could possibly go on. But then he added, "I must go ahead or give up. The people would be too disheartened if I sit still."

Well, Van Raalte did not sit still, and with determination and will power the aging leader of the colony rallied the people by saying on the day after the big fire, "With our Dutch tenacity and our American experience, Holland will be rebuilt."

*Van Raalte spoke with conviction to the distraught people and encouraged them by saying, "Let us remember, God lives."*

One year later Van Raalte spoke at the 25th anniversary of the colony and exclaimed with pride, "Our colonization efforts were based upon religious principles; they drew their strength from God. . . . Because God has built we live in the happy conviction that he

has done well with us and granted our hearts' desire."

### Dying Christian Warrior

The autumn years of Van Raalte's life were difficult. His influence in the colony waned as the people became more and more independent and no longer needed the *dominie's* leadership and advice. Some even started to resent Van Raalte, especially because of his business dealings.

Van Raalte could be dictatorial and overbearing, and a nasty disagreement arose between him and Holland's mayor, Isaac Cappon, over taxes and the boundaries of his homestead.

Meantime, Van Raalte's health had begun to fail and his venture in starting a new colony in Amelia County, Virginia, had been a total failure. He returned to live out the final years of his life in the city that he founded. . . without the clout he once had and without the loving support of his dear wife.

Rev. Roelof Pieters, pastor of Pillar Church and Van Raalte's worthy successor, called on his friend and colleague regularly during the last days of Van Raalte's life. Van Raalte refused to spend his days in bed and preferred to sit at the table, fully dressed, still wearing his riding boots. His pious conduct and serenity impressed Pieters: "How shall I convey the impression of that visit? The questions he posed to me and the words of wisdom that he spoke are branded in my memory. . . At that time I regarded him as a model of a dying Christian warrior."

On Tuesday morning Nov. 7, 1876, only a few words emerged from Van Raalte's lips. One clearly understood sentence was, "My little boat is tossed about on the foaming waves; soon it will be in the harbor." And when he saw his children wiping their away their tears, Van Raalte said, "Oh, do not cry, children. When I close my eyes, be assured that I will join in with the hallelujahs before the throne." By 7:30 that morning he breathed his last.

R.H. Joldersma, a student at the Preparatory School of Hope College, wrote a six- page account on the death of Albertus C. Van Raalte in the student publication *Excelsior*. He was moved by the sight of

the very long funeral cortege of 76 carriages in addition to the formal lineup of city council members and the vice-president of the United States, Thomas W. Ferry.

When the carved-oak casket was lowered into the grave at Pilgrim Home Cemetery, the youngest student of the college laid a wreath of evergreen on it in the name of the school. "After Dr. Crispell had closed with prayer," Joldersma wrote, "we left the cemetery fully convinced that a great man had fallen."

### One More Split

After Van Raalte's death the Pillar congregation became embroiled in a controversy over Freemasonry. The church Van Raalte founded decided to separate from the RCA over the matter, and on Dec. 3, 1884, the congregation officially joined the

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CRC. The move shocked the Holland community, especially because the church's historic church building became CRC property. It took the Michigan Supreme Court to make the transfer of the building legal. For many years this beautiful white church building with its six pillars became a symbol of division in the city of Holland.

I would like to make a not-so modest proposal regarding Pillar Church as the CRC looks ahead to our sesquicentennial celebrations of 2007. What if Pillar would work toward becoming a "Union Church" and make both the CRC and the RCA of Classis Holland co-owners of this church building? Now that the relationship between our two Reformed denominations has become congenial, wouldn't this be a wonderful testimony to our unity in Christ?

Van Raalte's statue in Centennial Park depicts the leader with his left hand on the Bible and his right



Called to the church at Neerlandia, Alberta:

**Rev. R.J. Eikelboom**

of Calgary, Alberta.

hand extended forward. His gesture suggests that we move ahead and keep on spreading the good news of the gospel. His challenge is as relevant as ever.

### A Brief Comment

While I appreciate this historical overview of Van Raalte's life and work, I question the "not-so-modest" union proposal towards the end of the article. Van Raalte had his hand on the Bible, and basically sought to maintain the truth of God's word in all his work. But both of the church federations that his work spawned have departed from that basis over the years, and have opted for a clear opening to modernist sentiments. To properly honour Van Raalte's legacy, we should go back to the foundation of the Reformed churches as found in Scripture and summarized in the confessions. Then, and only then, can we build on a union that *lasts*. 

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## An Introduction to Electronic Learning: Is it worth investigating?

By D. Stoffels

The delivery of education via computers and the Internet is growing in popularity. The pervasiveness of computers and Internet access has made it possible to revolutionize the way schools are organized or structured. How this will unfold is not clear, but what is clear is that schools are addressing the matter. We hear of Learning Centres instead of schools, electronic bussing of students instead of physical bussing of students, schools that do not have a building but nonetheless enroll significant numbers of students. It is clear that changes are occurring in education.

Electronic learning is challenging the traditional model of brick and mortar schools. It is changing the way people view school. Now the hours and time of year have become flexible. Many Learning Centres are locating in shopping malls and staying open year-round and into the late evening. The age range of the students is from the low teens and upwards.

Electronic learning has been warmly received by many home-schooling parents, parents of academically and/or athletically gifted students, travelling families, adult learners and parents of students who are not able or willing to function cooperatively in the traditional school setting. Up until now these changes have been mainly in the public school system. The changes are coming to independent schools as well. In British Columbia the Ministry of Education has just given approval for up to five independent school Distributed Electronic Learning (DEL) programs to begin this September.

### What is electronic learning?

There are five main ways in which education is being delivered electronically today.

1. Computer managed learning (CML) in a classroom with qualified teach-

ers physically present to answer questions immediately and to teach as needed. It is possible to customize the course to suit your needs and desires and the teacher is physically present so feedback is immediate and personal (See <http://www.odysseylearn.com/> as an example).

2. Live on-line instruction similar to a classroom but the students are geographically dispersed. Fixed times of meeting on-line. The students often have webcams and interactive software so that they can see the teacher and ask questions as the class progresses (See <http://www.scholar-tutorials.com/> as an example).

*Electronic learning is challenging the traditional model of brick and mortar schools.*

3. Online course or CD-ROM course that provides instruction through video clips, simulations etc. You work through it screen by screen and there is no contact with a person (See [www.plato.com](http://www.plato.com)).
4. Correspondence course with links to resources on the Internet and email contact with the instructor. Often there are chatrooms set up for the convenience of the students and for the teacher to monitor and see if there are common problems in understanding the material (See [www.k12online.ola.bc.ca](http://www.k12online.ola.bc.ca)).
5. E-bussing: This is the name of a program developed by the Nechako School District of B.C. It is intended to be home schooling within the parameters of the government curriculum documents. The basic arrangement is that the school district provides the family with a computer, Internet connection and licensed educational software. The parent then home-schools with the support of the school district (see [www.e-bus.com](http://www.e-bus.com)).

Some of these options have already been implemented in some of our independent schools. In Ebenezer Canadian Reformed School in Smithers, British Columbia, a CML system was used to allow the school to offer a broader range of electives at the Grade 11-12 level despite the small number of high school staff and students. In Tynedale Christian School in Calgary, Alberta, some of the students took courses electronically as well. In Calgary's case another school administered the courses.

### Why should we look at electronic learning?

Every day we make choices. These choices are normally the result of our perception that by choosing a particular option we receive maximum benefit and minimum disadvantage. In the area of schooling, choices made long ago and repeated yearly have resulted in our traditional school structure. This structure has advantages and disadvantages. As electronic learning becomes more commonplace an increasing number of people are beginning to compare the advantages and disadvantages of these two methods.

I believe that electronic learning has sufficient benefits to be worth investigating, especially for smaller schools. I also believe that our current school structure has many benefits. Both methods/structures give rise to significant concerns as well. By combining the two methods, can a school society gain by deriving greater benefits and reducing points of concern? The answer to that question will vary from one school society to another and will need to be solidly grounded in careful analysis of the school society's needs and comfort with electronic education.

What are the benefits and concerns? In the following sections I will outline a few of each. This list should not be construed as exhaustive and some people may see some of the advantages as disadvantages and vice versa. Also, since there are a variety of ways to use electronic education some of the advantages or disadvantages will not apply to all options for electronic learning.

## Concerns

There are four main concerns that often raised. First, is this just a glorified correspondence course? (or reworded, teacher taught courses result in better learning); second, it is important for my child to socialize properly, and I am afraid that that will not happen if they are seated behind a computer too much; third, how will students be kept on target for completing the course in time? Fourth, what about group work in the various courses or labs in science? Each of these concerns has legitimacy but none are insurmountable. They can each be resolved if time is taken to look for solutions.

To address the glorified correspondence course concern, it is crucial that the element of teacher involvement in the course be valued and preserved. The main weaknesses of high-school correspondence courses tend to be that they are not academically demanding, they are not uniquely Reformed, and they lack significant and prompt feedback. In Smithers we chose CML because it was capable of addressing each of those concerns.

There is indeed a risk that students begin to interact with the computer to the exclusion of people but that is a problem that can be prevented. Another concern is that people begin to think that computers hold the answer to questions. I am not convinced that this needs to be a problem. With discretion these obstacles are easily overcome. The

guide I offer to my students is that they should always apply balance, discernment, and proper motivation to their lives. If each parent and educational institution applies those three things to their planning and execution, they can minimize if not eliminate these potential problems.

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Students are not all self-motivated and this third concern manifests itself very concretely. Students can produce or be given a chart that shows them how much work they have to complete at any given time if they are to complete the course by the end of the school year. It is then the student's responsibility to find a way to stay on track.

The fourth concern regarding discussions, group work, and science labs are in my opinion the most significant. These can be overcome in various ways, such as simulated labs on the Internet (check out [www.froguts.com](http://www.froguts.com)), scheduled mandatory discussion times based on readings that are not specific to one particular point in the course, oral testing at various points, and so on. The group work can be accomplished

in a similar fashion. Again the topic needs to be broader to allow for students who are at different points in the course to work together. This group work can also take place electronically between students in different communities.

Each of these concerns are legitimate but each can be resolved. They are not unlike the challenges our schools have faced in the past, challenges such as having a properly equipped science room or varied teaching styles.

## Benefits

Five potential benefits are: closer cooperation between schools, students become more independent as learners, students develop greater self-discipline, the ability to progress at their own speed, and teachers are able to adjust the difficulty of a course for individual students quite easily.

Mr. Otto Bouwman (see *Clarion* Vol. 51 No. 14) recently pleaded for the establishment of an infrastructure that would bring our school communities closer together, and electronic learning could be a way to contribute to that. If several schools with smaller classes were to get together and, based on the staffing strengths, determine which schools will deliver which courses, there is potential for relieving teacher shortages as well as offering a greater range of courses. The Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College (CCRTC) could deliver courses for teachers in this way thereby overcoming the barrier of distance. These areas could be explored for cost versus benefits – I am referring to educational, pedagogic, social, spiritual and economic costs and benefits.

Electronic learning can also contribute to teaching independence in learning as well as place more onus on the student to take responsibility for their learning. In Smithers each student was free to choose whether they wanted to complete one course at a time or several courses at a time and how much to do at any time. The teachers provided guidelines showing how much work needed to be completed each day to stay on track for completion by the end of the school year. This forced the students to discipline themselves to carry out a plan and when necessary, make up for their lack of planning or lack of self-discipline. At times the teachers did have to step in and with the parents set a required work schedule. However, this was an exception.



Electronic learning also allows a teacher to easily create a custom path for a course, one that accommodates a learner's difficulties if they are in need of an individualized education plan. The teacher can select and de-select assignments as necessary creating a new version of the course.

More benefits will be discovered as electronic education develops. The important thing is to identify whether the benefits that currently exist are sufficient to lead one to adopt electronic education in one form or another at this time.

### Points to consider

I would like to share some points that are important to consider when developing an electronic learning system. It is crucial that an electronic learning approach is not seen as self-managing; that you just put students in a room and expect disciplined, and excellent learning to happen. As with all teaching, human nature needs to be reckoned with and there must be an actively involved teacher present to motivate and to teach.

*Electronic learning can also contribute to teaching independence in learning as well as place more onus on the student to take responsibility for their learning.*

The ability to tailor courses is of prime importance to electronic learning. Just as our school societies charge school boards to hire teachers who will tailor courses to the Reformed worldview, so school societies should do with any electronic course. The developers of platforms for electronic learning have certainly kept this ability to customize courses in the forefront of their products. It is technologically simple to create a course that reflects the Reformed worldview and links to all sorts of resources either print, video, electronic and human.

The main economic costs would be associated with course development. Most schools today have the technology to offer electronic courses so there should not be a need for a significant cash outlay to acquire technology. To ensure a successful implementation of electronic learning, courses need to be

complete and tested before they are offered to students. This requires time and, in this case, time is money. That is a large task that would require temporarily freeing teachers from teaching so that they can develop courses. Alternatively a school could provide the software, one to two years in advance, for teachers to develop and test courses during the school year or summer. If a number of schools were to band together, they could form a consortium to develop the courses. Potentially, organizations like the Reformed Curriculum Development Committee (RCDC) or Curriculum Assistance to Reformed Education (CARE) could assist in this area.

Implementation of electronic learning should be phased in to familiarize students and parents with the process. As people are first exposed to electronic courses it is important to keep the courses evenly distributed throughout the schedule. Electronic courses could be introduced gradually and increased in number as students move into the higher grades. The majority of major courses should probably not be delivered electronically unless experience has shown that it is a viable option.

Electronic courses must, in my opinion, include definite points requiring discussion of material with other people. Evaluation of students by means of oral discussions can be made the norm instead of the exception. In this case the oral evaluation should be weighted heavily to show that it is valued more than the completion of assignments.

Minimum progress levels need to be set and enforced. A suggested schedule for progress should be presented to the students, and those who lag behind need to be motivated to get on track and move ahead at a speed that will see them finish in a reasonable time.

If electronic learning is introduced into a school, the society should establish a review process to determine how effectively the new method is functioning. Adjustments can then be made as

necessary. Given the learning curve in implementing this new method of educational delivery, a school society should commit to run the program for at least three years before making a decision to terminate it.

A foolproof, 100% reliable backup system is required as well. This means not only having a system in place to backup the computers on a daily basis but also regular checking that the backup is in fact working.

*Just as our school societies charge school boards to hire teachers who will tailor courses to the Reformed worldview, so school societies should do with any electronic course.*

### Conclusion

Electronic education represents yet another development in the way education is delivered. It offers opportunities and challenges. In line with the idea of constant improvement it would be worthwhile if schools, especially smaller schools with high school grades, explored the possibilities that electronic learning holds. The potential to modify the current school structure for the purpose of mitigating or eliminating certain drawbacks makes this an exciting opportunity.

Education Matters is supported by the Canadian Reformed Teachers Association (CRTA East). Reader responses or articles can be sent to [abkingma@kwic.com](mailto:abkingma@kwic.com) or to Clarion. 

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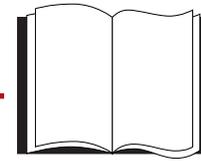
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By W.W.J. VanOene

## Feud Defused?

In the *Clarion* issue of July 5 of this year, the Rev. J. Visscher tries to put some water on the fire that is burning because of controversies regarding the manner in which the Lord's Supper is celebrated. Let me begin with stating that I appreciate his effort to bring an end to the "feud," as he calls it, for nothing would be more welcome than that. Having read and reread his editorial, however, I have come to the conclusion that in several respects his reasoning is extremely flawed, to put it mildly. In my view he did not throw water on the fire but oil that fuels it even more.

## By what were the controversies started?

To start with, the controversies and the "feud" were caused by the changes that were propagated and sometimes strongly promoted by some. For as long as I can remember, there were no controversies among us about the manner in which the Lord's Supper was to be celebrated before (what some consider to be fundamental) changes were made. Do not blame those who oppose the changes. Blame those who came with and succeeded in pushing through the changes.

## Arguments correct?

When weighing the arguments that Rev. Visscher brings to the fore, we must come to the conclusion that they are insufficient, sometimes even blatantly incorrect. Take for example his first statement when "examining the issues." There he states, "The One Cup or the Many." And he exclaims: "Where have those members who insist on a single communal cup been for the last fifty years?"

In the first place, I have never heard *anyone* promote the thought that there must be only one communal cup, and I have been around for quite a bit longer than the last fifty years. In fact, my wife and I have been celebrating the Lord's Supper for some sixty-plus years. Here Rev. Visscher puts something that he will be unable to prove. Let him say when and where some person claimed that there must be only one cup. It is

possible that someone made that foolish statement, but I haven't heard it ever.

From this statement Rev. Visscher comes to a totally false opposition. The issue, namely, is *not* "One cup or many cups." The issue is: "*Communal* cup or *individual* cups." That is something totally different. And thus Rev. Visscher's whole reasoning here falls flat. He is beating the air and opposes an imaginary adversary. For when the issue is, communal cup or individual cups, then it does not matter at all whether there is just one communal cup or two or four or eight.

The difference – and thus the controversy – is not in the number at all! The point is, communal or individual. Since the opposition that he puts is false, the whole entourage of this opposition has to be discarded.

## Wine or juice?

Frankly, I am sort of tired of all the talk about the "fruit of the vine." What else would the Lord and his apostles have referred to than wine? Would they have meant grapes (for these are the fruit of the vine) or hop (for that grows on vines, too)? Here the most logical and "natural" understanding of "fruit of the vine" (namely, wine) is replaced by what those who oppose the use of wine want to read into it. Even the fact that most times wine was mixed with water does not change the character of the fluid. Diluted wine is still wine.

Those who want to push the thought that just juice is meant must prove that the manner in which this expression has been understood for centuries is wrong, and that now finally the light has arisen.

Even the time of year in which the Lord instituted his supper is an argument against juice and in favour of wine. Although the Jews may have had the ability to preserve grape juice in unfermented form, (they had no freezers or refrigerators or canning jars) yet it is highly unlikely that it was widely used. The Lord instituted the Supper when the grape harvest was months away. Thus, wine is the most logical and "natural" understanding of "fruit of the vine." That the gospel writers never use the word "wine" proves nothing.

## Table or pews?

Another point is whether the supper should be celebrated while participants are sitting at a table or whether the bread and wine should be distributed throughout the pews. Again I must say that the point is not "One table or many tables." The point is "table(s) or pews."

The many tables are frequently the result of the sometimes "monstrous" size of a congregation. For years we were members of a church that numbered more than five thousand, divided over three church buildings. However, even with the need for more than one table during a celebration the principle of sitting at the table is not violated.

The Lord's Supper is a meal, and when a family has a meal together, it is normal that they sit together around the table, right? Then you don't give one child a plate to take to his bedroom (except, perhaps, as a punishment for misbehaviour), another plate to another child to sit on the porch with it. A meal you have together as a family, and this togetherness is demonstrated by gathering around the table. The Lord's Supper is a meal that you have as the family together, not a snack that you can enjoy on the run.

I do know that many different ways of celebrating the Lord's Supper can be found in the history of the church. But we have to go by what is at present, or at least until recently, is the common practice in the churches here. There must be good and pressing reasons for changing that, and it has to be proved that those changes are necessary.

When I read that the Scriptures do "not even mention sitting at the tables," I thought, "What kind of silly reasoning is that?" The point is not at all "reclining or sitting." The point is: at the table or spread all over the auditorium. The latter fits exactly with the individual cups. Whether they were reclining or sitting, the Lord Jesus and his disciples were at the table. Let anyone prove that it was not so.

## Different conditions?

Rev. Visscher also points to the practical impossibility of using wine in Islamic countries. In addition, I could

point to discussions that were conducted about the celebration in mission fields, where bread and wine were not available. Could sago be used instead of bread? And some other fluid instead of wine? But we are not speaking of abnormal circumstances or times of persecution. We are speaking about our "normal" situation, where we have the perfect freedom to use the ingredients that have been used by the church for centuries.

Then pointing to abnormal situations does not put any weight into the scales. Keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Indeed, who would not speak a heartfelt "Amen" to that? That is all the more reason not to introduce changes that uproot a practice that has been normal in the churches here. There are many more points that could be touched upon.

I could mention that sometimes there are members who desire to have the individual cup with juice, although they never had any problem with alcoholism, nor have a medical condition that would be aggravated by the use of a small amount of wine taken from the cup. They seem to have a paranoid fear of infection or contamination.

I did mention already that my wife and I have participated in the celebration of the Lord's Supper for more than sixty years. In all but a handful of occasions we drank from the communal cup and have never experienced any ill effects of that. There is also still something like trust.

As for the fear expressed that (former) alcoholics might relapse if they

tasted a little wine at the Lord's table, I was very grateful for an article I read (I think it was by the Rev. G.I. Williamson) in which it was stated very clearly that the above reasoning ascribed more power to natural factors than to the Holy Spirit, who is able to keep us standing and to cause us to persevere in the path of obedience until we will be freed from all blemish, spot, and wrinkle.

Keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace also means that we shall trust Him to apply all the merits of our Saviour to all that rely on his one sacrifice, including the perseverance of the saints.

*Rev. W.W.J. VanOene is an emeritus minister in the Canadian Reformed Churches.*

#### **A Few Editorial Comments:**

a) Under "The One Cup or the Many" I was reacting to a number of brothers who have said to me personally that since the Lord Jesus used only one cup, we must do likewise. The fact that we use more than one is seen by them as a necessary compromise. As for my colleagues's challenge to name these brothers, I do not see any benefit in that.

My colleague also suggests that "the issue is 'communal cup or individual cups'." I do not disagree, although it would be more accurate to say "communal cup(s) or individual cups" seeing that even when the communal cup is used often four or more are circulating at the same time.

b) While wine is the common drink in use at the Lord's Supper, my colleague fails to prove that it is the exclusive and only drink allowed. It is also unfortunate that he dismisses the scriptural distinctions between the expression "the fruit of the vine" and the word for "wine" in such an off-hand manner.

c) Yes, the Lord's Supper has the character of a meal and it is regrettable that our churches are often so large that all of the communicant members cannot eat and drink together. At the same time one would be hard pressed to prove which is most edifying – a procedure in which members eat and drink in shifts at table or a procedure in which they eat and drink together in the pew.

d) Throughout my editorial I stressed the distinction between descriptive and prescriptive, and I regret that my colleague has not seen fit to interact with it. Indeed, he makes it sound as if the manner in which he has celebrated the Lord's Supper all of these years is prescriptive. And I regret that. It is one way and it is a good way, but it is not the only way. In the history of the church this sacrament has been administered in different ways and thus we must be careful not to absolutize our practice as if it is the only way.

*J. Visscher*



*Dr. J. Visscher is minister of the Canadian Reformed Church at Langley, British Columbia.*

## **L**ETTER 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.

### **Letter to the Editor**

The article by Rev. J. Visscher was a very good one and I agree with it all. And yet, why did I feel I lost something when we drank from individual cups the last time in the

church? Was it because another link with the past and history of the church is gone? I do love church history, and feel one with the brothers and sisters who have gone before us. Anyway let's be understanding of

those who have misgivings about it all. And I hope that the celebration of the Lord's Supper may be a blessing for us all.

*Sincerely,  
Mrs. Fred Hofsink Sr.*



By Aunt Betty

## Dear Busy Beavers

Back to school again. Time to start a new learning year, possibly time to make new friends at your new school or new friends at your old school with the new students. Whichever, the case, make sure you make time for your new friends as well as your old friends. Not only do you need to keep your old friends, it is always good to make new friends, because friends are very important to you. Without friends, you could become very lonely, or others could become very lonely because you can't be friends with them.

If one of your fellow students is lonely, try to help them by asking them to join in your games or give them a chance to do something with you. Don't always let them stand on the sidelines and watch, but help them to make friends by being a friend to them.

A friendship like Jonathan and David had is very important. They loved each other because the other was always there for them. Some people can be very difficult to become friends with, but they may be difficult because they are shy or unable to make many friends. They may be very lonely and think that you are only "patronizing" them. But if you keep trying to make friends with them, they will appreciate what you are doing to them and share themselves with you.

Think about it.

Lots of love, Aunt Betty

September Birthdays	
2 Jessica Verhelst	9 Cheyenne Bergsma
8 Kaitlin Doekes	16 Ashley Tuininga

## Puzzles

*Seven means "complete" in biblical terms.*

Match each statement about seven with the proper person.

- |                                                               |                                   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Had seven locks of hair                                    | a. Solomon, 1 Kings 6:38          |
| 2. Laboured seven years for a wife                            | b. Naomi, Ruth 4:15               |
| 3. Judged Israel for seven years                              | c. Mary Magdalene, Mark 16:9      |
| 4. Ate grass seven times                                      | d. Samson, Judges 16:13           |
| 5. Possessed seven devils                                     | e. Pharaoh, Genesis 41:2-3        |
| 6. Dreams of seven fat and seven lean cows                    | f. Ibsan, Judges 12:8-9           |
| 7. Built the Temple in seven years                            | g. Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel 4:25,33 |
| 8. Was condemned by seven princes                             | h. Vashti, Esther 1:14-15, 19     |
| 9. Became king at age seven                                   | i. Jacob, Genesis 29:20           |
| 10. Women said her daughter-in-law was better than seven sons | j. Jehoash, 2 Kings 11:21         |

## Jokes

from Michelle VanDerVelde

*Teacher:* How did you get that horrible swelling on your nose?

*Joshua:* I bent down to smell a brose.

*Teacher:* There's no "b" in rose!

*Joshua:* There was in this one!

*Jenn:* What's the difference between a cookie and a whale?

*Emily:* Did you ever try dunking a whale in your milk?

*Freddy:* Have your eyes ever been checked?

*Jimmy:* No, they've always been blue.

*Bob:* You have to do something? I keep thinking I'm a frog!

*Doctor:* How long has this been happening?

*Bob:* Since I was a tadpole.

What do you call a talkative crab? A gabby crabby.

What happens to an air conditioner when you pull its plug?  
It loses its cool.

## Books to Re-Write!

Each of the following is a "jumbled" book of the Bible.  
Can you "re-write" them in the proper order?

- |               |                 |
|---------------|-----------------|
| 1. SAOM       | 11. HAMWETT     |
| 2. UTSTI      | 12. HOPNELIM    |
| 3. KUEL       | 13. SAEOH       |
| 4. ZAER       | 14. HAAIIS      |
| 5. GAAHIG     | 15. NESSIGE     |
| 6. MARSON     | 16. SINAIPPPLHI |
| 7. KKKAHUB    | 17. SHERWEB     |
| 8. MYIHOTT    | 18. HUIJASO     |
| 9. ISAAAGNTL  | 19. NOTAILVEER  |
| 10. TUVSLIEIC | 20. MANUH       |

## PENPAL WANTED

Michelle VanDerVelde is 11 years old and would love to have a penpal. She loves playing sports and animals, especially cats, dogs and horses. If you would like to write to her, please sent a letter to 4915 Canboro Road, Wellandport, Ontario L0R 2J0.



## FROM THE MAILBOX

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, Michelle VanDerVelde. Thank you for your letter and jokes. I really did appreciate them, so I'll put some of them in *Our Little Magazine* today. There were a few too many for one time. Is your brother up and about again? It really shows that God cares for us when we are sick. He has amazing ways of showing us that He is still there, looking after us, don't you think? Bye for now, Michelle.