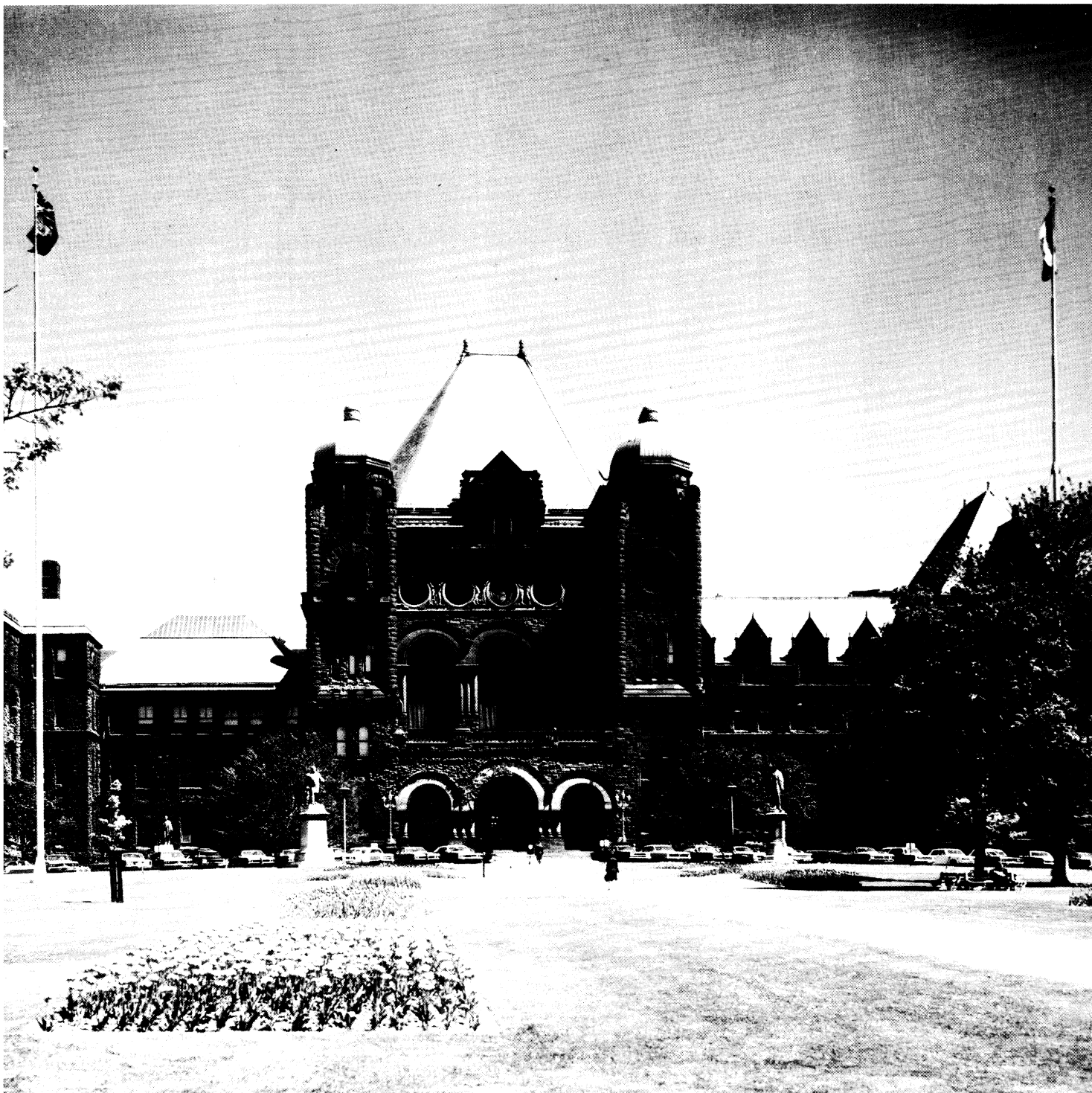


Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

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The Latest Attack on The Belgic Confession

Among the reports of Study Committees in the 1979 Agenda for Synod C.R.C. there is one that deserves special attention of everyone who loves the Confession of Faith. It is the report of the Belgic Confession Translation Committee, a report that occupies no less than seventy pages. It consists of four parts. The first is an introduction in which the mandate of the Committee is stated, its work is described and especially "The problem of the *Textus Receptus*" is discussed (Early History of the Text).

The second part is a provisional translation of the 1559/61 Confession. The third part gives a comparison of the 1559/61 Text and "the Revision." It speaks first about main differences and their theological significance and then about specific issues and implications. The fourth and last part of the report provides the synod of the Christian Reformed Church with, a.o., the following recommendations:

A. That synod authorize the Belgic Confession Translation Committee to use the 1559/61 de Bres version of the Belgic Confession as the *textus receptus* for the New English translation.

Grounds:

1. It is the earliest version available.
2. It was written in times more akin to our own vis-a-vis church-state relationships than were the later revisions.
3. Its theological nuances are, in general, preferable to those in the later revisions.

B. That synod communicate this decision to other churches in the Reformed community using the Belgic Confession as an official standard and invite those churches to give relevant reactions to the translation committee.

At the moment I do not yet know what Synod 1979 C.R.C. decided and whether also the Canadian Reformed Churches will be invited to give reactions to the translation committee, or not. Let me respond immediately. For when I read this forcefully written Report 33 (Agenda, pp. 360-430) I was both thrilled and appalled. In this respect my reaction was more nuanced than that of the *Banner* editor Dr. L. De Koster. If we find space enough in this issue of *Clarion*, I will intrude into the columns of the "Press Review" and have a part of Dr. DeKoster's editorial reprinted. The matter is important and it does not happen too often that in our pages *The Banner* is quoted with agreement. I share DeKoster's indignation. Nevertheless, I was thrilled by the fact that we now have a translation into modern English of the original, personal text of the Confession of Faith as written by Guido de Brès and published in 1561. Students of the history and the confessions of the Reformed Churches will certainly benefit from the work of this Study Committee. It is printed

in strophic or versified form and the main ideas of the Confession are brought out to the left hand margin. I checked the translation with the original and, although I have some objections in detail, this translation evokes the freshness and lucidity of de Bres' French.

At the same time I was appalled by the manner in which this scholarly fine translation is used in an unprecedented attack on the Confession of Faith in its revised and now ecclesiastically binding text. I completely disagree with the recommendation to use the 1561 de Brès version of the Belgic Confession as the *textus receptus* for a new English translation. The situation of the text of a creed or confession (e.g., The Apostles' Creed) is different from the text of Holy Scripture. The churches have revised their confessions. We must distinguish between the *original* version and *authentic* texts. As far as the Belgic Confession is concerned, a revision took place already at the Synod of Antwerp in May 1566. This revision found its counterpart in the Dutch text of 1583. The following important revision of the French and Dutch texts happened at the Synod of Dort 1619. Over against Report 33 I am of the opinion that the *textus receptus* is not the personal de Brès version of 1561 but the authorized French and Dutch texts of Dort 1619. It is amazing that the report does not refer to the standard work of J.N. Bakhuizen van den Brink: *De Nederlandse Belijdenisgeschriften in authentieke teksten met inleiding en text-verwijzingen* (Amsterdam: Ton Bolland, 2nd ed., 1976).

Over against the recommendation and its grounds the following can be remarked:

1. Not the earliest version available is the *textus receptus*, but the authentic text is established by the Reformed churches in the Synod of Dordrecht 1619. Office-bearers bind themselves to an English translation of this text.
2. If we return to the personal version of de Brès 1561 we bring into the then authentic text some elements that the churches in the Synods of 1566 and 1619 did not accept and we lose the important improvements that these Synods officially made.
3. The whole interpretation by the Christian Reformed Committee of the differences between the editions of 1561, 1566, and 1619 is debatable. When the Committee speaks about "the Revision," it makes the methodological mistake not to distinguish between the revision of 1566 and that of 1619. When it speaks about "the course of conflict between two schools of thought," it overestimates the difference between the original text of 1561 and the revised texts of 1566 and 1619. While the main revision already took place ac-

ording to a procedure set by the Synod of Antwerp 1565, the difference in church-state relationships and in "theological nuances" were not great. Does Report 33 not invent fictions of contrasts between Calvin and de Brès, de Brès and Junius c.s., etc.? The Report reads in this respect as a bad detective story. I will gladly try to prove this statement in detail, for the unprecedented attack on our Confession requires a detailed answer. It is not true that by adopting the text as de Brès wrote it we lose nothing, "come clear of some things that rightly embarrass us; and . . . have a more adequate statement than the revised text on a number of issues that have rightly concerned, and still do concern, the Reformed community (p. 367).

4. Report 33 states that we should not "try to 'patch up' either the statements of de Brès or the Revision. For by definition a creed, written at a certain time, is an historical document. In our view it should not be rewritten

or revised but only translated, at most, by later generations." This statement shows that the Reformed concept of binding to an authentic text of the confession, established by a General Synod, is abandoned. Acceptance of de Brès' original version by the Christian Reformed Committee is nothing but acceptance of a *historical* document without strict ecclesiastical binding in the present. So the scholarly translation of de Brès' words becomes a weapon against de Brès' and our *confession*. The first is thrilling, the second appalling and dangerous.

J. FABER

CORRECTION

The title of the editorial in the previous issue of *Clarion* should have read: "From RES to RIS?" Our sincere apology to Dr. J. Faber and the readers of *Clarion* for the error.

PRESS REVIEW

REPORT 33: BELGIC CONFESSION TRANSLATION COMMITTEE

Dr. L. DeKoster wrote in *The Banner* of May 25, 1979:

On request of the "New Translation Committee," Synod of 1977 appointed this translation committee with the mandate "to prepare a new translation of the Belgic Confession incorporating textual references." Innocent enough, perhaps, though I do not know who finds the language of the present Belgic obscure.

Now, I will guess that on some Sunday morning, while waiting for the service to begin, you passed the time by reading the Introduction to the Belgic as it appears toward the back of the Psalter Hymnal. And you may remember two things: 1) the "chief author" of the Confession was one, Guido de Brès; and, 2) he is called "chief," but not the only "author" because others (including probably Calvin) had some hand in revising de Bres' work, then adopted by the Synod of Dort "after a careful revision, not of the contents but of the text." So the Introduction informs us.

It is no secret then, and it was no secret when the translation committee was given its mandate, which Belgic Confession constitutes part of our Forms of Unity — to which members of the translation committee who are office-bearers are themselves solemnly bound by the Form of Subscription.

But, surprisingly, what everyone knew about the Belgic Confession was made by the translation committee into a major problem: which version of the Confession were we assigned to translate: the original of de Bres or the revision of Dort — one of our Forms of Unity?

Now, the version of Dort has served the Reformed churches for 360 years, but the translation committee could not wait one more year to ask Synod of 1978 what

their mandate meant. The committee simply chose to exhume the original version of de Bres, and to translate that. Still more, the committee chooses to spread upon the *Agenda* this translation, and to justify their so doing at the expense of direct, and indirect, criticism of our Form of Unity. Synod is now, after the fact, asked to approve it.

No one need be told that two differing versions of the same Confession simply devalue each other, and rob both of normativity for doctrinal purity. Dort knew that, and adopted only its revision.

The report spends twenty pages comparing, generally unfavorably, the Confession which office-bearers have promised "diligently to teach and faithfully to defend" with a document which the committee arbitrarily chooses to substitute for it. Part III of the committee's report is titled, "A Comparison of the 1559/61 Text and the Revision" — the "Revision" being our Form of Unity. Sub-part A of this section is headed, "Main Differences and Their Theological Significance," and frequently consists of playing off de Bres' version to its advantage against the "Revision" which is our Confession. And sub-part B of this section sets forth "Specific Issues and Implications," the flavor of which can be caught from an earlier statement: ". . . by adopting the text as he (de Bres) wrote it we lose nothing, in our judgment, of what must be positively retained; we come clear of some things that rightly embarrass us; and we have a more adequate statement than the revised text on a number of issues that have rightly concerned, and still do concern, the Reformed community" (p. 367). Does one "diligently teach and faithfully defend" a Confession he dubs "rightly" embarrassing?

The Church surrounds her Forms of Unity with the Form of Subscription for good reason. Which will be *the* Belgic Confession if this report be endorsed? Was Dort so unfamiliar with the original

as to be misled in its revision? Or was there good and sufficient Biblical ground, also in Geneva, for modifications mandatory then and now because true to the Word? Essentially, the committee sets the original de Bres against our Form of Unity as if it were setting the Bible over against the Confession. But this surely calls for gravamen, if it is to be done in obedience and good order.

In short, what Synod '77 asked for, Synod of '79 does *not* get; and what no one, probably, in '77 expected is laid on our doorstep. This reflection upon the Confession is, in my judgment, deeply to be regretted. It cannot but weaken respect for both the Forms of Unity and the Form of Subscription. It cannot but suggest ways around the Confessions at the level of our highest ecclesiastical body and the committees it appoints to serve us all.

If the Forms of Unity are subject to modification by the "discovery" of some antecedent version of them, Dr. Boer and others might well forego the pains of gravamina. And the Church will find her Confessions dwindled in stature, in authority, and in their ability to unite us against the tides of modernity.

I make a few remarks:

1. In accepting a new Heidelberg Catechism translation, the Christian Reformed Church made already the mistake not to distinguish between the *original* version and (more or less) *authentic* texts.

2. Although I fully agree with many observations of Dr. DeKoster, this Report 33 deserves a broader answer.

3. For a Reformed confederation of churches Synod is never "our highest ecclesiastical body." With the pawn of the elder Calvin checkmated the pope.

J. FABER

press review

AN AUSTRALIAN READER REACTS ON OUR SCHOOL DISCUSSION

The reader will remember that some time ago we had a discussion in our magazine on Reformed school education with the question in the Form for the Baptism of Infants about education. There was a remark in a report about the opening of one of our schools, that now with the school being there the parents could fully live up to the promise made at the baptism of their children. Rev. VanOene reacted to it in the *News Medley* and Rev. G. Van Dooren did the same in an article in the next issue. There were a number of letters to the editor on this matter. I do not have to repeat what was written. The same matter was also touched upon later in articles from Rev. Cl. Stam appearing in *Clarion* on "Covenantal Education." The article of the Rev. Van Dooren also received some critical reaction from a *Clarion* reader in Australia. It appeared in the Australian magazine *Una Sancta* in four consecutive issues. In the third article the author, br. J. Eikelboom of Armadale, gives a summary of his first two articles, in which mostly quotations were given. I give here the two last articles:

To make it easier for you to continue the reading of this article I will give a summary of the contents of parts 1 and 2 published in previous *Una Sanctas*.

At the opening ceremony of a Reformed School in Canada the following words were spoken:

"... to come to this point where we now finally may live up to the promise we gave at the time of the baptism of our children, namely, to cause our children to be instructed in the doctrines of the church ..."

Rev. G. van Dooren, in the *Clarion* of 27/1/79 criticizes these words on two counts. Firstly, he says: the promise of instruction could also be lived up to *before* the Reformed School was there. Secondly, it is wrong to say: "in" the doctrines of the Church, since that would mean to entrust the task of the Church to the School.

With the first criticism I do agree. With the second criticism I do not agree. And so I concluded part 2 with these words: "if the speaker, in response to the criticism would amend his words to the effect that ... parents would now be able to *better fulfil* their baptismal promise ... would there be any ground left for criticism?"

My answer is: no, we cannot criticize this statement.

For we may with confidence regard the sending of our children to a Reformed School as part of the baptismal promise: "... cause them to be instructed *therein* to the utmost of your power."

This does not imply, as Rev. van Dooren says, that we then entrust the School with the task of the Church.

The instruction of our children in the doctrine of the Church, the doctrine of salvation, is indeed first of all a task of the parents, and then also of the Church. We will all fully agree to that. But if we can, *after* all that, also establish a Reformed School, that institute must work with the same aim.

For, the doctrine of the Church, the doctrine of salvation, governs our *whole* life. We should be governed and guided by it in all things. And the use of the little word "in" is not a carefully selected formulation to express a Reformed School philosophy, but part of a perfectly fitting reminder of the baptismal promise, once given by the parents who were in the audience at that opening ceremony.

The question may be asked: But why must we talk about such a seemingly insignificant matter? What difference does it make?

It makes *this* difference, that Rev. van Dooren concludes that the quotation of this baptismal promise at the opening ceremony of a Reformed School is wrong. He says: it means that you give the task of the Church to the School.

Contrary to this conclusion I say: A Reformed School will allow the parents to *better live up to* their baptismal promise. The School, in being fully subjected to God's Word, will also teach ... in the doctrines of the Church. And there is absolutely no question of competition between Church and School. Just the opposite is true. Namely this: *in accordance with promises given in the Church* the parents establish a school.

Naturally the character of instruction in the School is different from that at catechism, in the sermons on Sundays, and from that at home. But there are the Bible stories, the psalms, the occasional Lord's Day question and answer, the occasional (part of an) article of the Confession; and then in every other subject whenever the opportunity arises the reference to the Faith, to God's Word and Will. In short: instruction in, and in accordance with the doctrine of church. Thus, each of the three has a task in the same field of instruction; the home, the church and the school. A distinction? (*onderscheiding*): yes, but a separation? (*scheiding*): no, and certainly no competition or take-over.

In full harmony they may work together, to live up to the promise to: "instruct your children in the aforesaid doctrine, and to cause them to be instructed therein to the utmost of your power."

We will continue with Rev. van Dooren's article and give some comment from time to time.

"In addition to what has already been said about this aspect, we should now agree on this 'philosophy' that School teaching and training is not to be 'Church-oriented' in this sense that the School is there to produce better church members and as a result better churches.

The (Reformed) orientation of schools is *towards Kingdom-service in the midst of this world*. To put it in a different way: Our schools turn their "back" upon the church in the sense that they are "backed up" by the membership united in the faithful church. At the same time the school "faces the world" in which our children have to fulfil their *diakonia*, their God-given office and calling, though they are not "of the world." The school prepares them for that calling by teaching them what they need to know to develop their talents and double them in the service of our King. That is the proper, and really only, perspective for Reformed schools."

So, Rev. van Dooren asks his readers to agree on a "philosophy," that is: on a fundamental truth.

Which truth?

This: Reformed teaching and training is *not to be* "church-oriented ... the school is not there to produce better church members and as a result better churches.

and: The Reformed orientation of schools is *towards Kingdom-service in the midst of this world ... etc.*

I believe that we must have some very strong objections to this manner of reasoning. In the first place this: a Reformed school philosophy is best stated in positive terms. We should say and define what a Reformed school *should do*. And not in the first place what a Reformed school *should not do*. Secondly, I think it is poor that the first thing to be said about a Reformed school creates distance with the Reformed church.

Thirdly, the statement that "it should not aim to produce better church members ... etc" arises in connection with the baptismal promise having been used at a school opening ceremony.

Rev. van Dooren sees as a danger that application of the baptismal promise to the work of a Reformed school would mislead the believers into thinking that school and church have too much to do with each other. The school as "nursery" for the church, so to say.

We perceive here the beginnings of what today is becoming a popular pastime: the identification of a "dilemma be-

tween Church-worship and Kingdom-service."

And when we then read that "the school is backed up by its membership" and "faces the world, in which our children have to fulfil their diakonia," we should wonder what is meant by such a formulation.

It is not language which inspires confidence, certainly not after the objections raised against the use of the baptismal promise.

Now don't get me wrong. There may be a good reason to define the Reformed school philosophy in terms of its membership, its relationship to the church, its position in the world. The learned men can say much about these things and perhaps the members of the school societies can learn much. But *to be sure*, let us maintain our earlier confession and belief and understanding and motivation that school and church are very intimately connected and that the baptismal promise is the fundamental reason for us having Reformed schools.

Let us now just read on with Rev. van Dooren (to the end):

"We have consistently used the term 'Reformed.' Instead of speaking about 'the doctrines of the church' we should prefer to speak of the 'Reformed confession or doctrine or faith' which is much older than any of the Canadian (American) Reformed Churches. The Catechism, for example, has been translated into about fifty languages, and the Canons are treasured by several churches with a different name.

In conclusion, no one — hopefully — has considered these lines as criticism against our schools and against those who work so hard and faithfully for them. On the contrary. We should, however, all agree on a clear purpose for our schools as long as we may still have them. Before we had them Reformed parents, and Reformed pastors and teachers have 'lived up to the promise given at the baptism of our children.'

This did not depend on a number of teachers. As long as we still have that freedom (which will not last forever) we will thankfully support our schools and concentrate on the training of God's Covenant children for His glory and Kingdom. And even in case our schools will be taken away from us in the last days, parents will continue to fulfill their baptism-promises, and the Church, possibly underground, will continue to instruct our children in the complete doctrine of salvation."

I would like to make a few remarks. Br. Eikelboom writes that the school "will also teach in the doctrine of the church." I italicize the word "also." This word "also" shows that, practically, the brothers are not that far apart. The Rev. G. Van Dooren has no objec-

tions at all that at our schools Bible instruction is given as well as the teaching of Reformed doctrine. And the author of the Australian article is aware that at the schools much more is done than the teaching *in* the Reformed doctrine. Both are also fully in favour of our Reformed schools. That was also shown by br. Eikelboom with respect to Rev. Van Dooren, when he took over the concluding part of the latter's article. It is therefore that I am of the opinion that in a discussion of these matters we should refrain from stating that the confidence is at stake; "It is not language which inspires confidence."

On the other hand, I agree with br. Eikelboom that there is a strong connection between the baptismal promise and our Reformed schools. As far as I can see the teaching at a Reformed school is more than only according to our Reformed doctrine. When the many subjects are taught according to the Reformed doctrine that doctrine so permeates the teaching that one cannot but point to the doctrine, and, at the same time, the teacher is in fact teaching that doctrine itself as well. It is not done extensively, but it is included.

I agree with br. Eikelboom when he points to the dilemma of either Church-oriented or directed to Kingdom service, and then referring to what Rev. Stam wrote, namely, that there is no dilemma here because the two are inseparably related. I certainly hope that beside the Reformed teaching at home and by the Church the Reformed teaching at the school will also be helpful and a good tool in the "production" of "better" Church members.

But I certainly hope that this "better" (or rather, let us simply say: good, good Reformed) means: good *Reformed Church members*, who are, at the same time, good Reformed farmers, tradesmen, salesmen, nurses, secretaries, housekeepers, and not to forget: doctors, lawyers, engineers, scientists, ministers, teachers, and so on.

It is my wish that our Reformed schools will also have this result: that a number of our young people, who have received the talents from the Lord, and who have the opportunity, will continue their studies at a college or university, not so much to get a good and high position in life, and also not to earn quite a bit of money, but because they want to serve the Lord and His Church in this life; because they do not like it to leave the whole field of sci-

ence and liberal arts, etc., in the hands of unbelievers; and, therefore, are willing to study doubly hard: to learn what the unbelieving world is thinking and teaching, but at the same time to learn how to place the Biblical, Christian view in all those fields over against the unbelievers' view; and who are willing to try to help the brotherhood in being and remaining Reformed workers on God's earth.

I encourage young people to study in order to confess the triune God — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — in all fields of life, in all trades and professions, and not to leave such a large part of life to the unbelievers. But I warn them also: study, but do so in the fear of the Lord. Do so in humbleness of heart. Do so for the Lord's sake and for His Church's sake, in the com-

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MEDITATION

“The Visible Communion of Saints”

Psalm 133:1: “Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell even together.”

What is the communion of saints? And with whom do we have this communion? That is an important question. A question is more than once answered in two different ways. The one says that we can and do have the communion of saints with other believers outside the church. And on the basis of that communion we can work together in Christian education, for example. Someone else says that we have this communion only with the members of the church.

Our Heidelberg Catechism shows us two aspects of the communion of saints in Lord’s Day 21. It is, in the first place, that believers, all and every one, as members of Christ, are partakers of Him and of all His treasures and gifts. That applies to all believers. But that is only *one* aspect of the communion of saints. The second part is that every one must know himself bound to employ his gifts readily and cheerfully for the advantage and salvation of other members.

So you see: all believers are members of Christ. But all believers must also be members of each other! No one can say: I am a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, while at the same time he remains all on his own, all by himself. No, he must also *join* the other believers. He must join the body of Christ.

Every one, every believer, is bound by the Lord to join himself to the true church of the Lord.

When we celebrate the Lord’s Holy Supper, we have holy communion with each other. That is in the first place communion with our Lord Jesus Christ at His table. But at the same time we also have communion together with each other as brothers and sisters, as members together of the body of Christ. By the same Spirit of Christ we should also be united as members of one body in true brotherly love and so shall we all who by true faith are incorporated into Christ, be altogether *one body*. You will remember these words of the Holy Supper Form.

While studying Psalm 133, it becomes more and more clear that the Lord teaches us a lesson about the communion of saints in this short psalm.

And what is then the first thing this psalm teaches us? That this communion is a *visible* communion. Where does Psalm 133 teach that? In the very first word! “Behold!” Behold! Look! See how good and pleasant it is when brethren dwell even together!

Psalm 133 is a “song of degrees.” A pilgrim’s song. It was sung by Israel as they went up to Jerusalem, to Zion, where the LORD dwelt in His holy sanctuary, in the tabernacle and later on in the temple.

And what is there to behold? What do you see in Jerusalem? What is *visible* at the tabernacle and temple? That the Israelites who are brothers by flesh and blood, are now dwelling (literally: sitting) together! As brothers!

They have come from far and near. From the north and from the south. But they came, all and every one, to *one* place: Mount Zion. To the sanctuary of the LORD. They have come for *one* purpose: to dwell in the house of the LORD. Not individually, but together! “From strength to strength Thy children dear, come forward till they all appear in Zion’s courts, God’s holy mountain (Psalm 84)! Now that can be *seen* that those pilgrims are traveling to mount Zion. That is *visible* that they dwell in the house of the LORD. There they are, the fathers and the mothers, together with their children. From Dan and Naphtali. From Benjamin and Judah. All gathered as brothers *together* sitting in the house of the LORD. Celebrating the feasts of the LORD. Around *one* table. Around *one* altar.

Behold! Do you see that? Brothers are sitting together! That is worth taking a look at. That is indeed good and pleasant. This is what pleases the LORD. That visible communion of saints. That visible unity of His church!

Yes, there have also been times in Israel’s history when this visible unity was broken. Think, for instance, of king Jeroboam, who, after the division of David’s kingdom, built an altar in Dan and in Bethel *over against* the LORD’s altar on mount Zion! That was *not* good and *not* pleasant in the eyes of the LORD. Jeroboam broke up, he split up the true brotherhood! The result was that the true believers of the northern kingdom had to move to the south in order to maintain the true communion in the faithful worship of the LORD.

Now they could easily have said what many people say today: oh, at least we are all members of the invisible church! And we still have the communion of saints together! Too bad this split happened, but we can still worship the LORD, each in his own way! They might even have admitted: the church in Jerusalem is a more pure church than ours. We here in Dan and in Bethel are a less pure church than the one on mount Zion. But at least we are still a church of the LORD, are we not? And we are still *brothers* are we not?

But the LORD says in Psalm 133: Behold, how good and pleasant it is when *brothers* are not only brothers of flesh and blood, but when they as brothers *dwell, even together!* That is pleasing to the LORD.

Can we have communion of saints with believers outside the church of God? Are they not also our brothers? But the LORD says: if you are brothers, then

that must become *visible* in your dwelling together! Then you must together go up to the house of the LORD on mount Zion! Then you will have to break away from that image worship in Dan and Bethel. Then the true believers must separate themselves from the unfaithful, the false churches and join the true church of the LORD. That is the church that is true to the Word of God. Then we must sit together at the same table of the LORD.

Communion of saints with believers who belong to different churches? But what do we see when the Lord's Holy Supper is celebrated? Then we see a *table* here in church. But where then are the other saints? Why then are they not united at Holy Supper as members of one body in true brotherly love? If we are

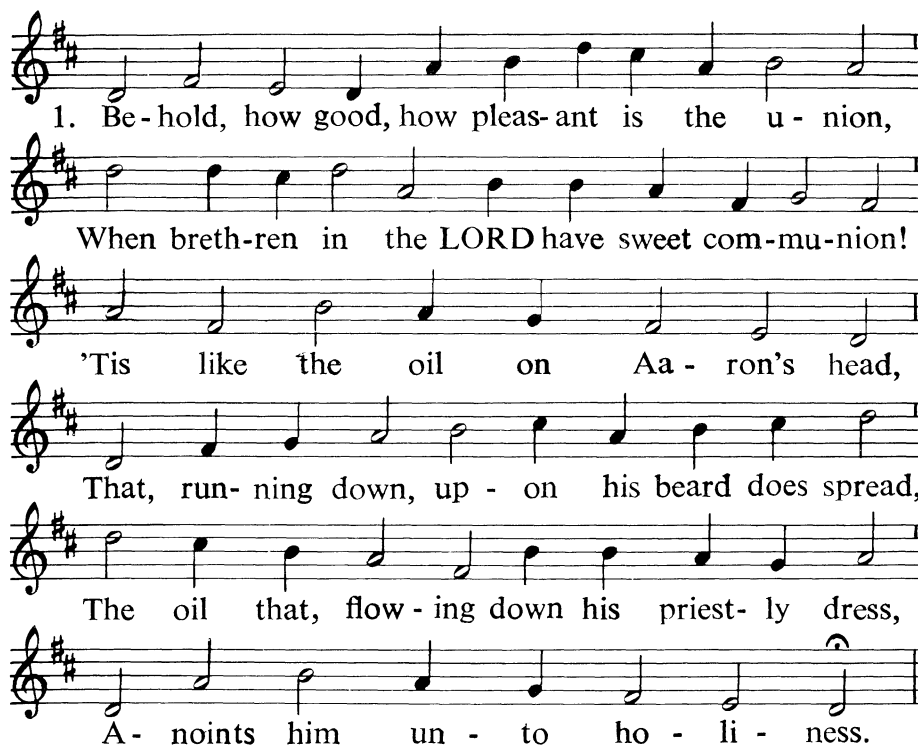
brothers, then we can and we should dwell, sit together in the house of the LORD.

The communion of saints is a *visible* communion. Let us then be thankful that we can see each other at the same Lord's Supper table, partaking of the same bread and the same wine. It is especially in Holy Supper that the true communion between brothers finds its visible expression. There we have communion with Christ: we receive the bread and the wine. And we have communion with the brothers and sisters: we pass the bread and the wine on to each other. We all partake of Christ.

Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell even together!

M. WERKMAN

Psalm 133



1. Be-hold, how good, how pleas-ant is the u - nion,
When breth-ren in the LORD have sweet com-mu-nion!
'Tis like the oil on Aa - ron's head,
That, run-ning down, up - on his beard does spread,
The oil that, flow - ing down his priest-ly dress,
A - noints him un - to ho - li - ness.

2. 'Tis as the dew on Hermon's brow descending,
The dew that falls where Zion's slopes are bending,
And makes their vintage overflow.
So they who dwell in peace no want shall know,
For there the LORD their God his blessing sends
And grants the life that never ends.

news medley

To my knowledge there is just one couple to whom we are to extend our heartfelt congratulations this time. That couple is to be found in Edmonton: brother and sister Klaver celebrate their feast on the 27th of this month. We are, therefore, plenty early with our congratulations, even though it takes about two weeks for these lines to reach them via our *Clarion*. From the write-up with their picture we understand that they are looking forward to their retirement and the possibility of travelling to the old country. Having immigrated in 1953, they will have gone through the whole development also of Church life since that year, and personally as well as Church-wise they will be amazed at the goodness and faithfulness of our God. May He also guide them further and grant them many years in good health and joy with children, grandchildren, relatives, friends, brothers and sisters.

We might as well pay attention to the news from Edmonton at the same time.

“On singing the Confession of Faith, it was decided that, ‘At least once a month the Confession of Faith will be sung instead of the pastor reciting it.’ ” I understand that the Apostles’ Creed is meant and not the Confession of Faith. Both reciting and singing (how?) the latter would take the better part of a service, if not all of it.

We, too, have been thinking of singing the Credo once in a while, but we decided to wait with it till the provisional hymn section is in our possession: a few changes have been made in the melody, by which changes some objections have been taken away. I made some remarks about that before, and therefore refrain from elaborating on them at this moment.

Another point which had the attention of Edmonton’s Consistory is the point of members who are living far away or who are moving to remote places, anyway to such places where the Consistory cannot exercise supervision. That is a point which has had the attention of Consistories for as long as the Canadian Reformed Churches have been in existence. It is a point which is not easily solved, I think.

Are we to forbid our members to go farther away and to settle in regions where there is (as yet) no Canadian Reformed Church? If we remain more or less centralized — as we are at the moment — we do not have to count on considerable growth by means of adding others to the number of Church members. That the Churches are found in a relatively restricted area (or in various “centers,” so to speak) renders it more difficult for brothers and sisters to accept employment in regions where they have more possibilities but where they cannot attend Church. That not only restricts them, it sometimes renders it impossible for them to either choose or continue in a specific vocation. I think here of the Armed Forces, of federal or provincial Police Forces, of the Banking System, and so on. I think that we all know examples in those fields.

One could, of course, decide the whole question in one sentence which may sound staunchly Reformed but which fails to do justice, and therefore is not pious at all.

Quite a while ago I made a few remarks about the command that we shall fill the earth, and at that occasion I

tried to point out that we should disperse, strengthen the smaller Congregations and establish new ones, not necessarily by splitting up existing ones. I shall not repeat what I wrote then either, but do wish to point out that *one* has to make a beginning to such an undertaking, or a few families together.

What is then the position of such a brother or sister or family or families?

That is a question which is not easily decided. On the one hand, when they move so far away that the Consistory cannot have supervision over them, can they be maintained as members of that specific Church? If so, how is the Consistory to supervise their way of life, their whole behaviour, their conduct? When there are a few families together such becomes a little easier, for the brothers and sisters can practise mutual supervision. If the number grows, it would even be possible to appoint one of their number to the office of elder — something which was done more than once in the past.

However, what if the Consistory decides that they can not be maintained as members of that specific Church? Have they then ceased to be members of the Church of Christ? Are they then, all of a sudden, outsiders? They have not withdrawn from the Church, they have not broken with the Church, they do not turn away from the Lord; have they yet ceased to be Church members by their moving to a faraway place?

We send out missionaries to bring people to the Church, to expand the dominion of our Lord and Saviour, and should we then send brothers and sisters away into the desert because they move to a distant place “for their own personal honourable interests” — as we express it in the prayer for all the needs of Christendom?

I do not have an answer to all the above questions, I just raise the questions in order that the various aspects may be considered thoroughly.

The Edmonton Consistory decided “For the case of members moving a great distance away from the church, the Council decided that, ‘to those members of the congregation who move such a distance away from the Church that proper supervision cannot be exercised, shall as a rule an attestation be given.’ ”

There are a few points not clear to me in that decision. Having received an attestation, have they ceased to be members of the Edmonton Church then? And: will an attestation be given even when they do not ask for one? What is the sense of giving an attestation when the Consistory knows that there is no sister Church within “reachable” distance to which such an attestation can be presented? Can a Consistory give an attestation if someone does not ask for one? And if a Consistory does so, is that then, in fact, not an act of dismissal? Does a Consistory have the right to do that? Is that another method of causing someone’s Church membership to cease?

I know that concerning attestations there is this widespread misunderstanding: that an attestation is oftentimes regarded as a certificate of membership, which can be transferred from the one Church to the other. People ask then for “my” attestation, as if there is such a thing. And Consistories then give someone “his” attestation, as if it is a membership card which has now been removed from the files. That is a totally wrong concept.

An attestation is simply a testimony concerning doctrine and conduct, which testimony is written by the Consistory at the time of one’s departure to serve him as

an introduction with the Church to which he moves. Or: an attestation can be written upon one's request in order that he may show it to the Consistory of a sister Church where the Lord's Supper happens to be celebrated during his brief stay there.

Such an attestation, such a testimony becomes worthless after some time. Generally speaking, an attestation is valid for about three months. At least that is, to my knowledge, the practice among us. What can one do with an attestation after having lived somewhere for a year or for two years? It has become a historical document, as some of the older ones among us still may have the certificate that they were inoculated against smallpox before they were enrolled in Grade 1. But when they immigrated into Canada they had to have an updated certificate: they were to prove that they had been immunized recently.

Also with a view to the above I ask, "What is the sense of giving an attestation when it is a testimony which gradually loses its value as such, when there is no Church to which it can be presented to support the request for being received into the communion of saints at that place? Or is it to serve the brother or sister as an introduction with the Pentecostal Church, or with the United Church, or with the Presbyterian Church?"

Let no one construe the above remarks as intended to be criticism of Edmonton's decision. I only raised those questions to show that the matter is not as simple as some may think and at the same time in the hope that a few misunderstandings about attestations may have been removed.

From Edmonton we travel to Winnipeg. "The Consistory decided that the manse will be taken off the market for the time being if the present asking price cannot be obtained and as soon as the current sales period is over." It seems that the prices of houses are not as high as they were a few years ago. Or am I mistaken, not being in a position to buy or sell a house?

From Winnipeg to Carman does not take all that long. About an hour, depending on the point in Winnipeg where you start.

A Congregational meeting was to be held at which the building plans were to be discussed and viewed. Perhaps we shall have some more information next time. That next time will take us a month or so.

Questions were raised concerning the League Day to which the sisters in Carman and Winnipeg have been accustomed. "In accordance with the wishes of the Winnipeg ladies this will now be at the end of August."

The Rev. Van Rietschoten tells that a young sister approached him about making profession of faith. The minister adds a few remarks to that information. "This is the way it preferably should be. Make your desire known. Do not wait for a special class and then say, 'Yes, if the others do it, I will follow.' Make your desire known because it is *your desire*."

That is something which should be borne in mind. We are used to the fact that there is a special class, conducted for those who wish to make profession of faith the next spring or summer. I think that every minister begins that class with making clear to the students that this is just a course in which is repeated that which they have learned in the course of the years, that this hour does not have any special, symbolic or mysterious meaning, and that making profession of faith is an individual matter, not a group enterprise. It is good when those things are also mentioned in the bulletins, as is done above.

40th Wedding Anniversary



Mr. and Mrs. Jan and Iemktje Klaver are celebrating their fortieth Wedding Anniversary on July 27th. They were married on July 27, 1939, in Marum, Groningen. In July 1953 the big decision was made to emigrate to Edmonton, Canada, where they are still living today. The Lord blessed them with eight children, seven of them still living. Six are married, and the youngest one is engaged to be married in the fall. They have seventeen grandchildren. Mr. Klaver will retire from his work with the City on June 28, 1979. Both Mr. and Mrs. Klaver are looking forward to enjoying their retirement very much. They will be taking a trip to The Netherlands in the fall to meet all friends and relatives in the old country.

We jump somewhat back and forth, going to Calgary now, where the Consistory adopted a proposal "to set up a Public Relations Committee that will look into the possibilities to promote the Church at Calgary, in the Canadian Reformed community, and Sister Churches as well as to outsiders." If I am not mistaken, judging by what I read in the bulletin, the Calgary Church has been growing lately. May their numbers increase, as also those of the other Churches that would love to see a larger number added to their ranks.

The Church at Ottawa — we are faster than a DC 10 — received word from the N.C.C., that is, the National Capital Commission. "The N.C.C. officially informs us that no land is available for lease for the purpose of church building." Meanwhile, as we mentioned before, the Ottawa Church rents other facilities, facilities which I hope to see in a few weeks. Especially now that the summer season is here and Ottawa can again expect many visitors, it is the more pleasant that the services can be held in a real Church building.

Our last piece of information comes from Brampton this time. The Consistory decided to change the date at which new office-bearers are ordained to take the place of those whose term expired, from January to June. I do not think that there are many Congregations in our midst where the old custom of having new office-bearers ordained on the first of January is still being followed. Having the

school crossing

GRADUATES CLASS 1979

Throughout the provinces thankful students, parents, teachers, and school board officials join in graduation exercises. Some of the schools, operated by our Canadian Reformed School Societies, run to Grade Eight or Nine, others to Grade Twelve. Which school you were able to attend depends on where you live. We are thankful that by now the majority of our graduating sons and daughters have had at least part of their education at a Canadian Reformed school. Then there are also college and university graduates. At whatever level you are graduating, the readers of *Clarion* congratulate you. May our Lord make the continuation of your way successful, be it in a chosen work area or in further studies.

FELLOWSHIP OF CANADIAN REFORMED UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

Judging by the little bulletin and the scant publicity the F.C.R.U.S. puts out and receives, the spirits may be just a little crushed. But I have a crush on F.C.R.U.S. and see a bright future for this Fellowship. Just look at the number of alumni and post-graduates we have to encourage the undergraduate students and freshmen. Look each other up and join in this Fellowship, whether you study in one of the university cities of Ontario in the East, or in Winnipeg, Edmonton, Lethbridge, Vancouver, out West. Benefit from each other's experience. Be alert to the fact that as Canadian Reformed students you need one another in the academic effort as brothers and sisters. Together you must discover what your calling as Canadian Reformed men and women is in the scale of disciplines that make up the world of science, both in theory and in practice. Let's hear from you, university students!

INCREASED ENROLLMENT

At the start of the last school year the Canadian Reformed School in Edmonton, Alberta had an enrollment of just under forty students. According to the "City Guide" confirmed enrollment 1979-1980 now stands at ninety-four and is expected to pass the one hundred mark. This surely gives reason

for thankfulness. How are the other schools coming along enrollment-wise?

GRANT — MONEY SAVED THE DAY

I have mixed feelings about government grants to our school societies. This is not only caused by the possibility of government interference. For the present there does not seem to be any such interference in evidence. At the moment I feel uneasy about grants because of *internal* reasons. Let me illustrate this by quoting from one of our bulletins.

There are some families who are behind one or two months and some several (three & up) months. We urge all members to do their utmost to catch up. We were lucky to receive the final payment for the past year from the government . . . , or else we would have been in trouble.

We leave the school-society concerned *in cognito*. We want to benefit from their experience, not intrude upon the privacy of their internal affairs. The experience is one of relaxing the tension on the bow-string because of the comfort of the blessings of the Lord. The Lord increasingly is making room for our school societies. Government recognition and support from public funds is becoming a reality in several provinces. Let us be thankful, and show our thankfulness by *continued* effort in prayer, work, and financial offering.

OUR HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAMS NOW BASICALLY ACADEMIC

"From the "Principal's Message," May 10, 1979, Maranatha and Emmanuel Schools, Fergus/Guelph, Ontario, Mr. N. VanDooren.)

. . . The program now is basically an academic one. We lack the teaching expertise in special areas, as well as the equipment and students, in order to do much in the way of extra programs. However, I do not apologize much for that situation. It is a proven fact that the ideal Grade 12 graduate is still the one who has stuck to a basic core program of studies. I do not want to criticize the elaborate technical programs of some public high schools, but various comments from people who should know, point to excessive costs and a low success rate in practical life. Since our high school is academic rather than practical in nature,

does that mean that it is a school for the "elite" or for the gifted child only?

Most emphatically not! First of all, we offer both the Advanced and General courses. The Advanced for those who intend to go to Grade 13 and university — the General (which the government suggests for practically everyone else) for those students who want to have Grade 10 for apprenticeship purposes or Grade 12 for college or other purposes. We did study the possibility of a two-year program this year, but experts in the field strongly advised us against it. Although there are always exceptions to the rule, practically all our students can cope with a high school program. As a matter of fact, many students can do much better than their present progress indicates. Usually comments regarding excessive demands of a high school program come from those students who complain the most and do the least. Please think about that some time . . . !

With a new school year coming up I thought it timely to bring this message under the eyes of many parents. May this help you to motivate your son or daughter to a practical, Christian attitude toward their high school studies in the 1979-1980 term.

PAINT-A-THON

Do you know what a Paint-a-thon is? If you want to find out I suggest you write to the pupils of John Calvin School in Yarrow, B.C.; they know! The address is Pupils of John Calvin School, 4268 Stewart Road, Box 288, Yarrow, B.C. V0X 2A0. Climb in your pens, boys and girls!

REV. J. VANRIETSCHOTEN

A
Book
is
a
Lasting
(Beautiful)
Gift

change in summer prevents that the work during the winter season has to be taken over halfway by "new" office-bearers.

Herewith we have come to the end of our medley. I could still sing a hymn on the appearing of our Yearbook, but shall not do so, for someone might get the impression that I am in league with Premier Printing and that is definitely not the case.

When glancing through the Yearbook I noticed that this time only one Church could not report any change in membership. All the others showed at least some change. As for the growth, if I calculated well, it is between 2½ and 3%.

We are to be grateful that there is no loss but a gain. Yet it does not show any appreciable strength to attract people. Only the number of children born in Fergus made

the membership grow already by more than three percent during the past year. I realize that there are also Congregations where a large percentage of the members are elderly, with the predictable result that the growth of such a Congregation is much lower as far as new births are concerned than is the case with other Congregations. However, we should have grown more by attracting others. That is something about which I am concerned in spite of the joy that we not only held our own but even increased in number.

July is holiday month for us. Thus we shall have to forego the pleasure of meeting for a couple of issues.

I wish you all pleasant holidays, safe journeys, an enjoyable time and new strength for the resumption of your labours.

vO

PRESS RELEASE

of the Classis Ontario-North, June 14, 1979.

1. After Christian opening, the credentials are examined and Classis is constituted: Rev. Cl. Stam, chairman; Rev. W.W.J. VanOene, clerk; Rev. J. Mulder, assessor. The agenda is established.

2. The church at Burlington-East requests Classis to rescind the decision of Classis March 8, 1979 re: "giving guidance to brothers and sisters who spend a shorter or longer period of the year in Florida."

Classis decides: "Since the request of the church at Burlington-East is in fact an appeal against the decision of Classis Ontario-North of March 8, 1979, Acts Article 6B, this request is inadmissible since appeals are to be addressed to the major assemblies."

3. The church at Burlington-West notifies Classis that the Rev. Cl. Stam has accepted a call to the church at Smithville, Ontario and that he has been most honourably released of his ministerial duties in Burlington as per August 29, 1979. This church now requests Classis to grant a classical re-

lease to the Rev. Cl. Stam.

A certificate of release is read, signed, and handed to the Rev. Stam.

4. Upon request of the church at Burlington-West the Rev. G. Van Dooren is appointed as counsellor of the church at Burlington-West.

5. In executive session Classis deals with several appeals.

It is decided to appoint a committee to advise Classis in the matter of these appeals. Appointed are the brothers J. Mulder, G.J. Nordeman, Cl. Stam, J. VanderWoude, M. van Beveren.

This committee will inform the moderamen when it has arrived at a conclusion and advise, so that Classis can be reconvened. If possible a two week notice will be given.

6. The church at Burlington-East informs Classis that a report re the archives of Classis is forthcoming.

7. Next Classis: convening church - Orangeville; date - Thursday, September 13, 1979 at 9:00 a.m. in Toronto; moderamen - Rev. van Beveren, chairman; Rev. Olij, clerk; Rev. VanOene, assessor.

8. No censure according to Article 43, Church Order was necessary.

9. The Acts are adopted and the Press Release is approved.

10. Rev. J. Mulder spoke words of farewell to Rev. Cl. Stam, who in return wishes the churches of this Classis the LORD's blessing.

After the singing of Psalm 97:6 and thanksgiving by the Rev. Cl. Stam, Classis is adjourned.

For the Classis,
J. MULDER, assessor, e.t.

Church News

Classis Ontario South of the Canadian Reformed Churches, held on Wednesday, June 27, 1979, at London, Ontario, hereby declares that:

Mr. G.H. VISSCHER

Bachelor of Divinity and communicant member of the Canadian Reformed Church of Hamilton, has satisfactorily passed the preparatory examination and, having promised not to teach anything which is not in accordance with the Reformed Confession has been made eligible for call within the federation of the Canadian Reformed Churches, of which the evidence is hereby given to him.

On behalf of the Classis,
M. Werkman, Chairman
W. Huizinga, Assessor

CALLED:

CANDIDATE G.H. VISSCHER

by the Church at Houston, B.C., Winnipeg, Manitoba and Guelph, Ontario.

Canadian Reformed Church at Brampton:

Clerk: *C.J. Nobels*
R.R. 1,

Cheltenham, Ontario L0P 1C0
Phone: 838-2518

Canadian Reformed School Society (Brampton and Toronto combined):

Secretary: *C.J. Nobels*
R.R. 1,

Cheltenham, Ontario L0P 1C0
Phone: 838-2518

OUR COVER

Parliament Buildings, Toronto, Ontario. (Photo courtesy Ontario Ministry of Industry and Tourism.)

What We Cannot Do

The greatest danger to which we are exposed is conformity with the world. The congregation of Laodicea went wrong because the brothers and sisters willingly let themselves become entangled with the pleasures that their rich life-style had to offer them. They did not break with the church, but their hearts were elsewhere.

However, whatever can be said about Laodicea cannot leave the liberated churches (including the Canadian Reformed Churches) untouched. What is the depth of spiritual life among us? What meaning do the big words in our confession still have for us; the words such as misery, debt, conversion, fleeing from sin, and striving for righteousness? Have we perhaps become skaters who calmly glide over such words without realizing how deep the water under our feet is?

One who experiences the terrible appeal of the world in his own life will not be astonished to a lesser degree by the facts which J.A. Knepper revealed about our youth. Are we amazed by these facts? If we are amazed by this we start to look for a scapegoat.

We look at the *parents* who do not know how to form a Christian family. We say that *television* should never have been allowed in the house. We find that the *Young People's Society* no longer gives training, as in former days. We regret that our *press* does not speak more firmly.

Whoever searches for a reason in this manner is doing it in a very superficial and dangerous way, because he forgets that many younger or older people started to love the world *after*

they had been brought up in a Christian family. Perhaps they received their schooling at an old-fashioned Y.P.S. Perhaps for years the "Reformatie" or the "Clarion" was their magazine. But still they succumbed to temptation. Then we should not look to their parents or their leaders. When many turned their back on Jesus Christ it was not caused by the inadequate teaching of our Lord, was it? It was not Paul's fault when Demas left him because of love for the world, was it? Therefore we must be careful in immediately pointing the finger at the culprit.

Whoever goes into the world and out of the Reformed churches, no matter which society or family he comes from, has received enough knowledge so that he will not be able to excuse himself. Maybe his parents did neglect their task, but there still was a minister, a friend, or even a very clear sermon which could have stopped him. If we are looking for a scapegoat we are engaged in a dangerous pursuit.

We actually think that the picture which Mr. Knepper draws cannot be a true picture of our churches. We are very principled: we give our children an education at the best schools, and decry abortions, euthanasia, sexual promiscuity and other such practices. And if our children do go wrong then there has to be a reason for that! So we call the parents, the Y.P.S., the educators, and whoever else we can find on the carpet. Things were so good in the churches; the decline was found elsewhere, but now this . . .

Yes, but there are two things we cannot do. We cannot give faith to the people, and we cannot keep them in the faith either. We can use all kinds of methods, but the best means are not good enough. Yet they are and remain means, even if together they form a whole network of Reformed organizations, from the kindergarten to the senior citizen centres.

It is *God* who opens the hearts of men for His message and it is His good pleasure when a division is drawn right through the family and also right through the middle of the Church. We may plant and water, but God has to give the growth.

We cannot give to people, old or young, the faith or ensure that they do not fall away from the faith. The devil, the world, and our own flesh are enormous powers. It is a miracle when we are saved. Therefore we should not marvel at the falling away from the faith, but rather we should marvel about the perseverance of faith. Satan has us in his sieve quite often but luckily there is Christ Who prays for us that our faith shall not fail (Luke 22:31). This knowledge does not make us passive (Christ will save us . . .) but does inspire us to be conscientiously busy with our salvation. We have to work our salvation with fear and trembling, says Paul, because it is God Who, because of His good pleasure, works in us to will and to work (Philippians 2:12ff.). Because *God* is busy in us we also have to work for our salvation.

One who expresses himself in this way does not get support from the ecumenical theology of today. Everything has to be turned upside-down, except we ourselves. That we ourselves in a very personal way have a relationship with God and that this is a matter of life and death is indeed a message from Geneva, from Calvin, but not from the Geneva of the World Council of Churches anymore.

You cut a ridiculous figure when you want to discuss first the regeneration of man and then the regeneration of the world. This order has to be reversed: change the world, and then you will be changed along with it. Turn the world upside-down, and man will be turned right-side up again.

We would like to let the modern theologians talk. The Bible has a different message. No one who wants to be worldly can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again (John 3:3). One who does not honour the personal commitment in the first place is not worthy to see this kingdom of God in the world either.

We could do better by listening to Paul, who has something different to tell us, different from what we hear around us today. Paul worked hard and was busy for everybody. To the Jews he was a Jew and to the Greeks he was a Greek. He did everything for the gospel; for this cause he counted himself as nothing. His eye was turned toward the world and he was not blinded by his inner self. He revealed his outward self, from Jerusalem to Rome and perhaps even further. But, although he

PRESS REVIEW — Continued

munion of the saints, with constant prayer and having yourself led and guided by God's Word. If this condition is not met, if there is a studying, or a receiving of any education, without faith, in selfishness, there is the grave danger of drowning spiritually or rather: there is a process of drowning already. But this counts for every aspect of life, not only for studying, but also for seeking a job.

J. GEERTSEMA

was active for others, he did not forget to work his own salvation: ". . . I buffet my body and make it my salve, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified" (I Corinthians 9:27, NASB).

Paul reminded Timothy of that same buffeting, that same chastisement. Timothy, too, was nothing but activity on behalf of others. He had his hands full with the congregation of Ephesus. They were quarreling amongst each other; there had to be good elders and deacons; the women did not always want what the Lord asked of them; the danger of affluence threatened all of them — all of these dangers existed along with many others. Although Timothy was involved in his work for others he should not be consumed himself, Paul warned. He had to drink a little wine for his stomach and for his regular sicknesses (I Timothy 5:23), and he was admonished to "discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness" (I Timothy 4:7). It was not only important that others were saved but that he was also saved. We, too, have to work our own, our very personal salvation.

NO PIETISM, BUT PIETAS

If there is a pastor among us who burns with zeal on the pulpit, in the congregation, and in all kinds of work as a synod deputy, then the following question is not superfluous: Dear brother, how is your personal relationship with the Lord? If from abroad the question is asked, "Are your students at Kampen saved?" then such a question may rightly be asked. This is not the case when we ask for the date and the hour of conversion and forget that conversion must be a daily occurrence. It can be done if we want to know if the gospel has been written in the hearts of the students themselves. It may also be asked if they exercise godliness, to which they have to call others in the future.

When our young people want to do public profession of faith it should not be an automatic process: baptized, so many years of catechism instruction along with a knowledge of the required material, and then it is time to do public profession of faith. Because of this, there should be not only an examination about the knowledge but also about the motives. The belief of the Church should also be their own belief. It may be asked if they want to love

God the Lord, if they want to break with the world and its sinful lusts, and if they want to live God-fearing lives. Fairly soon they answer "Yes" to these questions (see the form). Do they know then what they are saying?

When we pose these questions we do not ask for a portion of "pietism" in our churches. We ask for *personal* belief and not for individualism. We ask for *inner* experience without losing sight of everyday life and the calling which reaches to the far corners of the earth. We ask for *piety*, but piety in the way of life in the covenant and in the church. Scriptural piety seeks the entire life, the inner room of the heart, the Reformation of the church, and the well-being of all people.

We ask with this piety for happiness, for a song, for the outpourings for and with others from our hearts. Emotion, surely, because what the heart is full of, the mouth must express. "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!" (Philippians 4:4.) The entire man is called, so that he can cry but also laugh in the Lord. We do not ask for pietism, but for "Pietas" or piety. This piety dwells in the heart and glorifies God's worldwide works.

NO METHODISM, BUT METHODS

He who considers what has been written throughout the ages about the exercising of godliness has to become aware that today so little is written on this topic among us. In the days of Voetius the Reformed people knew that beside a course in ethics there was one in ascetics. The prayer existed beside the command.

Ascetics did not deal in the first place with ascese as avoidance but with ascese as exercise. In his book *Ta Asketika* (1664) Voetius points immediately to the text which we have already quoted (I Timothy 4:7). He wrote this book for the university students whom he wanted to offer a course in the *exertia peitatis*, the exercise of godliness.

It is easy to disregard such a book. It is not free from scholasticism, pietism, and methodism. But one who discards all of these faults will retain at least one positive element: the life with the Lord knows order. It is found in Bible reading, in singing, in praying, in the celebration of the Lord's Day, and in self-examination. There is a time to work; there is also a time to pray. One who does not like to listen to Voetius

may listen to Calvin. In the *Institutes III*, chapter 20 he says: there is a time for praying; there is also a place for prayer: the inner room.

We are afraid of methodism, but let us not be afraid at all of the *method*. Paul and Timothy have exercised themselves in godliness and when the apostle speaks about it he uses images taken from the sports hall. Training is required! We should not be haphazard in this respect.

But how many times are we being lax? There is a time for many things; we are training ourselves for many things. But praying and Bible reading quite often take place in the intervals, quickly and hastily. We, although we have so much leisure time, race through life.

Who recognizes in his own prayer-life that "prayer is somewhat of a secret nature having its chief seat in the mind and requires a tranquility far removed from the turmoil of ordinary cares"? Who still seeks the aid of the inner chamber "which enables the mind, in itself too much disposed to wander, to become sincerely intent on prayer" (*Institutes III*, 20, 29)? Whose personal prayers are more numerous and longer than the prayers which he offers together with others at home or in church? Only in that case can he say with Calvin that continuation of prayer (pray without ceasing, I Thessalonians 5:17) in the first place pertains to every-one's personal prayers (*III*, 20, 29).

In these matters too, it is possible that we generalize when we ask critical questions. But we imagine that this is not the case. We asked before: where is the depth of our life in faith? And now we add: how can there be any depth if there is so little method, so little methodical exercise and training? This question is extremely urgent because it pertains to the chief part of our thankfulness, prayer.

J.D.

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FOR THE READER'S INFORMATION

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News items are published with a view to their importance for the Reformed Churches. Selection of an item does not necessarily imply agreement with its contents.

GOUDA

The Classis East of the Reformed Congregations in The Netherlands brought the general synod of those churches to a decision about moustaches and beards. If they are worn as a sign of conformity to the world, the office-bearers have to admonish moustached or bearded persons according to the synod.

Short hair with women and long hair with men is in conflict with God's Word, Synod stated. Such cannot be said of moustaches and beards, but that practice will have to be condemned if it is shown thereby that the wearers "have an aversion against abiding by the simplicity of the congregation" (ND).

That's what you get when an ecclesiastical assembly starts with making decisions about all sorts of practical matters concerning which there is no express command of the Lord. How in the world can it ever be determined whether one wears a beard because he does not wish to "abide by the modesty and simplicity which is fitting"?? Let us strive to stay away from all sorts of decisions and ecclesiastical statements (whether made by a Consistory or a major assembly) concerning "practical ethics" and customs.

WASHINGTON (RNS)

Pastor Georgi Vins, the recently-released Soviet dissident Baptist leader, told government officials here that his living conditions in a Soviet prison "improved radically" in 1976 after a resolution seeking his release was introduced in Congress.

Pastor Vins said reports of that resolution were published in Soviet newspapers, and Soviet authorities were "very angry."

He appeared before the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, known as the Helsinki Commission.

After the resolution was published in the Soviet Union, the imprisoned pastor said he was sent to a hospital where he remained for one year "under doctors' care," receiving the "hospital diet," superior to that he got in prison (CN).

NEW YORK (RNS)

An unprecedented set of proposed guidelines for joint worship by Christians and Jews has been drawn up here by a group of Protestant clergy and Reform rabbis.

The document was drafted at the culmination of a day-long symposium (June 6) at St. Peter's Lutheran Church, a Lutheran Church in America congregation, and at Central Synagogue.

Sponsored by the Office on Christian-Jewish Relations of the National Council of Churches (NCC) and the Department of Interreligious Affairs of the Union of America Hebrew Congregations (UAHC), the symposium began with a joint worship service conducted by Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman of Central Synagogue and the Rev. Ralph E. Peterson of St. Peter's held in the sanctuary of the Lutheran church.

The guidelines suggest that use of the Lord's Prayer is inadvisable in a joint service, "not because of the text itself but because of its strong historical identification with the church alone." Similarly, the document says that Jews cannot be expected to use a cross or crucifix in worship "since, unhappily, these are too intimately associated with memories of programs in their history" (CN).

Even the prayer "which Christ our Lord Himself has taught us" cannot be used in such a joint "worship service." Of course not, for it came out of the mouth of our Saviour, whom the Jews reject until this present day.

That the Jews cannot stand a crucifix is understandable; we cannot stand it either, for we do not look at a suffering Christ but we look up at Him Who has risen and has ascended into heaven. But the basic reason why the Jews cannot stand a cross is not because it is connected with what

Christians did to them or what was done to them under the *cover of Christianity*; the basic reason is that Christ's cross is still a stumblingblock to them, even after so many centuries.

And I am wondering what kind of a "prayer" that is which is offered up *not* in the Name of Him for Whose sake alone our God will hear.

GRAND RAPIDS

Failing last year in her bid to be a candidate for the gospel ministry in the Christian Reformed Church in North America, (Mrs.) Marchiene Rienstra has nevertheless joined the ranks of ordained ministers, but in the United Presbyterian Church USA. Of the ministers participating in her ordination service, four were Christian Reformed. Last year the Rev. Mrs. Rienstra, a mother of four, became the first female graduate of Calvin Seminary in Grand Rapids, but her request for candidacy was refused by the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church (RES NE).

And when you can't get what you want where you always believed you should be, you simply put on another ecclesiastical coat and everything is fixed.

Although the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church refused the request, no fewer than four Christian Reformed Ministers felt at liberty to go and take part in an ordination service in a "denomination" with which there are no bonds of a sister church relationship. Perhaps some "ecclesiastical fellowship"??

NEW YORK (RNS)

A study commission of the Episcopal Church has urged the Church not to make homosexuality "an absolute barrier to ordination."

The recommendation to the triennial General Convention, which meets this September in Denver, said the determining factor in screening candidates for the priesthood should be whether or not the candidate "will lead a life which is a wholesome example to Christ's flock."

The word "wholesome" was not defined by the panel.

Of course not. When the standards set by the Word of God are abandoned, who can then still give a correct definition of terms and expressions?

vO