

# Triumph of Relativism

When we scan the ecclesiastical horizon at the beginning of this new year 1981, our attention is drawn to the synodical Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (RCN). They occupy an important place within the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES) and their influence upon young Reformed churches in the world should not be underestimated. Because Dutch immigrants in Canada enjoy the privilege of being acquainted with the language, they have a responsibility in observing the development in the RCN and informing other English-speaking Reformed and Presbyterian churches about it.

Three issues call for comment, and they are all related to the Reformed Ecumenical Synod. I mention the first two in passing and elaborate on the third.

The first is the case of Dr. H. Wiersinga, whose views on the atonement deviate from Holy Scripture and the Reformed Confessions. Our readers may remember that the Interim Committee of the RES had reported that whatever impressions people may have received of the disciplinary process, the RCN cannot be faulted as neglecting or refusing to exercise judicial discipline. The Reformed Ecumenical Synod in its assembly at Nimes, July 1980, agreed without debate. There was only a slight difference in wording. While the Interim Committee had reported that in their opinion the RCN had "faithfully" exercised discipline in this case, the Synod substituted for this the word "officially." In my editorial "Double Talk" in *Clarion*, September 20, 1980, I tried to explain this misunderstanding of the situation: there is the double talk about juridical discipline and justiciary discipline. Judicial discipline is only words, but no action. Representatives of the RCN may have spoken to the Interim Committee of the RES about (judicial) discipline, while in their own circles General Synod had stated that it should *not* exercise (justiciary) discipline. Now in the beginning of November, the matter was discussed at the Synod of the RCN. The Rev. P. Schravendeel and Prof. Dr. J. Plomp wondered about the RES statement that the RCN had exercised discipline in the case of Dr. Wiersinga. The Rev. Schravendeel remarked: "Very considerably we did not want to exercise discipline with respect to Dr. Wiersinga and we expressed this emphatically." Prof. Plomp regretted the fact that the information given to the churches abroad had led to the conclusion of discipline. "*Want er is perse juist geen tucht geoefend.*"

I did not read any decision of the Synod of the RCN in this matter. It would be appropriate to inform the thirty-eight member churches of the RES officially. In the meantime, the RCN remains a member at least until 1984, for did *RES News* not give the jubilant report "RES Nimes prayed and stayed together"?

One is almost inclined to become a bit biting, when we consider the second issue. There has also been double talk with respect to the RCN discussion concerning homosexuality. Delegates of the RCN to the RES 1980 gave the impression that the decision had been misinterpreted. They alleged that the Synodical Churches had only spoken about a homophilic disposition and not about homosexual activity. Such disposition or propensity would not be an impediment for being an

office-bearer or for partaking in the Supper of the Lord. The Dutch word *beleving* had been the cause of misunderstanding. RES Nimes decided to ask for an elucidation. Had the Synod in The Netherlands really declared homosexual practice to be permissible? *Nederlands Dagblad* of November 7, 1980, reports the answer under the heading "*Synode Lunteren wil ruimte voor homofilie en homosexualiteit.*" The answer, therefore, is that the Synod of the RCN legalized homosexual *activities*. The Rev. B.J.F. Schoep was the mouthpiece of the synod committee. He acknowledged that Synod 1979 had chosen for a new route. Synod had given a pastoral statement that created room for homosexuals to function within the congregation. In the pastoral encounter with the homosexual fellowman within the congregation we should not be silent about the bodily expression of the mutual affection: "*ook aan de orde komt het lichamelijk uitdrukking geven aan de onderlinge genegenheid als beleving van de homofiele geaardheid. Ten aanzien ook van dit aspect van de homofiele geaardheid geldt hetgeen waartoe door de synode wordt opgeroepen, n.l. niet te veroordelen, maar elkaars levensgeheim te eerbiedigen en de eigen verantwoordelijkheid voor de Heer te erkennen.*" Also with respect to this aspect of the homosexual disposition — the bodily expression — synod admonishes not to condemn but to respect the secret of the life of the other and to acknowledge his personal accountability to the Lord.

Possibly some of our readers remember that in reports of the assembly of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod especially the delegates of the Third World churches were praised for the outspoken manner in which they had tried to convince the Dutch delegates of the clear teaching of the Scriptures. With open Bible in their hands, we heard, they pointed to those plain passages in the Old and the New Testament that forbid homosexual activities. But Prof. Plomp of Kampen afterwards remarked that the usage of the Scriptures was different in the Dutch synodical churches compared to the other members of the RES. He was right; at the basis of all deviation and divergencies is the question of the authority of Holy Writ.

This leads us to the third issue, the most important development in the Synodical Churches of The Netherlands. It is the unanimous acceptance of the long-awaited report on the nature of the authority of the Bible. The Deputies for Church and Theology had studied and discussed for more than six years, and they finally came with a report of eighty-four pages. The report will be rephrased in order to function in the local churches and will be sent to the sister churches within the Reformed Ecumenical Synod. It is to be regarded as a counterpart of the famous Report 44 of the Christian Reformed Church in North America, although I have the impression that the Christian Reformed report now will seem to be quite conservative.

Characteristic of the Dutch report is the important role assigned to *man* both in the origin of Scripture and in the exegesis of the Bible. Scripture is no completely objective revelational truth that outside of man invades the human world like a meteorite. Scripture is the residue

of many human events and human stories narrated throughout the ages. They are truly human and conditioned by political, social, and psychic factors. Only, as such human stories they relate at the same time the superior power of divine redemption and reconciliation. Scripture does not contain a system of eternally valid truths. "The Bible does not contain such a system in the field of morality nor of theology." In the application of the Bible we should neither exclude our situation nor the text. Fundamentalism excludes the contemporary situation and only sticks to the Bible text; relativism makes the situation dominant and loses the text of Scripture. This Dutch synodical report wants a completely different approach.

The deputies made a distinction between the salutary authority of Scripture and the historically-conditioned ritual and ethical authority of the Bible. Our situation differs from biblical times, and the Bible often does not give ready answers to ethical questions. In a dialogue with the Spirit of the Scriptures every new generation has to formulate new answers. This reasoning is the background also of the statement about homosexuality.

Now already it may be clear to our readers that this report is a deviation from our Reformed Confession. We confess the Bible to be God's eternal Word, and we receive all its books as holy and canonical for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith, believing without any doubt all things contained in them (Article 5, B.C.).

The Dutch report, however, states that the questions concerning the authority of Holy Scripture in our age are indissolubly connected with the changing views concerning history and the manner in which we experience reality and truth. Therefore, the first chapter is written by a philosopher, Prof. Dr. C.A. van Peursen, and is entitled: "*Veranderingen in het waarheidsbegrip*"; it deals with the shifts in the concept of truth. There is "*de waarheidsverschuiwing, die wij nu eenmaal doormaken*." Whether we want it or not, we are submitted to a change in the truth. What is truth? The report rejects both an objective concept of truth and a subjective concept; it makes a choice for a "*relational concept of truth*." Truth is not something that exists outside of us and has to be appropriated by us. It is not something objective that has to become ours subjectively. Truth exists in relation. Truth manifests itself only via an intimate relation of subject and object. Dr. van Peursen writes: Truth is not simply outside man, it is also not a human achievement nor the addition of both. Our personal engagement is part of the truth that touches us. The new meaning of truth is "relational." Truth only becomes evident within a relation, when man is related to something else. "*Die nieuwere betekenis van waarheid is relationeel. Dit wil eenvoudig zeggen dat waarheid zich steeds binnen een relatie, binnen de betrokkenheid van de mens op iets anders, aftekent*." Truth according to Dr. van Peursen, is not only the finish but also the race, not only the treasure in the field but treasure and digging and finding all at once.

At synod Dr. H.B. Weijland introduced this part of the report by saying that this "relational concept of truth" opens new possibilities especially in the area of the historical problems and contradictions in the Bible. Man was completely involved in the origin of the Bible, and that means man with his ideas and presuppositions and also with his lack of knowledge. The relational concept of truth may become a neat cover of negative criticism on the Bible.

Although we may have opportunity to discuss other

chapters of this report later, for now it may suffice to direct our attention to this new "relational concept of truth." It reminds me of the philosophy of existentialism. It is not without significance that the first chapter of this report of the synodical churches is written by a philosopher who studied existentialism. It reminds us of the twentieth century concept of truth as an encounter. The dialectical theologian, Emil Brunner, under the influence of the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, wrote a book about truth as an encounter.

But is it right to have a report about the authority of Scripture determined by a philosophical exposition about truth? Would it not be better to ask what the Bible itself says about truth? Certainly, I can appreciate the fact that Dr. van Peursen tries to escape objectivism and subjectivism, but if we call the truth *normative*, we do not speak about truth as a meteorite that plunges into the human world from the outside. Scripture is God's covenantal word. Within His covenant God addresses us. Scripture is, as Augustine vividly pictured, the letter of God's love. Within His covenant God speaks to us His word of promise and demand. *He addresses* His word to us; His promise asks for our faith and obedience. Paul speaks about the obedience of faith.

But it is precisely when we see the truth of Scripture as covenantal words addressed to us, that we should not speak as if our involvement, our personally being engaged, is part of the truth. The promise of God's covenant may be rejected in unbelief, but it is, nevertheless, eternally valid.

This report, fighting against what it sees as scholastic objectivism in Reformed circles (fundamentalism), itself falls prey to *subjectivism*. The human subject has become an idol. And subjectivism with respect to the authority of the Bible always means relativism.

This report may try to take a stand against relativism, but the dominating idea and terminology of the "relational concept of truth" invalidates this attempt. With all its talk about "relational" it makes the truth relative. When I read those philosophical remarks about the changes and shifts in the concept of truth to which man is subject nowadays, will he nill he, I thought of Psalm 119. Certainly, we know about the progress of the dispensations — we may live in the new dispensation of God's covenant — but we understand the psalmist when he compares the ordinances and statutes of the law of the LORD to His ordinances in creation. As firmly established as the heavens is the truth of God's Word. And we think of the manner in which our Saviour spoke of the words of the Father, "For I have given them the words which Thou gavest me; I have given them Thy word; sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth" (John 17:8,14,17).

Did the Lord Jesus Christ speak here about "relational truth," or was the truth simply contained in those words which the Father had given to Him and which He gave to His disciples?

The apostle Paul thanks God that the Christians in Rome had become obedient from the heart to *the standard of teaching* to which they were committed (Rom. 6:17). The covenantal Word had met with faith and obedience and commitment, but it was, first of all, the *standard of teaching*. We glorify God by our obedience in acknowledgment.

Already the first chapter of the RCN report, "The Nature of the Authority of Scripture," shows the sad situation of a church overcome by false philosophy and carried about with every wind of doctrine.

J. FABER

# For the Sake of True Ecumenicity<sup>2</sup>

Yet at first it was not expected that synod would require all members to express their agreement with the pronouncement. They might think that way because the quoted synod of Utrecht had not done so. But soon this expectation appeared to be unwarranted. The Synod did not flinch from drawing from its decision every possible conclusion, both with regard to its contents and to its obligatory nature.

It provided the churches with two official publications to explain its pronouncement: *Toelichting* and *Praeadvies*.<sup>15</sup>

Particularly the *Praeadvies* made clear beyond any doubt the teaching of the synod. In it answers were given to many requests for revision. One of these requests was the so-called *Verklaring van Gevoelen*,<sup>16</sup> written by prominent ministers and other members of the churches. We gladly quote here its fully scriptural conclusions, as they express very well the views of the now liberated churches. They read as follows:

We believe on the basis of Holy Scripture and confess in accordance with the Forms of Unity and the liturgical forms:

1. that all children are conceived and born in sin and that therefore they are subject to all manner of misery, yea, to condemnation itself (Form of Baptism);
2. that God in Christ has established his covenant of grace with the believers and their seed (Gen. 17:7; Gal. 3:14 and 19);
3. that therefore all the children of believers are children of the covenant (Acts 3:25);
4. that all these children are holy (I Cor. 7:14) or sanctified in Christ (I Cor. 1:2 and Form of Baptism);
5. that therefore to all these children has been given the promise of salvation, belonging to that covenant (Acts 2:39);
6. that therefore with respect to all these children the administration of baptism is a sign and seal of the covenant of grace or that promise of salvation (Gen. 17:11 and 13, 14; Form of Baptism);
7. that therefore all these children are called very seriously to accept this promise of salvation by true faith (Hebr. 4:1);

8. that so many of them as accept this promise by true faith do so through the regenerating working of grace by the Holy Spirit, according to God's eternal election (Jer. 24:7 and Ez. 11:19; 36:26, 27);
9. that children who do not accept this promise with uprightness of heart for this reason will be punished as breakers of the covenant with a more severe punishment (Lev. 26:15, cf. also Deut. 31:30; Rom. 11:28-30; Hebr. 12:25, cf. also 10:28-31);
10. that always should be kept in mind the admonition: take heed lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God (Hebr. 3:1, 12).

What kind of doctrine did the synod teach against these fully reformed conclusions? Unfortunately it applied to the doctrine of the covenant of grace notions and distinctions borrowed from scholastic dialectics. In doing so it utterly undermined the firm solidity as well as the seriousness of the covenant.

The Synod distinguished between children of the covenant, who are truly in the covenant and others — the non-elect children — who have only an outward relationship to the covenant.<sup>17</sup> Further it made a distinction between the promise of the covenant in its full and deep meaning, given to the elect children of believers, and an outward and conditional promise, given to the non-elect.

The promise given to the elect children, according to this synod, assured them of having already in their actual possession the gifts of grace, faith included. On the other hand the conditional promise, given to the non-elect, contained but an offer of grace.<sup>18</sup>

Another assertion was that strictly speaking we are not right in speaking of covenant-breakers, because they, who are indicated by this name, have never been in the covenant.<sup>19</sup>

With regard to baptism the synod held to the view that there should be a distinction between a full baptism, signing and sealing the full and unconditional promise of the covenant, and a baptism, that properly speaking does not deserve the name of baptism for

the reason that it is just an outward sign of an unconditional promise.<sup>20</sup>

It went even so far as to say that non-elect children do not have the right of receiving baptism in its full and deep meaning, and that baptism given to them cannot be considered a full baptism.<sup>21</sup>

There can be no doubt that in this way the blessing of the divine revelation concerning the covenant was deprived of its character of making free of doubt and uncertainty all the covenant-people who lack assurance and confidence. On the other hand this erroneous doctrine robbed the covenant-idea of its warning and threatening pressure on the disobedient or unbelieving covenant-member.

That the synod, in all this was concerned with more than just a theological discussion became apparent when it pronounced that all office-bearers were expected to agree with its statements. It also decided that the classes should make sure that every candidate to the ministry, examined by them, expressed his agreement.

The evil consequences of synod's stand are common knowledge by now. They, who could not obey on grounds of conscience, were suspended and finally deposed from their offices. The "liberation" had become unavoidable.

The Reformed Ecumenical Synod cannot plead ignorance. The things referred to here "were not done in a corner." Partly they were discussed even before 1944 in the periodicals of the churches corresponding with the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands. These churches further received information from the side of the liberated churches after 1944. That the Reformed Ecumenical Synod did nothing to stem the evil by calling back the synodical churches to doctrinal soundness, was a shortcoming which made it lose its truly reformed quality from the start.

There is, however, more to be mentioned here.

Also with regard to church government there was a change for the worse. By violation of some of the articles of the church order the church government was transformed into something of a hierarchical disposition.

We would go beyond the scope of this booklet if we would point to everything touching on this subject. Therefore we will give attention to the most important infringement upon the



church order: the wrong use that was made of Article 31.

This article reads as follows:

If anyone complains that he has been wronged by the decision of a minor assembly, he shall have the right to appeal to a major ecclesiastical assembly, and whatever may be agreed upon by a majority vote shall be considered settled and binding, unless it be proved to conflict with the Word of God or with the articles of the church order, as long as they are not changed by a general synod.

From this article it is apparent that the established rule is that decisions of a major ecclesiastical assembly shall be considered binding. There are, however, exceptions to this rule. The most important exception is that when a member or a consistory is convinced that a decision conflicts with the Word of God, they do not have to obey that decision. Though, of course, they have to extend an appeal to the proper assembly. What an appealant considers to be proved to himself he has to submit to the test of the right body. The same holds true whenever a decision is considered to be an infringement upon one of the articles of the church order.

So Article 31 is of great weight in a truly reformed confederation of churches. In it the scriptural rule is safeguarded that we ought to obey God rather than men.<sup>22</sup> Wherever this rule is abandoned the reformed character of a christian living and working together of churches is taken away.

And precisely this is what the synods of the synodical churches in The Netherlands have done in order to enforce obedience from its members with regard to the above mentioned doctrinal statements.

To this end the synod interpreted Article 31 in such a manner that its actual meaning was changed into something quite contrary to it. The word "unless" was read by synod as if it meant "until." In this way the right of not yet obeying a decision, until an appeal has been acted upon, was removed from the church order. People, who were on grounds of conscience convinced that they should not comply with a synodical pronouncement, were compelled to do what they could not do. They had to obey immediately, even when their appeal had not been dealt with as yet.

In this case too the synod was not just presenting a theory on church government. It immediately acted in agreement with its unreformed view in taking measures against those who re-

fused to accept its decisions. The Synod also directed the minor assemblies to act according to this new conception.

How contrary to the text of Article 31 the synodical dealings were, was made evident in following years. When judges had to decide in matters of church possessions, in almost all the lawsuits they upheld the "liberated" exposition of Article 31 as the only possible one.

As a result in 1959 the synodical churches undertook a reviewal of the church order. The old Article 31 was replaced by a new Article 33. In this new ruling the hierarchical form of church government was firmly established. It reads:

If any one objects to a decision or pronouncement of the general synod because he is of the opinion that it is in conflict with pronouncements of the Word of God, the assemblies shall use tolerance with regard to him, unless he acts in a way detrimental to the right working of the ecclesiastical fellowship, locally or in the confederation of churches.

From the new article it is clear that the right of those, who object to decisions because of the Word of God, is replaced by a dubious tolerance by the grace of the ecclesiastical assemblies.

Here too the Reformed Ecumenical Synod cannot plead ignorance. Especially the churches, which had a relationship of correspondence with the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands before 1944, knew about what had happened.

The "liberated" churches informed them from the beginning and also later on. They knew about the reviewal of the church order in 1959. But they brought up in the meetings of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod neither the injustice of the abuse of the old church order nor the shifting to another church order, which is not according to the principles of reformed church government.

Therefore also on this account the Reformed Ecumenical Synod as a reformed synod failed from the beginning.

*B. The Reformed Ecumenical Synod still tolerates that some of the member churches are at the same time members of the World Council of Churches*

The Reformed Churches also disapprove of the fact that some member churches of the Reformed Ecumenical

Synod are members of the World Council of Churches.

Two member churches belong to the World Council since 1948: the Gereja Kristen Jawa and the Gereja Kristen Indonesia Jawa Tengah. Though the Reformed Ecumenical Synod spoke out against this membership of the World Council it failed for more than thirty years to take action accordingly.

The synodical churches had sent observers to the meetings of the World Council for some years, but in 1969 they joined. This was done in spite of the fact that the Reformed Ecumenical



THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE  
Published bi-weekly by Premier Printing Ltd.  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Second class mail registration number 1025.

ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE  
MATTERS: (subscriptions, advertisements, etc.):

CLARION, Premier Printing Ltd.  
1249 Plessis Road,  
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R2C 3L9  
Phone: (204) 222-5218

ADDRESS FOR EDITORIAL MATTERS:  
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Fergus, Ontario, Canada N1M 2W7

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

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SUBSCRIPTION RATES FOR 1981:

Canada - Reg. Mail	- \$20.00
Canada - Air Mail	- \$31.50
United States - Reg. Mail	- \$22.50
United States - Air Mail	- \$32.50
International - Reg. Mail	- \$30.00
International - Air Mail	- \$44.50

ISSN 0383-0438

#### IN THIS ISSUE:

Editorial - J. Faber	2
For the Sake of True Ecumenicity(2)	4
Press Release - Synod 1980	
- M. VanBeveren	7
International - W.W.J. VanOene	10
Letter of Appreciation	
- Mrs. Y. DeBoersap	11
News Medley - W.W.J. VanOene	12
Press Release - M. Werkman	14
Our Little Magazine - Aunt Betty	15

#### OUR COVER

*Ice formation along the George Walls, Elora, Ontario. (Photo courtesy of Leo Lodder, Fergus, Ontario.)*

Synod had never condemned the World Council so plainly as it did in 1963, when it declared:

that outspoken liberals are active and in some instances prominent in the WCC and that some of its member churches knowingly tolerate and even highly honor as preachers and teachers deniers of cardinal truths of the christian religion.<sup>23</sup>

This pronouncement was made when synodical churches had already serious designs of joining the World Council.

Since 1969 more than ten years went by, but still the Reformed Ecumenical Synod did not discontinue the relationship with this member church, which wilfully ignored its condemnations of the World Council.

It is to be feared that by this attitude of tolerance the reistance to the double membership will vanish altogether.

Our fear that the Reformed Ecumenical Synod will take the wrong course is also based on what was done with regard to this matter at the synod of Capetown, 1976. There the bold statement was made that this synod

expressly declares membership in the WCC to be inconsistent with membership in the RES.

However, this declaration was considerably weakened when it was added:

"inconsistent" meaning in this instance a deviation from decisions of previous RES synods, but this does not imply an immediate irreconcilability between the RES and the churches that are members of the WCC.<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, after so many years of condemnation of the World Council, the synod of Capetown did deem it necessary to instruct its Interim Committee to seek and to arrange consultations with the churches which are members of the World Council. In 1978 said Interim Committee reported to the member churches. It appears from this report that during the consultations with the "moderamen" of the synodical churches this moderamen told the Committee that from the synodical churches a new report on the matter was to be expected. The Interim Committee asks the member churches to study this new report.<sup>25</sup>

We wonder how a study with regard to this subject from the side of these churches, which so strongly uphold the cause of the World Council, can be helpful to reach a truly reformed judgment concerning the World Council. For that matter: not even the report of the Interim Commit-

tee gives any hope that the synodical churches will reconsider their membership of the World Council of Churches.

*C. There is still another reason why the Reformed Ecumenical Synod should have severed ties with the synodical churches*

In the preceding paragraphs we gave evidence for our firm persuasion that, from the viewpoint of a truly reformed manner of cooperation of churches, the participation of the synodical churches was indefensible.

Apart from that, however, since 1946 the situation in these churches has worsened so much that also for this reason the relationship with them should have been cut off a long time ago.

We know that the sad deterioration of the synodical churches did have and still has the attention of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod. Yet we want to give more information. We want to do so because we are of the opinion that often the condition of the synodical churches is judged too favorably.

When the deviations from reformed doctrine are being discussed most of the time only two names are mentioned: Prof. Kuitert and Dr. Wiersinga.

Further, when the question is asked whether the synodical churches exercise doctrinal discipline, these churches still find too easily belief for their assertion that they do so. The latter is certainly true of the Interim Committee in its report mentioned above.

As early as in 1967 our churches for special reasons informed the Presbyterian Church in Korea about deviations from reformed doctrine in the synodical churches. This was done with regard to two points of doctrine, the first being the reliability of Holy Scripture. We then pointed to two books, published in the series "Cahiers voor de Gemeente."<sup>26</sup>

In his treatise *Narrative and Fact in the Old Testament*, Dr. Koole wrote with regard to the first chapters of the book Genesis:

So there remains with us the fact that with regard to Genesis 1-11 it is very difficult to speak of real historiography . . . There is no escaping therefore from the conclusion that, according to the meaning of Holy Scripture, real facts are the basis of Genesis 1-11. We remain uncertain with respect to our question how the authors of the Bible received knowledge about these facts. This "histori-

ography" must have been achieved in a special way, and from this it may be gathered that we also have to understand it in a special way.<sup>27</sup>

No one can fail to see how much is put to question here of what should be, among reformed people, certain. Here opening is given in the direction of theology critical of the reliability of Scripture.

#### FOOTNOTES:

<sup>15</sup> A "Toelichting" is an "Explanatory Memorandum."

<sup>16</sup> "Verklaring van Gevoelen": literally: "Declaration of Opinion."

<sup>17</sup> "Being truly a covenant-child is not the privilege of all who are outwardly in the covenant." *Praeadvies* p. 44.

<sup>18</sup> The Synod disagreed with those who "do not distinguish between the offer of salvation, as it comes to all who hear the Gospel . . . and the unconditional promise of salvation, which comes to the elect and which constitutes the special contents of covenant and sacrament." *Toelichting*, p. 21.

The Synod declared that "the promise of the covenant includes regeneration and therefore salvation; and since not all the children of believers will be saved it follows that the promise, meant in its full sense, does not include all children." *Praeadvies* p. 38.

<sup>19</sup> "When (in Scripture) the breaking of the covenant is mentioned . . . it implies that the breaker was to a certain extent in the covenant . . . but that strictly speaking he was not included in the seed to which the covenant is promised as an eternal covenant." *Praeadvies* p. 55.

<sup>20</sup> Holy baptism is (according to the Form of Baptism) "the assurance of grace that should be considered present" (in the child that is baptized). *Praeadvies* p. 12. According to the synod in the Form of Baptism "the meaning of the covenant and baptism for the non-elect is disregarded." *Praeadvies* p. 24.

<sup>21</sup> "From the fact . . . that these children (the non-elect) are not included (in the covenant) it is rightly concluded that the right of being baptized is not to be assigned to them in its full and profound meaning. Their baptism cannot be considered as being baptism in its full significance." *Praeadvies* p. 24.

<sup>22</sup> Acts 5:29, cf. 4:19.

<sup>23</sup> Acts RES of Grand Rapids, 1963, p. 49.

<sup>24</sup> Report Interim Committee, p. 3; Acts RES Capetown, p. 55.

<sup>25</sup> Report Interim Committee, p. 5.

<sup>26</sup> Dr. J. Koole, *Verhaal en feit in het Oude Testament*, and Drs. Tj. Baarda, *De Betrouwbaarheid van de Evangelien*, both books published by J.H. Kok, Kampen.

*To be continued.*

# Synod 1980

*of the General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches held from November 4 till December 5, 1980, at Smithville, Ontario.*

On behalf of the convening Church the Rev. Cl. Stam called the meeting to order on Tuesday, November 4th, at 10:00 a.m. He requested the brethren to sing Psalm 16:1, 3, 4 and led in prayer. In his opening address he expressed the wish that I Corinthians 12:1-11, which he had read, would be Synod's foundation and guideline for the work to be done. Rev. Stam then informed the brethren that the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, the Igreja Reformada of São José, Brazil, and De Gereformeerde Kerken in The Netherlands had sent their best wishes for Synod.

The following officers were elected: Chairman: Rev. D. VanderBoom; Vice-chairman: Rev. M. van Beveren; First Clerk: Rev. J. Visscher; Second Clerk: Rev. J. Mulder. The Rev. H. Scholten, emeritus-minister of the convening church, was invited to serve Synod in an advisory capacity.

One of the first matters dealt with by Synod was the request of the Church at Lincoln that Synod deal first with the objections and appeals concerning the decision of Synod Coaldale 1977, Acts, Article 91, before a delegate of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church be given the privilege of the floor. Synod, however, considered that it could not deny a delegate of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church the right to exercise the privileges of the floor once an invitation had been extended and accepted, and as long as the General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church had not been informed of any change in our relationship with them.

Upon the request of the Board of Governors of the Theological College Synod dealt with the matter of appointments at the College as soon as possible. Rev. H. Scholten, M.Th., had retired as lecturer in Ecclesiology, and Prof. Drs. H.M. Ohmann had accepted the appointment of professor of Old Testament at the Theologische Hogeschool at Kampen, The Netherlands. Synod made the following appointments: Rev. W.W.J. vanOene, M.Th., who had already temporarily taken the place of Rev. H. Scholten, lecturer in Ecclesiology, and as per May 1, 1981, Rev. C. VanDam, M.Th., at Surrey, B.C., professor of Old Testament. It was noted with thankfulness that Rev. G. VanDooren, M.Th., although he had reached the age of 70, had declared himself willing to serve till the end of the academic year 1981/1982 as lecturer in Diaconiology. Since the department of Diaconiology is considered a very important part of the curriculum at our College and demands much preparation on the part of the instructor, too much to be combined with a full-time pastorate in a congregation, Synod decided to charge the Board of Governors to approach the next Synod with a recommendation regarding a fourth full-time professor, preferably a professor of Diaconiology.

The day after his appointment Rev. C. VanDam was already present to meet with Synod. Letters of acceptance from Rev. C. VanDam and Rev. W.W.J.

vanOene were received while Synod still was in session.

Another decision regarding the Theological College was that the provision of Article XXIII, 2, of the Constitution was dropped, which means that a person who is 30 years of age or over and not in possession of a Bachelor of Arts or equivalent degree, will no longer be admitted to the course of study. This decision was proposed by the Church at Surrey and endorsed by the Board of Governors and the Faculty. Synod considered that scholarly preparation for the admission to the studies by an extended study program leading to a B.A. degree will enable the gradual upbuilding of necessary knowledge of Hebrew, Greek, Latin and the history of Philosophy much better than a few fragmentary courses in these areas taken to pass "entrance examination." Synod also took into account that in Article 8 of the Church Order the Churches have provided an ecclesiastical way for exceptionally gifted persons over 30 years of age to be admitted to the ministry.

Synod instructed the Board of Governors and the Board of Trustees to continue their efforts to obtain for the College the legal authority to grant degrees. The reason is that the government of Ontario, with a view to the misuse in granting degrees by colleges and other institutions, is introducing a bill to restrict the right to grant degrees to reliable institutions only. General Synod considered it of great importance that our College would receive this right in the new legislature.

The Board of Governors and the Board of Trustees were again charged to look for a more suitable building for the College.

Since the Committee for the Revision of the Church Order had not been able to submit a final draft to the Churches, Synod decided not to adopt any article of the Church Order in its revised form. The Committee received the mandate to send a complete definite draft to the Churches before January 1, 1982.

The Church at Lincoln proposed that all proposals, letters, appeals and reports be included in the Acts of Synod. It was decided, however, not to accede to this proposal because it is not proven that all documents presented to Synod are "worthy to be recorded." Moreover, the Acts of Synods do not only record decisions but also observations and considerations in which the material presented to Synods is summarized.

On November 17th the chairman could for the first time welcome an official delegate of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church at one of our Synods. Prof. N. Shepherd attended the sessions for three days.

The Churches at Chatham and London appealed a decision of Regional Synod of Ontario of June 1980. The Churches requested Synod to declare that Regional Synod should have granted Chatham's request by pronouncing that Classis Ontario North of May 28, 1980, made a wrong decision when it decided to give support ad Article 19, Church Order, to a needy student, not only for his theological studies but also for his needy family. Synod did not grant the requests since the fund under

discussion is not a general fund and it is not in the jurisdiction of General Synod to decide whether the classically cooperating churches should set restricted or less restricted standards for their support.

General Synod rejected a proposal of the Church at Cloverdale to appoint a committee for the support of needy theological students. The Churches in the minor assemblies had not dealt with the proposal and there appeared no need for such a general fund at present since the Churches cooperate in classical resorts.

In closed session Synod dealt with appeals of Rev. and Mrs. C. Olij and several members of the Church at Orangeville against the decision of the latest Regional Synod of Ontario regarding the decision of Classis Ontario North of March 20, 1980, namely, to approve the decision of the Church at Orangeville to release its minister in accordance with Article 11, Church Order. Synod did not grant the requests of the appellants.

The Committee appointed by Synod 1977 to give advice in the matter of the so-called Women's Voting Rights had recommended that the Churches should refrain from introducing the practice of women's voting in the elections for office-bearers. Synod studied the report of the Committee and concluded that (1) although the Committee stated that the right for women to vote can not be deduced from Scripture, their statement is not supported by the Scriptural data presented to Synod; (2) the Committee's conclusions with respect to Reformed Church History do not give a complete picture and are therefore somewhat misleading, conflicting also with the material presented in the report itself; (3) the Committee's reasoning is unsatisfactory and basically inconclusive. Voting is either fully a deed of governing or not. It is either in harmony with Scripture or not. Synod decided to appoint a committee to re-examine the matter.

Regarding Bible Translations Synod decided (1) to use the Revised Standard Version for the Scripture quotations in the Creeds and the Liturgical Forms as much as possible, (2) to recommend to the Churches to use this translation in the worship services and for catechism instruction, and (3) to leave it in the freedom of the Churches to use the King James Version and the New American Standard Bible if the acceptance of the Revised Standard Version meets with insurmountable objections.

Several changes in the Psalms and Hymns as proposed by Churches and individuals were considered by Synod. Then, finally, after many years of work by the Committee for the *Book of Praise* (since 1954), Synod could with thankfulness to the Lord adopt the Psalm and Hymn Sections of the *Book of Praise* as the final editions for use in the worship service. It was understood, however, that room be left open for necessary changes in future editions.

With a view to the printing of the *Book of Praise* and safeguarding the copyrights of the Churches, Synod appointed a standing committee for the Publication of the *Book of Praise* with the authorization to have itself incorporated. One of the tasks of the Committee is to see to it that at all times the *Book of Praise* remains available to the Churches at a reasonable price.

Revision of the Creeds is a difficult and time-consuming work. It appeared that in several cases the time given to the appointed committees was not sufficient to complete their important task. For those parts that were submitted to Synod, several Churches had also proposed a number of changes and improvements.

The Committee for the Revision of the Heidelberg Catechism reported that it had been unable to fulfill its mandate, and requested Synod to give a clearer mandate as to which text to use as basis for a new translation. Synod decided that the German and Latin texts of 1563 and the Dutch text of 1611 be used.

A revision of the Apostles' Creed was adopted.

Of the Belgic Confession a proposed revision of the Articles 1-23 was discussed. Of the Canons of Dordt the "Rejection of Errors" is still to be submitted to General Synod. The Committees appointed to complete the remaining work of revision were instructed to have their results checked on the quality of translation by a sub-committee of linguistic experts.

While none of the revised Prayers was adopted because of improvements still to be made, considerable progress could be made as far as the Liturgical Forms are concerned. Synod decided to give tentative approval to the revised text of most of the Forms, and charged the committee to have the adopted and linguistically corrected Forms published either separately or with the Psalms and Hymns as soon as possible in 1981 for provisional use in the Churches. Adopted were the Forms for the Baptism of Infants and the Baptism of Adults, for Public Profession of Faith, for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper (including an Abbreviated Form), for Readmission into the Church, Forms for the Ordination/Installation of Ministers of the Word and of Missionaries, and Forms for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons and for the Solemnization of Marriage. It was also decided to leave the use of the Lord's Prayer in the Liturgical Forms and the manner in which it is used, e.g. praying in unison, in the freedom of the Churches.

In closed session Synod dealt with an appeal of the Church at Neerlandia against a decision of the Regional Synod in Western Canada of October 30, 1979. After several motions had been defeated, also the amended proposal of the advisory committee, the following motion was adopted: "1. The Church at Neerlandia has not submitted proof that the views of Rev. D. DeJong regarding the Church and the Communion of Saints are against Scripture and Confession; 2. There is reason for the Church at Neerlandia to consider these views, as expressed in the sermon published on Lord's Day 21, confusing and contradictory."

Regarding the Orthodox Presbyterian Church Synod first dealt with appeals of several Churches against the decisions of Synod Coaldale 1977, as mentioned in the Acts, Article 91. Although General Synod admitted that Synod 1977 had not always given a clear explanation of its decisions in Article 91, it was decided not to accede to the several requests of the appellants.

The Committee for Contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church reported that the 46th General Assembly (1979) of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church accepted the offer of our Churches to establish "Ecclesiastical Contact." It also reported on the progress in the latest discussions with representatives of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Synod considered that the discussions on the doctrinal and church-political divergencies should not continue endlessly but come to a conclusion. It charged the Committee for Contact to publish, for the benefit of our Churches, a detailed evaluation of the divergencies, showing them not to be an impediment in recognizing the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as a true Church. The Committee was also charged to complete the discussion and evaluation of the relationships which the Orthodox Presbyterian Church



has with other parties, especially the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, the Christian Reformed Church, the Reformed Presbyterian Church — Evangelical Synod, and the Presbyterian Church of America.

The Committee for Correspondence with Churches Abroad reported on its activities. From the Deputies of the Netherlands Sister Churches the information was received that they expected their forthcoming General Synod Arnhem 1981 to authorize them to proceed to the establishing of a Reformed International Conference. Those Deputies requested our Synod that delegates be appointed to attend this Conference and that those delegates be given the mandate to help set up an agenda for that meeting.

Synod decided that the Committee for Correspondence be authorized to send two delegates to the Conference, and that a report on the Conference analyzing its basis, aim, powers, structure, members and agenda, along with a recommendation on how to proceed further in this matter, be sent to the next Synod. Synod refrained from any official endorsement of this Conference due to its preliminary character.

From the Korean Presbyterian Church (Koryu-Pa) the Committee for Correspondence had received the Revised Form of Government adopted in 1979. The Committee was still waiting for a reliable and complete translation. Synod charged the Committee to continue the contacts with this Korean Church and to give an evaluation regarding the question whether official ecclesiastical correspondence, even if it would be warranted in principle, can be responsibly maintained due to distance and language.

Synod decided gratefully to continue the corres-

pondence in accordance with the adopted rules with the Free Reformed Churches in Australia, De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, and Die Vrye Gereformeerde Kerke in Suid-Afrika.

The Church at Surrey requested Synod to study the feasibility of having another relationship, less comprehensive than the present form of correspondence with churches abroad. Surrey meant especially a relationship with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Korean Presbyterian Church, which would be less demanding and would take into account the differences in historical development, in reformational confessions and in cultural and geographical factors.

Synod, however, considered that adoption of different rules expressing different degrees of closeness to various churches would lead to an undesirable distinction between churches which are all equally true Churches of the Lord Jesus Christ. The present rules for correspondence were considered sufficient when applied realistically according to the circumstances.

Synod decided to appoint the Church at Cloverdale, B.C., to convene the next General Synod in 1983.

At the end of the last session of Synod the Chairman noted with thankfulness that Censure ad Article 43 of the Church Order was not necessary.

After the closing speech of the Chairman, the Vice-chairman spoke words of thanks to the Chairman for the way in which he had chaired the meetings, and led in thanksgiving and prayer to the Lord.

The Chairman closed the ninth General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches in the evening of Friday, December 5, 1980.

For General Synod,  
M. VAN BEVEREN

## Lo, what a cloud of witnesses

*Hebrews 12: 1 - 3*

*St. Flavian*

*John Day's Psalter, 1562; alt.*

1. Lo, what a cloud of witnesses  
En-compass us around!  
Men once like us with sufferings tried,  
But now with glory crowned.

2. They reached the finish of the course  
And thus obtained the rest.  
We too — for God fulfils His Word  
Shall be with vict'ry blest.
3. Let us then full of confidence  
Run to complete the race  
And put off sin and every weight  
Which could slow down our pace.

4. We look to Jesus even more  
Than to all those around;  
In Him, the Author of our faith,  
Its Finisher is found.
5. He, for the joy before Him set —  
Unselfish is His love —  
Endured the cross, despised the shame,  
And now He reigns above.



*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.*

### LOS ANGELES (RNS)

A Seventh-day Adventist pastor says he has found more evidence that Ellen G. White, the revered Adventist prophet and author of some 60 books, was a "plagiarist."

The amount of unacknowledged materials she copied may be incalculable because of paraphrasing, said Elder Walter Rea, pastor of Long Beach Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Mr. Rea, who is completing a manuscript for a book based on his two years of research, said he hasn't found any major work by Mrs. White which didn't use a previously published source.

Ellen White (1827-1917) was a health reformer and prolific writer of 25 million words, including 53 books, whose trance-like visions helped guide the Adventist Church in its early decades. Her works were considered inspired by the Church which today is known for its Saturday Sabbath, modest dress, vegetarian diet, and extensive medical facilities.

By the time of her death in Napa County at age 87, Mrs. White was the revered prophet of a church body with 136,000 followers and a strong medical missionary thrust overseas. Today, only 593,000 of the church's 3.5 million members live in North America.

\* \* \*

The Seventh-day Adventist Church revoked the credentials of Walter Rea, a Long Beach, California, pastor who charged that Adventist prophetess Ellen G. White plagiarized extensively in her prolific writings. Church officials have acknowledged that she borrowed from her wide

reading, but North American Division president C.E. Bradford said, "Rea's action towards one of the denomination's highly respected pioneers, in my opinion, has rendered him incapable of serving as an Adventist minister." (CT)

\* \* \*

One hundred churches in South Vietnam have been closed since the Communist takeover or are being used for other purposes. That is what the Christian and Missionary Alliance reports in the *Alliance Witness*, based on firsthand information, about the fate of its 490 churches in existence there in 1975. Approximately 50 Vietnamese pastors have been sent to reeducation camps, none have been permitted to move from where they were five years ago. The tribal church in the mountain highlands has been almost totally destroyed at least in an organizational sense. In spite of all this, some churches are experiencing growth. The principal church in Ho Chi Min City (formerly Saigon) reported 1,000 conversion decisions during 1979. (CT)

\* \* \*

### WASHINGTON (RNS)

Ronald Reagan's own Presbyterian pastor will give the opening and closing prayers at the January 20 presidential inaugural in a departure from most recent swearing-in ceremonies.

No other prayers are planned in the inaugural ceremony, said a Washington official making arrangements.

Protestant and Roman Catholic clergy have delivered inaugural prayers since President Franklin D. Roosevelt's inauguration in 1937. In 1949 a rabbi was added. An Eastern Orthodox Archbishop first participated in the 1957 inaugural of President Dwight D. Eisenhower.

Little is known why Mr. Reagan chose to have only his own pastor give the prayers except that "it was his personal choice," said Tom Decker, an aide to Sen. Mark Hatfield's office who is working on inaugural arrangements. (CN)

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### ST. PAUL, MINN. (RNS)

A modern counterpart to the event described in Acts 19:18-20 recently took place at the Camp Zion Christian Life Center here.

More than sixty persons decided to "free" themselves from "the

questionable and ungodly influence of rock music groups" by smashing their records indoors and tossing combustible album covers into a nearby bonfire on the center's campgrounds.

Armed with a permit from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency giving them permission to burn album covers but not the vinyl records inside, as an act of "religious observance," the Peters brothers supervised the burning of more than 500 record albums. Small amounts of drug paraphernalia, pornography and books ranging from a black magic manual to an "Empire Strikes Back" were tossed into the flames.

Jim Peters said an estimated \$20,000 worth of records were discarded in connection with the event. (CN)

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### NORTHBROOK, ILL. (RNS)

The nation's top teenagers hold to strict traditional values, are today more hawkish than dovish, and give high priority to self interest, says the annual poll of Who's Who Among American High School Students.

As in other years, the 1980 survey showed that the nation's outstanding teenagers are active churchgoers. Some 83 per cent said they attend weekly services. Only 4.7 per cent said they "never" attend services.

This year's leading teenagers tend to be nonsmokers, light drinkers, in favour of censorship, and holders of traditional views on sex and marriage. (CN)

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The country's Catholic bishops may applaud Ronald Reagan's positions against abortion and for school prayer, but they signaled at their meeting in Washington last month that they aren't happy with other views held by the incoming administration. One of the largest rounds of applause at the National Conference of Catholic Bishops was accorded Auxiliary Bishop Thomas R. Gumbleton, who expressed alarm at "a president who believes we have to have superiority in nuclear weapons." In other business, the bishops decided to ask the Vatican to drop the word "men" from the eucharistic blessing of wine, and eliminate several other male-only references, in order to make the liturgy less "sexist." (CT)

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### BOMAKIA

The Rev. Y. Parman of the

## Letter of Appreciation

*The following letter is a translation of "het financiële overzicht" from the Dutch organization "Stichting Redt een kind" (Foundation Save a Child), which was sent to the C.R.W.R.F.*

*To all those who financially supported us:*

Dear brothers and sisters:

With this letter we wish to give you our annual financial report of 1979. We thank all those who, through their gifts and prayers, have made it possible for us to keep children in poor countries.

We have recently returned from a trip to India. On visiting this country, one always gets a feeling of helplessness. In spite of all the help, given by many organizations of different countries, the poverty does not decrease. The slums stay, the many poor people in the small villages are not getting better living conditions, and the number of repatriation camps is increasing instead of decreasing. One can do so little about the situation. We are thankful that there are also the children's homes, with children who are well taken care of, and who happily come towards you. That is something for which we should be very thankful.

We were also very thankful when we saw that in South India, because of the help given to these children, some of the Hindu parents came to accept the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour. In South India, the Bethel Fellowship, with our financial help, has accepted children from repatriation camps. If these children still have parents, they return home for a few days during the summer holidays to preserve the tie with their

parents. This way the parents learn how they live in the children's home. As a result of the Christian upbringing, the children also learn to love God, and this is noticed by their parents. They wish to learn more about the faith that leads the helpers in the children's home to helping their children. It has now happened that several parents, after the visits of their children and the people of the children's home, have accepted the Christian faith. On the first Sunday that we spent at Bethel, 92 people were baptized, and 123 on the next Sunday. They were men, women, and children. Whole families were baptized, and many of these children came from the children's home.

If one remembers that heaven rejoices when one sinner repents, then those Sundays were not only happy days for us, but also feast days for heaven, because these very poor people had heard and accepted the Glad Tidings of the Gospel. Much prayer, also from us, is necessary, because only the foundation has been laid, and we are very much aware that continued building on this foundation is necessary.

Among the baptized people were those who came from poor villages, and one of them asked us if we would take care of children of poor families from his village. We have visited this village and came to the conclusion to try to help here also. We are planning to help these children at their parental home and not to send them to a children's home.

We received many requests for buildings and other necessities, required to help more children. Other requests were:

- a) New sleeping quarters in the children's home in Bhogpur (the old one is at the point of collapsing).
- b) New sleeping quarters in Dehra Dun for Bal Vikas Kendra. There are now too many children for the available space.
- c) A building for a small hospital in Danishpet, where the Bethel Fellowship takes care of 600 children, and where a doctor - couple, connected with the children's home, is no luxury. A small hospital is a necessity.
- d) The buying of a house in Madurai in South India. It is now being leased, but the children will have to leave if it is not bought.
- e) Requests for seven new children's homes.

One children's home was requested for a slum area in the city of Bangalore. There is already a Christian school for poor children in this area, where they receive one meal every day. The money for this is collected by Christians of this city. But this help does not seem to be enough for several of these children. They also had a very special reason for requesting our help: many children of this area come from problem families. Often there is only a mother, because the father has left the family. But these fathers again become interested in their daughters, as they mature. There is much prostitution in this area, and the fathers wish to use their daughters for this purpose, to make more money. Girls are also sold to Bombay for this very reason. The mothers asked the people of the school for help. They would like the girls to remain at the school and not to return home, so that the fathers can no longer get in contact with them.

We felt this to be such an important reason that we, when we discovered this address to be very trustworthy, did not dare deny their request. Several of these children have already been adopted financially, but others are still waiting.

Much needs to be done, and your help is greatly needed also in the coming year. We hope for many new adoptions (financially) for f. 55.- or f. 25.- per month, but also many gifts which are necessary to take care of these children.

With friendly greetings,  
"Stichting Redt een Kind"  
For the C.R.W.R.F. Executive  
Committee,  
(Mrs.) Y. DeBoersap

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### INTERNATIONAL — cont.

Evangelical Christian Church in North Irian Jaya will come to The Netherlands for two years — most likely in 1982 — to study systematic theology and ethics at the Theological College of the Reformed Churches in Kampen. He will be accompanied by his wife and three children. Rev. Parman is an Indonesian from North Sumatra, and the contacts have been made via missionary the Rev. C.J. Haak of Bomakia. (ND)

### COLOGNE (KNA)

The deposed French Roman Catholic Archbishop Lefèbvre considers ordaining a bishop who is to succeed him as the leader of a rather considerable number of conservative Roman Catholics. He said this in an interview for the West German Television. Lefèbvre, who turned 75 on November 29, 1980, hopes, however, that a reconciliation with the Vatican will be brought about. (ND)

vO

# news medley

A blessed 1981, all of you.

I hope that we shall be able to meet regularly via our *Clarion* and that we may continue to work together towards the Day of our Lord Jesus Christ in harmony and love. May also our medleys be instrumental in that.

Thus we resume our work in this new year and shall continue it for as long as we receive the opportunity to do so and the strength to communicate to our readers the news considered of sufficient importance to pay attention to it and the remarks which are considered necessary or advisable.

We are thankful for the encouraging words which we have received also on cards sent during the past festal season and wish to express this gratitude openly.

When resuming our activity in this respect, we are faced with the difficulty that the news is not all that abundant this time. Mailing difficulties seem to have affected the quantity of bulletins that have arrived, absence of ministers who were delegated to General Synod appears to have affected the contents of quite a few bulletins, and the general cancellation of some regular activities due to the many holidays in these weeks have further cut down on the available news.

Speaking of mailing difficulties, we hear time and again that readers receive their copy of *Clarion* very late; that it can make a difference of some days and sometimes even of a week between the one place and the other, even though these places are quite close to each other. We cannot do anything about that, except by each and every one sending a complaint to his member of parliament. Whether that will help or not is a second question. In any case, the members of parliament are then aware of the difficulties and, especially when they belong to opposition parties, have some ammunition to make a debate in the House of Commons worthwhile.

However, what I wished to come to is the remark that no one needs to be upset too much when he receives his copy of *Clarion* a week later than his neighbour across the road who lives in a different community. I do not know where the cause is to be sought, but the bulletin of Smithers mentions receipt of a communication sent by the Church at Grand Rapids. In connection with that we read, "This copy, by the way, was mailed in August and received the third week of October." That beats what I've heard thus far.

Two years ago we sent a card from the Victoria Airport to Fergus. We mailed the card at the airport on July 31st. When, on August 31st, I got it out of our mailbox here I went inside and congratulated the postal clerks with their achievement that it took only one month to have it delivered to the address mentioned. There was, perhaps, a certain element of unfairness in my remark, for the people here could not help it that it took so long. But they are members of the same union, and then should do whatever they are able to do to urge their "brothers and sisters" to show that they are worth their salt (and much more than salt).

I assume, of course, that the Grand Rapids communication was not just *dated* the month of August but also sent in that month. There might be a slight difference between the date of a letter and the date of its mailing, as we all know.

Let us remain for a little while in the "spirit" of the past weeks. In connection with the 25th of December I mention a decision by Surrey, Maranatha. "Next on the agenda is the singing of 'Ere Zij God' in Dutch after the service on Christmas day. It is felt that singing a Dutch hymn is not edifying when so many members do not understand it anymore. Council decides to terminate this custom."

The argument which is used should find agreement with us all. And that apart from all other objections which exist to the above mentioned hymn. I wrote about it before, and shall not repeat it. Let me only state that, having preached on Luke 2:13 and 14 on December 25, my objections to that song have increased. Also for that reason I mention Surrey's decision with satisfaction.

Further news from the Valley comes from Chilliwack. "It is reported with gratitude that we have received the complete Interim Agreement back. As the balance of the purchase price must be paid into the trust account of our solicitors on or before the 20th day of December, we had a few anxious moments, but interim financing has now been arranged. The possession date is still December 31st, 1980, and if all goes well, we should be able to have the first church service in the New Year in our very own building. The members that have not yet paid their pledges are urged to do so as soon as possible."

That I can inform our readers so speedily about this development is the fruit of the attentiveness of a brother who sent me a copy of the brief report of the Consistory meeting of December 15 in a letter. In that way I did not have to wait till I received the *Church News*. It is that kind of cooperation which is greatly appreciated. And we congratulate the brothers and sisters in Chilliwack with this present they have received out of the hand of the Lord. I have never seen the building inside, but do know the outside appearance. Perhaps, in due time, we shall receive a further description and, perhaps, some pictures. We are always very sensitive to such kindness.

Yes, and herewith we have to leave British Columbia.

All we have to mention from Alberta and Manitoba is that in Edmonton "The matter of calling a second minister was discussed. Council decided to keep on gathering information by the existing calling committee to be able to call a minister as soon as possible after the split on April 1, 1981." The reasoning behind that decision is, as I understand it, that the present situation renders it inadvisable to call a minister, for that would mean that the Congregation as a whole "imposed" a minister on the Congregation to-be-formed. That new Church, I understand, is to act for and on its own. That appears sound reasoning, doesn't it?

It is not only in Edmonton that calling is being considered. The calling committee in Burlington-West has also been revived, and the Rev. Pouwelse has been added as a member.

Now that I mention the name of our brother Pouwelse, I also wish to inform our readers that Rev. and Mrs. Pouwelse have taken upon themselves to be an extension of the work of Bralectah in The Netherlands. In all likelihood, there will be an official announcement about that in *Clarion*, but I thought that it would be good to talk about it in our medley as well. Bralectah, as our readers may or may not know, is an organization which, among others, provides blind brothers and sisters with tapes that contain the text of publications which appear within the Churches. It is the intention of Rev. and Mrs. Pouwelse to read the contents of *Clarion*, *Mission News*, and possibly other publications "into" a cassette recorder so that

brothers and sisters who have difficulties with reading can still learn the things which are written among us.

Frequently we read in reports on Consistory meetings that a letter has been received from the "Bralectah Foundation" with a request for support and for names of members who might be in need of their services. Now we are going to have something like that in our midst as well. We wish our brother and sister much success with their undertaking and are certain that it will be appreciated by an increasing number of our members.

From Burlington-West to Burlington-East is only a few steps (if you live on the Guelph Line, that is!).

I was very happy when I read the following lines from the hand of the Rev. van Beveren: "Meanwhile I am preparing the official Press Release of Synod which hopefully will be published in the first issue of *Clarion* in 1981." We can assure my colleague that we shall gladly publish, as long as we receive it in time.

Our readers will be grateful when they can read an official report on the proceedings of Synod 1980. Thus far all my knowledge has been gathered from bulletins in which ministers who were members of Synod kept their own Congregations informed — as well as that could be done — about important decisions. Once in a while I heard some rumours, but at times we got the impression that things were done in secret. That was not the case, I can assure you, but when you don't hear a thing, what are you going to think? Now I found an extensive report from the hand of the Rev. Geertsema in the Chatham bulletin. That gave at least some information. And I had already decided to send that to Winnipeg with the request to publish it in *Clarion*, when I read Rev. van Beveren's joyful announcement. I am certain that we shall find that Press Release in the same issue in which this medley appears, so that, after all, we don't need the report in Chatham's bulletin. Thanks anyway. Now at least I know that Hymns 8 and 64 have been deleted and that the rest has been adopted by Synod, together with the rhyming of the Psalms which was presented.

Thus, for the first time in the history of the Canadian Reformed Churches, we have a Psalmbook which has been officially adopted by the broadest assembly of the Churches and is no longer the report of a committee. I hope that it will soon be printed and made available to the membership.

The Chatham Church drew the consequences of that synodical decision right away, for the Consistory decided, "Now that Synod accepted the Hymn section, we will use it now during the worship services, starting next week."

December is budget time. Everywhere the Consistories are busy with weighing the various items on the budget, trying to lay not too heavy a burden upon the Congregation, yet being faced with the fact that many matters will require a larger sum of money.

Burlington-East spent two evenings on the budget. Finally a decision was reached. "The consistory was able to cut \$10,000 off the proposed budget. Finally, after two meetings, the budget as amended is accepted to the amount of \$123,800.00." That is quite an amount for one Congregation. And, according to the information from the Consistory, the weekly minimum voluntary contribution expected and needed to meet this budget is \$14.00. However, before anyone starts groaning and complaining, let him read the following: In Brampton the weekly voluntary contribution needed to meet the budget is fifty percent more, namely \$21.00.

With the discussion of the budget the matter of

Mission Aid was also dealt with. "A proposal to maintain Mission Aid on the budget is adopted by a majority vote." Here we find a decision different from the one Hamilton took, as I mentioned the other time. I do not know what reasons Burlington-East had for maintaining the Mission Aid on the budget, but I deplore that decision, as I do the information "majority vote."

Hamilton also made some decisions when discussing the budget. "During the discussion of the budget a proposal is made to eliminate one of the two regular collections. The remaining collection will be for the work of the deacons. Collections on Sundays when the Lord's Supper is celebrated will be for other purposes, as will be collections held during special services. The proposal is seconded and, after discussion, adopted." That is a decision which I applaud, as can be known.

I have no idea how large the membership of the Churches is as at January 1, 1981. Perhaps — if all Churches this time send in requested information — we shall learn that from the forthcoming Yearbook. Of one thing I am certain, namely, that any growth will be mainly the fruit of the birth of children. Every year anew with Christmas celebrations and other festivities we see the treasures which the Lord has given us in the many children in our midst.

That stresses the facilities of many of our nurseries to the utmost. In some instances it even causes the nurseries to be completely inadequate. That is the case, among others, in Hamilton. A solution had to be sought. "It's good to see the nursery being used by so many people. Unfortunately, more often than not, the large room is too crowded, making it difficult for the babysitters to keep the kids happy. We have the consent of the consistory to use the room downstairs behind the washrooms. Our suggestion is that parents take their older children, approximately 2½ years and up, who can listen to a story for a while, do some colouring, etc." For the reassurance of our readers I can state that that "room behind the washrooms" is not a dark hole somewhere behind heating ducts and furnace tentacles, but a decent meeting room.

Burlington-East has a similar solution, but with the added advice, "The sleepers will be put in the kitchen since there are usually only one or two." I would say, "If you need some more of those, go and have a look upstairs."

This time I have not yet mentioned any particulars about persons. There are, to my knowledge, no couples that have to be mentioned on the occasion of a wedding anniversary. Thus there is only one brother whose name should not be absent from our column. In one of the bulletins I read that the Rev. W. Loopstra suffered a stroke and is in the hospital. I do not have much more information than that, and therefore confine myself to passing this on and expressing the wish that our brother may recover from this and may continue in our midst. It will be deplored that he will not be able to attend the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the institution of the Churches at Brampton and Fergus, for he was the first minister in Ontario, and it would have been much appreciated if he had been able to be there. He may, however, be assured that he will not be forgotten.

Let me, in conclusion, mention something from the periodical in our Australian sister Churches, *Una Sancta*. Some articles appeared in that bi-weekly magazine which deal with reporting on ecclesiastical meetings. Much of what is written in those articles can meet with our agreement. And I had to think about them especially when I



read in one of the bulletins about a consistory meeting which, apparently, had been convened for the specific purpose of dealing with one letter that had been received from a member of the congregation. In the short report it was duly mentioned what was read at the beginning, that prayer was offered, and that the brothers were welcomed by the chairman. It was also mentioned that the short report was read, that the meeting was closed with prayer and thereafter adjourned. But the actual report read only, "A letter has been received from a brother in the congregation and is read. Matter is discussed. An answer is drafted and approved." That's all.

When I read that, I thought, "What a waste of time and effort, ink and paper to have something like that published." If nothing is to be reported, why, then, "report" at all? There are many occasions when matters are being discussed and decided upon which should remain secret. The congregation knows that there are things which a Consistory is not allowed to elaborate on. But why then mention those things? When you have nothing to say, don't talk! A lot of useless sentences are oftentimes found in Consistory reports, such as that a bill has come in from the plumber and is passed on to the treasurer; or that the hydro bill was given to the bookkeeper. Do our Consistories think that the Congregation is really interested in that kind of stuff? Let us try to make the reports on Consistory meetings interesting for the Congregation. Leave out all that does not give any real information anyway, and make a story out of the rest. And if there are things about which no further information may be given to the Congregation, why, then, not put it this way: "The Consistory discussed a letter which had been received. That discussion took quite some time, as did the discussion of remarks made at family visits. Perhaps some points will be brought to the attention of the Congregation as soon as the time for that is there; for the time being the above must suffice."

It is only a suggestion and can be greatly improved upon, I'm convinced. But then, at least, the Congregation learns something, gets some real information while the Consistory yet does not give out any information which it is not permitted to divulge.

Let me now give you a passage from one of the articles I mentioned above.

It could be a great improvement if church bulletins would disregard routine matters as opening, and mention straightaway in an informative way the business dealt with. In many cases this could mean not just mentioning the nature of the business — for instance, a proposal to alter the church services — but also the arguments for or against, the advantages and disadvantages as they were presented in the discussion. Possibly the attitudes of the brothers can be mentioned too, so that the congregation can have a clear idea of what is living inside the congregation and inside the church council. That is opening of the business which belongs to the Congregation.

However much I am in favour of telling as much as possible from the Consistory meetings, we are to bear in mind that a report on the Consistory meeting is not a report on what brother A. said or the arguments which brother B. brought to the fore, or whether brother C. was sitting there looking bored whereas brother D. showed extreme interest. A report does not have to reflect all someone might have learned who attended the meeting in person. What the Congregation is to be told is what the *Consistory* did or decided and what the arguments of the *Consistory* were for its action or decision.

With those reservations I would support a plea for making the reports more readable and for omission of irrelevant "information." Our Congregations do trust that the meetings are opened with reading of the Scriptures and with prayer; and our people trust that the meetings are closed properly, as we have provided in our Church Order. We don't have to mention that the minutes were approved after some minor corrections, or even unaltered. Our members want to *know* something. Let's tell them that.

Well, again we have touched upon more matters than is usual for our medley. But then, when there is not all that much news, we have an opportunity to say something about points which otherwise might not have a chance of getting sufficient attention.

I had better sign off for this time and say, "Auf Wiedersehn."  
vO

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## PRESS RELEASE

*of the Classis of the Canadian (American) Reformed Churches of Ontario South on December 10th, 1980, at London, Ontario.*

1. Opening at 10:00 a.m. On behalf of the convening church of London, Rev. J. DeJong invites the delegates to sing Psalm 116:7 and 10, reads Isaiah 66:10-16 and leads in prayer. He welcomes all delegates and mentions the fact that due to circumstances the Rev. J. Geertsema of Chatham and the Rev. Cl. Stam of Smithville are absent. He requests the delegates of Smithville to convey to the Rev. Stam Classis' condolences with the passing away of Rev. Stam's father.

2. *Credentials.* The delegates of Smithville examine the credentials. Of the

church of Grand Rapids only one delegate was able to attend.

3. Classis is constituted as follows: chairman: Rev. J. DeJong; clerk: Rev. P.K.A. DeBoer; assessor: Rev. M. Werkman.

4. The Agenda is adopted.

5. *Reports.* The church at Chatham reports regarding the Fund for Needy Students ad Article 19, Church Order. Classis adopts this report and decides to ask the churches to pay \$2.00 per communicant member for the first quarter of 1981.

6. Question Period ad Article 41, Church Order is held. One church asks ad-

vice in disciplinary matters, for which classis meets in closed session.

7. Personal question period is held.

8. Convening church for the next classis: Smithville. Chairman: Rev. M. Werkman; clerk: Rev. J. DeJong; assessor: Rev. P.K.A. DeBoer. Date: March 11th, 1981. Place: London, Ontario.

9. Press release is read and approved.

10. The Acts of classis are read and adopted.

11. Censure ad Article 43, Church Order, is not necessary.

12. *Closing.* The chairman invites the delegates to use the available lunch and wishes them well in their congregations and work. Classis sings Psalm 126:1, the chairman leads in prayer and classis is adjourned.

For the classis,  
M. WERKMAN, assessor

# our little magazine

Hello Busy Beavers,

A happy new year to you all!

It is a little late, I know, but better late than never, right?

And here we are at the beginning of a brand new year!

I was thinking, "What can we talk about at the very start of this new year?"

And then I thought of something very important!

Many times new Busy Beavers ask about our BIRTHDAY FUND.

So let's talk about IT.

"Older" Busy Beavers know that for years we have collected money in our Birthday Fund.

What is this money for?

Well, it's to be a "Birthday Present." You could guess that! A birthday present for our Theological College where young men are trained to be ministers in our churches.

Each year, in the fall, when the College celebrates its "Birthday" we give as a present the money in our Birthday Fund.

Last fall we did too.

So now it's time to start collecting again, Busy Beavers!

Some Busy Beavers put aside for the Birthday Fund part of each allowance they get.

Isn't that a good idea?

Whatever amount of money you send is welcome, Busy Beavers.

Every little bit helps. Just remember that!

Let's ALL pitch in.

Let's get our Birthday Fund off to a Good Start in 1981!

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## Snowy Sights

Look at the air that's powdery white!

Isn't it a beautiful sight?

Look at the snowdrifts piled so high!

Some cars can't even get by.

The ground is all covered with snow.

And look at the snowmen stand in a row!

by Busy Beaver *Cynthia Oosterveld*

## Winter

In the winter

the trees are bare.

Also there's snow

Falling, here and there.

Kids are so happy

that snowmen appear.

And everything's so white and clear!

by Busy Beaver *Cynthia Eenkhoorn*

Did you all enjoy the poems as much as I did?

Thank you for sharing, you two Busy Beavers!

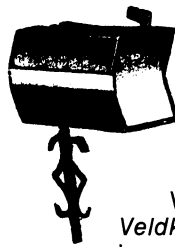
I hope you're an inspiration to our other poets!

## RIDDLES

In the mail I got lots of riddles for you, Busy Beavers. Do you have your thinking caps on? Here we go!

1. Why did the boy take his bike to bed?
2. What does a tea-kettle sing?
3. Why did the woman walk slowly by the medicine cabinet?
4. What did one foot say to the other?
5. Why are bald men always so happy?
6. What is the hardest part about learning to ice skate?
7. Where was Simple Simon when the lights went out?
8. How can you make a skirt last?
9. What have we seen but will never see again?

Answers: 1. He was tired of walking in his sleep; 2. "Home, Home on the Range"; 3. She did not want to awaken the sleeping pills; 4. Together we make 2 feet; 5. Nobody can get into their hair; 6. the ice; 7. in the dark; 8. Make the blouse first; 9. yesterday.



## From the Mailbox

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Tammy Veldkamp*. We hope you will really enjoy joining in our Busy Beaver activities. Did you join in our story contest and did you have a good holiday, Tammy?

Hello, *Cynthia Oosterveld*. It was nice to hear from you again. Yes, I did like your poem, Cynthia, and I think the other Busy Beavers will enjoy it, too. How about you? Did you have a good holiday?

You did very well on your quiz, *Charlene Van Woudenberg*. Keep up the good work! Did you get lots of snow to play in, Charlene? Thanks for the riddles! Write again soon.

Thanks for the puzzle, *Melina Veldkamp*. I think the Busy Beavers will enjoy doing it. What did you do during your holidays, Melina? Did you have a good time?

Hello, *Annette Haan*. It was nice to hear from you again. I like your Christmas quiz, but it reached me a little late. But it'll keep, right? Write again soon, Annette.

Yes, I like the name of your school, too, *Alan Janssens*. I think you're probably glad to sit down in your classroom after the long climb up, right? Thanks for your puzzle, Alan, but we'll have to save it for another year since it reached me a little late. Is that all right with you?

You may give whatever you like for the Birthday Fund, *Cynthia Eenkhoorn*. Thanks for your poem, and the puzzles, too. I see you've been a real Busy Beaver! Did you enter our Contest, and did you have a good holiday, Cynthia?

I see you've been a real Busy Beaver, too, *Heather Van Middelkoop*. Thanks for the puzzles for the Busy Beavers. How were your holidays, Heather? Bye for now.

## QUIZ TIME

Busy Beaver *Cynthia Eenkhoorn* wants to see if you can unscramble the names of these:

*Old and New Testament Bible Books*

sGiesne = \_\_\_\_\_

hsalai = \_\_\_\_\_