



Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

Vol. 31, No. 15

July 30, 1982



Crisis in the RES

The Reformed Ecumenical Synod faces a crisis in 1984. This is the conclusion to which Dr. B. Spoelstra comes in the interesting essay he published in the South African theological journal *In Die Skriflig*. What is the cause of this crisis? It is clear that the author points in one direction: the Synodical Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (GKN - syn.).

He even pictures the GKN as the cause of the ambiguity in the RES with which we dealt in the previous editorial. The first ecumenical synod in 1946 declared that unity of church polity cannot be stressed as a fundamental requisite for participation. While unity in church polity was no part of the basis, real ecclesiastical unity, organization and federation in synods was excluded right from the beginning. The GKN did not want real ecumenical *synods*. Their axiom was that a denomination finds its apex in its national synods. An ecumenical synod would only have an advisory purpose and never become an assembly for appeal according to Article 31 of the Dordt church order. Spoelstra senses a Dutch inclination to individualism: "apartheid," but now in The Netherlands

One could ask whether there are no other reasons for not extending a confederation of churches outside national boundaries. This must undoubtedly become a topic for discussion at the upcoming international conference, organized by our sister churches in The Netherlands. Does the catholicity of the church require visible organization? Or is it wise to limit ecclesiastical federation ("kerkverband") to a certain territory? Some years ago I asserted that we should localize conflicts and that this was a reason not to extend the rule of Article 31 to ecumenical or international synods. But I am aware of the fact that also a sister relationship between national federations involves responsibilities that should not be shunned in case of a conflict within one of the federations. It is our complaint that the Reformed Churches in South Africa (GKSA) and the Christian Reformed Church in North America have not taken this responsibility seriously after the Liberation in The Netherlands in 1944. Was the Reformed Ecumenical Synod not brought forth and conceived in sin, when in 1946 the synodical Dutch churches abused the first meeting to obtain a speedy sanction of their doctrinal statement concerning covenant and baptism? Was its beginning — when the African and American Reformed churches hastily gave this requested sanction — not wrong? Dr. Spoelstra does not really analyze this part of the early history of the Re-

formed Ecumenical Synod. I may suggest to him that not only may Dutch isolationism or individualism cause fear of international synods but also such abuse as 1946 immediately evidenced.

Be this as it may, the author is correct in discerning the influence of the synodical Dutch churches in establishing the ambiguous character of the RES. According to the Church Order of Dordrecht a synod is no permanent body or structure. Congregations having the same foundation meet in synods *ad hoc* and decide together. Such an assembly or synod ceases to exist after its closing. "In 1949 was dit egter duidelik dat die GES op pad was om 'n ekumeniese liggaam (struktuur) in eie reg te word, soos wat die GKN in sy kerkordelike koersverandering na 1950 die "sinode" as 'n struktuur in eie reg (naas die kerkraad) gereglementeer het." In 1949 the synodical churches in The Netherlands had changed their church government. Synods had become structures in their own rights besides the consistories. The new church order in 1950 codified and legalized this change in church polity. Therefore already in 1949 it became evident that the Reformed Ecumenical Synod was on its way to becoming an ecumenical structure in its own right.

Here Dr. Spoelstra touches a sensitive point. Canadian Reformed people always shudder when they read about the Reformed Ecumenical Synod of which this or that denomination is a member. We ourselves speak of the synod of Smithville 1980 as a meeting of delegates in the past; it did its work and has been disbanded; it does not exist any longer. No Canadian Reformed Church is a member of the Synod of Smithville; how could we then be a member of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod? Could it be that the Dutch synodical churches did not really want international synods, but used the name at the first meeting in 1946 for the purpose of their above-mentioned abuse? Could it be that in the meantime, during this conception and birth of the first Reformed Ecumenical Synod, they induced their newly invented and recently practiced synodocracy?

But beside this church political aspect there is the *doctrinal* development. On August 13, 1946, the opening prayer for the First Reformed Ecumenical Synod entailed these words: "Unite us more and more in true faith. Grant that the unity in doctrine may be unity of strength Grant that this assembly may be instrumental in bringing our Churches to renewed reformation." Dr. Spoelstra now concludes that the course of history 1946-1980 has made evident that this prayer was not answered: "Die verloop

van die geskiedenis 1946-1980 openbaar dat hierdie gebed nie verhoor is nie.” Certainly this is a strong statement, but he argues: The synodical churches in The Netherlands have deviated from Reformed faith and practice and they have endangered the unity with the churches in the RES. There is a distressing series of events. Within two decades the heart and profile of the GKN have changed dramatically. With respect to women in office they went their own way in spite of studies within the RES. The synodical Dutch churches reformulated Article 36 of the Belgic Confession — concerning civil authorities — all by themselves; they did not consider what other RES churches said, although according to the 1946 statement “reformation in doctrine and practice” was one of its main aims. The GKN joined the World Council of Churches and became an agent of its politicized theology and Program to Combat Racism. In the meantime they altered the form of subscription unilaterally; they admitted children to the Lord’s Supper, they organized worship services together with the Netherlands Reformed and the Roman Catholic Church. Theologians like Dr. H. Kuitert jettisoned the authority of Holy Scripture. Dr. H. Wiersinga rejected the doctrine of Christ’s substitutionary atonement. The GKN was impotent to discipline these theologians. Then came the November 1979 decision to condone homosexual practices and to admit the perpetrators to the offices and the Supper of the Lord.

How did the RES react? When the GKN was accused at the last Reformed Ecumenical Synod (Nimes 1980), no final decision was taken. Spoelstra received the impression at Nimes that the RES appoints more and more study committees in order to escape the obligation to make a statement. He rightly observes that there is no longer any unity in accepting the objective norm of Holy Scripture. Prof. Dr. J. Plomp wrote that the RES in Nimes was divided in the understanding of the authority of Scripture.

Indeed, for what was the sequel to the story? Immediately after this last assembly the difference manifested itself in the November 1980 publication of the GKN report concerning the nature and extent of Scripture authority, entitled *God Met Ons*. As our readers remember, this report was permeated by a rather philosophical concept of relational truth. And form-critical methods of Scripture exegesis were officially introduced.

In the meantime, history marched on. After Dr. Spoelstra had published his essay, a regional conference of European RES churches declared that membership in the World Council of Churches is not incompatible with membership in the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (see *Nederlands Dagblad*, May 1, 1982). Dr. Spoelstra relates the history at the background of this decision. Originally, the RES was certainly meant as an alternative to the WCC but in 1953 the Netherlands Reformed Church of South Africa threatened to leave the RES if membership in the WCC was prohibited. The Indonesian Reformed churches had also joined the World Council. Although the RES strongly advises against joining the WCC, the synodical churches in The Netherlands began to cooperate with the World Council, first in missionary work and later as member of the World Council itself. In 1967 they propagated this affiliation with the World Council by publishing a brochure entitled “Communion of Saints.”

After many discussions and statements in Sydney 1972 and Kaapstad 1976, three members — Free Church of Scotland, Orthodox Presbyterian Church USA, and Reformed Churches of New Zealand — requested at Nimes 1980 that the GKN should be compelled to choose be-

tween the RES and the World Council. Dr. H.B. Weijland, however, argued that Art. 28 and 29 of the Belgic Confession precisely *require* affiliation with the WCC! It is clear that the synodical churches in The Netherlands prefer their affiliation with the WCC above the RES. They continued their membership in the Reformed Ecumenical Synod mainly to influence young churches in the Third World. But they think of themselves as having outgrown the Reformed church family.

Dr. B. Spoelstra justly remarks that the RES in 1980 procrastinated by delaying the hour of truth with respect to the GKN. “Indien die volgende GES lidmaatskap tot die WRK sanksioneer, maak hy m.i. sy eie bestaan oorbodig.” If the next Reformed Ecumenical Synod sanctions membership in the WCC, it renders its own existence superfluous. But this seems exactly the course that the European regional conference of RES churches now wants to take! If RES 1984 *maintains* the incompatibility of a double membership, the GKN will undoubtedly leave the RES for the sake of the World Council and will try to take along the Reformed churches of the Third World. And what will, e.g., the Reformed Churches in South Africa (the “Doppers”), the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and the Reformed Churches of New Zealand do, if the RES *changes* its course and declares double membership to be admissible? It is clear that the Reformed Ecumenical Synod is in a crisis situation and that 1984 should be decisive.

At the end of his essay, Dr. Spoelstra even surmises that in Geneva and The Netherlands there will be strategic plans to cause as much embarrassment at the following RES as possible in order to obtain the greatest gain for the World Council of Churches. South Africans should not become paranoid, I think, but it is true: the “apartheid” issue will be the card played by the synodical churches in The Netherlands against the white South African members of the RES. Even the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, let alone the Christian Reformed Church in North America, is open for this line of strategy. They will be inclined to join the synodical churches in their attack on “apartheid.” The last General Synod of the Christian Reformed Church (1982) refused to enter even into the broad ecclesiastical fellowship with the Netherlands Reformed Church of South Africa, while they still maintain this relationship with the synodical Reformed churches in The Netherlands. We do not defend South African “apartheid,” but the question may be asked: Will the Christian Reformed Church (and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church for that matter) sufficiently discern the doctrinal deviation in the synodical Dutch churches? And will they be firm in their opposition against the World Council of Churches?

Dr. Spoelstra’s essay should certainly help them to discern the spirits and to keep the priorities straight. And the Canadian Reformed Churches and our sister churches in Australia, The Netherlands, and South Africa would do well to consider the developments with deep attention, also with a view to their own Reformed International Conference. In all struggle we continue praying, *Thy kingdom come*. That is: so rule us by Thy Word and Spirit that we may submit ourselves more and more to Thee; preserve and increase Thy Church; *destroy the works of the devil*, every power that exalts itself against Thee, and *all wicked counsels* conceived against Thy holy Word, until the perfection of Thy kingdom arrive wherein Thou shalt be all in all. *This* prayer will certainly be heard.

J. FABER

LABOUR AS A MANDATE

Part 2

The first article stated the antithesis in the evaluation of human labour. We found our foundation in Genesis 1:26ff.: the original mandate given to man as God's Image, to fill and subdue the earth. Socialism in all forms does not know about this.

Sharpening our Focus on Labour

For our thesis that all human labour is fulfilling a mandate given by the Creator, we found the basis on the first page of the Bible. The "slogan" is: back to the beginning! It is, however, not sufficient to recognize this all-decisive starting-point. That would not answer your questions or help in a positive way to find satisfaction and joy in your specific "labour," whatever it be. Thus we have to sharpen our focus on that all-embracing labour-mandate that was not abolished when sin entered the world, but will remain one hundred percent valid till the new paradise comes, and forever after.

1. When considering Genesis 1 and 2, we must keep in mind that man, male and female, stood at the *beginning* of a road, a long road. The LORD, adopting man as His child, said to him: "Let's go together, My child, you with all yours and I, towards the everlasting hills, towards a full house with many mansions, My House." On that road man had to go with God, to live in faith and obedience. Yes, in faith indeed, faith as believing God in His Word and being faithful to Him.

At that beginning there were only the two of them: the first couple. Yea, the man was even alone at first. Starting the fulfilment of His mandate he felt the need for a helper "meet for him." Only one room of all creation was yet furnished and made ready for man and woman. The house had to become full; all the rooms had to be furnished! Thus growing mankind had to spread out over the earth, and wherever they came they would have to "subdue" the earth. They were to make the earth serve them, so that they, with all that creation contained, would serve God (cf. sub 3).

If man had not fallen, he would ultimately have reached that goal, set by his Creator and Father: the first paradise served "only" as a starting point towards the finish: the second paradise.

From this obvious, Biblical teaching we must conclude that therefore all human activity and labour, whether done with the head or with the hands or with both, was going to be a "dominion over all things," filling the earth and subduing it. Whatever small part of that labour was to be given to any individual, his task would be to develop creation to the glory of his God, to his own enjoyment, and to reaching the goal mentioned sub 1. Whatever kind of labour one would have to perform, it would be: serving the kingdom of God. "All things are put in subjection under his feet." Paul writes this in *1 Corinthians 15:27*, having drawn the parallel between the first and the last Adam, vv. 21, 22. From this context we may conclude that what goes for Christ, the last Adam, would have been true for the first Adam: "But when it says, 'All things are put in subjection under Him,' it is plain that He is expected who put all things under him. When all things are subjected to him, then the Son Himself will also be subjected to Him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to everyone," vv. 27,28.

Because of the fall and the need for redemption Christ had to come to do all this. If man had not fallen, he with his posterity would have reached that goal.

3. This view on man and his labour is the special "flavour" of *Calvinism*. *Luther* saw man being saved from sin and from this world, while this saved man in the meantime had to live in this world as best as he could. In due time he would leave everything behind him anyway. *Calvin* saw man as being redeemed and restored to his original position and office. *That would be his divine calling.*

Our Reformed Creeds have retained this flavour. We mention only two examples. The first is from Heidel-

berg Catechism, Lord's Day 49, where, in the explanation of the third petition, we confess, "Thy will be done, as in heaven so on earth, that is, grant that we and all men may renounce their own will, and without any gainsaying obey Thy will, which alone is good, that so everyone may discharge the duties of his *office and calling* as willingly and faithfully as the angels in heaven."

I emphasize "*office and calling*." Our Creeds love to use such twin expressions; in this instance: "office and calling." The two explain each other. Because it is a divine calling, therefore it is an 'office'; and vice versa. "Office" is to be understood as a mandate given by a higher authority. Thus we speak of the "office" of a judge, a minister, etc. On the horizontal level of human society a carpenter does not have an "office" in that sense. He established himself as carpenter; he was not "called" to it. In the vertical relationship with our God, however, everyone is "called," and consequently has his own, specific "office and calling."

The *Confession of Faith*, Article 12, does not even hesitate to elaborate on this concept of "office and calling" to *all* creatures: "We believe that the Father, by the Word, that is by His Son, has created of nothing the heaven, the earth, and all creatures, when it seemed good to Him, *giving unto every creature* its being, shape, form, and *several offices to serve its Creator*."

Let's stop here for a moment: every creature, a cow, clouds, water, birds, potatoes and other vegetables, each and everyone has an "office to serve its Creator!" Each and everyone has to fulfil its specific place, role, function in the whole of creation. But these creatures cannot do that on their own, without a master who has dominion over them and can subdue them. Therefore we continue in Article 12: "that He also still upholds and governs them by His eternal providence and infinite power"

Stop again: behind all these func-

tions and offices of all creatures there is not only divine power in upholding them, but also a definite plan. "Providence" is not only "taking care of"; it is always also: steering and directing towards a goal. "Providence" and "Plan" are twins.

Then comes the closing sentence: "He upholds and governs them for the service of mankind, to the end that man may serve his God." Permit us to paraphrase this. God governs and upholds all creatures so that they may serve man. Did He not, in the beginning, give man dominion over all things: the birds, the fish, the fruits, Genesis 1? But why did He make all creatures to serve man? So that man, while causing all creatures to serve him, would — with all creation — serve his God!

This is the Biblical perspective on human labour, *all* labour, even that of childbearing and foreign mission, as we saw in the first article.

4. Yes, man fell from his high position. "The Man" lost his head, the article with his name: "the Man." He became just Mr. Adam, one individual. Right from that moment on, the second Adam took over. Man was clothed with the skins of the first animals sacrificed for him, pointing to the Lamb of God.

Man's fall into sin changed an awful lot of things. One only has to read the words of judgment and punishment addressed to the woman and to the man in Genesis 3. Labour would become toil and pain and sweat. In the end the king of creation, God's Vice-roy, would return to dust

Still, we read nowhere that the LORD God cancelled or undid the original mandate. After the flood, when the LORD continued the history of redemption with Noah, He repeated (part of) the words of Genesis 1, in Genesis 9:1ff.: "And God blessed [meaning also: ordained, installed] Noah and his sons [as the fathers of second mankind] and said to them: 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.'"

Yes, it is the old mandate, though adapted to the new situation. Therefore the "dominion over the creatures" is now given in these words: "The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, upon every bird of the air, and upon everything that creeps upon the earth, even the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered. As I gave you [Genesis 1] the green plants, I

now give you everything for food." It still is the same mandate but modified because of man's sin and "cursed is the ground because of you," *Genesis 3:18*.

A Paradox?

It seems as though from now on Scripture will contradict itself re: the evaluation of labour of every kind. "Royal Labour," as formulated in the first divine mandate, suffered so much under the curse against sin that it took on the appearance of slavery. "I will multiply your pain in childbearing" — "the earth shall bring forth thorns and thistles" — "in the sweat of your face you shall eat bread" — "to dust you shall return."

Where is the glory of man and where has the glory of his labour gone? Indeed, toil and trouble (remember *Webster's* interpretation of labour!) became synonymous with labour. Compare some Bible translations, and the one will use "labour," where the other has "toil." Just an example: I Thess. 2:9, II Thess. 3:8. The NEB: "we toiled and drudged." "Labour" and "toil" alternate all the time.

This becomes very clear, as might have been expected, in *Ecclesiastes*. It forces us:

To Speak With Two Words

Since the fall, and, we may add, also since the Cross and Resurrection of our Saviour, we must speak about labour "with two words." This expression is a somewhat free use of the words which we often heard in our young years and therefore in Dutch. In addressing guest, or the minister in the Catechism classroom, we had to "speak with two words" ("met twee woorden spreken"; not only say "yes" or "no" or "hello", but "Yes, Sir:" "No, Reverend," "Hello, Madam." Do our youngsters still get the same education?). When I use this "speaking with two words here," I mean something else, of course, I mean:

— on the one hand, we must recognize the toil and trouble of Genesis 3, as echoed in *Psalms 90*: the years of our life are soon gone; their span is toil and trouble. Think of all the slavery in sweat and blood; of mothers dying in childbirth by the tens of thousands; of child labour in England and elsewhere. We mentioned *Ecclesiastes*. There already at the start, 1:3, it says: "What profit has a man from all his labour under the sun?" RSV has: "What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?" Thus one un-

derstands why he cries out, "I hated all my labour . . ." and RSV and others have again, "I hated all my toil in which I had toiled under the sun," 2:18.

— on the other hand, however, he exclaims, even in the same chapter, 2:10: "I kept my heart from no pleasure for my heart found pleasure in all my toil (= labour), and this was my reward for all my toil (= labour)."

Yes, the last word he has to say about labour is 5:19, "Accept your lot and find enjoyment in your toil (labour) — *this is the gift of God!*" We plan to elaborate on this "gift of God" in the next article.

Concluding on "speaking with two words," we must state that, notwithstanding all the destruction and distortion brought about by sin, there is still the old mandate. Even unbelievers fulfil their part in it. That is why we did not hesitate to confess in Lord's Day 49 (see above), "that we *and all men* . . . may discharge the duties of

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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

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		Regular Mail	Air Mail
Canada		\$20.75	\$37.50
U.S.A.	U.S. Funds	\$23.25	\$37.50
International		\$31.25	\$52.50

A CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE TOWARDS SEX

In *THE STANDARD BEARER* (the magazine especially for Protestant Reformed readers) of May 1 and June 1, 1982, two articles appeared under the title which I wrote above this Press Review. They are the two installments of a speech by the Rev. Arie den Hartog, missionary in Singapore, delivered for young people of the Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore. In the introduction the need for learning and having a Christian attitude towards sex is shown. God has created man with a desire for sexual happiness and fulfillment. But on account of our sinful nature and the fact that in our modern world sex is so much emphasized, there is so very much sin in this respect. In our world the philosophy of many is: "everything goes." Then we read:

Many books have therefore been written about how to attain to sexual happiness and fulfillment in life. It is especially striking how many of these kinds of books have been written by authors claiming to be Christians. You will find more books on the subject of sex in most modern Christian book stores than in any other book stores. Sad to say a great many of these books are not very good, and Christian young people must be strongly warned about reading them. Many under the subtle guise of being Christian present views that are as immoral as those of the world, and certainly more dangerous, because they pretend to come with Christian perspectives.

It might be exaggerating to say that many a Christian book store has more books on sex than others, but I agree with the statement that many a so-called Christian book on sex places too great an emphasis on the pleasure factor. One gets the impression that the whole purpose of sexuality is pleasure. Although we must not deny this aspect of pleasure and happiness, in my opinion, we have here the influence of our hedonistic, pleasure-and-fun-seeking world. This

influence of a self-centered, consumer-society I see also on authors who claim to shed a Christian and Biblical light on sex. Nevertheless,

We believe, first of all, according to the Word of God, that the sexual aspect of our nature is a part of the good creation of God. God created man male and female The deep joy and excitement and fulfillment of the sexual union are all part of God's good creation It is good for the sake of a good and happy marriage that he [= the Christian young person, J.G.] learn the proper use of his sexual nature.

After having spoken about Adam and Eve in kind of a speculative way, the author continues:

There are other places in Scripture that teach us the goodness of sex when properly used. In Proverbs 5:18, 19 Solomon, filled with the wisdom of God, exhorts the young man: "Let thy fountain be blessed: and rejoice with the wife of thy youth. Let her be as the loving hind and pleasant roe; let her breasts satisfy thee at all times; and be thou ravished always with her love." It is plain that Solomon is speaking here especially about the joy and pleasure of sexual love. This love within marriage is good and something so intense that it is said to be ravishing.

In the Song of Solomon we have a beautiful picture of the love of Christ for His bride the Church. This we believe is the proper understanding of this book of the Bible. Solomon speaks unashamedly of the sexual aspects of this love as part of this picture.

Perhaps, I should let this go, because it is not the issue here. But on this point of the exegesis of the Song of Solomon I disagree. As far as I can see, the background of the view that this book describes the love of Christ for the Church is caused by the view that a book about the happiness and fulfillment in the love of a man and his bride, cannot be given a place in the Bible, because sexuality is not

spiritual enough. But this is the opposite of what Rev. den Hartog says. Let us not spiritualize the Song of Solomon, where we do not have any indication in the book itself that we have to go in that direction. But I agree again, when he writes:

God has created the sexual aspect of our nature exclusively for marriage if that means: the fulfillment of the sexual desire in intercourse. And that is what is meant. For we read further:

To engage in premarital sex is not a matter of innocent sexual activity; it is according to the Word of God the great sin of fornication. The very nature and character of the sex act as created by God is such that it is good only in the sphere of marriage According to the ordinance of God, sex is a gift of love which a man and woman must give to each other in marriage . . . , whereby they express their love and joy in one another.

I made the restriction, because sexuality is more than "the sex act," like being made male and female is more than this act. A single man or a single woman, with his or her own sexuality, is a complete person, and can certainly have a happy and satisfying life, in which fulfillment is found. Also here we can refer to I Cor. 7. Sexual fulfillment is not indispensable for a happy life, as some suggest. One can be happy without it. But let us read on:

Today, especially among young people, we find often that marriage is discounted It is said that you can engage in sexual intercourse before marriage as long as there is a measure of love and commitment to each other. All of this is nothing but a ruse. It is an attempt to justify the great abomination of which we hear so often today where couples live together in an open-ended relationship and engage in sexual intercourse without committing themselves to each other in marriage. It gives to them the "freedom" to commit fornication with one partner and when they get sick of this partner to have another. There is no amount of fancy reasoning that is going to change the fact that such relationships are nothing less than abominable fornication and adultery

Sexual sin is a horrible sin. It is first of all a great abomination in the sight of God. Those who walk in this sin surely incur the terrible wrath and judgment of God [See Eph. 5:5, 6 and Col. 3:5, 6; as long as they remain in this sin and do not repent, J.G.]. We as Christians must always be aware of how God hates this sin. There are today many who seek to minimize the seriousness of this sin. They dismiss it with a smile. The very prevalence of

this sin can easily make us forget how horrible it is in the sight of God. In holy fear before God we must never forget how our holy and righteous God hates all adultery and fornication.

The misuse of our sexual nature is also a very great evil against our fellow man. No amount of talk of love will remove this great evil. It always causes great psychological and spiritual harm to those with whom you sin.

When we keep in mind that fornication is not the only abominable sin, but that idolatry, and stealing, and slander are also abominations (more can be mentioned), we have to say: this is correct. We must also not forget that there is a difference between falling in sin because of weakness and living in sin, either because one does not want to give it up, or because it is even seen as the right thing to do.

In the second installment the matter of dating and petting is dealt with:

Many practical questions have been asked relating to the proper use of our sexual nature before marriage. What is proper activity for Christian young people when they are dating? Certainly dating is a very wonderful and exciting activity for young people. It can be the grace of God be a holy activity if it is not spoiled by the great evil of fornication. . . . It is urgent that you always seek the blessing and favor of the Lord upon all your activities together. Be aware of the power of your sinful nature. . . . Do not place yourself in tempting circumstances. . . . Today most of the world is saying that heavy petting is perfectly innocent activity for Christian young people to be engaged in. . . . Be not deceived, this is great sin in the sight of God.

One cannot say everything in a speech. And basically I can agree also with this. Premarital sexual intercourse is called fornication in the Word of God. Therefore, also what leads up to it must be regarded unchaste and enticement to sin. Young people should watch themselves and not place themselves in temptation. But the struggle against sin can be a hard one, especially with the sometimes long periods before the wedding is possible, while the desire for each other grows. Living close to the Lord, keeping the Lord always before you, as David says in Psalm 16, will help you continue on the straight path. Rev. den Hartog also speaks about masturbation. We read:

Many today are suggesting that this is a purely harmless activity. The more liberal are saying that young men should be encouraged to find sexual release in this manner rather than to

engage in "antisocial behaviour." Many suggest that to restrain such activity and to denounce it as sin will only cause great psychological frustration and maybe even do permanent damage. The Bible condemns this activity as sin. In the first place it involves the perversion of our sexual nature for a use which is contrary to nature and to the ordinance of God. God ordained that we must use our sexual nature only in the holy loving relationship of marriage and not for the gratification of our own sinful passions and lusts. Secondly, this practice always involves the sin of adultery in the heart which our Lord condemns. It is simply impossible that the Christian man engaged in such activity could be using his body in the service and glory of God.

Again, basically I agree. It is not natural and must mostly involve fornication in the mind. However, on this point there can be a great need as well. A boy is different from a girl also in this respect that his body produces sperm. And this production effects the sexual urge for release. It also very easily effects the mind and can, for instance, cause sexual dreams. And when a teenager and young adult does not know what is happening in his body and that his body can effect his mind, this ignorance can cause intense guilt feelings and despair. Parents must also here talk about these things with their children, not only boys, but also girls. Masturbation or self-gratification occurs with both sexes. I would like to add to Rev. den Hartog's warning that there is forgiveness and salvation and correction in the blood and through the Holy Spirit of Christ. Sin is and must remain sin. But we must also have an open eye for human need in our broken world.

A last point that I like to take over is about dress. It is relevant, especially in connection with the holiday season, and the desire of so many to get a nice tan. The author says:

The women of the world love to dress in such a way that they excite the men of the world to sinful thoughts and desires. They find great excitement in wearing clothes that will turn the eyes of all men towards them.

This is putting things too much in a black and white frame. Fortunately, not all the women that do not believe act this way and have such a mind. Let us say: there are some. And let us also say: there are designers who can have this sexual excitement in mind when designing clothes. But let us also be aware of the fact that there are girls and women who wear

clothes that are not all that decent, without any indecent intention in their mind, but in innocence. Nevertheless, it is good to be aware and make each other aware of the reality of sin in a sinful world:

The Christian young woman must have no part in this at all. For her it is a grievous thing that the men of the world should be looking at her with evil thoughts and desires. The Christian young woman knows [must know, J.G.] the wickedness of man's heart and she knows [must know, J.G.] the great power of the woman's body to entice and suggest evil. Therefore she must be deeply conscious of the manner in which she dresses. . . . The young woman truly motivated by the love of God and also the love for her brothers in the Lord will wear nothing that would possibly lead another to sin in his heart.

Let not fashion be the ruler. Let the Word of the Lord, received in thankfulness, be our guide. We are bought with a price. That price is the blood of Christ. It bought both soul and body. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, our calling is to glorify God in and with our body, in the midst of a perverse generation, I Cor. 6:18-20.

J. GEERTSEMA

MANDATE — Cont'd.

their office and calling. . . ." Even those who do not belong to Christ have to do their share in filling the earth and subduing it. How much more God's own children who will forever serve Him in the renewed creation, *Revelation 22:3!*

In VERDICT, Jan. 1982, *J.B. Jordan* interpreted "with two words" as follows:

"So we live in a first-creation world by the power of the new creation. We still have the tasks assigned to the first Adam, but we fulfil them by the power of the resurrection of the last Adam. We are in a continual sabbath in Christ. [Jordan was dealing with "Sabbath & Sunday," vD], but our oldcreation bodies still need weekly rest, and we still alternate between our cultural and cultic tasks."

"*Cultic*": we "faithfully attend God's Church to learn His Word," cf. Lord's Day 38. "*Cultural*": our daily labour is part and parcel of the mandate given to man(kind).

G. VANDOOREN

To be continued.

THE BOOK OF RUTH

Part 4

The New Testament redemption foreshadowed: in Boaz

The fourth and final chapter in the book brings the story to a rapid conclusion. All things proceed according to plan, even though the suspense grips us right to the last minute. The nearer relative, too, offers to redeem the land, and it looks like the whole scheme will fail. However, when Boaz informs the nearer relative that this situation of need requires his marriage to Ruth, the nearer relative backs off. Then Boaz announces his case and draws on witnesses in order to legally pursue the requirements of redemption as the law pointed them out to him. In every way, he acts in obedience to God's law.

Clearly, the crucial point here is the matter of the *marriage* to Ruth. This is the point at which the nearer relative bows out. This is precisely the point of *total* obedience, i.e., obedience to both the letter and the spirit of the law. Presumably, the nearer relative was afraid of the loss of his newly-acquired inheritance to the son who might be born to Ruth. However, something deeper lies in his refusal to marry Ruth. He must have known about all that had happened to her former husband and father-in-law, and how the marriage to the Moabitish women had only brought curse and death to those concerned. He was afraid that the same thing would happen to him if he took this Moabite into his home. He was not willing to take the risk! He had the right to refuse, and he did not mind leaving these women in their need.

However, Boaz looks beyond outward things and knows Ruth in her heart and in her actions. Boaz also realizes the purpose and intent of the law of God, including the law forbidding marriage to those outside the realm of the covenant. Ruth was not out to pull anyone away from the covenant; rather, she wanted a place in

the circle of the covenant! She sought her salvation with the LORD and among His people! Therefore, Boaz is not afraid to marry Ruth, even if he would lose the field to her son. He realizes how the LORD wishes him to act, and he obeys!

In his obedience, Boaz fulfils another important function, a function which he himself did not realize. He foreshadowed the *full* and *perfect* obedience of Jesus Christ, who also gave His life as a *complete* redemption of His people. In fact, Boaz is also the instrument in the LORD's hand to bring His Son into the world. In his obedience, Boaz is chosen to be a forefather of the Lord Jesus Christ. He did not look to temporal rewards, but to the eternal reward! And he received the eternal reward: his name appears in genealogical line of Matt. 1, while the name of the nearer relative has been long forgotten, cf. Ruth 4:1. And even in his own life, he received a hundred-fold, a full reward, cf. Ruth 4:9, Mark 10:30.

* * *

The New Testament Foreshadowed: in Ruth

The one figure that seems to rise above Boaz in the story is Ruth. Her obedience stands out, and for her obedience she, too, reaps a full reward. Her name, too, can be found in the genealogical list of the forefathers of Jesus Christ. While her former husband's name and property were redeemed, the Holy Spirit chose to put her alongside Boaz in the covenantal line. Although she was from a totally heathen background, she won a high rank in the assembly of the saints! She became a mother of the Lord Jesus through her marriage to Boaz.

In this she shows the abounding grace and mercy of the LORD. Her inclusion in the line of the Saviour represents and foreshadows the lifting of the *curse* over all the heathen, and the inclusion of the Gentiles. Her obedience anticipates the obedience of the New

Testament dispensation, the obedience of faith, both among Jews and Gentiles, Rom. 1:6, 16. In and through her, the LORD of the covenant was reaching ahead to the dispensation of the Spirit, when the all-powerful and heart-changing Spirit of God would be poured out upon *all* flesh, Acts 2:17.

Consequently, the book of Ruth does two things for us. First of all, it shows how the LORD kept working in order to bring His Son into the world, and was even willing to reach beyond the borders of Israel in order to fulfil His promise to them. It shows how He gave His Son a royal genealogy, which also manifested the powerlessness and coming defeat of Satan. Secondly, the marriage between Boaz and Ruth, with all that was involved in it, gives us a foreshadowing picture of the full and complete redemption of Jesus Christ, through which He takes the Church as His bride to Himself, and gives her every blessing in riches and in truth. That is why this book points to Jesus Christ on every page. That, too, is the way the book must be understood. It must not become a humanistic and moralistic tale from which we may glean some practical lessons. First of all, we must see the abounding and gracious work of love the LORD has done for us in Christ.

This does not mean that we cannot draw any lessons from this book. We certainly can! Think of Ruth's faith and her steadfast allegiance to the God of Israel. She was determined to follow the LORD's will in choosing her husband, not her own desires. That is why this book is not quite the love story that many modern soap opera writers make it out to be. In fact, Ruth may well have been more attracted to the younger men with whom she had contact every day. Boaz, too, may not have been all that keen on a late marriage — a marriage to a woman who was young enough to be his daughter. Ruth 2:8. At any rate, it is obvious that they are not acting on the basis of feelings or selfish desires in their marriage;

they are acting on the basis of faith!

Think, too, of how eager Ruth is to live under the shelter of the wings of the LORD, Ruth 3:9. She makes her plea in the way of the covenant. In her, young people have a good example when considering the question where they might seek their life partner. And the discreet and delicate actions in Ruth 3 tells us a lot about the way we should act today. Yet all these things come down to *faith*. Our actions must be based on the same — if not deeper — trust in the Messianic promise. We have much more than Ruth had! And we have more than Boaz had! Our obedience should be that much greater!

* * *

Conclusions

In conclusion, we may say that the book of Ruth reveals the salvation work of the *one triune God*. The first two chapters focus on the Father, and His daily, sustaining providence. They reveal how, “all things come not by chance, but by His fatherly hand, Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 10. The third chapter unfolds the redemptive work of God the Son, who is bringing His redemption to the world. The final chapter focuses on the work of God the Holy Spirit, through whose inspiration the facts of salvation are documented and given authoritative character. In that sense, the fourth chapter is also an important chapter in the history of *revelation*, just as it is an important chapter in the history of *salvation*.

Besides this, the book also anticipates the dispensation of the out-poured Spirit in many ways, as we have seen. In every case in which the law is applied, the letter of the law appears inadequate. The law cannot save, as Paul says, Rom. 3:20. In every case, the law searches for the man who will act according to the promise, in the *spirit* of the law. In every case, this book manifests the poverty of the law, and simultaneously reaches out in eager anticipation to the hour of fulfillment, when all men will receive and act in accordance with the *spirit* and *intent* of God’s law, Jer. 31:31ff. Here law and gospel do not oppose each other; rather, they complement each other. The intent of the law is made clear in the gospel, and the gospel is enriched and enhanced in the law.

Therefore, its basic message stands in unity with the rest of the Scriptures. This book illustrates and looks for *faith, faith* in the Christ of the Scriptures. And in its indissoluble unity

with the Scriptures of the New Testament, and the full revelation given to the Church of the New Testament, it tells us how *rich* we are in Christ. It points to our deepest reason for thanksgiving: *complete redemption*. And it commands that this full-orbed, Spirit-induced faith and thanksgiving live in our hearts and actions today, and on down through the generations, until the great Messiah comes to us again!

J. DEJONG

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BILL C-10

Some time ago the Consistory approached one of our members, Prof. Oosterhoff, who teaches law at the UWO, to request his advice on the impact of Bill C-10 on churches, and what affect it may have on our own church life. Prof. Oosterhoff was good enough to send us an extensive response on the background, purpose, and possible effects of this Bill.

The first, and, I think, most important point raised by Prof. Oosterhoff is that our own church life would not be directly affected by the Bill. The Bill is apparently only concerned with non-profit corporations which are incorporated under federal legislation. Few, if any, churches in our federation are incorporated; at any rate, the Canadian Reformed Church at London is not incorporated, and therefore does not fall under this legislation at all.

However, Prof. Oosterhoff adds that this does not mean that freedom of worship is entirely unaffected. If any Church happened to fall under the Bill, its order and government could be seriously affected by the Bill. Says Prof. Oosterhoff:

“I believe that these (Sections 116, 214 and 215 of the Bill) represent an unwarranted interference by the state in the affairs of the church. The Bill should either be amended to ensure that the disciplinary powers and rights of government of churches and church-related organizations are not interfered with or limited, or it should be made inapplicable to churches.”

Shortly before receiving this communication from Prof. Oosterhoff, the Consistory also received another circular letter from the same Ottawa MP who first drew the attention of various churches and groups to this matter, the Hon. Walter Baker. In this letter, Mr. Baker states that the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, Mr. Andre Ouellet, has given his assurance several elements in the opposed sections of the Bill will be either deleted or amended. However, Mr. Baker warns us that the whole matter of disciplinary powers and rights of government of churches (Section 214) still remains unsettled.

On the basis of the advice of Prof. Oosterhoff, the Consistory has decided not to take any direct action itself (since the Church is not directly affected). However, we would encourage members to voice their concern about the possible affects of the Bill on both the freedom of worship and church government, and on the affairs of church-related non-profit organizations. Letters of concern can be sent postage free directly to Ottawa, or to the office of your local (federal) MP.

We extend our thanks to Prof. Oosterhoff for his assistance in this matter. Let us also continue to pray for those who are in authority over us, “for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, godly and respectful in every way” (1 Tim. 2:2).

J.D.J.

This piece was written for our local bulletin, but may also be of interest to other churches and/or school societies, etc.

FROM THE SCRIPTURES

“But rejoice in so far as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed.” 1 Pet. 4:13.

The Moment of Triumph

On first reading, it appears as if the apostle is simply repeating himself when he holds up the hour of full rejoicing for the persecuted believers that he addresses. But there is more to his words than meets the eye. Once again the apostle’s choice of words is firmly rooted in the Scriptures of the Old Testament. The word translated above as “and be glad” actually reads “and shout for joy,” and is the same word that the Septuagint uses in the many places where the Psalms refer to the shout of joy and gladness raised to the LORD by His people. In the Psalms, this moment often is more than simply a moment of praise; it is also a moment of *triumph*. David, in several places, speaks of raising a shout of joy at the downfall of his enemies; Ps. 5:11; 35:27; 54:6,7; 58:10; and so on. When the LORD gave the city of Jericho into the hands of the people of Israel, they were commanded to raise a great *shout*, Josh. 6:8ff. In all these cases, the shout of victory is raised to the LORD; God’s people share in the moment of *His* triumph.

It is precisely this moment which is so deeply rooted in Israel’s history that Peter recalls and holds up before the scattered and persecuted believers in his day. Moments like these were not to be regarded as outdated incidents of primitive or exaggerated self-expression; rather, these were sanctified shouts of joy to the LORD, and thus were to be regarded as great milestones in the history of redemption. Throughout Israel’s history the shout of triumph brought the kingdom of God ever nearer, until its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. All Israel’s campaigns find their fulfillment in Christ and His death and resurrection.

The remarkable thing, however, is that this moment is promised here to those who are without triumph in the world. It’s the persecuted and oft-defeated believers who receive this promise of triumph. And the context clearly indicates that the shout of triumph is only for those who in true Christian forbearance avoid all hatred, malice, and revenge in the struggle of faith here on earth. The intense persecutions against the believers from all sides — including the established authorities — no doubt tempted them to retaliate against the provokers, repaying like with like. But Peter repeatedly exhorts his fellow-believers to endure injustice, bearing their suffering with patience and forbearance. They must look to the example of Christ, and rest in Him alone, 2:18ff., 3:13ff. In these words, the apostle echoes the words of Paul in Rom. 14:12ff, “Bless

those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them Beloved, never avenge yourselves but leave it to the wrath of God; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay,’ says the LORD.”

Thus, it is only by consistently ruling out any element of *personal* triumph — in the face of repeated temptations — that the disciple of Christ may share in the *divine* moment of triumph at the last day, when Christ’s glory is revealed. As Christ suffered, so those who are His must suffer for His sake, John 15:20. They must nobly endure hostility and mockery against the gospel of Christ, maintaining the confession of the truth, but yet avoiding personal revenge when they suffer for this confession. Their suffering is not personal, but determined by their *office* and calling; and just as their suffering is part of their office, so their moment of triumph will not involve personal revenge, but be a moment they may share because of their *office*.

It is only the conviction of duty to office that yields joy in suffering here on earth, and also allows heart-felt participation in the joy of triumph at the last day. Only by learning to deny ourselves and our own revenge can we actively participate in God’s vengeance and see the blood of the saints avenged by a just and righteous judgment. And because personal triumph will have been removed — by the cross of Christ — the great and final shout of triumph at the last day will also be a moment of *communal* triumph. In obedience to her *office*, the Church will raise a mighty triumphant shout as part of her doxology of praise to the Almighty Creator, and the Son, our Redeemer, Rev. 19:1ff. The shout of triumph is also part of the liturgy of praise to the glory of Christ the King.

That moment will be a moment of earth-shattering intensity. It will be a moment in which we cannot but be involved with all our feelings and emotions. We will rejoice in the triumph over our spiritual enemies, Ps. 137:7ff. Indeed, in this moment, the Lord’s revenge is also *our* revenge, and God’s triumph is also *our* communal triumph. Here we will not be observers but participants — witnesses and judges in the final drama of judgment that brings glory to the Son and His saints. At that moment, rejoicing in suffering will meet its perfect and perfected complement — rejoicing in triumph. And then, indeed, our joy will be *full*, John 16:24.

J. DEJONG



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.

BURGERSDORP, SOUTH AFRICA

A unique event happened here on Sunday, September 10, 1981, when the consistories of three local churches, the Dutch Reformed Church (white), the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (brown), and the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (black), met in conference together. The conference, a first in the history of these churches, was a revelation to the participants. Though many had met before in daily life, they were not aware that the others were officebearers in the same Dutch Reformed church family. The theme of the conference was the witnessing task of the church today. The emphasis was on the need to help each other in this common task and on building bridges toward each other. (RES NE)

BRISTOL, U.K.

The United Reformed Church of England and Wales has approved a covenant between the Anglican, Reformed, Methodist and Moravian denominations. The covenant involves mutual recognition of ordained ministries, and the consecration of bishops. In July the Anglicans must give approval by a two-thirds majority and the covenant will likely go into effect. (RES NE)

MUNSTER, W. GERMANY

Retiring after nine years as Moderator of the German Reformed Federation (founded in 1844 and comprising the Reformed Church in North-west Germany, the regional Church in

Lippe and Local Reformed churches and individual members), Prof. Dr. Hans Helmut Esser of Münster urged that the established church become serious about inviting back to the services and to active involvement in the church those who are "notoriously absent." But if after repeated urgings no results are seen, such members should terminate their membership. In his words, "if we exercised this minimum degree of church discipline, we would be more honest and more credible." He said the church needed to be reminded of the warning of Dietrich Bonhoeffer that the church should not become a junk shop "in which cheap grace is offered at reduced prices." Church discipline is one of the characteristics of the Reformed churches and creates lively congregations. Another feature of the Reformed church, according to Esser, is the awareness that it is a people's church. This is reflected in the leadership structure: joint leadership by pastor, elders and deacons. He regards this presbyterial-synodal structure of church life as a good incentive for all members of the congregation to become actively involved. (RES NE)

MOSCOW, U.S.S.R. (EWNS)

The Soviet Communist Party, evidently fearful that religion is eroding its ideological grip on young men and women, has opened a new campaign to intensify and modernize atheist education. Robert Gillette of the Los Angeles Times reports (May 16, 1982).

Newspapers, radio and television, along with weighty political journals, reflect a rising official concern that after more than 60 years of drumming on antireligious themes, Soviet atheist propaganda suffers from crudeness and a hackneyed approach that make it ineffective against a reviving interest in religion among Soviet youth.

The new campaign is nationwide in scope but appears to be focused on two large areas of the country where religion and nationalist feelings are closely interwoven. One is the Soviet Union's western flank — the Ukraine, Byelorussia and the Baltic Republics — where most of the country's Catholics and many of the Baptists and evangelical Christians live. The second area is the underbelly of the Soviet heartland, and predominantly Muslim republics bordering hotbeds of Islamic fervour in Iran and Afghanistan. (CN)

MINNEAPOLIS (RNS)

Gen. John Vessey Jr., a Minneapolis native who on June 18 was scheduled to head the nation's Joint Chiefs of Staff, attends Bible study sessions in the Pentagon every other week with his fellow generals.

Others are welcome, too, but generals, he said here, are the biggest sinners.

Gen. Vessey, a member of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, made this comment about his participation in the Bible study group. "Whatever racket you're in, you need spiritual help — the military more than most." (CN)

MONTREAL (RNS)

Suspended Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre expressed "shock" at what he found in Quebec church life during a recent visit here.

He said the church in this overwhelmingly Roman Catholic province was once the "driving force" of the social order. Now it is "disastrous" and "ruinous," he said.

The bishop spoke to 200 supporters in the Quebec City suburb of St. Foy during a Canadian tour.

He recalled the deep piety and faith he encountered during a visit to Quebec in the 1950's. "Today, I see former priests marrying, congregations reduced to a handful of worshippers and church buildings being sold for lack of use. It's disastrous. It's ruinous."

Archbishop Lefebvre, who still performs the Tridentine Mass in the traditional Latin and continues to ordain priests — regarded by the Vatican as validly but illicitly ordained — said he will continue "to soldier on as a rebel, a rebel against the enemy who undermines the church from within, who bears the name of progressivism, modernism and liberalism." (CN)

BUCHAREST, ROMANIA (EWNS)

Traian Dorz, active member of the evangelical movement Army of the Lord (Romanian Orthodox), and a renowned poet and hymnwriter, was arrested and interrogated in early April. His arrest was evidently one of many arrests during the past six months as Romanian authorities have come down hard on evangelical Christian groups who have persisted in evangelizing openly and distributing literature throughout the country.

More than 15 Christians have been sentenced recently, some receiving sentences up to six years. The widespread repression crosses all denominational lines: Baptists, Brethren, Orthodox, Lutheran, etc. (CN)

PASSADENA, CALIF. (EWNS)

Exiled Estonian human rights activist Sergei Soldatov predicted serious repercussions for Christians and Jews in the Soviet Union as a direct result of Billy Graham's recent comments.

"First, the Soviet propaganda machine is going to capitalize upon and emphasize the words of Billy Graham," Soldatov, who was forced out of the Soviet Union in 1981 says. "The words that are favourable to the religious policies of the Soviet Union will be used over and over again."

Graham's words will have such tremendous impact because of the world-wide respect he has garnered over the years. Soldatov says especially in the Soviet Union, where many of Graham's books have been circulated clandestinely, the evangelist is considered a religious authority. (CN)

WATERLOO, ONT. (KWR)

Dr. Russel Legge of Waterloo could preside over the death of the 38-year old Canadian Council of Churches.

Elected president of that 12-denomination coalition in Saskatoon last month, Legge — director of studies at St. Paul's College at the University of Waterloo — could be its last president.

At the end of his three-year term the council will consider disbanding in favour of a new wider ecumenical fellowship which will include the Roman Catholic Church, some Mennonite groups, the Christian Reformed Church and the Western-based Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada.

Bringing these groups — particularly the Catholics, the country's largest Christian denomination — into one fold after nearly four decades of division would be a major coup for the ecumenical movement in Canada.

Legge said the step would be "a very important one" because there will be one body representing almost the entire Christian community in Canada.

If the new body is to be a weaker voice because of the difficulty of

getting a consensus with four new churches, he and others in the council are against letting it "go out of business."

An ordained minister of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Legge is also moderator of that 3,000 member Canadian church until his office expires in August.

WATERLOO, ONT. (KWR)

The long courtship of the elephant and the mouse will reach a critical stage this summer.

Since 1969, the tiny 3,000-member Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Canada has been discussing the possibility of merging with the giant United Church of Canada which has about one million members.

In August delegates to the smaller church's Winnipeg assembly will vote on whether or not to accept "mutual recognition" of the United Church's members, an offer the larger church has already extended. The future of the merger hinges on this vote.

One way to convince the Disciples that the merger would be a creation of a new church rather than a takeover by the United Church is to have a new name for it.

But even Legge, who supports the merger, asks, "How could the United Church change its name for 3,000 people?"

VERSAILLES

The heads of state and leaders of the seven most important western industrialized countries who met here some time ago did not make use of the opportunity which had been opened by France as host for the conference to attend church on Sunday. President Reagan is a member of a Presbyterian Church, Mrs. Thatcher of the Anglican Church, Chancellor Schmidt of the Evangelical Church, but none of them could find time to go to church. As a comfort it can be mentioned that they were also too busy to have a group-picture made. Too many differences of opinion had to be ironed out. (ND)

The membership application of a largely homosexual denomination has been deferred one year by the National Council of Churches governing board. The Universal Fellowship of

Metropolitan Community Churches, begun in 1968, is about 80 percent homosexual. The denomination's application for membership in the NCC will now be considered again in May 1983. "This is not a delaying action but a responsible attempt to approach a very significant and delicate subject," said Bishop James Armstrong, president of the NCC. An NCC news release stated that "although many of the member communions support civil rights for homosexuals, none affirms homosexuality as a Christian lifestyle." Eastern Orthodox members of the NCC's governing board were said to be "prepared to vote against eligibility" of the denomination. (CT)

A French study of astrology concludes that there is no correlation between people's character traits and the signs of the zodiac under which they were born. The *Los Angeles Times* quoted Michel Gauquelin, the study's director, as saying that "the results were completely negative." Gauquelin's group compared the biographies of 2,000 successful people with their astrological signs. The subjects includes athletes, soldiers, actors, politicians, and writers. For all 12 signs, a statistical analysis found that the correlations between personality traits and signs were no better than would have been predicted by chance. Gauquelin's paper appeared in the *Skeptical Inquirer*, a journal set on debunking claims of the paranormal. (CT)

VO

Church News

CALLED to Brampton, Ont., Chilliwack, B.C., and Neerlandia, Alta.:

CANDIDATE H. BOUWMAN of Hamilton, Ontario.

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REVISED CHURCH ORDER: IMPROVEMENT OR IMPEDIMENT?

The following introduction was given at the League Day of Men's Societies in Ontario.

That I am introducing this topic to you this morning is the fruit of an invitation which I received from your Board. The title is not my choice; it has been given to me; and I like the alliteration of "improvement" and "impediment." However, this title places me before quite a few difficulties.

First of all, let me say that it is a good thing that our Church Order receives so much attention from the Church members. Although the non-office-bearers have little to do with the Church Order — it is an agreement which the Churches have made for their living together within the federation, and therefore the Church Order is in the first place a matter for the Consistories and for the broader assemblies — yet it is a good sign that there is interest in this document and its use.

It is also a good sign that there is interest in a proposed revision of this Church Order, for there is always the danger that by a revision thoughts and ideas are introduced which almost imperceptibly lead the Churches away from the old and proven course and make them set the first steps on a road which ends either in hierarchy or independentism. The more Church members are involved, therefore, the better it is. Thus I am very happy that I may introduce this topic for you today.

As said before, however, the title itself places me before some difficulties. That we are going to try finding an answer to the question whether the proposed revision is an improvement, is something which I can understand. One should never undertake a revision for the sake of revising: it should make sense and a new version should be an improvement over the version which was in use. I hope to be able to shed some light on this question.

It is the word "impediment" with which I have difficulties. An impediment to what? Is it the intention that the question shall be answered whether the revision of the Church Order is an impediment to the development of Reformed Church life? To what is the revised Church Order supposed to be an impediment or not?

I came to the conclusion that the word was chosen with a view to the alliteration, and not specifically with a view to any particular aspect of our Church life. I gather that the thought to be expressed was whether the revision made things better or worse, whether it is to be considered an improvement or a deterioration: do we gain or lose?

If we shall be able to answer that question in our introduction and discussion today, we will have achieved our goal.

Before we speak about the revision as such, how-

ever, I first should like to touch upon another point. That is the point: What is the character of our Church Order? Is it wise or even advisable to undertake a revision?

Sometimes I get the impression that the Church Order is considered to be on a level with the Confessions that we have. Is it not so that the utterances of members sometimes make you think that they think it to be almost sacrilege to change the Church Order? The Church Order — thus they seem to argue — has been in force for so many centuries, why the desire to have it changed? What was good for our forefathers, will be good for us as well. Some may even see a striving for bringing in new ideas in every effort to bring about a change. All those new things — why don't we abide by the old and proven agreements?

To this I would say, "Our Church Order is certainly not on a level with the Confessional or even liturgical forms." It would be wrong to assume that proposals to change the Church Order are just as serious as proposals to change the confessions.

Our Confessions are the summary of the Word of God and changed circumstances may never be a reason why we should go and change these confessions. As God's Word remains the same throughout the ages and is not affected by changes in economic or political climate or by progress in the world of science and medicine, so our Confessions as the summary of God's Word are not affected by whatever happens in the world or by the conditions under which the Church lives. We may come to the conclusion that certain truths of the Scriptures can be formulated better and more accurately and, if this is advantageous, we should do it. That, however, is all.

Things are different with our Church Order. Certainly, our whole Church Order is built on the teachings of God's Word; yet we cannot say that it is a summary of God's Word and therefore may not be changed. We find in our Church Order the practical application of what we confess, the working out of the principles laid down, e.g. in Articles 30, 31, and 32 of our Belgic Confession. For what we say in our Confessions we must be able to quote from the Word of God in order to prove that it is the truth of the Scriptures of which we make profession here with heart and mouth. No such requirement exists with respect to our Church Order. In the latter we are to see to it that none of the provisions we have drawn up *conflict with* the Word of God; we are not under the obligation to prove each and every provision from the Scriptures. Changed circumstances and political or social conditions may never be a reason why we go and bring about a change in our confessional forms; changed conditions and circumstances can very well be a reason why we change provisions in our Church Order. Throughout the centuries, the Confessions have stood unchanged except for a few points; our Church Order, however, has been

subject to almost constant change; hardly a general synod passed by which did not change or further clarify or modify one or more articles of the Church Order by various decisions regarding their reach and method of execution.

We are used to the term "The Church Order of Dort." Let me say that we do not have the Church Order of Dort. We have a Church Order which goes back to the Synod of Dordrecht 1618-1619, but which has undergone many changes. It may be compared to a house which was built by a certain contractor fifty years ago, but to which a porch has been added, in which some inner walls were removed, a few windows were changed and replaced by larger ones, and so on. Basically, it is still the same house that was built fifty years ago, but it has been modernized and made to fit the wishes and needs of the owners.

The basis for our Church was laid in 1568 at the Convent of Wesel, which was not an official meeting of delegates from various areas, but more of a private meeting. When the first Synod assembled in Embden in 1571, we find the provisions of Wesel 1568 back, but not in the form of an "orderly" Church Order, so to speak; the decisions were made one by one, and sometimes the brethren came to a certain decision in reply to a question posed.

The Synod of Dordrecht 1574, in turn, adopted the provisions in a more definite form, although here, too, we are to say that they did not deal with them as a fixed collection of provisions but discussed each and every item and made a decision about it as if this were the first time a Synod dealt with the point in question.

The Synod of Dordrecht 1578 acted likewise: it did not take the decisions of 1574 as if they formed a well-rounded Church Order, but decided upon each and every point that came up for discussion.

It is at the Synod of Middelburg 1581, that we find the articles in the form in which we know them, at least by and large. The Synod of 's Gravenhage 1586 brought about some changes, and contributed further to the form in which the Synod of Dordrecht 1618-1619 adopted the Church Order.

From this brief review of the early history it may become evident that what we now call the Church Order was not treated as a fixed document which, once adopted, kept its validity unless a change was made, but that each and every General Synod adopted, with or without change, the decisions which a previous General Synod had made regarding the manner in which the Churches were to live within the federation of Churches. Sometimes they were more or less compelled to make certain arrangements for the sake of the civil authorities, although they were convinced that the situation should be changed as soon as this could be achieved. Let me give you one example of such a provision.

The Synod of Middelburg 1581 provided regarding the calling of a minister, among other things, that the approbation of a call should be sought not only of the Congregation, but also of the civil authorities, be it that they added the restriction that it should be civil authorities who are making profession of the Reformed religion. This was a provision which was dropped later, as soon as it could possibly be done — which was not till the nineteenth century, after the Secession. Even the Church Order as adopted by the Synod of 1618-1619 contained this provision.

From the manner in which the various General Synods in the sixteenth century dealt with what we now call the Church Order we can also draw some conclu-

sions as to the character of our Church Order. We find in our Church Order the practical arrangement to which the Churches have agreed for their living together within the one federation. They have done so of their own volition, without being compelled to do it. And in doing so they have wished to express the unity of faith which brought them together into one federation. With the provisions they accepted as the guide for their living together in one federation, they have done what we confess in Article 32 of the Belgic Confession: "In the meantime we believe, though it is useful and beneficial that those who are rulers of the Church institute and establish certain ordinances among themselves for maintaining the body of the Church, yet that they ought studiously to take care that they do not depart from those things which Christ, our only Master, has instituted."

Mind you, we confess this, in the first instance, concerning the local Church and not concerning the Church federation. If it is already mandatory to see to it that we do not deviate from the ordinances of our only Master when making ordinances concerning the *local* Church-life, it is the more an absolute necessity to see to this when we deal with the *federation* and the living in the midst of the federation.

Thus, when making their covenant to live together within one federation, the Churches agreed on the conditions for such a federation. Having drawn up these conditions, the Churches, however, are also at liberty to change the conditions with common consent. This is something which the Churches have understood from the very beginning. I mentioned that we find our Church Order in the form in which we have it today in the Acts of the Synod of Middelburg 1581 for the first time. The last article reads almost exactly like the last article which we have and which I quote in the draft translation of 1968:

These articles, relating to the lawful order of the Church, have been so drafted and adopted by common assent, that they may and ought to be altered, augmented or diminished, if the profit of the Churches demand it. However, no particular Congregation, Classis, or Synod shall be at liberty to do so, but they shall show all diligence in observing them, until it be otherwise ordained by the General or National Synod.

Did you note that we say that these articles "may AND OUGHT to be altered, increased or diminished, if the profit of the Churches demand it"? Situations can change, conditions can become so different that certain provisions simply *have* to be changed in order to serve the profit of the Churches. The Churches may also come to the conclusion that the times have changed so much that a partial revision of the Church Order is not sufficient but that nothing but a total overhaul and revision will do. Again I use the example of a house: You may keep replacing a board here, a two-by-four there, a strip of insulation here, a window-frame there, but it remains patchwork: finally you decide that there is no wiser course to follow than ripping out the whole window and replacing it completely to stop all draft and seepage. At the same time you may decide to replace the single diamond pane with double glass to improve the insulating qualities of your window without hampering the view.

A revision of the Church Order as such can be called neither an improvement nor an impediment, neither boon nor bane. It is the big question WHAT KIND OF CHANGES are made and whether the profit of the Churches is indeed served and promoted by the changes. When we come to the conclusion that the changes are indeed beneficial, we have to make them and to do so as

soon as possible. There can be circumstances which prevent us from adhering to that which we have agreed upon. If that appears to be the case, we must make changes, for few things are more damaging to the faithfulness to agreements than having to say, "This is what we agreed upon, but the situation has become so different that I simply cannot keep my promise." If this has to be said in one instance, it becomes easier to say it in another case as well, and thus the faithfulness to the covenant of Churches is undermined without anyone wishing to do so.

The need for change has been felt right from the outset within the Canadian Reformed Churches as well. When members of the Reformed Churches emigrated to Canada, they took along the Church Order as the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands had it at that moment. They did not take along the Church Order of Dort 1618-1619, for that Church Order no longer existed. They took along the Church Order as it had been augmented, altered, diminished by various General Synods in The Netherlands, especially since 1893. Thus, after some time, we find a gap: articles 51 and 52 are missing: the Mission Order had been abolished in the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands after the Liberation, and there was no longer any relationship between the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands and Churches of Europeans in the Netherlands East Indies. The Netherlands East Indies had become the Republic of Indonesia, and the Churches of Europeans, insofar as they still existed, had chosen the side of the Synodical Churches. These articles were soon deleted, for they no longer made any sense. The numbering was retained so as to cause as little confusion as possible, but it was a strange thing: to have a Church Order with two articles missing right in the middle.

The need for change became evident right away. The Church Order which the first immigrants took along spoke constantly of "The Reformed Churches in The Netherlands," but it was clear that this had to be changed to "The Canadian Reformed Churches." And this was not the only change which was obviously necessary.

If anyone should think that the plan for revision is of recent date, he had better read the Acts of our General Synods. Better still, he had better read the Acts of the

first Classis Canada. Actually, we cannot even speak of the "ACTS" of the Classis Canada, for the brethren themselves spoke of the "MINUTES" of the Classis Canada. They were to be approved and adopted at the next Classis Canada! This was not the only un-Reformed act of the first broader assembly. From the minutes of the meeting of the Consistory of Edmonton of August 7, 1951, it appears that the chairman of the Consistory, the Rev. J.T. Van Popta, instructed the brethren in Edmonton somewhat more amply about the truly Reformed way of doing things. The conclusion was, "Now the discussion of the minutes of the Classis of April 18 at Edmonton starts. It becomes a lengthy and extensive discussion. From various remarks and criticisms of the chairman it appears that due to the inexperience of the delegates sometimes things were done which are not in harmony with the Church Order." The Classis to which the minutes refer was the second Classis Canada. The first one was held in Lethbridge, Alberta, November 15, 1950. I must say that the minutes of Edmonton's Consistory put it very mildly. However, that is a separate point.

In the minutes of the second Classis Canada of April 18, 1951, we read the following:

Art. 23. The last proposal by the Church at Georgetown comes into discussion now. It proposes to advise the Churches to abolish the so-called "blind feast days" (Good Friday, Easter Monday, Ascension Day, Boxing Day) since there are no grounds to be found in God's Word to observe these days. The opinions are divided. Some of the brethren wish to retain these days, others are in favour of dropping them. It is decided to leave it in the freedom of the Churches to call the Congregation together on those days for the Worship Services.

This was, basically, a proposal to change the Church Order. On the one hand, it was an unnecessary proposal and discussion, since in the Church Order as the Churches had adopted it Good Friday is not even mentioned, whereas Easter Monday and Boxing Day were therein left in the freedom of the Churches already.

W.W.J. VANOENE

To be continued.

Letter-to-the-Editor

Dear Editor:

In his article "Prayer for Successful Living," the Rev. J. VanRietschoten presents us with some interesting comments on the meaning and translation of Psalm 144. While I am appreciative of his comments, I did have difficulty with one or two of his remarks, and since I feel that this matter is of interest to all readers, I thought that it would not be out of place to request further clarification of these remarks by the Rev. VanRietschoten. Concerning the modern translations of Psalm 144, brother VanRietschoten says that "the RSV reflects the patchwork type of approach; and the NIV the unity approach." Also he states that "the Com-

mittee for the RSV has given in to a theory which *rules* over Psalm 144 instead of respecting the literal text of Psalm 144" (emphasis his).

Now I do not want to get involved in a technical discussion concerning the various possible ways of translating the Hebrew conjunction in verse 12 of the psalm; suffice it to say that I am not at all convinced that the NIV represents *by far* the best translation, or that the translation in the RSV reflects a patchwork type of approach (emphasis mine). And it most certainly does not appear possible to me to maintain that the Committee for the RSV has given in to a theory which rules over Psalm 144 simply on the basis of its translation of verse 12 of Psalm 144.

Of course, I do not deny that it is possible that the Committee for the RSV has given in to a theory which rules over Psalm 144, rather than respecting its liter-

al text. However, the Rev. VanRietschoten's point appears to me to be entirely *unsubstantiated*. And I think we do well to *prove* our statements if we permit ourselves to give them this form. Perhaps the Rev. VanRietschoten can provide us with some substantiation to his claims regarding the Committee for the RSV.

Yours in Christ,
J. DE JONG

OUR COVER

Agawa Canyon, Ontario. (Photo courtesy Ontario Ministry of Industry & Tourism.)

our little magazine

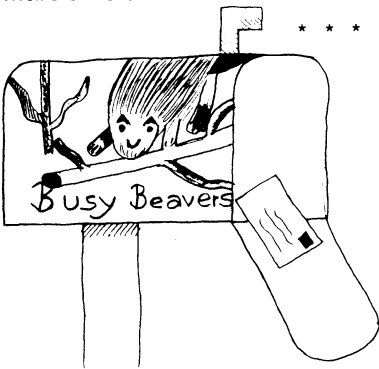
Hello Busy Beavers,
 Are you all enjoying your holidays?
 Who read a good book last week?
 Who has been out camping?
 Who picked berries for her/his Mom?
 Who has a garden to look after?
 And who just met a Busy Beaver you didn't know before?
 Be sure to tell us about it when you send in your contribution for our:

The birthday month of September is NEARLY here!



Now we want to wish all the Busy Beavers with an August birthday a very happy day and many happy returns. Have a really good time celebrating with your family and friends! And may the Lord bless and keep you in the next year also.

Cynthia Dam	August 2	George Alkema	August 20
Joanne De Vries	2	(Grimsby)	
Karen Ellens	3	Tim Hofsink	21
David Bisschop	5	Marlissa Lindhout	21
Cynthia Linde	5	Arthur Pieterman	21
Joyce Huinink	6	Shane Pieterman	22
Margaret Hansema	9	Henry Vis	24
Carol Griffioen	11	Brian Vander Laan	25
Diane Smith	13	Greg Hofsink	27
Sidney Doesburg	16	Craig Alkema	31
Bruce Hartman	16	Theo Wierenga	31
Marcia Veldman	16		



From the Mailbox

design by
 Busy Beaver
 Sharalee Terpsma

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Wayne Bartels*! We hope you'll really enjoy joining in all our Busy Beaver activities. What are you doing during your holidays, Wayne? Will you write and tell us?

And welcome to you, too, *Cheryl Boeve*. I see you're a real Busy Beaver already. Keep up the good work! How is your pet crow doing, Cheryl? Please write and tell me your birthday, will you?

Hello *Tammy Linde* and *Brenda De Boer*. I thought I'd have to get out my dictionary to read your letter! But you were very thoughtful putting the word list on the back! Are you enjoying your holidays? Thanks for your letter.

I'm glad you like your new home, *Jennifer Clarke*. You certainly moved a long way! How did you go? Thanks for the riddles, Jennifer. Bye for now.

I really like your picture *Pauline Lodder*. And thank you for the puzzle, too. Keep up the good work!

Thank you for your contribution to the BIRTHDAY FUND, *Margo Hofsink*, also for your nice letter. I hope your baby sister is all right. Sounds to me as if you had a good time with your grandparents, Margo. And how did your swimming lessons go?

* * *

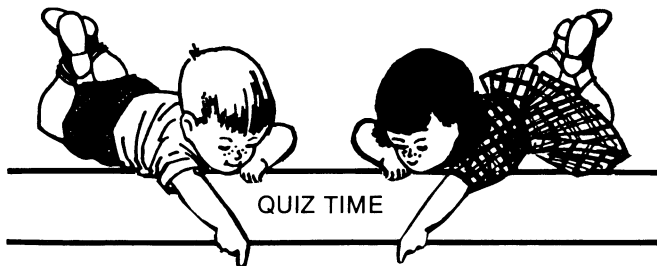
Riddles For You

With thanks to Busy Beavers *Jennifer Clarke* and *Cheryl Boeve*!

1. What 2 boys are always in school?
2. What travels miles and miles yet never moves?
3. What weighs almost nothing yet you can't hold it?
4. When are roads angry?
5. Why is a stone heavy?
6. When do people talk least?

Answers:

1. Art and Jim. 2. a road. 3. your breath. 4. When they are crossroads. 5. It has a "ton" in the middle of it. 6. February, because it is the shortest month!



QUIZ TIME

Icy Words

from Busy Beaver *Brenda De Boer*

- | | |
|----------------------|--------|
| 1. Rodents | ___ice |
| 2. Grain | ___ice |
| 3. Pleasing | ___ice |
| 4. Seasoning | ___ice |
| 5. Cost | ___ice |
| 6. Thin piece | ___ice |
| 7. Two times | ___ice |
| 8. Place of business | ___ice |
| 9. Guards | ___ice |
| 10. Beginner | ___ice |

Answers:

1. mice 2. rice 3. nice 4. spice 5. price 6. slice 7. twice 8. office 9. police 10. novice

14	1	15	
	12		9
11		3	16

Magic Square

Each line across must equal 34. Each line up and down must equal 34. Even the four corners must equal 34!