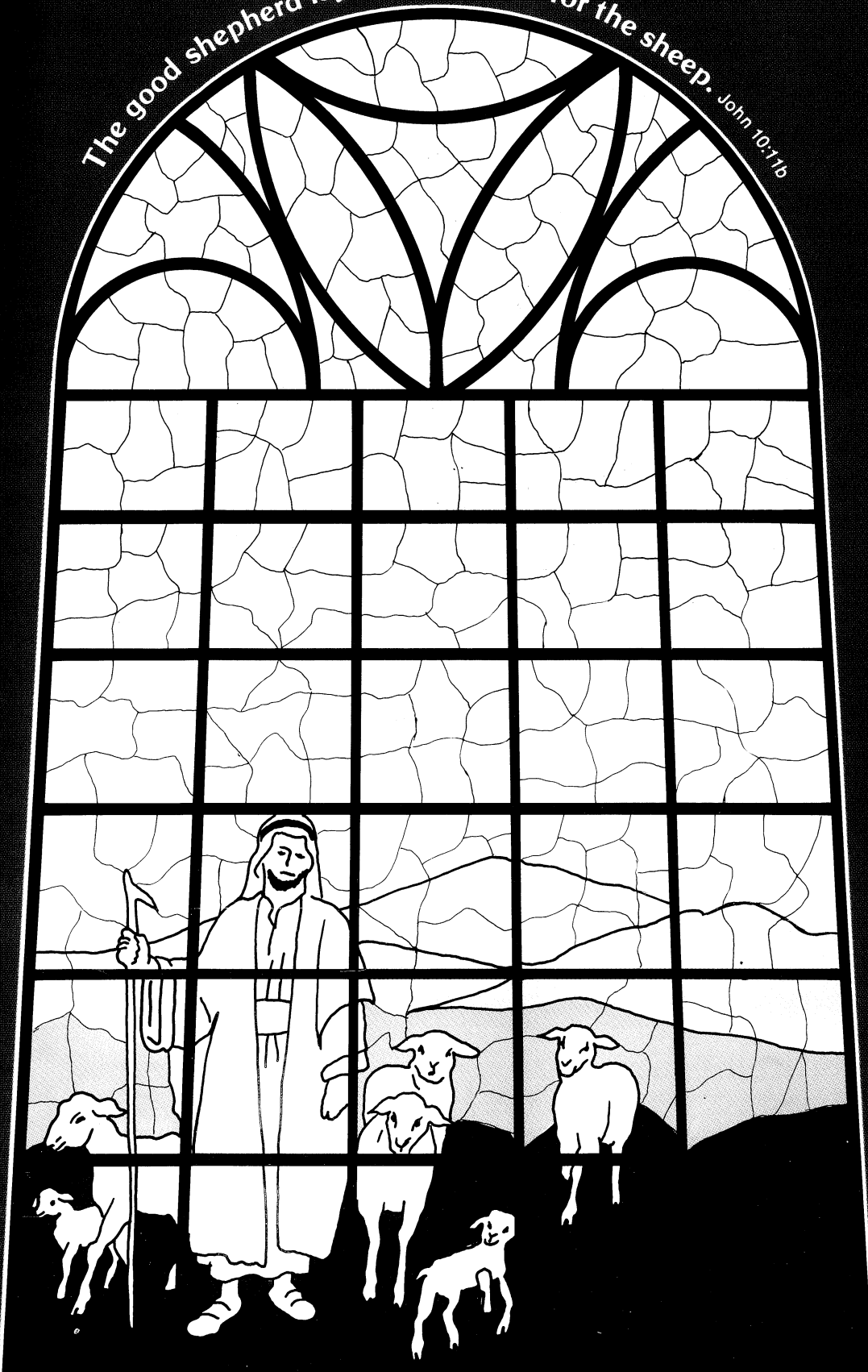


The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. John 10:11b



The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want;  
he makes me lie down in green pastures.  
He leads me beside still waters;  
he restores my soul.  
He leads me in paths of righteousness  
for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I fear no evil;  
for thou art with me;  
thy rod and thy staff,  
they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies;  
thou anointest my head with oil,  
my cup overflows.  
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
all the days of my life;  
and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

Psalm 23





# Christmas 1982-New Year 1983

## Is there still Hope?

### IS THERE STILL HOPE FOR THIS WORLD?

Two opposing world powers are building up their arsenals of both conventional and nuclear weapons. Aware of the immensely dangerous situation, President Reagan proposed to the new Soviet leader to make even more secure the prevention of a nuclear attack by accident from either side. Is it a wonder that many cry for disarmament?

A new year is about to begin. Is there still hope?

Behind the Iron and Bamboo Curtains, as well as behind the Berlin Wall, many cry for freedom: freedom of speech, freedom of religion. And when they take their freedom, mostly secretly, they live in the constant tension of unceasing fear: when will the secret police knock at our door?

A new year is about to begin. Is there still hope?

Behind the fences of their camps, the boring, miserable lives of thousands of refugees drag on. They are fugitives. Many of them fled when a communist revolution took over the government in their land, claiming to bring freedom and life. Or there are the thousands of citizens, caught in between the fire of warring government troops and revolutionary terrorists, and perishing.

A new year is about to begin. Is there still hope?

Within the walls of their house or of a hospital or of a nursing home are the thousands who are weak, handicapped by accident or illness, disillusioned, depressed, lonely on account of death or divorce, bored because of unemployment, and dull under the impoverishment due to insufficient income. And nobody seems to care.

A new year is about to begin. Is there still hope?

It all depends what we hope for.

If our hope is that this life will become a paradise through man's own efforts, our hope is vain. The hard reality is that the adversary of God, the devil, is still around. "We are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual host of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). That is the reality of life today. That was also the reality in the days of Paul, and of the days when Christ Jesus was born. But when, in that situation, the angel Gabriel announced the birth of God's Son as the great Son of David, he proclaimed salvation and hope. In Christ Jesus there is hope.

### GABRIEL'S MESSAGE TO MARY: YOUR SON WILL BE GREAT

Six months after his first mission to the earth, to the temple in Jerusalem, to a priest, the angel Gabriel is sent again with the announcement of a birth. This time he is sent to a virgin, a young woman, the fiancée of Joseph, who is the legal heir to the throne of David. Her name is Mary. There is a further similarity between these two announcements. To the priest, Zechariah, the angel said: "Your wife will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John (the LORD is gracious); joy and gladness there will be for you, for he shall be great before the Lord." We focus our attention first on that word "great." To Mary the angel says: "You will conceive and bear a son, and you shall give him the name Jesus (the LORD is salvation). He will be great."

The word "great" is used to indicate that something is beyond what is normal; it exceeds the normal measure: a great shout, a great cry, a great earthquake. The word is also used with respect to people. *The great men* in the city of Samaria were the nobles and other men with a high position, II Kings 10:6. II Kings 5:1 says that "Naaman was a *great* man before his master," the king. Esther 9:4 tells us that Mordecai became "great in the king's house" after he had received the position of Haman. In Exodus 11:3 we read that "the man Moses was great in the land of Egypt," while concerning David II Samuel 5:10 tells us that he "became greater and greater."

Our conclusion from these texts can be that the word "great," when used for men, refers to men with high positions and great power and might, who have important functions and fulfil their tasks with remarkable ability and skill. This proof of ability and power brings them the great respect of the people (Moses, David), and honour from the master or king (Naaman, Mordecai). Now Luke, writing about John, says that "he will be great before the Lord." Like Naaman was great before his master, the Syrian king, and like Mordecai was great in the house of King Ahasuerus, so John is great before the Lord. As far as I can see, this "Lord" means the LORD, Yahweh, the God of Israel. John will have a high position with a very important task in the service of God with regard to God's people. He will fulfil this calling with great power and ability which are given him through the Spirit of God. He comes

with the spirit and the power of Elijah. His task is like that of Elijah: to convert many of the Israelites to the LORD, their God, and so to make the hearts of the fathers turn to the children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just. In that way he will prepare the people of God's covenant for receiving the Lord whose herald he is and whose coming he will announce.

About John the angel said: "He will be great before the Lord." About Christ, who is the Lord Himself, he speaks in an absolute way. He says simply: "Mary, this child that you will bear will be great. He will excel among men. He will have a very important position. With superior power and strength He will fulfil His task, and with astonishing capability" (see Matt. 7:28). The fact that Gabriel speaks about the greatness of this child of Mary's as such, without adding the words "before the Lord," shows that this child will be greater than John. He is great with the absolute greatness of God. In many a place in the Old Testament also God is called great. "Great is the LORD and greatly to be praised," Ps. 48:1, 96:4, 145:3; ". . . great . . . is the Holy One of Israel," Isa. 12:6, etc. And just as the greatness of John was worked out in what the angel said further, so the greatness of Mary's child is also described in what follows. This Son of Mary will be called the Son of the Most High, on David's throne.

#### **GABRIEL'S MESSAGE TO MARY: YOUR SON WILL BE THE SON OF GOD**

When the angel says to Mary that her child will "be called" the Son of the Most High, we must not diminish the strength of this "be called" to merely the giving of a name. He will "be called" the Son of the Most High on the basis of the fact that he *is* what He will be called. He *is* the Son of the Most High. He is the eternal, natural Son of God. This name of God, "the Most High," occurs four times in Genesis 14: Melchizedek is king and priest of the Most High; we find it several times in the Book of Psalms, nine times in Daniel, and in some other places. In the New Testament it is mainly Luke who uses this name. It indicates the glorious power of the Almighty who is exalted so far above the earth and all creatures, and who has His hand in all what happens. He creates, He governs, His power will overshadow Mary (v. 35), so that she can conceive without knowing a man. Of this Most High, the almighty God of Israel who rules all the nations, Mary's Son will be the Son.

What does this word "son" mean? I said: He is the eternal, natural Son of God. Not all agree with this. Many are of the opinion that this word "son" must be explained in the light of the Old Testament prophecies to David about his son after him. When David calls Solomon to succeed him as king, David tells his son what the LORD had promised: his son, Solomon, would sit upon his throne after him, and he was to build a temple for the LORD; of him the LORD had said: "He shall be My son, and I will be his father, and I will establish his royal throne forever," I Chron. 22:10. This corresponds with what David sings in Psalm 2:7 about the decree of the LORD: "You are My son. Today I have begotten you." It is based on God's Word through Nathan to David, which we find in II Sam. 7:11-16: "The LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. . . . I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom . . . forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be my son. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before Me; your throne shall be established forever." See also Ps. 89:26-37, 110:1, 2, 132:11, 17; Jer. 23:5, 33:15; Hos. 3:5; Amos 9:11; Zech. 3:8, 6:12; as well as

Isa. 11:1, 10. Also Isa. 9:6, 7 and Dan. 7:14.

On the basis of the fact that God's promise is that He will be a father for David's son, Solomon, and that Solomon is called son of God as king on David's throne, many say that the word "son" in the mouth of the angel Gabriel, speaking to Mary about her son, must not be seen as an indication of the eternal, natural, divine sonship of Christ, but of His sonship of David, His Messiahship. Others deny this and maintain that we have to see here the divine sonship of Christ. So do Calvin and Greijdanus. In my opinion we do not have to make a choice here. Also later, at Christ's baptism, when the voice of the Father is heard saying: "This is My beloved Son; with Thee I am well pleased," Matt. 3:17; cf. Luke 3:22, I am convinced that both the eternal sonship of Christ and the Messiahship as son of David are included.

It is very remarkable that God has spoken about David's son who would sit upon David's throne also as a son for the LORD, for whom He would be a father. It is clear that King Solomon is meant, in the first place. But it is also obvious from God's words to David that His promise was not exhausted with Solomon. David would have a son of his own, a descendant of his own upon his throne forever; a son who would have God as father. He would be the everlasting Messiah: the everlasting "Anointed of the LORD." His kingdom, built on justice and righteousness would never end. The words of the angel make clear that this sonship in the house of David is certainly included. Nevertheless, I am also convinced that the words "Son of the Most High" in the first place mean that eternal sonship: He is God the Son. This is the message of the whole New Testament. It can, therefore, not be excluded here in the words of the angel, speaking in such a special way: Son of the Most High.

#### **GABRIEL'S MESSAGE TO MARY: YOUR SON WILL BE THE SON OF DAVID**

That He is the eternal, natural Son of God who will be born as Son of Mary, does not exclude, but includes, that He is the Son of David. That is clear from the words of the angel as well. But before I say anything more on this point, I would like to mention another aspect. In order to become fully the Son of David through Mary, but without Mary's knowing a man, God must do one of His wonderful works: He must create a new man. That is explained by the angel in answer to the question: "How can this happen, since I do not know a man?" The reply of Gabriel is: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God." Mary was speaking here about the child as born from her: a human child. So also Gabriel speaks here about the conception of Jesus as a human child. He explains that conception as God's work. The Holy Spirit will come upon you." Upon this word and the word of Gabriel to Joseph in his dream ("that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit," Matt. 1:20), the church has based its faith concerning Jesus' conception by the Holy Spirit and His birth of the virgin Mary. In this way Gabriel makes clear to Mary how she can bear a human son without knowing a man. That is possible because the power of the Most High will overshadow her. God's almighty creating power will, like a cloud, overshadow her and work in her. The Creator will create a new Adam in her. When Luke gives us the genealogy of Jesus in chapter 3, he goes back via David and Abraham to Adam. He calls Adam "the son of God," v. 38. This is most likely based on Gen. 5:1-3. Adam can be called God's son, because God created him "in the likeness of God." By not

using Joseph or any man, God breaks the line of the first Adam, the line of original sin, of a sinful, polluted human nature. God creates a new Adam, who is not polluted, and who, also as man, is holy again, which means here: without sin. Because we need such a highpriest: "holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners," Heb. 7:26. Mary's child will be holy Son of God, *also as Adam was a holy son of God*. He will be without sin, yet fully and completely a man, a human child, created in the image of God, in His likeness, in true righteousness and holiness, with the true knowledge. See also Daniel 7:13: "one like a son of man." By being created as the new Adam, the new man, and blameless, He can now also be the *true* promised Seed of David, that Offspring, that Branch, that will receive the eternal dominion. When He gave the promise of an eternal kingship to David's house, the LORD also spoke about sin. If David's son would sin, the LORD would chastize and punish him. This means: such a sinful son of David could not be an eternal king. The great Son of David who would receive the eternal kingdom could not be "produced" by David in his own power. David ('s house) was also polluted. Only through divine intervention, through a new work of God Most High, could David now receive His great Son, through Mary as mother, but without any male activity of Joseph, the heir to David's throne. Joseph can only provide the legal ground for Christ Jesus to be the heir of the throne of David. And also that is under the glorious rule of the Most High.

However, as the new Adam, the new Son of God in that double way as God and as Man, Christ Jesus will also be the Son of David. This means that now in Him all the rich promises of God for David, and via David for Israel and for all the nations of the earth, will begin to receive their fulfillment. It would be too much to work that all out here. But one thing must be mentioned, because that is stressed by the angel Gabriel. "The LORD will give to Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of His kingdom there will be no end."

There will be no end to His saving kingship and kingdom, because He establishes it on righteousness and justice. It is the justice which God requires in the covenant. It is the perfect satisfaction: the perfect loving obedience of God's child and creature to God's will, together with bearing the terrible punishment, the terrible wrath of God against sin. Sin against the Most High must be punished with eternal punishment: with hell. Christ Jesus, the eternal son of God, became the Son of man; He remained what He was: God's eternal Son, God Himself. He became what He was not: He took upon Him our human nature; He became the new Adam, the new man, without sin, righteous before God, and thus also God's new Son, created in the likeness of God, as Adam was, King and Priest, according to Psalm 110, according to the order of Melchizedek. So He paid the ransom for His people. He died for their sin and guilt. He fulfilled all righteousness of God's law in their place for them. Being forsaken, He still loved and obeyed His and our God. On that justice He built and builds His never-ending kingdom.

And He builds it on His love. He has mercy. He is full of mercy. The needs and the struggles of people on earth move Him. For sinners lost in their sin and guilt He became a man. He was born and He died for them, preaching to them the gospel of salvation through His blood and Spirit. That love and mercy is still the same. Therefore the gospel of His love is still being preached. On that love He continues to build His never-ending kingdom.

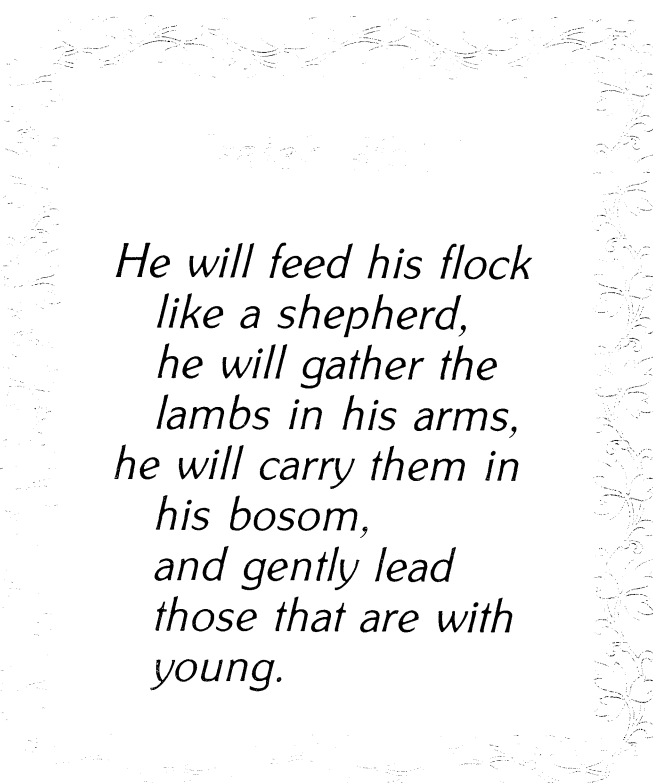
## CONCLUSION

We started with the question: Is there still hope? The powers of darkness and hatred and destruction seem so strong. The answer must be: Yes, there certainly is hope. It is the hope of Hebrews 11:1, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, and the conviction of things not seen."

Only those who believe in this Christ Jesus with a true faith have hope. They believe that their Saviour is their God and their Brother. They believe that their sins are forgiven them, through His blood. They believe that through the Holy Spirit Christ Jesus makes them believe and live as God's children with Him toward His great Day. They believe, knowing that awfully destructive weapons are kept ready to destroy. They believe, whether they be in a slave camp or psychiatric ward in the Russian archipelago, or in a boring refugee camp. They believe, whether they be enclosed within the walls of a hospital or of their own house, weak or handicapped. They all believe that they are strangers and sojourners here on earth who are looking forward to their homeland. And living with Christ Jesus, their mighty God and Brother, their Helper and Saviour, they work with Him towards His Day of their salvation, witnessing of Him and confessing Him with word and deed, showing His love in spreading love for others, even enemies; showing His care in caring for others in their needs; showing His forgiveness in forgiving others; showing Christ's holy and just life for God by living in holiness before God through Christ and helping and supporting those in need.

Is there still hope? Yes, there is. For the Son of God, who is the Son of Man, the Son of David, is the Redeemer and mighty King on the eternal throne. There is hope for all those who believe in Him.

J. GEERTSEMA



*He will feed his flock  
like a shepherd,  
he will gather the  
lambs in his arms,  
he will carry them in  
his bosom,  
and gently lead  
those that are with  
young.*

# Mandatory Recall

For those among our readers who have followed the events in the midst of the Churches during the past year this review will not contain anything new. A review never can give something new: it always scans the past and relates what happened in the course of a year. No new facts can be disclosed, only the facts of the past can be recalled so that we can sort of "relive" the past year.

This is extremely important.

Was it not one of the rebukes which oftentimes were uttered against Israel that they "forgot" the works of the LORD their God? This means that they no longer let themselves be guided and directed by what the LORD did in the past. Those works of the covenant God were no longer an incentive to trust in Him, to serve Him, and to expect from Him all good. And when these words of the LORD are no longer held in such remembrance that they urge His people on to remain obedient to Him, the desire to tell them to their children diminishes as well. In the long run the descendants no longer know the works of the LORD: these pages have disappeared from the books which describe the history of each one's life and experiences.

It is, therefore, mandatory that we recall what the LORD did during the past year, even though we cannot relate any new events; yet the mercies of the LORD were new every morning.

As for the evaluation of the various happenings, in many instances it is far too early to give any. Sometimes it is said that one can evaluate history correctly only when it concerns the history in which one was not personally involved. Leaving the correctness or incorrectness of this statement for what it may be, we shall confine ourselves mainly to recalling the events as such, without entering upon an evaluation, although we also realize that the manner in which they are recalled to a certain extent does express evaluation.

## *The Churches*

As far as the number of Churches is concerned, this remained the same, although it won't be for long. No Church had to be "disbanded" due to loss of membership; on the contrary, almost everywhere some growth could be reported. In some instances buildings which were designed with a view to future growth appear to have become too small.

In the Smithville Church the problem of "overcrowding" will have to be solved in the near future. Expansion of the seating capacity is not well feasible; the solution will have to be institution of a new Church.

Hamilton sought a (temporary) solution in the building of a balcony, as did Burlington West. However, in the latter Congregation efforts were made to institute a Church in the Flamborough-Waterdown area. When this could not find sufficient support among the members living in that area, another action went underway which appears to have succeeded: In the beginning of January 1983 a Church will be instituted in Burlington South. This new Church will be of a sufficient size to guarantee viability as far as our human calculations go, whereas a sufficient number is left in Burlington West so as not to bring the "mother-Church" into difficulties. The balcony in the latter's building can now be used for other purposes.

Speaking of buildings, the Brampton Church building was made more useful for all sorts of congregational activities by the installation of walls in the basement whereby nursery, Consistory room and meeting room were obtained. Brampton also decided to look for possibilities to acquire a parsonage, although up till now their efforts to attract a minister have not succeeded.

Another Church that acquired a parsonage is the Providence Church in Edmonton. Winnipeg built a new

parsonage, and Barrhead did the same.

The Immanuel Church in Edmonton is in the process of acquiring their own Church building. For one who has to get all his information from the weekly bulletins, it is not completely clear in what stage the plans of their execution are. The economic conditions will also play a part in the decisions and the realization of the plans.

One piece of "equipment" which is very important for our worship services is an organ. Langley could dedicate their organ and there are plans to add an important stop. It was already used for a concert which must have been enjoyed by all those attending. Guelph signed a contract to put an addition to its organ, while Hamilton is considering a complete overhaul of its instrument, something which will require a considerable cash outlay.

The Okanagan Valley also experiences the effects of the economic recession: various families made enquiries and had plans to move down there, but the uncertainty concerning the work-situation and economic prospects thus far prevented the so fervently hoped-for growth. The Churches of Classis Pacific decided to provide the house congregation in the Okanagan with pulpit supply once a month.

## *Ministers Sought*

During the past year the calling of ministers continued, and there was some moving around, although not all that much.

Chatham had to extend a call only once: the Rev. Van Rietschoten accepted and is serving this Church now. Edmonton Providence also succeeded in receiving a minister the first time they called one: Rev. VanBeveren left the Burlington region and exchanged it for Alberta's capital.

When Smithers called upon the Rev. VanSpronsen from now on to

give himself for the work among the Carrier Indians, he did not hesitate but saw his way clear to accept this call. This left Smithers vacant, and they extended their second call to fill the vacancy. At this moment it is not known yet whether the second call was accepted or not.

Chilliwack did see its second call accepted, when Cand. Cl. Bouwman came to the conclusion that his way led to the Fraser Valley.

Uncertainty is also the only term we can use with respect to the call which the Ebenezer Church in Burlington extended. Before year's end we shall know the answer.

Orangeville extended two calls, and the more recent one has not yet led to a decision. The same is to be said regarding the second call which Neerlandia extended this year; if it is accepted the number of ministers will be increased by one, for this time they called one from The Netherlands.

Carman extended three calls after the departure of the Rev. Van-Rietschoten; they were declined. Brampton and Ottawa called once, both with negative result.

Especially for those Churches that have been vacant for a long time it must be sort of frustrating that they are still struggling on without a minister of the Word. In a few years we hope to have some more candidates available from our College, and this should alleviate the shortage somewhat, although then, in all likelihood, there will be more vacancies as well.

This brings us to our Theological College.

At this year's Convocation the Master of Divinity degree was awarded for the first time. Only one brother had completed his studies so that we could see this degree conferred upon him.

The lectures could be given without interruption, although the absence of Prof. C. VanDam necessitated some juggling around of the hours. We are thankful that also others become more and more aware of the existence of our College and of the Scriptural character of the instruction given. This has attracted a few students not belonging to one of the Churches or sister Churches. We are thankful that in this manner we are allowed to impart some of the treasures which the LORD has given to us, the greatest treasure being that we have His inerrant, infallible Word. Whatever deficiencies the instruction at our College may have,

this certainly is not there: that the trustworthiness of the Word of God is doubted. However, we are convinced that also in other respects it may compare favourably with other institutions for higher learning.

#### *Ministers of the Word*

Some particulars about the ministers of the Word may not be omitted.

The Rev. A.B. Roukema was the one who celebrated the longest time as a minister: he remembered that he

was ordained forty-five years ago. Dr. Faber celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of his ministry, and the Rev. VanBeveren his twenty-fifth.

One of the number of the ministers was taken away by the Lord. The Rev. H. Scholten was called away from his earthly habitation to be received into the everlasting tabernacles.

The Netherlands appeared to have some attractive powers: Prof. VanDam went there to continue his studies towards a doctor's degree.

## **Micah 5:2-4**

*But you, O Bethlehem  
Ephrathah, who are little to be  
among the clans of Judah,  
from you shall come forth for  
me one who is to be ruler in  
Israel,  
whose origin is from of old,  
from ancient days.  
Therefore he shall give them up  
until the time  
when she who is in travail has  
brought forth;  
then the rest of his brethren  
shall return to the people of  
Israel.  
And he shall stand and feed his  
flock in the strength of the  
LORD, in the majesty of the  
name of the LORD his God.  
And they shall dwell secure, for  
now he shall be great  
to the ends of the earth.*



Rev. Stam spent a year in The Netherlands and returned to Canada in mid-summer; Rev. Huizinga spent some time in Kampen as did Rev. G.H. Visscher. Rev. J. Visscher went to Philadelphia, to Westminster Seminary in pursuit of a Doctor of Ministry degree. The Churches cannot but benefit from this zeal to increase knowledge and skill.

We already mentioned a few ministers who went to serve a different Congregation. With their number should be included the Rev. Tiggehaar who began his ministry in Barrhead as that Church's first minister of their own.

Our missionaries were partly in the news as well. The Rev. Meijer finally received a visum which allowed him and his wife to work in Brazil on a more permanent basis. The Rev. Boersema and family were on furlough in our midst and they visited the Western Churches plus some in the East. Especially the Hamilton Church made use of their presence in Canada to become more informed about the mission field chosen by them. Hamilton does not have a missionary as yet.

The Rev. M. VanBeveren and Rev. J. Visscher attended the International Conference of Reformed Churches on our behalf. Our readers can be informed about this conference via the extensive report which the Rev. Visscher sent us for *Clarion*.

#### Various Activities

Mention was made already of the mission work which the Church at Smithers is going to undertake with the support of all the Western and of some of the Eastern Churches. This will be the first official effort to discharge our responsibilities towards the original inhabitants of our country.

The work of the broadcasting is still going on and here and there some response is received. It remains a thing to be deplored that participation in the preparation of the tapes is not general and that the promised cooperation has not materialized as yet so that the Ontario ministers have to carry the burden.

Other means used to reach those who are without are the Vacation Bible Schools which become a more regular feature in several Churches. Others have been considering this possibility or are having definite plans to organize one next year.

The elementary and high

schools could continue their operation even though here and there financial difficulties and lack of teachers forced societies to cut down on years of instruction given. No new schools were opened this year, but we are very thankful already that the existing ones could keep going to the benefit of the children who, at this stage, may not fully see the value of what they receive in this kind of instruction. Even though the number as such is not decisive and each graduation is equally important, it does fill our hearts with gratitude when we see the large crowd of graduates of the Guido de Brès High School in Hamilton, pictured on page 435 of this volume of *Clarion*. How blessed are our children that they can receive instruction which is based wholly on the Word of our God and which is completely in accordance with the confessions we cherish.

We are also thankful for the possibility which exists to train young men and young women to become teachers in our schools. The Teacher's College has been in operation now for a sufficient length of time to see that it works. We are certain that the "products" of this institution will be an asset to our schools.

From young to old seems to be a large jump, but distance-wise it is not all that far from the Teacher's College (which operates in the basement of the Hamilton Church building) to the Old Age Home which is built adjacent to it. Ebenezer Villa is expected to open early in the new year and this is the first Old Age Home or Senior Citizens Apartment Building which was built especially for our people. In the Fraser Valley the plans are still very much alive, but the realization of the plans is not as speedy as was expected some time ago.

Of the activities we could still mention the league days of men's and women's societies, the study weekends of our young people, the ministers' workshop which was held twice in Ontario, the summer camps which were held for the native youth in the Smithers area and for the Handicapped in Southern Ontario, the work of the World Relief Fund which is going on quietly and, small though it may be when compared to other actions, yet provides indispensable support for younger people and for the hungry in the world.

Many more things happen and are done which don't make the head-

lines but which prove that our God is faithful and continues to take care of His children as He has promised. He gives strength and ability, He works faithfulness in the hearts of His own and, amazing grace!, He even will reward their faithfulness and labours.

Unto Him we entrust ourselves anew, knowing that also in 1983 His purpose of election is unchangeable and His providence is still the same. Therefore we have a good confidence for the future; in the past we were not put to shame. How could this ever be as we have a God like the LORD who has become our Father through Christ?

VO

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## FROM THE SCRIPTURES

*"Before she was in labour she gave birth;  
before her pain came upon her she was delivered of a son." Isa. 66:7*

# Birth Before Labour

Isaiah's closing prophesy takes a startling turn at this point, and after announcing the punishment that will come upon the apostate brethren now suddenly announces the surprising blessing that will come upon the remnant who remain faithful to the LORD. So sudden and surprising will be the LORD's blessing that it appears as a woman giving birth even before she has gone into labour; a son will be born before the pains come. The natural order of things is, as it were, reversed. The prophet cannot but evoke amazement, wonder, and surprise that something like this could take place. What will the LORD do?

Although temple and city lie in ruins because of the righteous judgment of God, the same LORD who brought punishment also is hastening to bring His full redemption. These words of prophesy are particularly directed to the believing remnant who faithfully trusted the promises of the LORD, even to the point of enduring the mockery and shame of their brethren according to the flesh, their fellow Israelites in exile. They had been ridiculed and mocked; they had even been banned from the public meetings. They are, humanly speaking, a pitiful group, of small number, with enemies without and within. What can come of this?

The LORD who works wonders will bring His salvation forth from this remnant. He will return to His city, and, in a short span of time, what once seemed to be small and without hope in the world will grow into a large community. Jerusalem will have many sons and will be filled with joy. The abundance of blessings will spill over to the nations, and many will enjoy the prosperity of Zion. In the execution of His judgment, the LORD arises to save and bring salvation. He never forgets His own.

What time does the Lord speak of here? Even the context makes it obvious that the LORD Himself looks beyond the time of the return from exile, beyond the rebuilding of the second temple, to a better, richer day. Of course, the return to the city is not completely excluded, as if that was not an important blessing from the LORD. But the prophet reaches much farther ahead in his message and brings to the believing remnant among the exiles the hope of the new age that is coming. That is the focus of his words.

So we see the words speak of the birth of Christ, the Saviour. His birth signifies the reversal of the natural order of things. He was not born in the ordinary way, strictly through natural means. No, He was born by the power of the Word on high. His birth was the miraculous wonder breaking into the

natural cycle of things. He was, as the prophet says in another place, "a shoot from the stump of Jesse, a branch growing out of his roots," Isa. 11:1. Only after the tree is completely cut down and removed can this shoot appear. His appearance is like a miracle; He is born before pain arrives and before labour sets in.

When we reflect upon what Christ has done for His people, we are able to understand why the prophet can speak this way, using an image like this. For the Messiah coming forth out of the remnant of Judah brings a tremendous reversal in the order of things. Of course, the natural order is not totally overturned, but it is fully renewed. In Christ the labour pains have been removed; their sting is now gone. For in Christ the cause of the toil and pain, namely, *sin*, has been fully dealt with. His coming brings an end to the punishment that came over man and woman in the beginning. He comes to take the penalty, to reverse the order, to remove the *curse*.

Thus, Isaiah can prophetically speak in jubilant tones about our age, the New Testament dispensation. In Christ the penalty is gone; the curse has vanished. Birth precedes labour, blessing precedes pain. The work of Christ reaches out to the Gentiles, who may be an ingrafted shoot. And for them the reality of salvation is much richer than it was under the old covenant. All this Christ gives us, too. We share the reversal and renewal of all things. We share life before death, joy before sorrow, birth before labour. That is what Christ's coming gives us!

For the Lord Jesus Himself returns to Isaiah's image in the night of His betrayal, John 16:20ff. Mindful of the sorrow of the disciples, He nevertheless says that their sorrow will soon turn to joy. The reversal was coming. The renewal of all things was imminent, Matt. 19:28. And did it not come when the Holy Spirit was so richly poured out upon God's Church, and when the good news of the preaching spread far and wide? That is what makes our age so different. To be sure, we also must endure sorrow and persecution, both from within and without. We also cannot rely on our own strength. We also live in a time in which the Church lives as a *remnant* in the world. However, it is not like Isaiah's time today. We have the gift of God's blessings, the lifting of the curse, the beginning of eternal joy, the first fruits of the Spirit. Christ has come in the flesh! He gave His Spirit, through His death and resurrection! Therefore we share the gifts of the new order as the old one is being thrown away. And we may share today the joy that never ends!

J. DEJONG

# Christian Freedom and Entertainment.

## *Christian freedom in the Scriptures*

In this light it becomes all the more important and interesting to see what the Scriptures indeed teach about Christian liberty. Since the debate centers especially on the question of the freedom *in Christ*, that freedom which came through the work of our Lord ("for freedom *Christ* has set us free," Galatians 5:1), we may restrict ourselves conveniently to the New Testament Scriptures, although it would be worthwhile to explore the motif of "freedom" also in the Old Testament.<sup>16</sup>

The theme of freedom is already prevalent in Christ's teachings, but it is not a freedom which man must make for himself. Freedom is connected to *truth* ("the truth will make you free," John 8:32). Freedom is always freedom from the guilt, curse, and power of *sin*. Freedom in the truth and freedom from sin is meant when the Lord says, "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36). It is evident then that this Christian freedom is not something acquired by man, but always *given* in Christ! At the same time it is clear that this "freedom" is lost immediately when men stray from the truth and sanction sin.

Freedom does not mean "being able to do what you want." The same elements in the teaching of the Lord return in the apostolic teaching: "... having been set *free from sin*, [you] have become *slaves of righteousness*" (Romans 6:18). We are no longer "under the law" (its curse and damnation) but "under grace" (Romans 6:15). This, again, does not mean that we may live as we please, for freedom means being restored in and to the service of God! "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the return you get is *sanctification* and its end, eternal life" (Romans 8:22). God has set us

free in Christ *from sin for service*. Justification by faith, through grace, indeed, but this justification is followed by and becomes apparent in sanctification and renewal of life.

This new freedom (from self for service) in Christ is imparted to us by the Holy Spirit. In this light we understand the well-known text, "... where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (II Corinthians 3:17). It is the Spirit who works faith and guides us in all wisdom. It is the same Spirit who works "sanctification" and makes us "heartily ready and willing" to live to God (cf. Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 1).

All this is relatively simple to understand, and the question may therefore be asked, "Why is the matter of Christian liberty then so complicated and controversial?" The answer is that there soon was "an attack upon Christian freedom" by the *Judaists*.<sup>17</sup> Not only did these Judaists maintain the doctrine of justification by *works*, but they also made mandatory various Old Testament rules and regulations which had been fulfilled by Christ. The matter first came to a head, after Paul's first missionary trip, in the Church at Jerusalem where "some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, 'It is necessary to circumcise them [heathen-Christians] and to charge them to keep the Law of Moses.'" But it was decided after some debate to lay no greater burden upon the heathen-Christians than these things: abstain from what is sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what is strangled, and from unchastity (Acts 15:5, 29). The issue, however, was a stubborn one: time and again the apostles had to battle this Judaism in the churches.

It is against this background that we must understand the many statements about freedom and the admonitions to stay in the freedom of

Christ. No justification by works and no return to the ceremonies and rituals of the Mosaic Law! All this is echoed in Art. 25 of the Belgic Confession, "We believe that the ceremonies and symbols of the law ceased at the coming of Christ, and that all the shadows are accomplished; so that the use of them must be abolished among Christians . . ." In the New Covenant it must be fully what was required essentially already in the Old: a true and free service *from the heart*.

It is against this influence of Judaism that the apostle Paul warns, e.g., in the letter to the Galatians and defends "our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus." The churches are not to yield to such Judaist pressures, "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1). This does not mean that in the New Testament Church everything goes, "For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another" (Gal. 5:13). It is and remains "freedom for service" to God and one another!

This "Christian liberty" is indeed quite extensive. A Christian may believe that there is "nothing unclean in itself" (Romans 14:14) and that "everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving" (I Timothy 4:4). The Christian is free from "human precepts and doctrines" which may have "an appearance of wisdom in promoting rigour of devotion" but "are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh" (Colossians 2:22, 23). This "Christian freedom" is an important matter, for, if it is taken away, the Church will soon again be caught up in a maze of human regulations and man-centered piety which leads to the age-old heresy of justification by works.



On the other hand, this Christian liberty is not unlimited. As a matter of fact, it is a freedom which is not only bound by the Law of God, but is also *self-restricting*. A Christian is called to restrict himself for the sake of brethren whose knowledge is lesser and whose faith is weaker. This freedom is to be applied with the discretion of love. When defending the liberty of the Christian, Paul adds, "Only take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumblingblock to the weak" (I Corinthians 7:9). The ultimate rule is that we shall seek the edification and good of the neighbour (I Corinthians 10:24). Even if we feel "free" to do something, we must consider whether we give real offense to our brethren, or not.<sup>18</sup> The knife cuts both ways: we must not quickly *take* offense at our neighbour's actions, nor be quick to *give* offense to our neighbour, even if we feel he is mistaken in his views. We shall not bind others to our opinions, yet always be prepared to consider the opinions of others!

I feel that Luther and Calvin presented an excellently-balanced and Scriptural view of Christian liberty and that this view is worth defending today. Christian freedom is freedom from the guilt and curse of the Law, which is fulfilled by Christ, freedom from all external regulations and precepts of men, a freedom to be used with the discretion of love to the edification of the neighbour and the glory of God. In this respect I have no quarrel with the principles adopted regarding Christian liberty by Synod 1966 of the Christian Reformed Church.<sup>19</sup> Another point, however, is whether these principles have been correctly applied with respect to the "amusements."

#### Entertainment

When we now proceed to investigate what implications the above has for "entertainment," we should first establish what we mean by entertainment. The word originally means "to receive and provide for," but has come to take the meaning of "amusing someone." This would imply that one party is *doing* the entertaining, while another party is *being* entertained. The modern situation is that a *few* are doing the work for *many*: the entertainment or recreation of most people is a *passive* recreation. It cannot be denied that the character of modern media has fostered this *passive* recreation, but that the same situ-

ation has precedent in the Roman arena: thousands were "entertained" by few.

Perhaps the word *recreation* is better than the word "entertainment," for one simple reason: our free or leisure time does not exist as a goal or means in itself, for it is intended to give new vigour for our *work*. It is not so that we work only for recreation (the typical modern T.G.I.F. mentality, "Thank God, it's Friday!"), but that our times of leisure are meant to give new strength for the work that lies before us. We need to be replenished, invigorated, strengthened, and in that sense: recreated. It is temporary relief *from* the work *for* the work. Concretely applied to the study society this means that we do not hurriedly get the discussion over with in order to plunge into the entertainment part, for then the recreative element would prevail over the real purpose: to study God's Word.

I do not think that anyone will argue the fact that recreation is an important aspect of our life, also the life of the study society. A society has a two-fold purpose: not only to deepen knowledge of Scripture, but also to promote fellowship and friendship among the members. In this sense the study society is just another instrument for shaping communion among the members of the Church. Recreation then is a worthwhile activity. It should be *refreshing* and *edifying*, and should fortify a feeling of togetherness. Geesink has remarked

that especially "informal recreation" is good to help people overcome "shyness and crudeness,"<sup>20</sup> and to facilitate contacts.

#### "Redeeming"

This does leave the question, however, concerning the *kind* of recreation which we shall pursue. Should we as Christians engage in secular forms of recreation (theatres and dance, e.g.) with the calling or claim that we are to "redeem" these forms for Christ and use them in a Christian manner? You will recall that the Christian Reformed Synod quite strongly put forward this notion of *redeeming*. If this element was marginal in 1966, it has become pivotal in 1982.

The verb "to redeem" is used mostly for *people* and not for *things*. We do read in Colossians 4:5 (KJV), "Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, *redeeming* the time." The original verb means "to buy out," in the sense: "to make the most of" (see RSV). The element which must have guided the Christian Reformed Synod is that "redemption" not only implies being freed from bondage, but also *restored to a former position*.<sup>21</sup> The idea is that we must win back worldly things for Christ by giving them a Christian content, on the basis of the "cultural mandate" I presume.

It is true that, e.g., in the Old Testament (Leviticus 25) one may "redeem" his possessions or have them redeemed for him by others. This law of redemption, however, deals with

### Matthew 25:31, 32, 33

*"When the Son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will place the sheep at his right hand, but the goats at the left."*

matters of inheritance within the covenant people, and it is highly questionable whether such a line of thinking can be applied to secular forms of entertainment. I am afraid that this notion of “redeeming” (a better expression, perhaps, would be: reclaiming) comes more from modern theology than from the Scriptures: as Christ redeemed us, so we must now “redeem” (in the sense of reclaiming) creation. But, if I understand it well, we are called to “expose” the unfruitful works of darkness, not to “redeem” them (Ephesians 5:11). Could it be that the “theology of secularization” is creeping into Reformed thinking?<sup>22</sup>

A good film can be made, but a “bad film” cannot be redeemed. Similarly a *worldly* form of expression (the dance) cannot be redeemed either, because it was never “Christian” to start with. It was *heathen* culture which first discovered and subsequently deformed dancing into blatant eroticism, connecting it with “courtship, puberty and fertility rites.”<sup>23</sup> Someone like Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones — who knows modern dancing better than many others — frankly admits, “All dancing is a replacement for sex.”<sup>24</sup> It is therefore imperative not to incorporate dancing as a legitimate segment of our recreation, especially since the youth do not desire square-dancing but social dancing and possibly even disco.

We must be very careful that this “redeeming” does not become a cover-up for mere “imitation” of the worldly forms. It strikes me that what is presented as “Christian entertainment” is often a softened form but nevertheless an imitation of secular entertainment. Perhaps this is due to the great influence which secular entertainment has on us. Anything that does not “look” like the original, cannot really satisfy. Instead of our “Christianizing” the secular world, we rather run the risk of falling into a secularized Christianity! I have not become convinced by the Christian Reformed motif of “redeeming.”

#### *Christian Freedom and Entertainment*

The question remains: what freedom do we then still have with respect to entertainment, or better, recreation? I feel then that a general rule must apply: we are free to engage in any activity which does not conflict with the Word of God and which is edifying and stimulating for all involved. I realize that this is a general

statement and that many would, perhaps, prefer a more concrete ruling in order to stem “the tide of worldliness” as the Christian Reformed Synod attempted in 1926.

But we must avoid the two pitfalls of *escapism*. We should not look with envy at the casuistry of Roman Catholic moral theology, where everything is “cut and dried” by pre-set rules and regulations. Neither should we feel that the Reformation has denied us the “solid undergirding” which we need.<sup>25</sup> We should not, out of fear of certain rules, run into libertinism, where everything is sanctioned under the cloak of Christian liberty. We should also not, out of fear of breaking loose, run into legalism, into a rigorous abstinence which only affords a false security. Upholding sound Christian morals, we shall avoid all sectarian moralism.

There is a difference, too, between what we do *privately* and *publicly*. Paul has written, “For why should my liberty be determined by another man’s scruples?” (I Corinthians 10:29). If I am convinced that what I am doing is not contrary to the Word of God and I partake with thankfulness, what is that to my neighbour who is not involved or implicated? In this respect we are told not to judge our neighbour, “. . . for it is before his own Master that he stands or falls” and “so each of us shall give account of himself to God” (Romans 14:4, 12). Whenever something, however, is *organized* for the recreation of many, we shall take into account also the viewpoints of others and arrive at those activities which are mutually considered edifying. Then we shall “try to please all men” in everything we do (I Corinthians 10:32). While no one need to dictate to me how I shall live my personal life (except the Lord), so we shall all decide together with respect to our communal recreative activities.

#### *Study Societies and Fellowship*

The study society’s main purpose, indeed, is to engage together in the examination and learning of God’s Word. At the same time the society provides an excellent opportunity to foster true Christian fellowship. As stated earlier, there is room and reason for the recreative element. But then the activities organized should be of such a nature that everyone can *participate*. In my opinion, therefore, the society should not be too concerned with providing “passive entertainment,” where a few are prevailed

upon to amuse many.

The first form of participatory recreation is the free intermission, when members can mingle informally and engage in mutual conversation. It is not so that something *must* always be organized, for the free association of the members can be relaxing and stimulating. I know that during intermissions, regular groups tend to form, and the members should see to it that they approach those members also who leave themselves out or are left out. It is here that we begin to help others overcome their shyness and tendency to withdraw. It is here also that personal contacts are laid which might be pursued privately.

If for annual meetings and rallies special “entertainment events” must be organized, there is a variety of possibilities which can be explored and utilized, depending on the enthusiasm and talents of the members. Communal singing, light drama, and amateur film-making, e.g., are avenues which should seriously be considered. These forms do not have to be “redeemed,” but may simply be used for mutual edification.

There is also a large variety of communal *sports* activities from which to choose, depending on the season and the facilities. Car rallies, swimming, skating, bowling, and sports such as baseball and volleyball have in the past provided much enjoyment, and there is no reason why such events now cease to be of true recreative quality.

If much of the above is considered to be too “tame” and boring by the majority of the youth, we should ask ourselves the question whether we have already not accustomed ourselves too much to a worldly style of entertainment. Many events are marred by excessive drinking of alcoholic beverages and indulgence in vandalism. In this respect sometimes our youth go even farther than many youths of the world. It must be a standing rule that no alcoholic beverages are permitted at society functions and those who do bring such materials in should be suspended from the activities forthwith. Here, certainly, “discipline” must be maintained, if need be by the office-bearers in the Church.

We are not isolated from the culture in which we live. We undergo the influence of this culture in more ways and to a greater extent than we possibly realize ourselves. Of great importance in someone’s life is who his friends are and whose fellowship he

seeks. Of great importance is also the style which his community maintains, where everything is done to mutual *edification* according to the Word of God. If that Word is at the core of our life and if our striving is indeed mutual edification, we will have little problems with "entertainment," even in the changing attitudes of our times. If these things are not the basis and purpose of our lives, we have already inwardly succumbed to the world and will be slowly but steadily enslaved by the forms of this world.

Christian freedom is a great gift. We shall defend it also over against a corrupt and *enslaved* world. Also in entertainment or recreation we shall remain free *from sin* and free *for service*.

CL. STAM

<sup>16</sup>See e.g. H. van Oyen, *Ethik des Alten Testaments*, Gutersloh, 1967, p. 113.

<sup>17</sup>W. Geesink, *Gereformeerde Ethiek* I, Kok, Kampen, 1931, p. 471.

<sup>18</sup>Regarding the matter of "offense" we must be careful. The distinction has been made between "*scandalum datum*" (giving offense to the weak, causing them to stumble) and "*scandalum latum*" (taking offense, something which the Pharisees were quick to do). Our Lord was not at all concerned about offending the Pharisees, Matthew 15:13ff.

<sup>19</sup>See: *Synodical Decisions*, *op. cit.*, p. 38, and *Clarion*, *op. cit.*, p. 331.

<sup>20</sup>Geesink, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 299, speaks of "bedeesheid en plompheid."

<sup>21</sup>See Ellul, *op. cit.*, pp. 66ff. on "redemption."

<sup>22</sup>See Harvie M. Conn, *Contemporary World Theology*, Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1973, esp. p. 50, "Secular theologians, to a greater and lesser degree, have an uncritical admiration for the achievements of modern technology and the mentality of the secular man." In the 1982 decisions I do not see an "uncritical" but certainly a "less critical" admiration.

<sup>23</sup>Bob Larsen, *Rock*, Tyndale House Publications Inc., 1980, p. 53.

<sup>24</sup>Q.C. *Scene*, Spring 1967, p. 72.

<sup>25</sup>CF. Thielicke, *op. cit.*, I, p. 457.

#### CORRECTION — Footnotes on Heaven and Hell, Vol. 31, No. 23

<sup>22</sup>Schilder, *Hel*, *op. cit.*, p. 83, "Vast staat voor ons besef dat hier alles beeldspraak is."

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid*, p. 79, niet "slechts symbolisch, maar wezenlijk symbolisch."

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid*, p. 86ff.

<sup>25</sup>Schilder, *Hemel*, *op. cit.*, p. 150ff.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid*, p. 169.

<sup>27</sup>e.g. George Beiderwieden, Heaven, St. Louis, 1961, p. 16.

<sup>28</sup>Schilder, *Hel*, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

<sup>29</sup>Schilder, *Hemel*, *op. cit.*, p. 226ff.

# PARALIPOMENA

## No Generation Gap? (con't)

### *Bridging the "Gap"?*

First, let's bridge the gap between this second instalment on the subject and the first. The "gap" is not a difference in age between two or more generations; it is a break-up of communication between, for example, grandparents and grandchildren.

Without generalizing or accusing, I wondered whether some grandparents did not create or even widen that gap from their side. All this, of course, comes from our conviction that the LORD does not want that gap but likes communication.

Now we will approach the gap from the other side.

### *What about the grandchildren?*

It is fashionable and customary to complain about the "younger generation." The present old one was also young once. I want to break with that fashionable custom, therefore. I am no longer so sure that (of course again "in general") grandparents are "better" than grandchildren. Grandparents who know themselves should be the last ones to proclaim that nonsense. Yes, there is a difference, in experience to begin with, and hopefully also in wisdom. But there is also the undeniable fact that nowadays young people grow up faster and are "adults" sooner than about half a century ago. In this respect "our" young people are no different from those "outside."

Yet, something has changed.

I'm not talking now about the behaviour of teenagers at home, although I've heard some dark sayings about that. I would like to say something on the way our beloved young people act in their activities and organizations. I remember that, when I was their age (and that's not *that* long ago), we had our conventions, our study congresses, our "Bondsdagen." I remember two things about them that, to my knowledge, have by now completely disappeared.

In the first place, on such occasions there were as many older ones present as there were younger ones. Parents and grandparents showed their interest and were obviously welcome. Not now anymore.

In the second place, such conventions were in the leading hands of older people. I know, that is still the case outside our small circle. I have seen

proof of that in *Calvinist Contact* and other magazines. My impression: good leadership, enthusiasm, even glory to Christ!

It *seems* to me (I want to be careful) that on the local as well as on the inter-local level today's young generation — in our midst at least — no longer like it that way. They want to be on their own. They don't need (so they think) older and wiser men and women to give guidance. If I am not too far from the truth here, then I must say that the "gap" between the generations is not bridged by the young either. Maybe it is even widened because they think that parents, let alone grandparents, are so old-fashioned in their ideas, etc., that they can do no good for them. I hope I am wrong, of course. Maybe the in-between generation, the parents, have just given up and gone on strike in this respect. But if I am not totally wrong, it's a bad situation.

### *Solution?*

This little corner holds no room for solutions, only for "leftovers." But I am convinced there *is* a gap, and the guilt lies on both sides. Maybe it is — on both sides!! — a form of "worldliness." If so: Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2). For the LORD had something different from a generation-gap in mind when His finger wrote in stone: "I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third (grandchildren) and fourth (great-grandchildren) generation, BUT showing steadfast love to the generations of those who love Me and keep My commandments.

CHRONICLER

NOTE: After I had written the first instalment on "No Generation Gap?" someone told me about and office-bearers' conference where pastoral care for the elderly was discussed. It was obvious that things were said that are similar to some of my remarks. I'm glad I'm not the only one who thinks this way.

CH.

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# *International Conference of Reformed Churches*



## *Opening Address*

*This address was delivered at the Constituent Assembly for an International Conference of Reformed Churches on Tuesday October 26th, 1982, in the Refajah Church at Groningen-South, The Netherlands, by the Rev. G. van Rongen, M.Th., after Scripture reading of Psalm 120 and Psalm 133 and the singing of Psalm 133.*

*Rev. G. van Rongen, Chairman.*

Dear brethren in the Lord!

1. We just read and sang Psalm 133. This is a suitable song on an occasion like this. For it claims our attention for something important. It starts with the word "Behold," which is heard more frequently in the "Songs of Degrees," and is intended to ask one's special attention for something peculiar. "Behold." Something could be seen, even literally. What could be seen was the dwelling together in unity of some brethren. They formed, as it were, one large family.

Yes indeed, "brethren" they were. This is the name which King David gave to the twelve tribes of Israel. Were not they the posterity of those twelve men who indeed were brothers? However, King David called them that on the occasion of moving the Ark of the Covenant towards Jerusalem and in connection with his plans to build a temple. Israel was not only a blood community but also a religious one around the dwelling place of the LORD God here on earth. This was also shown in their dwelling together in unity, which happened in particular during the great annual feasts and at the sacrificial meals held in the sanctuary. The commandments and statutes of the LORD had brought the brethren together and made them dwell in unity.

In Psalm 133 this dwelling together is called "good" and "pleasant." It was really exalting. It gave great joy and strengthened and encouraged its participants. It was also inviting and drew the attention of many others, making them desirous to participate also.

This, then, is made clear by means of two illustrations. The first one is that of the very special oil that was used on the occasion of anointing Aaron, the high priest. It was something special indeed: it spread a very nice odour, was cooling and stimulating. This oil symbolized and guaranteed that the high priest would be able to perform the duties of his office, to serve the LORD in a very special way. It could, as it were, be smelled and seen: the LORD wanted to dwell in the midst of His people, in forgiveness of their sins — He, the holy One.

The second picture is that of the dew of Hermon. It is pictured as falling on the mountains of Zion, which is a long distance away from Hermon. The dew of Hermon was very rich. It symbolized the energy and vitality given to the brethren who were dwelling together. Well, they were really in need of that. For Psalm 133 is one of the so-called "Songs of Degrees," the whole series of which begins with Psalm 120. And Psalm 120 is a complaint: the God-fearing people have to live in the midst of a hostile world, in an environment which is full of apostate children of the covenant. They are mocked at, ridiculed, and boycotted. At home it is not easy for them.

2. This Constituent Assembly is not a meeting held in a sanctuary as the Old Testament temple used to be. It is no church service. Yet we are together here as "brethren." We all have been put in the service of the God of free grace in Jesus Christ, His Son. If we could not confess this, we would not have invited you. Neither would you have come if you had not been of the conviction

that we are “brethren” in that great sense of the word. Together with the churches that have delegated us, we have the privilege of being one large spiritual family.

For approximately two weeks we hope to dwell together. From all directions we have come to this place — just as the ancient Israelites came from all directions to the great festivals. This is good and pleasant. It stimulates and encourages. And it draws the attention of others. It may strengthen the churches that sent us. For we all are living in the midst of a hostile world. Hostility is not of the same degree everywhere in the world. There are churches and believers who have to suffer under it more than their fellow Christians in other countries. But everywhere opposition is offered against the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Christ of the Scriptures. Because of that it is good and pleasant to dwell together. And we must call out to one another: “Behold!” Something can be seen. Let us pay some good attention to it!

3. What exactly, then, is it that gives strength and encourages? This we are told at the end of the Psalm: “. . . for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.” In days of old this was very clear. For the blessing of the LORD was imposed upon the people, on the brethren who were dwelling together in unity in the sanctuary. A strong term is used: “commanded.” “The LORD commanded the blessing.” This blessing is personified and given a command by God. It consists of: “life for evermore,” of spiritual as well as material gifts which together form life, true life, a life that lasts forever.

4. Once again, we are not here in the temple, and this meeting is not a church service under the New Testament. Yet we all have been called to one and the same service of the LORD. We have come together because of that common service, in order to be strengthened and encouraged, and in order to pass this encouragement on to the churches that sent us — if, as we really hope, we can come to the exercising of a strong fellowship through the proposed International Conference of Reformed Churches. Because of that, we have access to the throne of grace and can ask for God’s blessing. We can plead on the ground of the promise given to us here in Psalm 133.

5. In the same faith and the same awareness of having been put in the same service of God and His Christ, our forefathers, in the days of the Great Reformation of the 16th century, undertook all sorts of activities. They tried to establish a confessional unity on the basis of the underlying unity of faith.

Not for nothing did we select Psalm 133. For this song became the motto of a certain document that — be it indirectly — was the consequence of one of the efforts undertaken during the age of the Reformation to bring the brethren together. I have in mind the *Harmonia Confessionum* of the year 1581. I hope to come back to this document later.

This brings us to history. Several efforts were made to make the brethren dwell together in unity, and join hands in the common struggle against the common enemy, and in that way encourage one another. For it is indeed very important that we, too, are going to dwell together, not only for these two weeks, but also as churches in a certain organization and according to Psalm 133. But it is also of great significance to realize that we are lining up with several generations that went before us in church history, and following the faithful ones throughout the ages. The King of the church, our Lord Jesus Christ, has not given us a place in church history for

nothing! We can even say that the motto of the *Harmonia Confessionum*, that is to say Psalm 133, is typical of the desire for true unity which we can distinguish among those people who wanted to live according to the Word of God.

6. This is already apparent at the very beginning of the Reformation of the 16th century. After a discussion with Cardinal Cajetan at Augsburg — which had no positive result — Martin Luther appealed to a general council of the church. This is well-known. However, our impression is that not many people realize the import of this action. Luther was very serious in this respect and must be taken seriously. Most likely he had been advised by some of his juridically trained friends. On the 28th of November 1518 he appeared, together with some witnesses, before a solicitor, using an official form, the so-called parisian form. He repeated this action on the 17th of November 1520 after having received the papal bull of June 15th.

This was a very important action. If the result would have been positive, it could have been a great blessing for the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. By an official act the church of those days would have returned to the Scriptural track of the ancient Christian church and its great general councils. For Luther asked for a free, universal, and Christian council.

These three adjectives are very important. By “free” Luther meant a council that would not be convened by the pope, nor be under his control or censorship. He was of the opinion that a council was superior to the pope in matters of faith. Such a council should be “universal,” which means: churches from all sorts of countries should be represented, just as was the case at the great councils of Nicea, Constantinople, Ephesus, and Chalcedon. It should also be “Christian”: its resolutions and statements should be based on the Scriptures only.

By appealing to such a free, universal, and Christian council, Martin Luther put the church on a sound and important track, that of living together in a sort of federation of churches. This was also strongly emphasized and supported by John Calvin.

Surely, general councils have no absolute authority in Luther’s opinion. The universal church had the last and final word, that is to say, the national churches — as we would say, the local congregations. For they had to compare the council’s actions with the Word of God. That way Luther tried to bring the church back in line with the old Christian councils. It is really striking that the Reformers had deep respect for these councils.

Seeing this character of Luther’s appeal to a general council, we may understand now that the pope did not want to lose control at any cost. He offered strong opposition against the idea of a council being superior to the pope in matters of faith. Several popes had taken the same stand before. Even more than once a prohibition was issued to appeal from the pope to a council.

Since Martin Luther did not acknowledge this prohibition, we can consider the convening of what later would become the Council of Trent as a response to Luther’s wishes. For it was convened and controlled by the pope. This fact, then, decided on the attitude taken by the Reformers. The question whether or not some delegates should be sent to the council was seriously considered and discussed among them. It seems that at least a nominally Lutheran delegation attended Trent in the period of 1551-1552, and also that John Calvin and his colleague, Pierre Viret, genuinely intended to attend and participate in the council at that time but could not



do so due to certain circumstances. However, the majority of them, after some brief consideration, responded in the negative. But anyhow, they all took the council seriously. They hoped it would be organized and held in the line of the old great councils. As soon as it appeared to be entirely different, they started to act and write on Trent in a declining and rejecting way.

7. We may repeat that also from the side of the Reformed people the convening of a general council was considered to be of great significance. They were of the opinion that such a council — just as in earlier days — could be a good instrument in upholding the pure doctrine and keeping true faith, or in leading the church towards reformation. Luther's alternative was a national synod. Even this may prove that he considered living in a federation of churches to be of great importance. To use the words of Psalm 133, they heartily could say "amen" to what it says: "Behold, how great and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."

8. It is no wonder, then, that Henry Bullinger, Ulrich Zwingli's successor in Zürich, in the year 1561 wrote a booklet on the councils. It may be useful to pass on a few lines from this booklet. In his Introduction he wrote: "For many years a good number of people have been speaking about a general council. They expect it to repair the damage which has been caused by the serious and harmful disputes that are going on in the Christian world, and to restore the church, which in many respects has fallen into decay. They are desirous of a legal reformation. I myself am of the opinion that there is no reason for despair, if only a legitimate council would be convened in an orderly way. But no improvement can be expected if it would be held according to papal arrangement and procedure. On the contrary, it would result in cruel rebellion and dreadful wars."

His booklet has two main sections. The first is on the meeting in Jerusalem, Acts 15, and what it can teach us for peace and reformation of the church. The second deals with the papal councils and their damaging results. The present council — that of Trent, which had been going on for some time when Bullinger published this booklet — cannot be expected to bring peace and reformation. It will only cause serious troubles, revolutions, and wars.

Bullinger, too, often refers to the great councils of the early Christian era and would like the church to get in line with them. He, too, did not take a negative stand over against councils and other forms of living together as churches, as if these would be totally insignificant. On the contrary, he deemed living in a sort of federation of churches very valuable.

9. Here again we could learn something for our own plans. We should not limit ourselves to a negative judgment concerning organizations like the World Council of Churches, the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, and others. But we have to take into account the Scriptures that consider the dwelling together of brethren to be useful for the church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

10. With this man, Henry Bullinger, John Calvin rather frequently discussed, both orally and by correspondence, the urgency and possibility of "Zürich" and "Geneva" going together. This, then, resulted in the acceptance of the *Consensus Tigurinus* in the year 1549. More than once Calvin contacted Bullinger in relation to the plans to hold religious talks with the Lutherans and to draw up an inventory of the divergencies and conformities between Lutherans and Reformed people.

11. John Calvin also frequently published on the

subject of councils, of course in relation to the Council of Trent in particular. He did so in his famous *Institutes*, chapter IX of Book IV, with the heading "Of Councils and their authority."

Some other publications from his hands are *Acta Synodi Tridentinae cum Antidoto*, 1547, and *Mémoire sur le conseil*. In his voluminous correspondence we find several letters devoted to the councils and the efforts of establishing church unity. It is characteristic that Calvin frequently used the term "consensus" in his writings.

12. However, his correspondence with Thomas Cranmer is best-known. Cranmer, the archbishop of Canterbury, was of great importance to the Reformation in England. In a letter to Bullinger he drew up a plan for a synod of "the most learned and eminent men," who should come together in England or somewhere else "in order to talk about the pure doctrine of the church and in particular about an agreement regarding the controversy on the sacraments." King Edward VI deemed this to be of great use for the sake of the Christian faith.

Cranmer wrote a similar letter to John Calvin: "I often have wished, and still continue to do so, that learned and Godly men, who are eminent for erudition and judgment, might meet together in some place of safety, where, by taking counsel together and comparing their respective opinions, they might deal with all the heads of ecclesiastical doctrine and hand down to posterity an authoritative work not only on the articles of the faith themselves but also on their wordings."

Over against Trent such a council could serve to refute the Roman heresy, restore the pure doctrine, and accomplish a consensus on the Lord's Supper. In spite of the fact that Cranmer was clearly thinking about a commonly accepted confession of faith, in particular on the Lord's Supper, the plan was considered to be rather vague.

From the response which John Calvin sent to Cranmer we quote the following lines: "Rightly and wisely, illustrious gentleman, you are of the opinion that in the present confusing situation of the church there is no better remedy than for some pious, wise men, who have been well trained in God's school, to come together in order to profess their agreement concerning the doctrine of Godliness." And also this: "If only it could be achieved that 'grave and learned men from the principal churches might meet together at a place appointed and, after diligent consideration of each article of the faith, hand down to posterity a definite form of doctrine according to their united opinion.'" For in his opinion it was "to be reckoned among the greatest evils of our time that the churches are so estranged from one another that human intercourse of society scarcely has a place among us, let alone the holy communion of the members of Christ which all persons profess with their lips, but which few sincerely honour with their actions." According to these last words Calvin was convinced that it is not sufficient to ascertain a unity of faith, but that it must be made visible through exercising it.

Further on in his letter we read a sentence which has more or less become famous: "I would not shrink from crossing ten seas, should that be necessary, for the purpose of attending such a gathering. There would be sufficient reason for me to do so even if I could be helpful to the Kingdom of England only. But now that a serious Scripturally founded consensus of learned men is required, for the purpose of which churches that are located far from one another should unite themselves, I

am of the opinion that neither energy nor pains should be spared.”

In the meantime, Cranmer had to inform Calvin that his project could not be carried out. He had also sent a letter to Philip Melancthon, but the latter never responded to it. Bullinger answered that this was not a suitable time for that sort of a council seeing that Germany and France were waging war against each other.

13. Yet the line that was included in Thomas Cranmer’s plan and which came to the fore in John Calvin’s response as well — that of trying to compose a common confession of faith for all evangelical churches in Europe — was taken up again at a later stage.

And so we are now close to the *Harmonia Confessionum* which we mentioned at the beginning, the motto of which we quoted: the words from Psalm 133: *Ecce quam bonum et quam iucundum est consentire fratres in unum*, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.”

14. But first we have to make mention of something else that proved that the Reformers did not completely write off the Church of Rome but desired to put it back on the track of the ancient Christian church. In the year 1561 Catharina de Médici, who was the regent of young King Charles IX of France, tried to pacify Roman Catholics and Reformed. She arranged a colloquium at Poissy, a suburb of the city of Paris. John Calvin could not

wanted the Protestants to establish a league, by which she herself, the Huguenots, and the Dutch Protestants would be protected against Rome. For this purpose she sent several envoys to the European continent. But her efforts, which were more of a political than of a religious character, failed.

One of these envoys visited Count John Casimir of the Palatinate, who had a long discussion with him about a possible general agreement between the Reformed churches, which could produce a common confession of faith. John Casimir wanted to contact the churches of France, The Netherlands, Switzerland, and Poland. He also wanted the queen of England to support his plans with her authority. This would make some impression upon the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics. The queen ought to send some delegates from England. He also wanted the church of Scotland to attend.

Elizabeth’s plans were not realized, but the Convention took place. It made arrangements for the writing of a common confession for all the Reformed churches. Originally, Zacharias Ursinus, one of the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism, was approached. But he was prevented from doing it. Then Hieronymus Zanchius, who had been appointed as Ursinus’ deputy, set to work. At the next meeting, to be held in the year 1578, it was to be finalized and adopted.

Zanchius, indeed, wrote a draft and sent it to Gene-

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*“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.”*

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attend. He was already ill. Theodor Beza took his place as head of a Reformed delegation. Certainly, the Roman Catholics called for submission of the Reformed delegates to the pope’s authority. Yet it came to a discussion. However, as soon as the papal nuncio arrived he referred to the Council of Trent as the only authorized body to make decisions. That way even this effort failed.

But in the meantime the Reformed people proved once again that they did not take a negative stand to all sorts of contacts. They did not put off the Church of Rome as a partner in discussions and wanted to seriously carry through the reformation of the church. They really desired the dwelling together as brethren, in obedience to and under the blessing of God’s Word.

15. The Church of Rome appeared to be unwavering. Because of that some more efforts were made to promote the unity among the Protestants. This resulted in the Convent of Frankfurt, which was held in the year 1577. It was closely related to the strong controversy that had developed between the Lutherans and the Reformed, since among the former the followers of Philip Melancthon had lost much of their influence. The Lutherans had taken a stronger stand over against the Reformed people than before. They were on their way to accepting an extreme-Lutheran confession regarding the Lord’s Supper, the *Formula Concordiae*. Its acceptance would mean a definite split between the two groups.

The prelude to this Convent coincided with an action undertaken by Queen Elizabeth I of England. She

va (Beza), Zürich, and some more places. But Geneva could not approve of it. Another plan was made there: to publish a *Harmonia Confessionum*, a collection of all the Reformed confessions. This way the material consensus between the respective Reformed churches would be shown. Besides, no blood-sealed confession would be subordinated to others. This *Harmonia Confessionum* was published in the year 1581. Even the original Lutheran confessions were included, to counterbalance the *Formula Concordiae*. Its motto was, as we mentioned before, the well-known line from Psalm 133 on the dwelling together in unity of the brethren.

16. Again this may teach us some lessons; for example this: that, even if the old ideal of a common confession of faith for all the Reformed churches cannot be realized, there is the alternative of making an inventory of the similarities and the divergencies between the churches.

As for our Constituent Assembly, we hope to be doing this, be it in a modest measure. In our opinion this has to be done before we will be able to organize a real International Conference of Reformed Churches. We have to know where we stand with one another in the unity of faith according to Psalm 133.

In this light the tabling of some of the “papers” must be considered, those on the confessions of faith and on church-political matters. Doing so — and this is something really important — we are in line with history. Together with the fathers of the great Reformation

we go back to the ancient Christian church, which in her councils had the privilege of keeping that which was committed to her trust by the apostles, and through them by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. What we are doing is very modest in character and quantity. We definitely do not claim to be on a level with the ancient councils and the activities of the days of the Reformation regarding a consensus. Yet we are of the opinion that the simple work we are going to do during this meeting is important. This is why we could ask for God's blessing with a good conscience.

17. We can be brief on the efforts which were undertaken later. One of them was made in the beginning of the 17th century. The name of Pierre du Moulin, a Frenchman, is related to it. He, too, wanted to create a form of unity between the respective churches. He tried to get the support of the princes of those countries that had withdrawn from the pope's jurisdiction. King James I of England — well-known from the "King James Version" of the Bible — was very important to him. Du Moulin wanted the French, Dutch, and Swiss churches to send two delegates each, and the German principalities one or two each. It would be fine if the Lutheran rulers could be made interested as well, among others the king of Denmark and the princes of Saxony and Brunswick.

The province of Zeeland in The Netherlands would be a suitable place, according to him. All the respective confessions should be tabled and made to one single confession, which should be accepted by the rulers and the national synods. A formal proposal was made at the synod of the French churches held in the year 1614. With the approval and support of Philip du Plessis-Mornay, the leader of the Huguenots, du Moulin went to England the next year in order to personally discuss his plan with King James.

18. The Synod of Dordrecht 1618/19 did not officially deal with the plan. But it was indeed discussed in the lobbies. If it had been discussed and accepted at this synod, the Canons of Dort would never have been written, and the Belgic Confession of Faith would have had to abandon the field, while the Westminster Standards might never have come into existence. And today — just to continue our fantasies for a moment — we would be together here on the basis of one common confession of faith.

But let us return to reality. One of the counteracting factors was that du Moulin, who had been delegated to "Dordrecht" by the French churches, was prohibited from leaving the country. His king had forbidden him and his fellow delegates to leave for The Netherlands. Therefore du Moulin laid his plans before a number of theologians who would attend the Synod of Dordrecht.

The synod's chairman, the Rev. Bogerman, seems to have played a prominent role in this matter. Ultimately, he came to the conclusion that the synod had no authority to replace the Belgic Confession by any other. Besides, there were some considerable differences in church policy: King James was a strong supporter of the bishop's office. A better way would be for the respective national churches to approve one another's confessions and not make any amendments without the consent of the other churches.

19. If our dwelling together of these two weeks would result in the entering into a formal relationship, we might consider doing the same in the future. In this respect it is without any doubt very useful, during these weeks, to have a look at some of the divergencies in our

various confessions and church orders.

20. Anyhow, from what we have seen from history, it may be clear that the confessions of the churches have played and are still playing a prominent role in the matter of church unity. For this reason the Draft Constitution for an International Conference of Reformed Churches not only speaks of having some Scriptural confessions of faith but also of adhering and being faithful to them. They really have to function in the churches concerned!

In this respect our being together and the organization we have planned is distinct from the situation in the Reformed Ecumenical Synod. In its "foundation" the RES refers to all kinds of confessions, but it unfortunately tolerates churches that are not faithful to their own confessions, e.g., the "synodical" churches here in The Netherlands, and the Christian Reformed Church in the United States and Canada.

We differ even more strongly from the World Council of Churches. This organization, indeed, has a "Constitution" that must be signed by all the member churches. But in the meantime it leaves them free in the interpretation and understanding of this constitution. It is no wonder that all sorts of heresies are tolerated.

It is interesting to hear from these quarters that some efforts are being made to write one single confession of faith that is intended to be accepted by the whole ecclesiastical world. At first sight this plan may resemble the Reformers' ideal. Yet the gap is world-wide. For the supporters of this idea are of the opinion that it is high time to write a confession which expresses what is occupying the minds of the people of this era, e.g., the struggle against the "sin" of discrimination in any respect, the battle against poverty and for disarmament. They deem the ancient creeds, e.g., the Nicene Creed, to be useless, for these lack those elements. Therefore they want to formulate a better confession of faith. But this way they fundamentally differ from the Reformers who desired to lead the Christian church back to the truth of the Scriptures as it was confessed in a pure and faithful way in the ancient creeds and by the great councils.

Since we in our proposed organization want to follow the same track, we take a stand that fundamentally differs from this horizontalism. There is an unbridgeable gap between the WCC and us!

21. We would like to touch lightly on a few more historical facts. In Scotland as well as in England the desire to have international meetings was recorded in some official documents.

*The Second Book of Discipline* of the Church of Scotland, 1578, mentions four ecclesiastical assemblies: one consisting of "particular kirks and congregations," another of a province, a third one of the whole nation, and finally "of all and divers nationis professing ane Jesus Chryst."

The English *Book of Discipline*, 1587, finishes with the following sentence: "Thus much for particular meetings, the universal followeth, which is called a general or oecumenical council, which is a meeting of the chosen men of every national synod."

And *The Form of Presbyterian Church-Government*, that is to say, the Presbyterian Church Order, dating back to the year 1645, under the heading "Of Synodical Assemblies" had: "Synodical assemblies may lawfully be of several sorts, as provincial, national, and oecumenical."

22. Up till now we have not made any mention of



the increase of the church by means of the mission work. This is no wonder. For the circumstances were very difficult in the age of the Reformation. However, at this meeting we do hope to give some good attention to it.

This, too, can be based on Biblical grounds. For the prophet Isaiah foretold the spreading of the gospel to "the islands." Salvation would be granted to the Gentiles who would respond to the gospel preaching with repentance and conversion. That way the dwelling together in unity of brethren from many nations became subject of the prophecy. Well, under the New Testament this has been fulfilled. Our present meeting is only a small proof of that.

But Christ's work of gathering His church together is not finished yet. It is still going on, until the great and final day will be there. The dwelling together of the brethren is subject to expansion. That is why we hope to dis-

cuss a paper on the mission work. That is why we will also listen to another paper on the matter of ecclesiastical fellowship and preliminary ecclesiastical contact between the churches, a special section of which will deal with questions regarding the so-called "double relationships." We hope that both documents and their discussions may result in a close cooperation between all churches represented and in effective mutual help.

23. We have not given our meeting a sonorous name like Council, Synod, Convent, or anything like that. Yet we are of the opinion that we are lining up with the ancient Christian church and its four great ecumenical councils, and also with the Reformers and their spiritual posterity. In all modesty we are privileged to dwell together in unity. Let our dwelling together be a working together. Yes indeed, to work, dear brethren! On behalf of our churches here in The Netherlands we warmly welcome you all for that purpose in particular!



Rev. J. Visscher

## *A report on The Constituent Assembly of the International Conference of Reformed Churches*

The Constituent Assembly of the International Conference of Reformed Churches which was held from October 26 - November 4, 1982, in Groningen, The Netherlands, is now history. For nine days delegates from nine churches and from five continents met together and laid the foundation for what in the future will come to be known as The International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC).

### *Prayer Meeting*

The evening before the Constituent Assembly was to open, a Prayer Meeting was held in the Refajah Church of Groningen-South. Rev. G. van Rongen of The Netherlands opened that meeting and read the Scriptures: Psalm 46 and Matthew 28:16-20. A meditation was given by the Rev. K. Bruning of Australia on Hebrews 13:8, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever." He pointed out that the Old Testament background for these words might well be found in Psalm 102:27, "... but Thou art the same . . . ." There the

Psalmist stresses the fact that even though the church is in difficult circumstances, yet it can take courage in the knowledge that the LORD does not change. His promises remain true and certain. This becomes even more clear when we turn to the New Testament and behold the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. The entire history of the church points to the great reality that Jesus Christ remains the same. He cares for His people in all times and circumstances. Certainly the delegates gathered in Groningen, said the Rev. Bruning, can testify to that fact as they look back over the history of their respective churches.

In addition, he said, the fact that Christ cares for His own is proven in that He allows this gathering to take place. And then it is good that at the very outset of these meetings all attention is directed to the confession that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow. This confession is the only abiding reality and certainty. It is a confession that comes to the church through the Scriptures alone. On that basis the children

of God must work, and not upon any other. All false teachings must be rejected and all false fellowship must be denied. Even if it stands alone, the church must stand on the solid foundation of the Word of God; and that applies to this gathering too. Only in faithfulness to the Word of the Lord and the Lord of the Word must it do its work.

Once the Rev. Bruning had concluded his meditation, the Rev. D.W.H. Thomas of Northern Ireland led the meeting in prayer, after which Psalm 84 was sung and the meeting came to a close. Thereafter an opportunity was given for fellowship and introductions to the hosts and hostesses of the delegates.

#### *The Constituent Assembly Opens*

On Tuesday morning, October 26, the delegates from the various churches gathered together in the Refajah Church for the opening session. On behalf of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands, the Rev. G. van Rongen opened the meeting. He welcomed all of the delegates and spoke an opening word (the contents of which can be found elsewhere in this magazine). In it he pointed to the past and the attempts that have been made in the history of the church to come to greater unity in doctrine and practice on an international level. In closing, he expressed the opinion that in this Assembly "we are lining up with the ancient Christian church and its four great ecumenical councils, and also with the Reformers and their spiritual posterity."

Immediately after his address, the Rev. G. van Rongen proposed, on behalf of the convening and hosting church, the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands, that the following executive be appointed: Chairman — the Rev. G. van Rongen of The Netherlands, Vice-Chairman — the Rev. K. Bruning of Australia, Clerk — the Rev. M. van Beveren of Canada. This proposal was acceptable to all the participants. Next, he presented, also on behalf of the Dutch churches and deputies, a number of recommendations regarding the actual proceedings of the meetings. They related to the agenda, the timetable of events, the press, the actual sessions, etc. These too were deemed acceptable by the delegates.

#### *The Churches Represented*

After this each of the churches represented received an opportunity to introduce itself. The churches present and their delegates were as follows:

The Free Reformed Churches of Australia

— Rev. K. Bruning and Dr. S.G. Hur

The Canadian Reformed Churches

— Rev. M. van Beveren and Rev. J. Visscher

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Taiwan, S.P.

— Rev. J.Y. Lin

The Presbyterian Church in Korea

— Dr. K.S. Lee

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland

— Rev. D.W.H. Thomas

The Free Church of Scotland

— Rev. D. Lamont and Rev. J.N. Macleod

The Free Reformed Churches in South Africa

— Rev. K.J. Kapteyn and Elder J. Moes

The Reformed Churches on East-Sumba/Savu

— Rev. J. Klamer and Rev. C. van Kalker

The Reformed Churches in The Netherlands

— Dr. K. Deddens and Rev. G. van Rongen

It should be noted that the above churches were invited by the host church, the Reformed Churches of The Netherlands, to attend the Assembly. They were

invited by virtue of the fact that the Dutch churches either have ecclesiastical fellowship or temporary ecclesiastical contact with these churches. Churches which belong to either of these two categories, but which for one reason or another were not able to come, include the Korean Presbyterian Church of São Paulo, Brazil, the Dutch Reformed Church of Sri Lanka, the Reformed Church of Japan, and the Reformed Churches in South Africa. The first was not represented due to the passing of its minister. The second church was slated to be present but certain difficulties arose with the delegation. The third church had to excuse itself due to the fact that their General Assembly was scheduled to meet at the same time as the Constituent Assembly. As for the last church, it was absent due to the fact that adequate progress had not been made in establishing temporary ecclesiastical contact between it and the inviting Dutch churches.

In all, then, there were fifteen delegates at the Constituent Assembly. Dr. B.S. Oh was to have represented the Korean churches along with Dr. Lee; however, the heavy workload related to his being rector of the College and Seminary in Pusan made that impossible. The churches on East-Sumba/Savu considered themselves too small and bereft of manpower to send their own representatives and asked the Rev. Klamer and the Rev. van Kalker, two former missionaries, to stand in for them.

#### *Discussion — Proposed Dutch Constitution*

Once the introductions were concluded, the Assembly went over to a discussion of the draft Constitution that the Dutch deputies had written and distributed beforehand to the delegates. In these preliminary remarks a strong plea was made by both the Irish and Scottish delegates not to establish a conference that recognizes only one set of Reformational confessions, namely, the Three Forms of Unity, and one particular polity, namely, that of Dort, but also to give due recognition to the Reformational confessions of other countries, for example, England, Scotland, France, Switzerland, etc. The same applies to the matter of polity; there, too, other Reformed polities must be recognized as legitimate as well. In short, these brothers feared that the confessions and polity of one church, the Dutch, and its sister churches, would become the touchstones and exclusive hallmarks of what it means to be Reformed. The Conference, according to them, should be a truly international one, one that gives equal weight to the Reformed and the Presbyterian traditions, if one can speak of two basic "traditions."

No sooner had the Irish and Scottish delegates made their point, when the delegate from South Africa rose to react to the draft and in so doing proposed the exact point that the former delegates wanted so much to avoid. The delegate expressed the opinion that in the basis of the Constitution only the Three Forms of Unity should be mentioned. That should suffice for all of the participants. He also suggested that it would be better to speak about "Conferences" than about Conference in the singular.

For their part, the Canadian delegates made a number of critical remarks dealing with the proposed basis, the participants, and other aspects of the draft. They criticized the fact that the Dutch churches kept to themselves the power of determining who should or should not be invited to the Assembly, and as such rejected the request also to invite the Orthodox Presby-



Representatives to the ICRC and the Dutch Synodical Committee for relations with foreign churches (Com.) were photographed as they attended the first meeting.

From left to right — Seated: Prof. Dr. J. Doekes (advisor), Rev. K. Brüning — *Australia*, Rev. G. van Rongen — *Netherlands*, Rev. M. van Beveren — *Canada*, Prof. H.M. Ohmann (Com.).

Standing: Mr. J.J. Schreuder (Com.), Mr. D.J. van Wijnen (Com.), Rev. M. Brandes (Com.), Mr. H.W. Rodink (Com.), Mr. C.J. Smallenbroek (Com.), Rev. C. van Kalker — *Sumba / Savu*, Rev. J. Bomhof (Com.), Dr. K. Deddens — *Netherlands*, Rev. J. Visscher — *Canada*, Rev. J. de Gelder (Com.), Dr. Kum Sam Lee — *South Korea*, Rev. J.Y. Lin — *Taiwan*, Rev. D.W.H. Thomas — *Ireland*, Rev. S.G. Huh — *Australia*, Rev. K.J. Kapteijn — *South Africa*, Rev. J.N. Macleod — *Scotland*, Mr. J. Moes — *South Africa*, Mr. Hensen (Com.), Rev. D. Lamont — *Scotland*.

terian Church. They also presented an alternate draft Constitution which was considerably more extensive than the Dutch submission.

The final result of all of these reactions to the Dutch draft was that the Executive came forward later in the day with a proposal to refer the whole matter of the Constitution to a Study Committee. This Committee was made up of the following delegates: Rev. J.N. Macleod (Scotland), Rev. D.W.H. Thomas (Ireland), and Rev. J. Visscher (Canada). The Dutch deputies, Rev. M. Brandes and br. D.J. van Wijnen, also sat in on the meetings of the Committee.

#### *Paper — Dr. L. Doekes*

Late in the afternoon of that first day, Dr. L. Doekes, the retired professor of dogmatics at the Theological College in Kampen, presented his paper on "Harmony and Variety in Reformed Confessions." In it he first outlined the large measure of agreement between the Westminster Confession and the Three Forms of Unity. "In all its parts," he said, "the harmony (of the Westminster Standards) with the Three Forms of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands is very evident." He stated that this "has been acknowledged again and again with thankfulness."

This agreement, however, is not of such a nature

that it should be interpreted in the sense that there are no differences between the two sets of confessions. Dr. Doekes pointed to a number of differences, many of which are familiar to our readers, such as the expression "the covenant of works," the use of the word "elect" in the Larger Catechism Q&A 31, the teaching of the church as visible and invisible, the expression "highest heavens," the matter of the souls having an "immortal subsistence," the fourth commandment and its exposition, and a few more items.

Nevertheless, with these remarks Dr. Doekes said that he did not want to leave the impression that there were "controversies" between the Standards and the Forms; rather he would prefer to speak about "slight divergencies."

The discussion that followed this paper was, to say the least, very interesting. Because most of it was held in closed session, I am not at liberty to reveal the way that the discussion proceeded. Suffice it to say that those delegates who represented churches which have the Westminster Standards as their subordinate standards took the opportunity to question, debate, and disagree with some of the evaluations made. Later, the delegates looked back on this session with its frank and open debate as a vital step in bringing the participants closer together. The suggestion was also made that

once the Conference became a reality it would be very beneficial to commission study committees on an international level to look at the differences between our respective traditions. Topics such as "The Church in the Reformed Confessions" and "The Doctrine of the Covenant in the Reformed Confessions" were even mentioned. Time will tell whether any of the member churches will request these points to be placed on a future agenda.

In closing the discussion, the chairman thanked Dr. Doekes for his paper and all the work that he had put into it. Dr. Doekes, on his part, expressed appreciation for the fact that he had been invited to speak, and he hoped that his humble efforts would serve the cause of the Conference.

As a final closing note to the discussion, the chairman, on behalf of the Executive, proposed that the delegates rise to express their agreement with the fact that the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards should *together* serve as the basis of the International Conference. This all of the delegates proceeded to do, with the sole exception of the delegates from South Africa, who stated that they could not agree with the proposal for the reason that they had not acquainted themselves with the Westminster Standards to the extent that they could say that they were Reformed creeds. They added to this the fact that their General Synod had never dealt with the matter of the Westminster Standards and taken a position on them and that hence they, as delegates, could not do so either.

#### *Constitution Committee Reports*

On Wednesday, October 27, the Assembly began its session with a continuation of the discussion of the Dutch draft of the Constitution. After one round the Constitution Committee was given the opportunity to begin its work. The remainder of the delegates spent the morning and afternoon reading and studying the other papers that would be delivered in the coming days. For various reasons, the Dutch deputies had been unable to send this material to the delegates prior to the meeting.

That evening the Assembly went back into session. The Constitution Committee then presented the delegates with a completely new draft. This was duly read and the discussion began once more. With very little disagreement the Assembly adopted Article 1 which states, "The name shall be The International Conference of Reformed Churches." Herewith the original suggestion of the Dutch deputies was agreed to. Other names, such as "Council," "Conferences," "Alliance," were rejected as being either too pretentious or too closely identified with other organizations whose aims and practices are less than laudable.

#### *Basis*

On the question of the Basis, a much more prolonged discussion took place. This was partly due to the fact that the Committee proposed: "The basis of the Conference shall be the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity (the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort) and the Westminster Standards (the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms)." After this it had added, "Subscription to this basis means that we find nothing in the Confessions of the member churches that hinders us from the fullest participation in this Conference in respect to its purpose." It was especially this last sentence that became the focal point of debate.

The Committee originally proposed it in order to help the delegates from South Africa who, although they had not studied the Westminster Standards, nevertheless had certain reservations about them. On behalf of the Committee, the Rev. J.N. Macleod stated that such a clause would mean that a participating church need not feel itself compelled to express agreement with every expression or formulation in, for example, the Westminster Confession. It would simply be recognizing the fact that such a confession, in spite of what reservations there might be about it, is basically Reformed.

In reaction to this, several delegates took the opportunity to express their negative opinion about this further clarification of the Basis. They felt that it was a weakening. The result was that the Assembly decided to delete this last sentence from the Constitution.

The Assembly was now at the point of adopting the Basis, and this it did with unanimous agreement. All of the delegates were convinced that both the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards should have an equal place in the Basis of the Conference.

#### *Purpose*

Having thus adopted Articles 1 and 2, the Assembly went on to consider the Purpose (Article 3). It was not until Thursday morning, October 28, that the meeting concluded its discussion on this matter. The final redaction reads as follows: "The purpose of the Conference shall be:

1. to express and promote the unity of faith that the member churches have in Christ;
2. to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the member churches;
3. to encourage co-operation among the member churches in the fulfillment of the missionary and other mandates;
4. to study the common problems and issues that confront the member churches and to aim for recommendations with respect to these matters;
5. to present a Reformed testimony to the world."

With respect to the first purpose not too much discussion took place. However, when it came to the second a number of questions were raised. This was due to the fact that the Dutch draft spoke not about the "*fullest* ecclesiastical fellowship" but about "*full* ecclesiastical fellowship." Why did the Committee change "full" to "fullest?" It was because here we ran into a question of terminology. Most of the delegates from Presbyterian churches were mystified by the use of the word "full," as if to say that it is also possible to have a relationship with another church that is less than full. According to them, when you have a relationship with a certain church it is a constant one. However, that is not the case necessarily with the Reformed churches, for they regard correspondence as the ultimate relationship and everything that comes before that is preliminary or temporary. First you have that partial relationship called "ecclesiastical contact," and then later you come to that full relationship called "correspondence" or "ecclesiastical fellowship."

In order to surmount these differences of approach, the Committee proposed the expression "the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship." In this way all of the participants would be encouraged to strive for the closest possible relationship with each other.

Another purpose that tended to draw a fair amount of debate was the last one, about presenting "a Reformed testimony to the world." Here one of the South

African delegates remarked that it is the duty of the church to do this and not the Conference. To this, one of the Canadian delegates reacted by saying that it is a well-known fact that the church rarely, if ever, addresses itself to the world or to the political powers that be.

Still, the point of the Constitution Committee in proposing this addition to the Purpose was not to push the Conference in the direction of making all kinds of political or economic declarations to the world. Rather, what was envisaged was that in adopting future reports of study committees, along with their recommendations, the Conference would be giving a testimony to the truth in a world that is so easily influenced by false churches and false philosophies. Over against humanism and liberalism there would stand the witness of the Gospel.

In the end the five-fold purpose of the Conference was adopted, with only the South African delegates voting against. They continued to have certain reservations and wanted additional restrictions made. The Assembly was not convinced by their argumentation.

#### Membership

The attention of the meeting now shifted to Article 4 of the Constitution, which deals with membership. It reads, as finally adopted,

“1. Those churches shall be admitted as members which:

- a) adhere and are faithful to the confessional standards stated in the Basis;
- b) furnish — (i) their confessional standards; (ii) their form of government; (iii) their form of subscription; (iv) their declaratory acts (if applicable);
- c) are accepted by a two-thirds majority of the member churches — every member church having one vote;
- d) are not members of the World Council of Churches or any other organization whose aims and practices are deemed to be in conflict with the Basis.

2. Termination of membership shall be by a two-thirds majority whenever the Conference is of the opinion that the member church in its doctrine and/or practice is no longer in agreement with the Basis.”

For the most part this article tends to be self-explanatory and thus it did not give rise to much debate. “Declaratory acts” are mentioned and for the most part our readers will wonder what that refers to. It has to do with the practice whereby a church, although recognizing a certain confession, yet declares itself not to be bound by certain parts of that confession. In the Belgic Confession, Article 36, there is the case of the twenty words that are placed in brackets. In that way the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands have declared that they do not consider themselves to be bound by such a description of the role of the magistrate. In a way this functions as a declaratory act.

Another point under membership that drew some attention was the explicit mention of the World Council of Churches. One of the South African delegates wanted the Reformed Ecumenical Synod included as well. This did not meet with acceptance on the part of the other delegates. A Canadian delegate pointed out that such a restriction in the Constitution would be unacceptable to the Canadian Reformed Churches who have accepted the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as a true church even though it is still a member of the RES. Also the Dutch



Rev. K. Bruning  
Vice-Chairman.



Rev. M. van  
Beveren, Clerk.

delegates expressed their disagreement stating that they have never made “breaking with the RES” an absolute condition for entering into temporary ecclesiastical contact. Plus, they said, such an addition would give the appearance that the ICRC is merely a counter-RES.

#### Authority

Already before the Assembly met in Groningen, the church press in various countries asked certain questions about the authority of the Conference and issued warnings not to allow the Conference to infringe on the exclusive rights and prerogatives of the local member churches. Well, this was never a point of issue. All of the delegates were unanimous in the opinion that the Conference would simply function as an *advisory body*. Hence Article 5 of the Constitution reads, “The conclusions of the Conference shall be advisory in character. Member churches are urged to receive the decisions of



the Conference and are recommended to work towards their implementation.”

One final article remained to be dealt with in the Constitution, and that was the matter of amending. On this point the meeting decided that all constitutional amendments would require a two-thirds majority.

With this step the Constitution was finalized — a fact that the chairman took note of with thanksgiving. The Regulations (or By-laws) would be next, but first the Dutch deputies had planned an outing. All of the representatives were invited to a welcome reception at the Theological College in Kampen.

#### *An Outing to Kampen*

On Thursday afternoon, once we had finished our customary warm lunch at the Crest Hotel, a touring bus stood ready to take us all to Kampen. Upon our arrival we were welcomed informally by the faculty and received an opportunity to make each other's acquaintance. Later the rector, Prof. Dr. J. Douma, officially welcomed us and stated that he, along with the rest of the faculty, were very pleased that they could host the delegates for an afternoon and evening. He made mention of the historic significance of the Conference and expressed the hope that the Lord would bless the work being done in Groningen.

Thereafter the floor was given to professors J. Lettinga, H.M. Ohmann, and C. Trimp to explain the course of study in their particular departments, as well as the set-up of the Theological College generally.

That evening a dinner was given in the Eudokia Church in Kampen, at which not only the delegates and the professors, but also the international students studying at the College and the student council were in attendance. It was a fine occasion to exchange opinions and ideas on an informal level.

From the church we proceeded once again to the College where we were given a tour of the premises by Prof. Ohmann and Prof. Lettinga. The former led us through the actual College building which houses the administrative offices, the lecture rooms, the student council and the senate chambers, and the study rooms of the professors. The latter led us to the new library complex that was completed a few years ago. It is just around the block from the main building, and, I might add on a personal note, that it is a most beautiful and functional building. It consists of both a very old part that was completely restored and a new part that has been made to blend it remarkably well with the old. No doubt the faculty and students are very pleased with this new facility. Perhaps they would be even happier if they could have access to the stacks, but, then, one cannot have everything.

In rounding off the afternoon and evening, Prof. Ohmann thanked the brothers for the opportunity to meet together in this way. He too expressed the hope that the Lord would bless the efforts of the Assembly and that the College wished it every success. On behalf of the delegates the Rev. D. Lamont of Scotland thanked Prof. Ohmann as the representative of the College for the gracious way that we had been received and for the unique manner in which he had led the reception. For those of us in Canada who are familiar with Prof. Ohmann, that word “unique” will convey all kinds of warm impressions.

With these final words, the gathering dispersed. The professors headed for home and the delegates filed onto the bus that would bring them back to Groningen, back to work.

#### *The Regulations*

On the next day, Friday, October 29, the Constitution Committee served the meeting with a set of proposed Regulations. Part of these Regulations were adopted in the morning and part in the afternoon. On the whole they did not give rise to a great deal of debate. Most of the points made were of a technical nature.

Article 1 of these Regulations establishes that the Conference will meet every four years. Article 2 deals with the Executive Officers, namely, a chairman, a vice-chairman, a recording secretary, and a corresponding secretary. In order to facilitate proper communication between the members during the interim between Conference meetings, the position of corresponding secretary will be a position that remains in force until the next meeting of the Conference. To supervise the work of the secretary, the remainder of the executive will form an Interim Committee. Once they report to the next Conference meeting, they will be dismissed.

Article 3 deals with the duties of this Interim Committee. Article 4 deals with the matter of appointing study committees, and Article 5 with the subject of participants. There a distinction is made between voting delegates, advisory delegates, observer delegates, and visiting delegates. As the name suggests, only the first will have voting rights. The role of the advisory delegates is self-explanatory. Each church may send two, and it is expected that in most cases professors of theology will be dispatched. Observer delegates are those who represent churches that have made application for membership, whereas visiting delegates refers to representatives from churches who are interested in joining but who first want to become better acquainted with the Conference.

It is interesting to note that, regardless of the size of the member church, each member will be entitled to send no more than two voting delegates. On the one hand, this may give rise to the charge of unfair representation, but, on the other hand, it safeguards against the danger that one or more large churches may attempt to manipulate the Conference.

The next article, Article 6, deals with the convocation of the Conference meeting and spells out the duties of the convening church. Then we come to Article 7, which relates to the matter of agenda material. Also here one comes across a basic point. In order to prevent the Conference from receiving a position independent of the member churches, it is expressly stated that all matters on the agenda must come from the churches. The Conference has no right to determine its own agenda. It shall place on its agenda all correspondence from member churches, applications for membership, internal reports from its study committees, Secretary, and Interim Committee. Finally, before an invitation will be sent to another church to send observers with a view to joining the Conference, it must have the support of at least two churches.

Thus it is that we come to the last articles. Article 8 deals with rules of order, Article 9 with finances, and that remains to be worked out. Finally, Article 10 deals with amendments to the Regulations.

By Friday evening the Assembly had finished laying the basis for the International Conference of Reformed Churches. The first and primary task of the delegates had been completed. What remained to deal with were the Interim Rules that the Constitution Committee was charged to draw up, and the rest of the papers that were on the agenda.

*Paper — Prof. D. Deddens*

On the same Friday that the Regulations were finalized, Prof. D. Deddens of the Theological College in Kampen received the opportunity to present his paper entitled, "The Unity of Faith As Gift and Mandate and Its Significance For Having Various Forms of Church Government." In this very detailed and extensive paper he outlined the historical backgrounds of the church polity of Dort and Westminster. He showed how these polities differed from each other at certain points and agreed with one another at other points. He went through the offices, the church assemblies, the supervision of doctrine and public worship, and the discipline, and described how they function in the respective traditions. In conclusion, he stated that "to have different forms of Church government has for the Presbyterian and Reformed church communities, which in all things wanted to be guided by the pure Word of God, never been an impediment to go together."

This paper naturally gave rise to a good deal of



*Dr. S.G. Hur (left) speaking with Rev. D. Lamont.*

debate. A Scottish delegate rose to express his appreciation for the way that Prof. Deddens had researched and presented his paper. A Canadian delegate asked whether in the Presbyterian system the presbytery did not dominate over the local congregation and also whether the fact that the minister was a member of the presbytery did not infringe on the rights of the session?

In response, both Prof. Deddens, as well as some of the delegates from Presbyterian churches, remarked that that was not a proper way of looking at the presbytery. The presbytery does not dominate over the local church and the fact that the minister is a member of the presbytery does not in any sense take away from the fact that his first relationship and responsibility is to the local church session. It is that session that exercises pastoral care over the minister.

Other questions that were brought to the fore also helped a great deal in giving the delegates a better understanding of each other's church polity. A number

of times it came to the fore that negative evaluations about each other's polity were often based either on ignorance or upon hasty judgments. In conclusion, Prof. Deddens was thanked for his contribution, and the hope was expressed that he would serve the churches with more studies on this matter in the future.

*Paper — Rev. P. Van Gulp*

Next on the agenda of that loaded Friday was the paper that the Dutch deputies had requested the Rev. P. Van Gulp to give on the topic, "The Unity of Faith As Gift and Mandate and Its Significance For the Reflection On Contacts and Rules With Other Churches." Rev. Van Gulp is currently the minister of the Reformed Church at Emmen, The Netherlands, and is a former member of The Committee For Relations With Churches Abroad.

In his paper Rev. Van Gulp described the Dutch rules for relations with other churches. He went into the matter of both "sister church relationship" and "preliminary ecclesiastical contact" and showed how they functioned. Thereafter, he went on to deal with the doctrine of the Church and with the question of denominationalism. In summing up, he said, "The ecumenical fellowship of Reformed (Presbyterian) Churches all over the world will be strengthened when we can agree on the nature of and the rules for the true fellowship in the Lord."

In the course of the discussion that followed, it became evident again that the Presbyterian churches have an approach to interchurch relations that is not nearly as defined and developed as that of the Reformed churches. The latter have hard and fast rules, whereas the former are more flexible in the creation and application of rules for relations with other churches. The latter try to apply the same rules to every case, whereas the former look at each church on an individual basis and then adopt rules that will function best in that given instance.

Still, that was not the only point that crystallized in the course of the discussions. It also became evident that almost all of the delegates were not in agreement with how Rev. Van Gulp had stated the matter of relations with other churches in the same country. In his presentation, Rev. Van Gulp said that when there are two true churches in the same land they must unite within a certain given period of time — he suggested six years — or else they must separate from each other "as from people not belonging to the Church," the implication being that those who refuse to unite are by that very fact a false church.

When the speaker was challenged on this point and asked to clarify it, he mentioned the example of the relations between the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands and the Christian Reformed Churches in The Netherlands and how for thirty years they had been trying to come together without success. Some people, he said, take the position that the contact has gone on long enough and should be terminated, and hence the other church should be characterized as false. Others are not willing to make such a judgment and want the contact to continue. In light of this he posed the question, "Does a true church remain true if it refuses to join a fellow true church for reasons which are not Scriptural?"

Various delegates remarked that they could not find themselves in the "either/or" of Rev. Van Gulp. If what Rev. Van Gulp said was true then almost every one of the churches present at the Assembly is guilty of sin, for in Australia, Canada, South Africa, etc., attempts at closer

contact with other churches have been made and have not succeeded. Yet none of these unfruitful negotiations has resulted in these churches being branded as "false." Indeed, in every case great caution is exercised so as not to sit in judgment.

On a related, but slightly different, note, one of the Canadian delegates asked the question, "Where do we go from here? Are the Presbyterian churches here represented willing to adopt the rules that the Reformed churches have for correspondence, or are the brothers of the opinion that basically two sets of rules should operate, one among Presbyterian churches and another among Reformed churches?"

Rev. Van Gorp reacted negatively to the suggestion of two sets of rules and could not see why both "traditions" could not come to agreement on this point. True, there are differences between us, but they are not of such a basic nature. Why, he reminded the delegates, Prof. Dr. K. Schilder always taught and believed that the Westminster Confession was truly Reformed.

Furthermore, he pointed out that "fraternal relations" does not have the same content in every Presbyterian Church. The one church applies it in a stricter way than another. He also cited the case of the Christian Reformed Church which changed its rules for interchurch relations in order to accommodate the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (Synodical).

It can be gathered that this paper and discussion left many questions unanswered and many delegates somewhat dissatisfied. The hope was expressed that in the future this topic would be placed on the agenda again or else that a Study Committee would be appointed by an upcoming meeting of the Conference to research the matter in greater depth and come forward with some definitive recommendations.

Once again the chairman thanked the speaker for his contribution and his willingness to field difficult questions. The Assembly was then adjourned for the weekend.

#### *Interim Rules*

On Monday morning, November 1, most of the delegates received the opportunity to sleep in, but such was not the case for the members of the Constitution Committee who had to meet early and prepare the Interim Rules that would be dealt with that same afternoon.

At 2:00 p.m. the Assembly once again opened another session and turned its attention to the proposed Interim Rules. This task occupied the meeting for its entire afternoon sitting. In the end seven articles were adopted. The first deals with the Convening Church for the first meeting of the Conference. It was decided to appoint the Free Church of Scotland to host this meeting from September 3-13, 1985, in Edinburgh. The alternate Convening Church is the Reformed Churches of The Netherlands.

It was also decided to appoint the Rev. M. van Beveren of Canada as the Provisional Secretary, and the Rev. J. Visscher of Canada as his alternate.

Furthermore, the Assembly accepted the proposal that all of the churches represented at the Constituent Assembly in Groningen should be recognized as "established members of the Conference," if they decide to join. Each of these churches will also be asked to submit a list of churches whose doctrine and practice is known by them to be in harmony with the Basis. Upon receiving that list the Secretary will send to these churches a copy

of the Constitution, the Regulations, and the Interim Rules, together with a letter stating that they *may* apply for membership in the Conference.

Finally, the matter of finances was dealt with. The Reformed Churches of The Netherlands agreed to bear the cost of publishing and distributing the *Proceedings* of the Assembly. This was taken note of with gratitude. Also, the Provisional Committee, composed of one member from the Irish, Dutch, and Scottish churches, shall serve the first meeting of the Conference with a proposal regarding an equitable assessment formula.

No doubt there will be some questions about the fact that the Assembly decided to recognize all of the participants at Groningen as "established members," especially since some of these churches are unfamiliar to us. What needs to be realized, however, is that the Conference has to start somewhere. It has to have a certain body of members in place when it comes to the first meeting of the Conference, otherwise there will be difficulties with constituting the meeting, as well as with judging applications for membership. To surmount these problems the Assembly decided in a way to "legitimize" the invitations that the Dutch churches had originally extended. We must trust that their invitations went to the proper addresses. And, indeed, it should be said that there was nothing to suggest in all of the discussions that each of the participants was not solidly based on the Word of God and their subordinate confessional standards or forms.

#### *Interchurch Relations Committees Meet*

On Monday evening the Assembly did not meet; instead, the various delegations met together with the various subcommittees that make up the Dutch Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad. As Canadian delegates, we conferred with Subcommittee III, which deals with Australia, North America, Ireland, and Scotland. The delegates from these other countries were also present.

During this meeting we spent a considerable amount of time becoming familiar with how each church approached the matter of relations with other churches. The Rules for Correspondence that the Canadian Reformed Churches have adopted also came to the fore and were extensively discussed. Eventually, a kind of consensus began to emerge on how these Rules could be amended to deal adequately with the Presbyterian world as well as the Reformed world in which they currently function. Should such a consensus prove acceptable to all the churches involved, there would no longer be a need to establish an alternative relationship to correspondence. All the relations between churches could then be governed by one common set of rules. Needless to say, then, these discussions proved very fruitful for all concerned, especially for our Canadian delegation, in light of the fact that we are supposed to come to Synod 1983 with recommendations on a relationship with the Presbyterian Church of Korea (Kosin).

#### *Paper — Rev. M.K. Drost*

On Tuesday morning, the Rev. M.K. Drost, minister of the Reformed Church of Onnen, The Netherlands, and lecturer in Missiology at the Theological College in Kampen, received the floor to deliver his address entitled, "Reformed Mission Work in the Eighties." He began with a historical sketch outlining certain highlights with respect to missions at the turn of this century. He pointed especially to the great world mission confer-



ence of 1910 at Edinburgh and to developments in the International Missionary Council. He also showed how the rise of the World Council of Churches later had an adverse affect on this entire movement. In addition, he stated that the fact that the Reformed Ecumenical Synod has certain members who also belong to the World Council has done neither that organization nor those churches any good, and that is also evident on the level of missionary thought and activity.

Furthermore, he indicated that there are various areas that need more research and study, namely, the Scriptural foundation of mission work, the matter of contextualization, and the concept of word and action. Among the suggestions that he made to the delegates and to the churches that they represent were the following: (a) an inventory should be made of the missionary work that is being done by the churches; (b) some kind of consultation organization should be established to promote cooperation and an exchange of ideas and strategies; (c) the matters of mission aid performed by the different churches should be studied and there should be more familiarization with the methods used and the policies developed thus far; (d) the development of a Reformed missionary training institute should be studied and, if feasible, implemented; (e) a journal that is devoted to missionary matters should be developed, or else more attention should be given to this subject in a magazine such as *Lux Mundi*.

During the subsequent discussion of this paper all kinds of questions were placed on the table. A few of the delegates wondered whether Rev. Drost's description of contextualization was not overly negative. Another complained about the lack of good Reformed literature in this whole area. Still another suggested the creation of a missionary newsletter which would increase communication, promote the exchange of ideas, and list bibliographical material, etc. A question was also asked about the current missionary training done in The Netherlands. The topic of integrated, as compared to indigenous, churches also arose. Needless to say, there was enough to discuss and enough for Rev. Drost to react to.

As an outgrowth of the speech and discussion, every delegation took the opportunity to describe the mission work that their church is currently engaged in. It then appeared that the Presbyterian Church of Korea has plans to send missionaries to Indonesia, where the Dutch and the Canadian churches are also active. Later the Korean delegate and some of the Dutch representatives sat down together to learn more about each other's efforts and intentions and to explore various avenues of cooperation.

#### *A Boat, A Mayor, and A Thanksgiving Service*

On Wednesday, November 3, no sessions were held. The Committees received the morning to continue their work, and the rest of the delegates received the occasion to hold further discussions together. In the afternoon we were treated to a boat tour through the canals and harbour of Groningen. Later we traveled to the City Hall, where a reception was held in honour of the Assembly. That evening most of the delegates could be found in the Southern Church of Groningen for the annual Thanksgiving service. The Rev. R.T. Urban led this worship service and had been so considerate as to have his sermon translated into the English language for the benefit of those delegates who do not understand the Dutch language.

#### *The Constituent Assembly Comes to a Close*

The next day, Thursday, November 4, proved to be the last day of the Assembly. A communiqué drafted by the Executive was discussed and finalized. The *Proceedings* of the meeting were adopted. More meetings between various delegations took place.

That evening, with many of the church members of the Groningen area once again in attendance, the Assembly held its final session. The communiqué was once again read, this time in its final form, and adopted. The Chairman, the Rev. G. van Rongen, thanked the hosting church of Groningen-South for its hospitality and the use of its premises. He then paid tribute to the diligence of the other members of the Executive. He also presented a busy caretaker and his wife with some tokens of appreciation for all the refreshments served and the meals prepared. Thereafter, the Rev. K. Bruning thanked the Chairman for his leadership of the Assembly. The Rev. D. Lamont of Scotland thanked the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands for organizing the gathering.

In closing, the Chairman bade the delegates farewell with the words of John 16:13, "When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak, and He will declare to you the things that are to come." He urged us to remain true to the Word of God, no matter what the circumstances of our churches might be. Whether our churches are living amidst difficult political circumstances or are struggling against all kinds of spiritual dangers, they must remain obedient to the Lord.

He also expressed thankfulness for the fact that the delegates could meet together in unity around God's Word. At times it was evident that two different traditions were coming together in Groningen; nevertheless, the lines of communication and fellowship always remained open. In the end we could acknowledge each other anew as churches that seek to be true to the Lord and His Gospel. He wished the brothers a good trip home and the blessings of the Lord upon their respective churches. After singing and prayer, the Constituent Assembly closed.

All in all, it was a very eventful nine days. It is certainly not saying too much to remark that most of the delegates arrived in Groningen with a good deal of apprehension. Was the time and money being spent really worthwhile? Was the whole undertaking viable and would it really yield some positive fruit in terms of bringing the churches closer together? Would it lead to the establishment of an organization that would really be meaningful to the member churches? Questions, questions. Nevertheless, by the end of the Assembly, while all of the questions were not fully answered, it had become evident that an organization such as The International Conference of Reformed Churches could play a truly significant role in uniting, helping, and promoting the work that these true churches of our Lord Jesus Christ have been called upon to do in this world.

This, however, should suffice for now. In a future article I hope, D.V., to go into the value of an organization such as the ICRC and to show why I think that the Canadian Reformed Churches should join and stand shoulder to shoulder with other true churches of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ around this world.

J. VISSCHER

# Holy Days of Men and Holy Days of God Is Christmas Bad?

The first part of the title is also the title of an article that appeared in the December 1982 issue of *COVENANTER WITNESS*, the "Monthly Publication of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of America." The article was written by the Rev. G.I. Williamson, for the July-September issue of *Blue Banner Faith and Life* in 1962, from which the *Covenanter Witness* gave a reprint. The author was born and studied in the United States and became a minister in the Reformed Churches in New Zealand. It is not certain whether the author still stands behind what he wrote twenty years ago now.

The beginning of the article reads:

In the Gospel according to Luke, we read these words: "That which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God." These are the words of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And please note their force: that which is placed by men in the highest category is placed by God in the lowest category possible.

And what are these things that men highly esteem but which God utterly abhors? They are the things of religion. That is what Jesus was talking about. To the Pharisees He said, "Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts, for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God." It was precisely those things that they did in the sphere of religion, those things which they highly esteemed and which made them appear "just" before men, which rendered them abominable unto God.

When Jesus went on to add this

comment, his meaning became even more clear: "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail." Their trouble was that they did not heed the law of God. As He said, "Laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men . . . Ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition." Is it any wonder that the verdict was this: "They worship me in vain [that is, for nothing], teaching for doctrines the commandments of men"?

## I. Other Men's Traditions

It is easy for us to see the error of the Pharisees. They added to the Word of God many humanly devised traditions. Gradually, as time passed, these traditions gained so high an esteem among them that they took a place alongside the commandments of God. And by Jesus' time, these traditions had become more important to them (in practice if not in theory) than the commandments of God. Thus the Word of God was made of none effect by their traditions. Yes; and the special point to be observed is that those very traditions — time honored and sacred in the eyes of the Pharisees — were abomination in the eyes of God. Jesus said that they worshipped God in vain. That is, they might just as well have had no religious worship at all as to have had what they did. It was completely worthless.

The author continues giving a number of examples from the Bible in which we can see that God counted such formal religion in one's own way worthless: Cain's offering (Gen. 4:5), the burning of incense with strange fire by Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1, 2), and the "homemade" religion of Israel in the days of Zechariah (7:5-7). He further

points out the fact that the New Testament church can do the same evil thing and that this, in fact, happened in the churches in Galatia. He writes:

The Church of Galatia is a case in point. It is clear from the contents of Paul's epistle to the Galatians that that Church which had made such a promising start had soon gone off on the wrong track. Paul said that he marveled that they were so soon removed from the grace of Christ. And at least part of their trouble was this evil tendency under consideration. For the Galatians had decided that the pure religion delivered to them by the Apostles was not sufficient. They wanted something better (although there is nothing better). So they began adding to it certain holy days and seasons of their own devising.

We do not know just what those special days and seasons were, but we certainly do know what God's inspired Apostle had to say about them, for we find his words in Galatians 4:9-11:

" . . . after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain."

Observe how serious a matter this was in the Apostle's eyes. What is it to be "in bondage" again, if it is not to be enslaved to false religion? How could he say that he was "afraid of them, lest he had bestowed his labour in vain," except that such a religion as they were falling into was null and void before God? It is clearly another case of men highly esteeming the very thing that is abomination in the sight of God, and all because they were observing certain days and seasons without being told to do so by the Almighty God. Their sin was exactly the same as that of Cain, Nadab and Abihu, the captives from Babylon, and the Pharisees who made the Word of God of none effect by their own traditions.

## II. Our Traditions

It is one thing to condemn other men's sins, but it is another to mend our own. The Galatians would probably have had no difficulty condemning the wicked Pharisees, but it is not so certain that they were willing to hear themselves condemned. Paul said to them: "Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?" (Gal. 4:16). The author of this article would ask the same question. Suppose I do say some things that "hurt" a bit. Suppose I do speak out against something sacred to *you*. Do I then become your enemy because I tell you the truth?

The truth is that Christmas (and Good Friday, and Easter, and Father's Day, and Mother's Day, and Children's Day,

and any other "special holy day" except the weekly Sabbath) is an abomination to God. Now please note with care: we do not say that everything associated with these days is abominable. What we do say is that every special holy day (or season) is abominable to God.

#### *A Pagan Source*

This is true, in the first place, because of the source of such. Let us consider Christmas as an example. It is admitted by Roman Catholics and Protestants alike that Christmas is not revealed in the Word of God. The Bible does not give us the date of Christ's birth. It does not even tell us the precise month or even the season. It is also generally admitted that there was no trace of Christmas observance in the Apostolic and post-Apostolic Church.

It was not until the third century that the celebration of Christmas began to appear in Christian circles, and even then there was no uniformity. Various dates were set for the "holy day," including January, March, April, and May. To this day the Greek Orthodox Church observes January 6th rather than December 25th. When, under the growing authority of the Roman Bishop, December 25th was adopted in the west, it was largely an attempt to engage in competition with a pagan celebration called Saturnalia. It was a time of celebration, merrymaking and the giving of gifts. It was a pagan celebration in honor of the sun. They believed that the sun was a god, and that at this point it began to conquer over the darkness of winter. Gradually the Christian "holy day" and the pagan "holiday" coalesced into one. And the "tradition of Christmas" was firmly entrenched. On all this there is rather general agreement.

But there was a day in which Protestants and Roman Catholics disagreed strongly, not concerning what the source of Christmas (and other such holy days) was, but whether or not that source was valid. Then, as now, the Roman Catholic Church fully defended such man-made traditions, because, to quote its own words, "The Catholic Church has received from Jesus Christ the power to make laws for its members" (Baltimore Catechism). Among those laws we find the official designation of such "holy days" as Christmas and Easter, and such days are held by Roman Catholic dogma to be exactly the same as holy days designated by God Himself.

There was, we repeat, a day when Protestants disagreed. There was a day when Protestants said that "the whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for (God's) own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from scripture — unto which nothing at any time is to be add-

ed, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men" (Westminster Confession of Faith, 1, 6). And concerning this matter of holy days, they said that the people of God are to keep holy "such set times as He has appointed in His Word, expressly one whole day in seven" (Larger Catechism, Q. 116). That is, the Sabbath day alone was regarded by them as "Holy."

Suppose you were to imagine yourself to have the notion that it would be nice to observe the 3rd of February as a special holy day in memory of Jesus' visit to the Temple at the age of twelve. What right would you have to make such a designation? What justification would others have in accepting your idea? And what if your Church said, "No, we will not listen to such nonsense! Jesus Christ alone is King and Head of the Church, and He alone has the right to designate a holy day, and He has given us to keep holy the Sabbath alone?" Of course you would say that such a Church was simply keeping itself pure. Yet the truth is that Christmas (and Easter, etc.) has no more warrant from Christ than would such a day that were chosen by yourself. The *only* difference is that tradition through the process of time, raises something of purely human origin to the place that it is highly esteemed of men. But it is still an abomination to God because of its source.

#### *Distorting the Gospel*

The second reason why such holy days are an abomination to God is that it is necessary to sanction error in order to give them our esteem. We shall again cite Christmas by way of example. If there were any possibility that the date of Christ's birth were preserved through tradition, then it would be January 6th rather than December

25th which deserved the preference. The Greek Church is an older institution than is the Latin. And if tradition has any validity, that validity depends upon antiquity. Even if we were to appeal to the false criterion of tradition we would be condemned! However, as tradition is condemned by Scripture we can neither build upon it nor be judged by it.

Much more important is the fact that the celebration of Christmas (and other such humanly devised holy days) distorts the true gospel of Jesus Christ. By the special religious observance of certain days, certain aspects of the gospel are given a prominence which is not given them in the teaching of the Word of God itself. Christmas and Easter are the two "holy days" that claim an inordinate amount of attention each year, and so the birth and resurrection of Christ receive a measure of attention which other aspects of the truth do not receive.

This emphasis is not found in the Apostolic writings. For in all the epistles of the New Testament we can discover no explicit reference to the so-called Christmas story. The resurrection of Christ does constantly receive much emphasis, but there is also much emphasis in the Apostolic writings on events which took place on other days that men have not memorialized with special holy days. This is a distortion of the truth of the Gospel, and a distortion of the truth is not the same as the truth itself. Thus to approve of such holy days we must approve of that which must be called error.

The article continues by pointing out the sufficiency of the one Sabbath in the week which the Lord gave us and which we have to maintain, while the six other days of the week are for do-

## ***Hebrews 13:20, 21***

*Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in you that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

ing our daily work. We leave that out.

We have here a picture of the strongly Puritan way of thinking as this is found in the (Covenanter) Reformed Presbyterian Church. This group of churches also does not want to use an organ in the worship services to accompany and lead the congregational singing. And they sing only Psalms, no hymns, because the Psalms are God's own words given in the Bible for singing in worship, while hymns are not God's Word, but human words. For worshipping God only the best that is available (= that which comes from God) should be used. The principle here, as expressed by the author, is that "the whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for (God's) own glory, man's salvation, faith and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture — unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men" (Westminster Confession of Faith, I, 6).

It is interesting to compare this with our Belgic Confession, Art. 2 and 7. In Art. 2, the last part, we confess that God "makes Himself more clearly and fully known to us by His holy and divine Word, that is to say, as far as is necessary for us to know in this life, to His glory and our salvation." And in Art. 7 we say: "We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God and that whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation is sufficiently taught therein. For since the whole manner of worship which God requires of us is written in them at large, it is unlawful for any one, though an apostle, to teach otherwise than we are now taught in the Holy Scriptures: *nay, though it were an angel from heaven*, as the apostle Paul says. For since it is forbidden to *add or take away anything from the Word of God*, it does thereby evidently appear that the doctrine thereof is most perfect and complete in all respects. Neither may we consider any writings of men, however holy these men may have been, of equal value with those divine Scriptures, nor ought we to consider custom, or the great multitude, or antiquity, or succession of times and persons, or councils, decrees or statutes, as of equal value with the truth of God, since the truth is above all; *for all men are of themselves liars, and more vain than vanity itself*. Therefore we reject with all our hearts whatsoever does not agree with this infallible rule, which the apostles have

taught us, saying, *Prove the spirits, whether they are of God*. Likewise: *If anyone comes to you, and brings not this teaching, receive him not into your house.*"

I shall also quote here the rest of Art. 1, 6 of the Westminster Confession: It continues: "Nevertheless, we acknowledge the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word: and that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the Church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed."

What to say now about the celebration of Christmas, Easter, and so on. We have Art. 67 in our Church Order. This Article says: "The Churches shall observe, in addition to the Sunday, also Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. The observance of second feast-days and of Ascension Day is left in the freedom of the Churches." Must we now conclude that we allowed an "abomination" to creep into our Church Order?

I can agree very well with the rule as stated in Art. 1, 6 of the Westminster Confession. But the second part of this article shows that the Westminster Divines (the members of the Assembly that wrote the Confession) were aware of the fact that the Bible does not provide a rule or regulation for every detailed point of our personal life and of church life. The apostle Paul says: "... whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please all men in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved," 1 Cor. 10:31-33. That is the general rule.

Hereby, indeed, we bind ourselves in everything to the revealed will of God as we find it in the Bible for worshipping and serving Him. We reject what God forbids, and we maintain what God commands. But there is so much in life about which the Lord does not explicitly speak in His Word. Here the church and the Christians have to find a way that is pleasing to the Lord and about which they are fully convinced that they serve God with it in a positive way, that is edifying for His church(es) and does not go against His will.

When we maintain what the Bible, as the rule for our life, says, we

cannot say that the Bible forbids us to have Christmas and Easter and Pentecost, although the Word of God also does not prescribe it. God's Word leaves us free in this respect. In Romans 14:5 the apostle Paul writes: "One man esteems one day as better than another, while another man esteems all days alike. Let every one be fully convinced in his own mind, He who observes the day observes it in honour of the Lord . . ."

In the churches in Galatia the point was not the observing of days and months and times in itself. The false teachers in Galatia made this observance a matter of salvation: salvation was to be earned by observing certain days. That is the false doctrine. As soon as Christmas becomes a means or rule or law for salvation, we have to do away with it. But if it is maintained to honour that great work of salvation of our God in the birth of His Son, God's Word does not forbid us to have Christmas (nor Easter and Pentecost, and so on). Not as a "you must," but as a "you may"; we may enjoy these days.

I am afraid that this strong rejection of Christmas, etc., takes away the Christian freedom which our Lord gives to us: "All things are lawful, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful, but not all things build up," 1 Cor. 10:23. I am also afraid that such strong rejection comes close to a form of legalism. And it is against legalism that Paul fights in his letter to the Galatians. Is legalism not also a form of self-conceived religion? If there are Christians who (think they have to) reject Christmas for the sake of the Lord, they are free to do so. I feel free to have Christmas and rejoice in the birth of the Saviour as one of those great and mighty works of salvation of our gracious God and Father in Christ Jesus, His Son, our Lord.

However, we do good to consider not only the pagan origin, but also the pagan, commercialized character of today's Christmas (and Easter). It is too bad that also among us the Christmas tree and the Christmas presents and the specific Christmas sphere and mood, are taking over, whereby the true meaning of the birth of Christ and the glorification and sanctification of His Name so easily are pushed to the background or forgotten.

I wish you all a true, Scriptural, Christian Christmas and a blessed New Year.

J. GEERTSEMA



*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.*

#### LOUISVILLE, KY. (RNS)

The highest judicial body of the 9.6 million-member United Methodist Church has ruled that there is nothing in church law to prohibit homosexuals from being ordained to the ministry.

The unanimous ruling came Oct. 30 after churches in Texas, Georgia and Colorado had complained about Bishop Melvin Wheatly, Jr.'s appointment of a gay minister to the staff of a Denver congregation. The denomination is the second-largest mainline Protestant church in America.

"We are sensitive to the issue and concerns involved," the nine-member Judicial Council said in its opinion. "Our authority, though, is to interpret the existing law of the church, and we find no provision making same-sex orientation a disqualification for ordination." (CN)

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IN OCTOBER, Episcopal and Lutheran bishops joined for the first time to distribute the Eucharist at a Lutheran Communion service. The cooperation came after the two denominations approved closer relations in September. Episcopal Church Presiding Bishop John M. Allin and heads of three Lutheran bodies . . . also announced they will celebrate a joint Eucharist in Washington D.C.'s National Cathedral next January. (CT)

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THE EUROPEAN CONFESSING FELLOWSHIPS (ECF) came out swinging at their recent fourth convention. Tübingen (West Germany) University professor Peter Beyerhaus accused the World Council of Churches of "terrible distortion of Biblical truths."

He said that documents prepared for next summer's WCC assembly contain "dire misrepresentations of Christology." The ECF during its three-day gathering condemned abortion, pronography, common-law marriage, sexual abuse of young people, legitimization of homosexuality, and euthanasia. (CT)

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A RURAL COMMUNITY HEALTH Project in Pakistan was temporarily closed after a Muslim student nurse became a Christian. The Bible and Medical Missionary Fellowship operated the much appreciated project in the village of Kunri. Meanwhile, a committee appointed by President Mohammed Zia ul-Haq to suggest ways of turning Pakistan into a truly Islamic state, has come up with these proposals: the death penalty for prostitution and drug trafficking, a ban on ballroom dancing, the confiscation and burning of all vulgar and obscene materials, and measures to discourage women from buying jewelry and highly embroidered cloth. (CT)

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#### BUCHAREST (KNA)

The Rumanian government made known a considerable restriction of the number of students of theology. Especially the Roman Catholics, Lutherans, Calvinists, and Unitarians are affected by this decree, but not the Orthodox Church. The six Roman Catholic bishoprics are permitted only thirty students.

The Rumanian government says that by this measure it will diminish the influence of the Vatican and the activities of the Roman Catholic Church and of other, smaller religions.

The limitations put on the number of students of theology are also intended to counteract nationalistic feelings with the minorities in Rumania. Most of the adherents of the religions affected belong namely to the Hungarian and German minorities in the country. (ND)

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#### DURHAM, N.C. (RNS)

Advocates of biblical inerrancy were sharply denounced here by the new bishop of the Lutheran Church in America's North Carolina Synod in his first address to its Eastern North Carolina District.

Bishop Michael McDaniel said he had little patience with the doctrine of biblical inerrancy advocated

by the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, but added, "Let's pray that we keep our tempers, because I am very impatient with fundamentalists." The bishop then proceeded to lose his temper, denouncing inerrancy as a "hysterical point of view adopted by cowardly people who didn't have the guts to lean on Jesus Christ." (CN)

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#### PITTSBURGH (RNS)

The new minister of the First Unitarian Church of Pittsburgh is not your typical clergyman. "I would call myself an atheist, I really do not believe there is anything up there in the sky," declared the Rev. Paul H. Beattie during an interview at the Shady-side Church. Further, he said, the Bible for him, personally, is not a primary reference for living. He gets more spiritual strength from reading Shakespeare, poetry or the lives of people he admires. And sin, Mr. Beattie said, is a word that he tries to stay away from.

Mr. Beattie can understand why many Christians are appalled by such views. He was raised a fundamentalist Baptist. He went through the "Born again" experience but, he said, "I didn't take it." (CN)

VO

## Church News

DECLINED to Smithers, B.C.

REV. P.K.A. DEBOER  
of Watford, Ontario.

CALLED To Ebenezer Canadian Reformed Church, Burlington, Ontario

REV. J.D. WIELENGA  
of Coaldale, Alberta.

CALLED to Orangeville, Ontario  
REV. G.H. VISSCHER  
of Houston, B.C.

CALLED to Neerlandia, Alberta  
REV. A. DE JAGER  
of Anna Paulowna-Enkhuizen  
The Netherlands



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# Educated for Responsible Christian Action <sub>3</sub>

## *Living in Babylon . . .*

We live in a world where, if you attentively listen to the news properly — not only reading the comics when you open the newspaper — and where you listen critically, like Daniel would, to the news as it comes on the T.V. and the radio, you would notice (and I hope that you *are* noticing that already) that you indeed live in a Babylonian world. You live in a world where man is the idol and where the faith is in man: "We will make it. We will bring the Shalom!" In that world we are called to live in a new nature. You can only come to that tendency learning, you can only come to that learning, receiving, hearing and seeing, modeling, and now that *doing*, if you are in the new nature of Jesus Christ. If you have died with Christ; if your baptism indeed means for you that you have died with Christ to this world, to Babylon, and you have become a citizen to the Jerusalem which is above, structured by the law of Christ, then you are equipped to make your decisions. Then you are being prepared to live in what I would like to call the *car-home* age.

In using that expression, the "car-home age," I feel that I am bringing the meaning of the concept "Babylon" a little closer to home. You see, when we talk about Babylon and about that idolatry of man, then we say, "That's outside; that's outside the Canadian Reformed Churches; that's outside this building, outside the Young People's Societies, outside our homes, outside our schools." But when I say we live in the "car-home age," then I bring home to you the reality of how difficult it is to live a responsible Christian life, actively; how difficult it is to use that painful of education consistently.

## *The car-home . . .*

Last night I happened to mention to some of you fellows that when I got married I had to make quite an adjustment. I was used to the boys. I loved my girlfriend, but to become a married man is something different . . . .

You come home with your friend; it is twelve midnight. But it is three before you go to bed, because you have been talking in the car. The moon just shining through that window — it has its own atmosphere, you know. You just feel at home in a car! You know, when you step through the door of your parents' house, there are the rules, there is the voice, "You woke me up. Do you realize it is three o'clock? I thought I heard the car come in at twelve. Why did you not come in?" Gggggrrrrrrrr . . . .

Interference . . . . Give me the car. In my own car I'm my own boss. In my own car I'm at home. I'm *master* in my own car. As soon as I'm in the house I'm a kid again. But when I'm in the car, you know, I'm somebody. I can even receive guests in my car. In some cases I can even receive girls in my car, if my car is big enough, and if she has a pill in her purse, or I carry a condom in my pocket. Right? That's what the car is like. The car gives you loads of opportunities which you don't have at home. At home . . . that's where the structure is. At home . . . that's where the tendency learning is. At home . . . that's where the open Bible is. But I haven't got all that in the car . . . I leave that at home! And in the car . . . I have *my* life. And in the trunk I have *my* booze. And wherever I stop, I have my life. I can receive guests in my car and I can share the booze with them. And when I don't have it with me, then something is missing. Because, you know, this is my life. This is my week-day

life. This is even my Thanksgiving weekend life, at least for some of us — let's be frank.

Now, where is my Sunday face? **OUT WITH THAT SUNDAY FACE.** Where is my week-day face? **OUT OF THE OTHER WINDOW WITH MY WEEK-DAY FACE. I AM ONE!**

A car? Enjoy it! I used to! And I still do. In certain ways it is a necessary evil because it costs way too much money. On the other hand, you know, it is a wonderful feeling to be somewhere where you are you, but then the "you" who is using that painful of education in that car, for that car has a place of responsibility in your life.

And now I am just using that car as a symbol, an example, for there are many more situations and places: the apartment, the other places in my life where it boils down to this, "Am I also here a child of God, yes or no?" Also here I am under commitment to use what God has taught me. Am I a person who lives by the "nose chart," needing to be reminded all the time: step one, step two? Do I need a guardian and a tutor also in my car? Or am I an adolescent who is enjoying that responsibility, that opportunity, that God gives me, that I come to Christian, moral action? I have received that painful of education, *I'm* not going to slosh it!

You remember how miserable it felt to carry that painful of water and your jeans got all wet and cold from that sloshing water? **THAT's** *what* we *do to our life* when we spill the education, the Christian education which our LORD gives to us. We start feeling wet all over. And we don't want to admit it, *but it does not feel good!* Whatever anyone says, it feels anything but good: it is drenching; it makes you lose your self-respect; it

retards your growth — until you finally, by the grace of God, get so fed up with it that you say, “Hey, this feels much better. Just simply doing what I’ve been taught all along. Why did I not start earlier?”

### *Responsible Christian Action*

*Responsible Christian action leads to security*, security in the love of God, who loved me “while I was yet a sinner”; security in the love of God who does not come to me and say, “Now you first become a goodie goodie, and then I will love you.” No. It is the God who says, “I love you. And I teach you in My love. Now be thankful to Me and love Me in return.”

We do not love God to get something. We do not love God like a little child who kisses Mom so he will get a cookie. We love the LORD God because he has first loved us and *placed* us in security, so that in that car of mine I don’t have to feel insecure, but secure; because I belong to the God who loved me while I was a sinner and who wants to use me so that I love Him in return. Then I become somebody, I become *significant*.

I become somebody who in this world, with all the simple work that I may be doing — I may be turning a wrench, or I may be serving at a gas-pump, or I may be a medical doctor — am significant, for *I am doing it as a Christian*. I am doing it as I have been taught. I am doing it as it is ingrained in me. I’m significant because I’m heir of God’s kingdom.

### *The Street*

Then you withstand *Babylonian pressures*. On the top of the list of these I place the *street*. I do not know whether you understand what I mean by street. The closest you come to the “street” is mostly your car. In my ministry I have had occasion to visit a young brother in one of the jails of our country. What this young brother talked mostly about was the “street.”

“You know, you get fed up and disappointed with the young fellows and young girls in the Canadian Reformed Churches. They have Sunday faces and week-day faces; but they have just as much booze and drugs as others have.” And *he was frosted by it*. For all these young people looked at him as the bad one . . . . And he started pointing fingers. He was

wrong, dead wrong. It never helps when we blame others where we are to stand corrected ourselves. And yet . . . . No, he was not wrong altogether either. We are responsible for one another.

The “street.” He said that it’s different on the street. It’s not like in the church. On the street they stick up for each other — solidarity.

Now that’s the street. Babylonian pressure. Seemingly the “street” has its solidarity; the “street” takes care of its own.

But he was wrong. For together they are where death is. And in solidarity they sink down in the mire. Time and again the truth of that surfaced. He knew it all right. He knew the law of God, but it was not easy to give in.

Now I said that your car is the closest that brings you to that. Cars get you to all kinds of places. Cars get you to all kinds of situations . . . .

You are just like my little dog. I would take our little dog out for runs in the fields behind our home. For the longest time I could let her run free without the leash, and when I would call, “Draper! Tktktktk . . .,” she would come right back to me. But then came the point that she discovered that in the tall weeds I could not see a little dog. You walk your dog along tall weeds: one moment you see her, the next moment she has disappeared. Have you ever tried to find a little dog in tall weeds? She found that if she made herself invisible she could do what she wanted. She could follow the trail and she could track the scent to find out where that male was . . . .

Now you find with the Old Testament prophets that they use the same images for the wayward people of God. We go into situations; we follow the scents, the trails. Nobody sees us. We can go where we want. We can arrange the situations. And we all cover up for each other, for the “street” is solidaristic.

### *Friends — School — Church — Young People’s Societies.*

*Friends*. Well, I’ll just mention the old keyword which you are all fed up with, no doubt: “peer pressure.”

But you know what I’ve noticed? Although everybody is fed up with that keyword “peer pressure,” so

many people keep having problems with it. It still is so important that I am like the next one that, although I live by the slogan, “Dare to be a Daniel, dare to stand alone,” I’ll do what everybody else does, because he must be a Daniel, so I’d better join him. Friends. Peer pressure. God loved me while I was a sinner. God made me secure in His love. God gives me the significance of heir of His kingdom. WHO NEEDS PEERS?

Paul says, “Imitate me; follow your leaders in the faith; those are your peers. Who needs friends that break up your lifestyle? Who needs friends that give you guilt complexes, who wean you away from you loved ones, who make you lose your self-respect?”

You are heirs of the kingdom of God. You are taught in the Church, in the Christian schools, and so you have the opportunity in that beautiful time of your life which you people have . . . .

I still remember the Young People’s Societies of that time of my life: the talks; the time of your life of exploring; the time of your life of getting your fingers behind the answers of life; the joy when you start finding them; the pleasure when you have some fellows and some girls in your group who have some of the answers and are not stuck up about it but are simply one with you.

My five years of Young People’s Societies were the first five years after the “Liberation” of the Church and from the war in Holland in 1944. There had been years of war, there had been years of unrest in the churches. But after the Liberation in the Church we had a bunch of young fellows and young girls who ranged in age from (me, the youngest one) fifteen, to (the oldest one) twenty-five. And we did not notice any age difference. For what we were there for was, in that post-war world, to get our hands again behind the answers which structure life. Upon the rocks and upon the ruins of the Second World War, we wanted to build something again. And build we did, by God’s grace. And builders *you* must be. You have received a pailful of education. Live in Babylon as citizens of Jerusalem. Love Jerusalem and carry your pail well.

J. VAN RIETSCHOTEN

# *If He Came To Your House*

Would you meet Him at the door with arms  
outstretched in welcome?  
Or would you have to change your clothes before  
you let Him in?  
Or hide some magazines and put the Bible  
where they'd been?  
Would you hide your worldly music and  
put some hymn books out?  
Could you let Jesus walk right in, or would  
you rush about?  
And I wonder — if the Saviour spent a day or  
two with you,  
Would you go right on doing the things you always do?  
Would you go on saying the things you always say?  
Would life for you continue as it does from  
day to day?  
Would you take Jesus with you everywhere you'd  
planned to go?  
Or would you maybe change your plans for just  
a day or so?  
Would you be glad to have him meet your very  
closest friends?  
Or would you hope they stay away until His visit ends?  
Would you be glad to have Him stay forever  
on and on?  
Or would you sigh with great relief when He  
at last was gone?  
It might be interesting to know the things  
that you would do  
If Jesus came in person to spend some time with you.

*Anonymous*

Poem taken from *Guideposts*, January, 1966

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## PATRIMONY PROFILE 4

By Rev. W.W.J. VanOene

Had the Church been strong in her convictions regarding both doctrine and Church polity, and had she been insistent on living according to the adopted order and willing and prepared to bear the cost of that herself, things might have turned out differently. Now there was laxity, indifference, and a false ecumenicity concept. Hardly anything could be expected of the leaders, most of whom had kept their prominent positions throughout the various changes of the previous twenty years. The ecclesiastical officials and bodies took a wait-and-see attitude and remained inactive.

There was one exception: the Churches of South Holland pressed for the convening of provincial synods, but the king refused, under the pretext that that would be too expensive. The real reason was that plans were already in the making for another organization.

The king did take the matters of the Church to heart. As soon as feasible he issued an order that the salaries of the ministers should be paid to alleviate their poverty and misery. In November 1814 a Department of Public Worship was established. One of the persons who occupied an influential position in that department was the well-known J.D. Janssen.

It was suggested to the king to have a general synod convened in order that that assembly might make the necessary changes and improvements in the organization of the Church. However, the Council of State advised against it: it did not see the need for a change in the organization of the Church. The king, it was suggested, could appoint a committee, if any defects and shortcomings were discovered, to advise regarding improvements deemed necessary.

The king did indeed appoint a committee, but not the kind of committee the Council of State had suggested. When it was appointed and went to work, it appeared that all its eleven minister-members had to do was to approve a new regulation which had been prepared in secret. They were permitted to make some remarks and suggestions, which resulted in a few minor changes. The same gentlemen were called to a meeting in The Hague on October 25, 1815, where the concept was adopted and signed. The Council of State still made a few minor corrections, and on January 7, 1816, royal assent was given. The title of the new order was "General Regulation for the Government of the Reformed Church of the Kingdom of The Netherlands."

### *The New Regulation*

Let's take a brief look at how the organization of the Netherlands Reformed Church was revised and

regulated. In the first place we note that the singular "Church" is used. It is a principle of truly Reformed church polity that we speak of Churches (plural), since each local Church is autonomous and has no one else above it and its office-bearers but Christ alone.

It is characteristic of what we call a collegialistic system that the singular is used for the country-wide (Netherlands Reformed Church, United Church) or even world-wide (Roman Catholic) body, of which then the local congregations are considered to be members or locals. A collegialistic system is by its very nature also hierarchical: the local congregation is lowest on the ladder of authority and power; the broader the coverage, the greater the power. At the head of the whole body one finds then either a synod or a person, be it a pope or a king. In the latter two cases we usually give the system a different name, but the basics are the same.

Such a collegialistic system was introduced in 1816. Of the country-wide body the Regulation speaks as the Netherlands Reformed Church; the local Churches are called Netherlands Reformed Congregations.

The highest authority is with the General Synod, whose president is appointed each year by the king, as is the case with the secretary and the treasurer. Each Provincial Church Board appoints one member to attend the yearly synodical meetings. Each theological faculty of the three universities (Leiden, Utrecht, and Groningen) appoints a professor to attend synod in an advisory capacity.

The membership of the various Provincial Boards consists of one minister from each classis and, alternately, one of the classes is to appoint an elder or past elder. The Provincial Boards decide about possible controversies between the classes, admit candidates into or suspend and depose ministers from the ministry, and take care of the funds for ministers' widows.

The Churches under the Provincial Boards are divided into classes. A Classical Board consists of: the member of the Provincial Board as chairman, further some ministers, elders, and past elders, to be appointed by the king. The Classical Board takes care of the ministers' widows and orphans, of the interests of the Churches in its region, and has the supervision over congregations, consistories, and ministers. Once a year a general Classical meeting was to be held consisting of all ministers and some elders of the region.

Each Classis is divided into "Rings" or Circuits. These Rings or Circuits take care of pulpit supply in vacant Churches. The circuit ministers do not meet as if they had any authority to govern, but only for mutual upbuilding and for the strengthening of brotherly love.

It does not take long to discover the basic difference between this set-up and the truly Reformed church polity as laid down in the Church Order of Dordrecht. The ecclesiastical assemblies were abolished; in their place came boards upon whose membership the Church(es) had practically no in-

fluence. And what still looked somewhat like an "old-fashioned" Classis was no more than a vague shadow of its predecessor. The power and authority was put into the hands of a few men. Hierarchy was reintroduced. The new Regulation was to become an instrument in the hands of those in power to oppose a return to God's Truth, to protect false doctrine, and to persecute those whose only desire was to live holily according to the Word of the Lord. Its main author and spiritual father? Head clerk J.D. Janssen, secretary to the Minister of Public Worship, Repelaer van Driel.

#### *A Few Protests*

Did the Churches accept the new Regulation without a word of protest or without any effort on their part to retain the old "organization" as agreed upon in the Church Order? The only ones who noticed the changes were the consistories, the office-bearers. The old names had been retained: consistory, classis, synod; only the word "Board" was added to some of these terms. No change was brought about in the consistories; new regulations covering the consistories were adopted only in 1825. Thus the large majority of the membership did not notice any changes for quite a while.

Some ecclesiastical assemblies did send in their objections. Two months after royal assent had been given, Classis Amsterdam sent its objections to the king. These objections can be summarized as follows:

1. The Synod received too much power. Its members had no credentials by which they were bound and instructed regarding their discussions and decisions.
2. Since there were only relatively few members, there was an even greater danger that a popish or episcopal authority would grow from the present situation. And the danger was not imaginary (since the members were not bound by credentials) that Synod would make changes in liturgical and confessional forms.
3. The proper way would have been to convene the assemblies which had been established more than two hundred years ago, so that they could make the necessary changes upon approbation by the king.

The protest was sent to the king on March 4, 1816, a scant two months after the Regulation had come into force.

There was no other address to which the protest could be sent than the king, but actually appellants were faced with the formidable task of changing the king's whole concept of the relationship between Church and State and of his own position and task or non-task towards the Church. During the years of his exile he had become acquainted with the episcopal system in England and the Lutheran system in Germany. That had helped him form his ideas about the organization of the Church. Besides, the Regulation had been approved by the king, and it was almost a

foregone conclusion that a protest would be rejected.

However, the reply could hardly have been more haughty and derogatory. Already on the 28th of that same month the classis received an answer sent on behalf of the king by the Minister of Public Worship. The brethren were given to understand that Classis Amsterdam had ceased to exist as of January 7, 1816, and that they no longer had any right to call themselves by that name. Further complaints were not to be sent to the king but should be dealt with by . . . the synod. In Dutch one would say that they were told "to go to the devil for auricular confession."

Classis Amsterdam had also touched upon the possible changes in liturgical and confessional forms and the danger for the true doctrine connected with that. They were told that they did not have to be afraid of that, since Article IX of the General Regulation provided, "Maintaining the doctrine of the Reformed Church is always to be the main concern of all who, in their various positions, have been charged with the government of the Church. . . ."

At the first synod convened in accordance with the new Regulation a protest from some ministers in the (former) Classes Leiden and Woerden met with the same treatment and received the same reply as the one from Classis Amsterdam.

#### *The First Meeting of Synod and After*

On June 3, 1816, the first synod met. Or should we say that the synod met for the first time on that day? The latter is more correct in this case, also with a view to its membership. When it met, the synod consisted of twenty members, all appointed by the king. There were twelve ministers, one elder, the secretary and the treasurer, three professors, and two political commissioners. There was little mutation in the membership during the years following. Secretary and treasurer were permanent members, usually the same person was appointed as president (one occupied that position for fourteen years, from 1825-1839 — we shall read his name again in connection with the Secession: H.H. Donker Curtius), and Mr. J.D. Janssen attended all meetings until 1847.

After an introductory ceremony the Minister of Public Worship gave an oration in which the task of the assembly was set forth, and the work began. This work consisted mainly of examining and approving the special regulations which had already been drafted beforehand. Synod was adjourned on the 13th of July. The (former) Classis Amsterdam did not make use of the opportunity "to bring freely and unimpededly any objections which might still be left with them to the upcoming synod," as the Acts state.

This synod showed in its decisions that the fear of Classis Amsterdam was well-founded. The haughty reply that maintaining the doctrine of the Reformed Church ought always to be the aim of all who were charged with the government of the Church was no guarantee at all and soon proved to be of no value or impact when synod started to work.

*to be continued.*

## A Ray of Sunshine



On a radio programme called "Time Out" I heard the following reading. It applies to the meaning of our "Corner" and therefore I pass it on to you. I hope you will enjoy it. May it urge you to send many "rays of sunshine."

\* \* \* \* \*

### LET THE SUN SHINE IN

We speak of rays of sunshine as if they were symbolic of happiness. A grandparent, doting on a granddaughter, calls the child "a little ray of sunshine." A good moment at the end of the day comes "like a ray of sunshine."

We may not realize just how apt those words really are until we think about what makes a ray of sunshine. It is not just the sun shining. On a brilliant, cloudless day, on a plain or on the sea, there are no rays of sunshine to be seen. There may be a brilliant flood of sunlight, but no rays.

We see rays of sunshine — sunbeams — only when the sunlight is shining through a gap in something darker or something solid. We see sunbeams leaning down to earth through a rift in dark clouds. We see sunbeams slanting through windows into a shadowy room. We see sunshine as rays in a forest where it comes through the dark leaves and dapples the ground with light, or when it filters through thick mist or smoke. In other words, it is the contrasting darkness that makes rays of sunshine.

In the same way, it is the surrounding shadow of trouble or sorrow that makes happiness glow like a sunbeam when it does come through. Just as there are no noticeable sunbeams on a cloudless day, just so would happiness be unfelt in a totally untroubled life. It is the contrast, the relief, that makes happiness distinctive. As the poet Longfellow said: "The rays of happiness, like those of light, are colourless when unbroken."

\* \* \* \* \*

May I hereby take the opportunity to wish each one of you a happy New Year. May the Lord be with you in the year 1983.

"For the word of the LORD is upright;  
and all His work is done in faithfulness.  
He loves righteousness and justice;  
the earth is full of the steadfast love of the LORD."

Psalm 33:4, 5

\* \* \* \* \*

The Lord willing, the following brothers and sisters will have birthday celebrations in the month of January:

### LIZ KONING

c/o Michener Centre, Box 5002  
Nightingale N.B. Deerhome  
Red Deer, Alberta T4N 5Y5

Liz hopes to celebrate her 22nd birthday on January 2. Her epileptic seizures prevent her from living at home. She enjoys a lot of helpfulness at the home where she is staying. She attends church regularly. She likes to receive cards for her big day.

\* \* \* \* \*

### CHRISTINE BREUKELMAN

Box 666  
Coaldale, Alberta T0K 0L0

Christine's birthday is on January 7. She will celebrate her 11th birthday among family and friends. She is able to attend church now. She shows interest in happy music. Christine is mentally handicapped.

\* \* \* \* \*

### GRACE HOMAN

R.R. 2  
St. Ann's, Ontario L0R 1Y0

On January 17th, Grace hopes to celebrate her 25th birthday. Every year it is a great joy to her to receive so many cards for her birthday. She attends a workshop for the mentally handicapped. As a hobby she likes rughooking.

\* \* \* \* \*

### JANINE SMID

R.R. 1  
Arkona, Ontario N0M 1B0

Janine hopes to celebrate her 13th birthday on January 19th. She keeps all the cards she previously received in a scrapbook and enjoys looking at them again.

\* \* \* \* \*

### JAY VAN AMERONGEN

Children's Psychiatric Research Institute  
Crombie 2  
London, Ontario

Jay is new on our calendar, brothers and sisters. Please mark him down for January 27th. He will be 15 years old on that date. He is looking forward to receiving many happy birthday wishes. His problems are emotional and psychological. A ray of sunshine sent his way may do him a lot of good.

\* \* \* \* \*

### HANK ORSEL

2435 Second Street, Apt. 510  
Burlington, Ontario L7R 1E5

Hank has been on our calendar for several years. He enjoys the extra attention he gets on his birthday, and he looks forward with pleasure to receiving many best wishes. He will celebrate his 52nd birthday on January 27.

Happy birthday, brothers and sisters! Have a joyful day!

Send your requests to:

Mrs. J.K. Riemersma  
380 St. Andrew Street East  
Fergus, Ontario N1M 1R1

Dear Readers:

Another year is almost past — a year in which we here in Canada could continue to enjoy unlimited freedom. If we look around in this world, this certainly is a great privilege. O, yes, we all are experiencing the consequences of the economic recession, but did the Lord not provide us with our daily bread? Hopefully, our dependence on our Lord and Saviour is being strengthened on account of it, drawing us closer to Him. In such times, we perhaps also become better stewards of the gifts the Lord entrusts to us, using them first and foremost in our service in His Kingdom.

As you may recall, I have sold Premier Printing Ltd. to br. G. Van Dijken who comes from Assen, The Netherlands. He took over the management of Premier on Sept. 1, 1982. This is therefore my last letter to *Clarion* readers. It has been a privilege to serve you as publisher of *Clarion* for the past ten years. Everything did not always go as well as we would have liked, but our constant aim has been to publish a magazine whose contents display our desire to live in humble, but strict, obedience to the Word of God and in accordance with the Three Forms of Unity. We are grateful for the part we could play in promoting the Reformed heritage passed on to us through the Great Reformation, the Secession (1834), and the Liberation (1944), and in informing you of the happenings in our churches, our theological college, our schools, our teachers college, etc.

All this we could not have accomplished without the dedicated editors and contributors who continuously supplied us with copy for *Clarion*. I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to all those who more or less regularly contributed articles for the magazine this past year: Dr. Faber, Rev. DeJong, Rev. Geertsema, Rev. Stam, Rev. Van Dooren, Aunt Betty, and Mrs. Riemersma, and others.

One name I purposely omitted: the Rev. VanOene. Since January 1972, he has first been editor and then managing editor. Carrying the bulk of the workload, he has filled column after column, issue after issue, year after year. Like most writers, he has not been spared criticism. However, the genuine love for our churches and the constant watch over our "inheritance," which he so dearly wishes to "preserve," motivated him to continue to write. Thank you, Rev. VanOene. It has been enriching to work with you.

A sincere thank you is due to all our correspondents who worked hard to maintain that important link between the publisher and the people.

Last but not least, my sincere appreciation to our readers who by their subscriptions made it possible to publish regularly, and to those who placed advertisements — birth, engagement, wedding, wedding anniversary announcements, etc. — which helped keep the subscription rate down. Especially these announcements make our magazine a real Church-family magazine.

May the Lord keep us all close to Him, ". . . that [we] rightly acknowledge the only true God, trust in Him alone, submit to Him with all humility and patience, expect all good from Him only, and love, fear, and honour Him with [our] whole heart; so that [we] leave and forsake all creatures rather than do even the least thing against His will" (Lord's Day 34, Q & A 94).

May you all have a truly Christian festive season and a blessed and prosperous New Year.

G. Kuik



After the change in ownership of Premier Printing, Gerry Kuik left me also with the difficult task of getting familiar with the responsibility of being publisher of *Clarion* — a task which, I consider, is not easy. As newcomer to Canada, one has to learn a lot: first of all, of course, the language, but also the situation of the Canadian Reformed Churches, and the function which *Clarion* can fulfill.

It will take some time. But, supported by the knowledge and dedication of Gerry, our editors, and the staff of Premier, I hope to continue the line of *Clarion*. Sure, there will be changes in the time to come. We hope to improve the quality of *Clarion*. Plans in that direction are being discussed. But the base of this magazine for the Canadian Reformed Churches will stay the same, as already indicated by Gerry.

From day to day we are confronted with bad economic news. More and more people are being laid off. Also members of our churches are affected by this. In an effort to offer some help, we are prepared to take personal "looking for employment" ads at no charge in our '83 issues. So anyone who is looking for a job, because he (or she) is unemployed or is expecting to be laid off, can write us, and we will place an ad in *Clarion*.

For the rest, I wish all our readers and their families a blessed New Year, knowing that it is not the government, or the United Nations that make the decisions, but our Lord who looks after us.

Gerald Van Dijken



# school X crossing

## A. "Flashback" of the John Calvin School — Burlington, Ontario

John Calvin School, so I have been told, is one of the oldest (if not the oldest) Canadian Reformed School Society in Canada. If this is the case then I think it appropriate to share some of its history with our "School Crossing" readers. It goes without saying, of course, that we are writing this out of gratitude to the Lord who enabled us to operate this school for the education of our children in accordance with His Word. Perhaps we should say that despite our sins and shortcomings the Lord builds and maintains the schools for the furtherance of His Kingdom, and is willing to use us as instruments. What a privilege!

Although the Canadian Reformed Church in Burlington was not instituted until May 1, 1955, Burlington residents, who were members of the church in Hamilton, had been worshipping separately since February 1954. On March 30, 1954, the Canadian Reformed School Society of Burlington was founded by the Burlington parents. Funds were collected on a regular basis and those behind the society were recruiting others to become members on a regular basis. The weekly contribution was set at 25 cents per week. Five months after the institution of the Ebenezer Church in Burlington, the Rev. VanDooren was installed as minister. The school society needed a push, and with a minister who is a great believer in Christian education and with his involvement in Christian schools in The Netherlands, Rev. VanDooren ultimately became chairman of the society.

In October 1955, the first Church bulletin was issued. In the second bulletin dated November 5, 1955, we were already reading about discussions taking place between the Consistory and school board regarding the purchase of a common property for both the church and school. During the first week of April 1956, Mr. Thomas Smith accepted the offer made to him for his farm located on a dead-end, dusty road, on what was then the outskirts of Burlington (now the center of town). Church and school were now the proud owners of a few acres of land.

Not until the fall of 1956 was a school membership meeting held in the basement of the Church which was just completed. It didn't seem possible to build a school based on the estimates of public school costs. The public school estimate was over \$80,000, an impossible amount for the fifty or so members; however, the school was actually built for \$42,000 in 1961-62. Nevertheless, everyone had committed themselves and became more regular in their contributions. Time and again we read reminders in the old bulletins not to forget the "Rode Bus" (red box) for collections, and it took years sometimes for people to accept the regular sacrifice as normal.

The first plans to have Saturday morning school were made in June of 1956. It took a year or so to get it off the ground, but this Saturday morning school became the forerunner of our full-time educational system. On February 20, 1959, plans to establish a League of Canadian Reformed School Societies were made, indicating the need for communication with other church groups who had a common goal — Reformed education for their children.

The first issue of our now monthly magazine, *Home and School*, was published on September 13, 1959. Publication thereafter was very irregular, but nevertheless it kept the membership involved and informed about plans regarding the future of the school.

Some of the highlights dealt with:

- a discussion between the "Rode Bus" and the yellow bus (school bus)
- the suggestion to name the future school "John Calvin School," which was adopted and remains so until today
- the hiring of a full-time teacher to plan the curriculum, etc. (Without a building you can't sell a Dutchman on hiring anyone until the school doors are actually open!).

On January 16, 1961, a charter was issued incorporating the society. We had planned to open the school in September 1961, but with no principal teacher in place, the opening had to be postponed until September 1962.

During a membership meeting in early 1962, the chairman held a speech which was called "Lest We Forget." There the chairman told the members:

You are the parents of the children; we are the board elected by you. When the school opens its doors in September, you will send your children and the funds required to operate the school. We the board will do our utmost to ensure Reformed education for your children.

In August the school building was officially opened with a meeting in the church and a social hour in the school. For many it was an emotional evening which will always be remembered. If there was some division among the membership before, it was forgotten during that evening. That was necessary, of course, because on September 4, 1962, John Calvin School of Burlington opened its doors for the first time to 145 covenant children from 54 families. The children were received by four teachers dedicated to their task and with a lot to learn about Christian education. Nevertheless they took on the challenge and thus laid the foundation of the John Calvin School.

The school grew by leaps and bounds during the first few years. In 1965, three years following the initial opening we read that the building committee was already busy adding two classrooms. This, of course, resulted in the hiring of two more staff members. Again in 1970 the school was expanded by the addition of another two classrooms. The ultimate had been reached; eight classes, eight classrooms, seven teachers, and a principal. However, progress could not be stopped, and in 1975 an auditorium, kitchen, and two more classrooms were added to the building, providing our present ten-room school. Presently we offer Grades One to Eight, with full-time remedial, shop, and home economics.

At the moment an expansion committee is looking into the future requirements, since the area around the school has become high density and the student body is expected to grow from its present 250 to approximately 300-310 within the next ten

years. Kindergarten and Grades 9 and 10 are also alternatives that are being studied at the same time.

Many people have given many hours to the school, and I am sure they did it for the Lord. That is why I shall refrain from mentioning any names of board and committee members. Allow me to thank the past principals: Mr. J.B. Ludwig, Mr. Wm. Horsman, and Mr. H. Hoogstra, for directing the school to the best of their abilities, each in his term, during the last twenty years. Presently the principalship is in the hands of Mr. Nick Vandooen who started last September. We wish him the wisdom and strength required to fulfill such a demanding task.

During my five years as chairman of the school board, I have learned that teaching is much more than just a job, and that everyone, but especially we as parents, should pray for all teachers on a regular basis. After all, we have transferred part of our responsibility to them to educate our covenant children, not only in math and science, etc., but in the fear of the Lord.

Slowly the second generation is taking over the reins. They will never understand the first struggles that took place. That is not necessary, however, as long as the burning first love of the first generation for Christian education transfers to the second generation. This cannot happen without being filled with the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we pray that the Lord will also in His mercy use the future generations as instruments to further His Kingdom.

Much can be written about this school that has been in operation for over twenty years. Allow me to close with a few lines which were written in the congregational guide of September 23, 1956, and which still hold true today:

These two (presently three) money boxes beside each other in the back of the church cannot be separated; it's a mandate. The building of a church must be reflected by the building of a school. He who builds on Reformed education for the children of the church, builds on the future of the church and the church of the future.

Art Hordyk  
Chairman

John Calvin School Board

#### *B. Computers in Education*

Not unlike most of the uninitiated the concept of computers in schools,



particularly in our own school, seemed rather far-fetched and futuristic to me.

Others might be inclined to say, "Hold it. What kind of new fad are you thinking of getting involved in now?"

That and many similar questions are bound to arise. Don't worry just yet; no hard and fast decisions have been made, and you will be further informed. Have you ever thought of it . . . a computer in the school?

Most of you will have heard, in greater or lesser detail, of the "chip." This tiny piece of silicon is capable of technical "magic." It is capable of putting on our wrists and in our pockets what not many years ago was very sophisticated technological equipment, not only because of its size, but also because of the drastic *reduction* in cost (isn't that a rarity in today's world?).

What it has done for watches and calculators it is also doing to the much more complex computer. The price of desk top computers is now such that they are within the scope of even a small enterprise like our own.

A question that naturally comes up is whether that is a good reason for considering it. Not by itself, of course. The key question should be, "Does a computer have value in our school as an educational tool." The answer to that is a definite yes.

To get a feeling for that reality, a visit was arranged for the staff to a computer facility of The North York Board of Education. Once there, we received a "briefing" on computer hardware (the machinery) and software (the programs) currently in use and available. We naturally had many questions, most of which were answered, and we even had an opportunity to try our hands at the machines.

As a group, the staff was impressed with the possibilities, particularly in the areas of remedial work (extra drill, review) and of advanced work for the gifted among our pupils. The key lies in the availability and cost of suitable software. That is, are there enough programs available at moderate cost to make the investment in the hardware feasible?

The beauty of the equipment, among other things, is that programs can be written to suit our special needs. Thus computer technology could even be brought to bear in the areas of Bible and Church History — novel as that idea may strike you.

That would be more long-term naturally, since it would involve staff learning to program the equipment,

which is not an overnight undertaking.

The Education Committee has done some research and thinking in this area. Hopefully, there will be a machine to demonstrate the possibilities to you at the Fall Membership meeting. In the meantime, think of the possibilities . . .

F. LUDWIG

*Credo Courier* — Brampton, Ontario

*C. Canadian Reformed Teachers Association — Convention October 29, 1982 (Main Address)*

*Ten Commandments and Moral Education*

After we had our awakening cup of coffee, we were presented with a very enlightening speech by Rev. VanDooren. The topic: "Ten Commandments and Moral Education." He began by asking, "Is there really a separation between the two? Can we isolate the ten commandments from the other laws, the civil and ceremonial laws? Is this the teaching of the Scriptures? Does Scripture tell us to take it apart? Are some laws to be gone and do others remain unchangeable?"

If we set the ten words apart we present ourselves with a danger. There is no distinction in the New Testament. The New Testament shows the love of God revealed in the law. Christ was unimpressed by the petty rules of the Pharisees. Christ preached to us righteousness apart from the law. Laws can be obeyed without love in your heart, as the Pharisees did: it was a law of self-righteousness. They thought they could save themselves and that the Lord was indebted to them. Pharisees thought obedience to the law brings redemption. Obedience — Yes! But love also includes obedience. The law is abolished as a means of self-righteousness. Children can never repay love of parents, but they can in return give love — through obedience.

Rev. VanDooren then took the term "moral education." Just as the ten words are often separated from the other laws, so is moral education from other education. This is wrong, since moral education should be in the way you teach, not separate. More serious, though, is that moral education is separated from religious teaching. You cannot have moral education without faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God. Moral education is a response from the heart. It has to be integrated into religious education. We cannot act mor-

ally right if we are not changed by the Holy Spirit. Moral behaviour is the work of the Spirit. As it says in Lord's Day 32, we may be assured of our faith by the fruits thereof, and only because Christ, having redeemed us by His blood, also renews us by His Holy Spirit. As it also says in Ephesians 5, the fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, etc . . . . So moral education is not in contrast with the ten words but is the fulfillment of them. The ten words themselves do not mention this, but the New Testament gives us the whole picture.

Therefore love, moral education, is the fulfillment of the law.

P. BAARTSE

School Newsletter, Chatham, Ontario

*D. From the Annual Report of the Society of Christian Schools in British Columbia*

There continues to be a disturbing reality: many boards and teachers seem to think that it is possible to break with the powers and principalities of the secular world of education just by teachers being converted Christians. Now, of course, being a Christ-confessor and prayerfully living this confession in one's personal life is a prerequisite for being a Christian teacher. However, we all see through a glass darkly, and in an age when in society-at-large there is no "Christian mind," we need, as a Christian school community, to test the spirits and continually search for ways in which we can be obedient to God in our educational enterprise. Therefore it hurts . . . not just ourselves or even our children, but it hurts the name of our God:

- when boards do not insist on teachers taking courses dealing with *Christian* approaches to education, or when teachers are reluctant to take such courses;
- when schools do not use Christian textbooks or resources when they are available (e.g., few high schools as yet have class sets of CSI's *Natives of the Northwest Coast*, specifically written for our Grade 8 S.C.S. social studies program);
- when some teachers show little interest in developing truly Christian approaches for their classrooms, whether those be approaches published in some of our classroom units or ones they develop themselves;
- when teachers let a secular text *determine* the goals and structure of a course rather than ana-

lyzing the world-view of the text and on that basis deciding in what way the book can or cannot be used;

- when boards are so concerned about budget considerations that they are reluctant to provide funds for Christian resource materials or costs for courses and workshops that help teachers become better *Christian* teachers;
- when teachers complain that “we’ve heard all that philosophical stuff before,” but in their classrooms continue to use the approaches and books that “philosophically” have been shown to be at odds with Christian beliefs;
- when boards and communities fail to provide an environment that is appreciative and supportive of our teachers and principals and their often difficult task, and, instead of encouraging them to grow in Christian insight and understanding, do little except bicker about finances, transportation difficulties, and minor irritations.

#### E. A Biblical View of the Child (Is there a difference?)

So often, when we look at our children playing on the school grounds, talking together after church, or just being with friends, we wonder what really makes them so *different*. Their language and actions are no better than our neighbour’s children. They play the same sports, like the same clothing, and enjoy the same entertainment. In many ways our boys and girls seem to be the same as all other children on the street. Is there really a difference?

The Bible tells us that the covenant child is an image-bearer of God (Gen. 1:27, James 3:9). This means that he is a:

- (a) *Unity*. He is one, body and soul. He is more than an accumulation of parts or attributes. He has meaningful structure through the interrelationship and interdependence of his various parts (I Cor. 12:20). He is at once a rational, emotional, spiritual, physical, and social being.
- (b) *Religious being*. God breathed into him. He bears the image of God. He has an intrinsic desire to worship. Secular education states that the child has a religious part or aspect. Christian education views the child as a totally religious being.
- (c) *Creature*. He is dependent on the Sovereign God who created him.

He is not autonomous. He is not the centre of the universe. He does not function for his own purposes. He recognizes that there is a God. There is an outside Force to whom he must respond. There are absolutes.

- (d) *Unique Being*. He does not reflect God totally, but partially. He has unique talents, characteristics, and traits. The measure of his various abilities varies (Matt. 25:14-30, I Cor. 7:7)

Besides being an image-bearer, the child is also a sinner (Ps. 51:5, Rom. 3:23, I John 1:8). Is the moral nature of the child good, bad, or neutral? The child is not neutral and never was. Man, in fact, was at one time good. Genesis 1:31 records: “And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good . . . .” But, as recorded in Genesis 3, Adam and Eve sinned, and their nature became a fallen one. All children today have a sinful nature and are totally depraved.

Two considerations must be made, however:

- (a) Our children continue to bear the image of God, no matter how distorted and blurred it may be.
- (b) Children are *totally* depraved, but not *absolutely* depraved. Total depravity means that each thought, word, and deed has within it the taint of sin. Absolute depravity, however, means that each thought, word, and deed is so absolutely corrupted that there is no redeeming feature whatsoever. Absolute depravity would result in anarchy and chaos. But in God’s grace evil is restrained, so that His divine purposes can be carried out.

Having been given this framework of the Biblical view of the child, each reader should do some careful deliberation. Take a particular statement of this article and ask any or all of the following questions:

- (a) What difference should this make in pupil interaction at school?
- (b) What difference should this make in the exercise of discipline within the school? (the home?)
- (c) What difference should this make in our child’s actions? (response?)
- (d) What difference should it make in the bringing up of our children?

Very few topics are as difficult to consider in a rational way. The “growing up” process and the “nurture of the child” by the parents have no clear-cut, practical guidelines. Each child

is unique and situations or circumstances differ. However, we should constantly be involved and concerned with it.

*It does make a difference!*

N. VANDOOREN

#### F. Prayer

##### SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

I asked God for strength, that I might achieve,  
I was made weak, that I might learn humbly to obey.  
I asked for health, that I might do greater things,  
I was given infirmity that I might do better things.  
I asked for riches, that I might be happy,  
I was given poverty, that I might be wise.  
I asked for power, that I might have the praise of men,  
I was given weakness, that I might feel the need of God.  
I asked for all things, that I might enjoy life,  
I was given life, that I might enjoy all things.  
I got nothing that I asked for — but everything I had hoped for.  
Almost despite myself, my unspoken prayers were all answered.  
I am, among all men, most richly blessed.

*Anonymous*

May all of you experience a richly blessed Christmas and New Year!

NICK VANDOOREN  
John Calvin School  
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Burlington, Ontario

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# news medley

This time we have no congratulations for couples who celebrate a fortieth or forty-fifth wedding anniversary. We shall have a fifty-fifth anniversary some time in January, but will have to reserve that one for the next issue. We might not have any news for the first issue in 1983 from other sources!

Yes, it is hard to realize that this is again the last medley of a whole year. Time goes so fast. Even the children complain about it right now, but we shall not complain about it: the faster time goes, the sooner we shall have arrived at the end of this world's history and have entered upon the new world in which righteousness dwells. Let us rejoice when times goes fast, in the meantime using it well, redeeming the time, as the apostle Paul tells us to do in Eph. 5:16, or "making the most of every opportunity," as the NIV has it.

Thankful for the opportunity we had to continue also our medleys throughout the year, we hasten to conclude the series for the year of our Lord 1982. In their own way — we hope — they have contributed towards the coming of the Kingdom. Once in a while they also may have provided some entertainment. Once in a while they evoked some slight criticism.

The latter was the case with my remarks about the International Conference of Reformed Churches which was concluded in Groningen a few weeks ago. One brother thought that, by the manner in which I wrote about it, I had violated one of my own principles. He wrote, among others, "I must say in all honesty that I found your comments about the Conference in the last *Clarion* of a rather inflammatory character. For one who has always stressed that an official gathering should be judged on the basis of its Acts, or in this case Proceedings, and not on hearsay, you rather surprised me."

This reaction did surprise me. Did I not state emphatically that I did not write about this particular conference that was going on but about the concept of such a conference in general? I did not say that this particular conference was useless, but I spoke about the question whether such conferences in general were indeed so useful and advantageous for the Churches that the time and money should be spent on them.

Besides, I made my remarks in connection with what I quoted from the Hamilton bulletin. To the best of my knowledge I am not guilty of going by hearsay. Even if I had written about the Conference held in Groningen in recent weeks, I would not have gone by hearsay, unless one considers reports in newspapers and interviews that are published hearsay. I don't.

That I am not alone in my doubts may also become evident from some remarks which the Rev. J. Visscher makes in the *Church News* of the Fraser Valley. "Although I left home with doubts about the value of an international organization such as this, I returned home with a great deal more enthusiasm about the need and the benefits of such a Conference. Hopefully Synod Cloverdale 1983 will come to share that conviction too. Time will tell and the Lord will lead."

About Synod Cloverdale 1983, a few medleys ago I mistakenly typed "Coaldale" in connection with the forthcoming Synod. In the next envelope I included a

note requesting correction. Apparently it got lost, so that I take the opportunity now to make this correction. I certainly know the difference between these two places and Congregations.

From the *Mission News* of the Fraser Valley we learn that the Rev. and Mrs. Meijer are happy with their son (after about ten years of marriage, if I can trust the dates given in the Yearbook) and that the Boersemas are happy to be back at work. The Surrey Church tells us that "During the furlough of Rev. Boersema, we discussed also the matter of school education for the children. We thought that what is true here must also count there: if at all possible the children of the covenant should receive a Christian school education. The matter was discussed in São José. And (again) a school society was set up. Some research has been done to see which way it can come to the establishing of a Christian school."

This exhausts our news from the Fraser Valley and beyond, unless we would quote more extensively from the *Mission News*. It really would be worthwhile, but then we might get complaints from our readers out West that they read it all and want to read something new in *Clarion*. I (again) express the wish that a way may be found that all our people are informed about all the mission work in one periodical. Keep it warm!

Alberta is next and, in the hope that by the time our readers in Edmonton see these lines the foul-smelling gaswell has been capped, we first visit Calgary.

Financial difficulties do not bypass our Alberta Churches. The Calgary Consistory did a thorough study of the finances, and first came to the conclusion that, due to mortgage payments and needed repairs, it would be wiser to put the parsonage up for sale. Further deliberation and calculation, however, led to a different decision. The voluntary contributions were raised. "Also some no- or low-interest loans can be expected. The Consistory decided to ask Classis assistance for the amount of the expected deficit, and not to go ahead with putting the parsonage up for sale."

Rev. DeJong also writes about his not taking any courses at the university at the moment. "Because of the government's restraint in funding the M.A. program in Religious Studies is in limbo. However the Religion Department asked me for a lecture in a course of Continuing Education on 'Religious Reasons for Belief in Creation,' on October 27. I grasped this opportunity to deal with this topic from a Biblical, Reformed viewpoint. The same week, Friday, October 29, I am asked to speak at the Elders Conference of the Christian Reformed Church, Alberta-South, in Lethbridge, to give a 'Canadian Reformed View of the Christian Reformed Church.'"

Now we proceed to Edmonton. All we have to mention from there is the plans which the Immanuel Church has which should result in a Church building of their own. The Building Committee reported to the Consistory that "a. we are still waiting for our building permit, and that this is expected any day; b. some site work has been done."

With this we all have to be content for the time being.

The Barrhead bulletin has received a new face, and I must admit that I cannot solve the riddle of the "missing tree." It is too long ago that I was in Barrhead; all I recognized was the form of the Churchbuilding.

However, I was not going to weary you with riddles. It is from the Barrhead bulletin that I understood that in Neerlandia a library for adults has been set up and



opened. "You are cordially invited to the opening of the library for adult members on Tuesday, November 23, at 7:30 at the Canadian Reformed School at Neerlandia."

Carman's Home Mission Committee met with its Winnipeg counterpart. During this meeting it became apparent that Winnipeg would no longer pledge regular support for the radio broadcasts, although they will contribute whenever they are able to.

As for Vacation Bible Schools, "Winnipeg had another successful V.B.S. with over twenty students and quite a list of contacts also with parents of the students. Just lately they have also started a Sunday School for some of these students which is held before the morning service."

We are compelled to travel on to Ontario and the only Church about which we have to pass some news on to you is the one in Burlington West. This one is in the news anyway nowadays because of the impending institution of a Church in Burlington South.

About the latter: "The morning service in the Presbyterian Church at Lasalle Park Road will start at nine o'clock, therefore the afternoon service would be started at our convenience since the Presbyterian congregation conducts only one service." It was suggested to have the afternoon service start at 3:00 p.m., but I don't think that a decision regarding this was published.

The institution service will be held on January 2, in the Rehoboth building. "The afternoon service will be held under the auspices of the consistory of Burlington South in the same building and the Rev. Pouwelse will (of course) officiate. The neighbouring churches will be invited as well as the Classis North plus our first minister, Rev. G. VanDooren. An invitation will be extended to the local magistrate, Mayor R. Bird."

The Burlington West Consistory decided that "Burlington South was granted \$3,000.00 for initial expenses."

At one point in the past I made a few remarks about

(ab) using prayer in the midst of the Congregation to make things known, seemingly to the Lord but in reality to the Congregation. The Rev. Pouwelse writes about it in the Burlington West bulletin and it is good to pass a few lines on.

"The consistory deems it inappropriate that people learn about the most recent news via prayer. We have to call upon the Lord and we have to glorify His Name. That must have our full attention. Prayer should not be used to inform the congregation about the most recent news. Therefore no names or events which are not known to the congregation will be mentioned in prayer. If there is something special like a serious illness or an accident which has to be mentioned in prayer, it will be specially announced before prayer so that everyone knows what has happened.

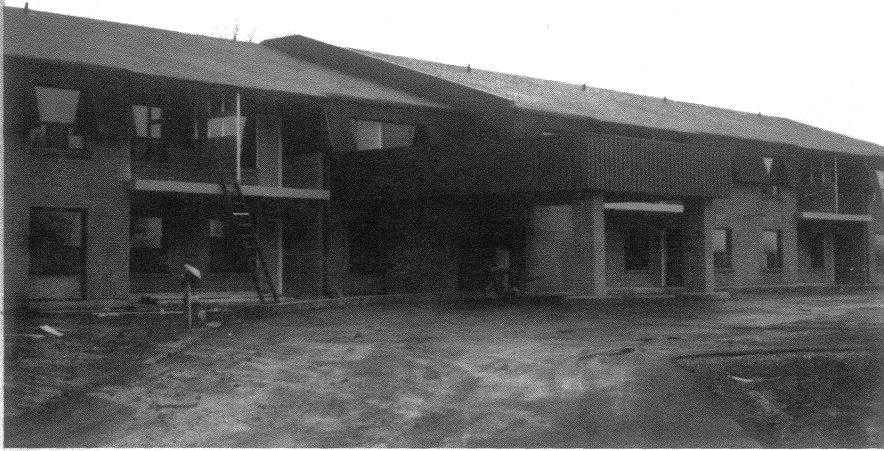
At this very moment Bob Kerr of CBC Vancouver announces the end of "Off the Record" for today. Likewise I have to announce that this is the end of our medley. There will be ample reading material in this issue anyway.

May we meet again in the first issue of the year of our Lord 1983.

If it had not been for all the brothers and sisters who send me so faithfully the bulletins of their Congregation, I would not have been able to write these medleys. I, therefore, owe them a special word of thanks for their faithfulness, expressing the wish that they may cooperate in the same manner in the new year.

And to all of you: the Lord's blessing for you and your families in these last days of the old year and all through the new year. This is a general wish, but while typing it, I see them before me, the brothers and sisters whom I know, whose names I read repeatedly, who went through sadness and grief, illness and recovery, disappointments and joy and who, with me, will have to confess: "If I had not believed that I would see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living . . .

VO



## NEWSLETTER

Just as 1982 is rapidly dwindling away, so we are also soon approaching another milestone, the completion and opening of "Ebenezer Villa," D.V. Feb. 1, 1983.

The end of the year may well be an appropriate time to glance back a bit into the past and to express our hopes for the future of the Home. It is, of course, with humility and gratitude that we do this. We realize that God has allowed us to be successful in the establishment of the home for the aged. It was only a couple years ago that this whole project seemed but a dream. Let's also not forget that already ten years have gone by in preparations. Realizing that during this time the road was not always an easy one, and the work often difficult, makes us all the more thankful that we may see results.

As we mentioned in one of our earlier newsletters, we may have been busy with a membership drive. It was interesting to note that there are still quite a number of people who do not realize that this project will be self-supporting, since we receive government funding. Therefore, contrary to other projects, our membership fees will hardly go up, if at all. As far

as what our membership fees are used for, we hope to use them to provide some kind of limited care, furnish the lounge and library, and provide some extras that the normal budget does not cover. Obtaining tenants has been somewhat slower than we would like. This is likely due to the fact that most people would like to see the finished product before moving into a home in which they may spend the rest of their life. This opinion was confirmed on Nov. 20, when we had a type of preview for the tenants so they could get a foretaste of what to expect. The response and the get-together which followed in the church basement was very encouraging, to say the least. On Dec. 18, we plan to have another preview like this and this time invite everyone who is interested.

All in all, when we look back at the year 1982, we could easily say it has been the busiest year in the development of "Ebenezer Villa." If we look ahead at the coming year, rather than trying to make all kinds of plans and predictions, we simply hope for God's continued blessing in 1983.

C. FEENSTRA

### COMMUNIQUÉ of The Constituent Assembly for the International Conference of Reformed Churches.

1. The Constituent Assembly for the International Conference of Reformed Churches was held in Groningen, The Netherlands, from October 26th — November 4th, 1982.

The delegates can look back on a fruitful series of meetings which resulted in important decisions.

2. One of the most significant items of the agenda was the proposed draft Constitution.

The Assembly agreed on the following conclusions laid down in the Constitution:

*Article I.* The Name shall be The International Conference of Reformed Churches.

*Article II.* The Basis of the Conference shall be the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity (the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort) and the Westminster Standards (the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechism).

*Article III.* The Purpose of the Conference shall be:

1. to express and promote the unity of faith that the member churches have in Christ;
2. to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the member churches;
3. to encourage cooperation among the member churches in the fulfillment of the missionary and other mandates;
4. to study the common problems and issues that confront the member churches and to aim for recommendations with respect to these matters;
5. to present a Reformed testimony to the world.

*Article IV.*

1. Those churches shall be admitted as members which
  - a. adhere and are faithful to the confessional standards stated in the basis;
  - b. furnish (i) their confessional standards;
    - (ii) their form of government;
    - (iii) their form of subscription;
    - (iv) their declaratory acts  
(if applicable);
  - c. are accepted by a two-thirds majority vote of the member churches, every member church having one vote;
  - d. are not members of the World Council of Churches or any other organization whose aims and practices are deemed to be in conflict with the basis.
2. Termination of membership shall be by a two-thirds majority whenever the

Conference is of the opinion that the member church in its doctrine and/or practice is no longer in agreement with the basis.

3. During the sessions of the Assembly much time and energy were devoted to matters which are deemed of great value for the present and future ecclesiastical relationship between the member churches.

Close attention was given to matters of doctrine, church polity, together with missionary mandates and practices.

4. It was agreed that the Conference be convened every four years; that the first meeting be in Edinburgh, Scotland, in September 1985, the Lord willing. A provisional Secretary was appointed in accordance with the Interim Rules, namely, Rev. M. van Beveren, 13904-86 Street, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada T5E 3C1.

5. The confessional unity that exists among the participating Churches was reaffirmed and promoted. Gratitude is expressed to the Lord Who has established His world wide Church and is faithful in the ingathering, the defence, and the preservation of His people until the end of the ages.

## PRESS RELEASE

*Board Meeting of the Canadian Reformed Association for the Handicapped (CRAFTH) held September 17, 1982.*

1. The chairman, Mr. P. Feenstra, opens the meeting by requesting that we sing Psalm 103:1, after which he read Psalm 103. He then welcomed all present, especially Mr. H. Faber who came to give us advice re: incorporation of our society.

2. The floor was given to Mr. H. Faber, who gave us an outline of all possibilities for incorporating, and explained first why?:

- 1) for national revenue (mandatory);
- 2) it limits personal liability;
- 3) forcing to maintain certain standards;
- 4) needed if we wish Provincial help.

This act covers:

- 1) each present member of the board is a member of the corporation;
- 2) no personal gain for members;
- 3) auditors are required on a yearly basis.

The two types of corporation are:

- 1) social non-profit corporation;
- 2) charitable non-profit corporation.

The last one requires public trustees, etc., and there will be more controls.

After a vote it was decided to apply for the charitable non-profit corporation, and Mr. H. Faber was given permission to do this for us. Mr. H. Faber left the meeting and we had a short intermission.

3. After this Mr. John Scholten came, regarding the sales of the tapes of the choirs. One thousand tapes were made and only a few were still left. The association was asked at this point to take over

the sale of the tapes. Mr. J. Scholten will keep the copyright under his personal name. It was decided to inquire about the price of 1000 tapes.

4. Minutes of the meeting of July 30, 1982, were accepted as presented. Matters of the minutes: a) no date was set yet for a get-together of the summer camp participants. This will be in October or November. Invitations will be sent out. b) Mr. Dieleman and Mr. Brouwer did not meet yet with Rev. Klomps of Christian Horizons. (Reason: holiday of Mr. Churchman).

5. Mr. J. Wanders Jr. submitted his resignation as board member of the society. This was accepted. Mr. Dieleman will notify him about this and also the need for nominations from the local membership of Brampton.

6. Establishment of a Home: So far only one telephone call was received to inquire about the advertised position. This was from a single sister who was on a visit in Canada from Holland. Although we will keep this name on file, we prefer a couple to start a "foster home" as planned.

7. Summer camp: There were still a few bills outstanding: a tent and three cots were bought and insurance had to be paid. Mr. W. Sipkema, the treasurer, took care of this. The camp committee plans to establish rules and regulations for a future camp holiday.

8. Public Relations asked if a fee was available for an (invited) speaker. The board decided to set a ceiling of \$50.00 and mileage for this purpose.

9. Question Period: Revenue Canada has to be notified about changes in the by-laws. Mr. W. Sipkema will take care of this.

Mrs. H. Riesebosch presented a cheque to the treasurer, proceeds of a garage sale held by several ladies in Smithville. A thank-you note will be sent to them by the corresponding secretary.

10. Next meeting will be held October 22, 1982.

P. FEENSTRA

## PRESS RELEASE

*Board meeting of the Canadian Reformed Association for the Handicapped held on October 22, 1982, in the basement of the Canadian Reformed Church of Hamilton.*

The chairman, br. P. Feenstra, opens the meeting with the reading of Psalm 98 after which he leads in prayer. He then welcomes those present, especially sr. H. Nobel who takes the place of J. Wanders Jr. from Brampton, and sr. T. Vanden Bos as guest. After a minor change, the minutes of the previous meeting are adopted as made. The agenda is then established.

Br. A. Dieleman reports to the meeting concerning a fund-raising committee in The Netherlands which could help to buy a home. If this group can be convinced of the necessity of such financial help, they could raise a specific amount

(set by the board) within a year. However, the Association should be prepared to shoulder the main burden and consider the help from Holland only as something to ease the financial burden.

The chairman reports on a paper drawn up by a brother regarding incorporation. The paper itself was not available. He also reports that br. J. Scholten is looking after the reproduction of 500 more tapes of the massed choir. They may be ready before Christmas.

On Tuesday, October 26, br. A. Dieleman and br. K. Brouwer will meet with representatives of Christian Horizons to discuss the possibility of cooperating in any way.

The chairman reports that Summer Camp 1982 was not only a success as was attested to by the participants, but it was also a financial success. Due to the large number of participants at the camp, enough money was collected to pay for all expenses.

The treasurer, br. W. Sipkema, thankfully reports that a donation of \$446.97 has been received from the Women's League Day.

No definite progress has been made and no applications have been received for a couple interested in running a foster home. The board realizes the urgency of the matter. It is decided to approach specific couples whom they feel will be capable to fill this position. The board also realizes that otherwise a new solution will have to be found.

The point was brought up to go overseas (The Netherlands) for a prospective couple. The board will try to find a contact person for communication with The Netherlands and will advertise in *Nederlands Dagblad*.

The treasurer reminds the board that the year is almost over and urges that all dues not yet collected should be collected and given to him before the year's end.

*General Question Period:* It was suggested that a list be completed of all the handicapped brothers and sisters in Ontario.

On Nov. 13, 1982, the Toronto choir will give a performance to which everyone is invited. The proceeds will be for the Association for the Handicapped.

Since the term of br. A. Dieleman is completed, the chairman thanks him for all the work he has done and asks him to close with prayer.

For the Board,  
K. BROUWER

**DID YOU SEND  
IN YOUR  
SUBSCRIPTION  
RENEWAL?**

# our little magazine



Dear Busy Beavers,

Do you know this children's hymn? Listen!

"Who came down from heaven to earth?  
 Jesus Christ, our Saviour,  
 Came a child of lowly birth?  
 Jesus Christ our Saviour.  
 Sound the chorus loud and clear,  
 He has brought salvation near;  
 None so precious, none so dear,  
 Jesus Christ, our Saviour."



That's about Christmas — you know that.  
 The poor little baby born in a stable.  
 In a stable, of all places!  
 But He didn't stay a baby.  
 He grew up to be a man.  
 He did His Father's work.  
 He died on the cross for our sins.  
 But He rose from the dead.  
 And then He went back to heaven to the glory of His Father.

And best of all He will come back to this world.  
 Not as a little baby again, oh no!  
 Then He will come as King of kings and Lord of lords!

Can you sing the hymn that tells about that?

"Come, Lord Jesus, Maranatha.  
 Come, make all things new.  
 Bring about the new creation,  
 Where we'll be with You."

\*\*\*\*\*

Here are two Christmas poems written for you by Busy Beavers.

### Poem

Jesus was born on Christmas Day,  
 Without Him we would have no way.  
 He died on the cross for all our sin,  
 Victory over death He did win.



### Christmas

Lying in a manger  
 Was the lad  
 Anyone could see  
 He was not sad.

They did know,  
 (His parents dear)  
 That the Saviour  
 Was now here.

2000 years later  
 We celebrate His birth  
 It's a celebration  
 Known throughout the earth.



### Names and Meanings

You know that in Bible days people's names had a meaning.

Here are the names of the people in the Christmas story.

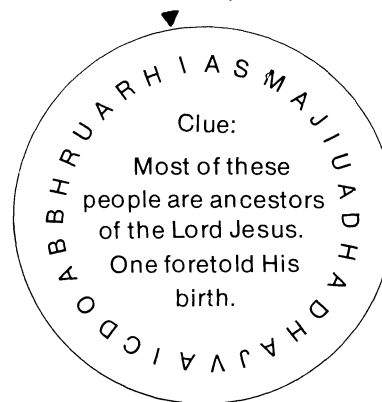
Can you match them to the right meaning?

- |              |                           |
|--------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Zecharias | a. bitter                 |
| 2. Elizabeth | b. oath of God            |
| 3. Mary      | c. Saviour                |
| 4. Joseph    | d. my God is the Lord     |
| 5. John      | e. the Lord has heard     |
| 6. Jesus     | f. God's gracious gift    |
| 7. Elijah    | g. remembered by the Lord |
| 8. Simeon    | h. the Lord shall add     |
| 9. Anna      | i. grace                  |



### Puzzle Wheel

How many Bible names can you find?  
 How many Bible names can you find?  
 Start at ▼ and take every *other* letter.



Clue:

Most of these  
 people are ancestors  
 of the Lord Jesus.  
 One foretold His  
 birth.

Answers at end of Our Little Magazine







## From the Mailbox

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club *Sarah Vander Woude*. We are happy to have you join us. I see you're a real Busy Beaver already, Sarah, with all kinds of hobbies, and sending us a quiz. Thank you very much. Write again soon.

How is your puppy doing, *Jennifer Stam*? I am glad you like your membership card. Be sure to keep it in a safe place. I'm looking forward to your letters, Jennifer! Thank you for the picture, too.

Hello, *Cindy Oosterveld*. It was nice to hear from you again. Thank you very much for the riddles. I'm sure the Busy Beavers will enjoy them. Write again soon, Cindy.

And a big welcome to you, too, *Frederick De Wit*. Sounds to me as if you can have lots of fun around your house. Are you skating yet on your dugout? I think you must be busy helping look after all those pets, Frederick!

Hello, *Mary-Ann Van Woudenberg*. It was really nice hearing from you again. How did your song for the welcome evening turn out? And how is your knitting coming along? Remembrance Day is gone, Mary-Ann. Shall I keep your puzzle for next year? Thank you, anyway!

I'm glad you had such a good time at your cousin's home, *Cornelius* ??? in Iron Springs, Alta. Are you skating on your pond yet? Will your choir be giving a Christmas Concert? Thanks for the picture, Cornelius. Bye for now.

Don't you think it's interesting having so many teachers, *Annette Haan*? And I'm glad you're getting good marks. Keep up the good work. Thanks very much for the puzzle, Annette. That was thoughtful of you.

Thank you for the pretty letter, *Carol Witteveen*! I'm happy to hear you're doing well in music and enjoying Our Little Magazine. I hope you get your pen-pal. Have fun collecting, Carol!

Hello *Audrey Vandersluis*. I'm glad you like the quizzes in Our Little Magazine, and if you like drawing maybe you'll send a picture to me sometime to share with the other Busy Beavers? Bye for now, Audrey. Write again soon.

Congratulations on a good report *Erica Blom*. Yes, I can see you would enjoy school more this year. Keep up the good work! Thanks for the puzzle and quiz, Erica. Bye for now.

Busy Beavers we need a PEN-PAL for:

Carol Witteveen  
1240 Sumas Way, R.R. #2,  
Abbotsford, B.C. V2S 4N2

### Winter

In winter it is fun,  
But there is no sun.  
It is sometimes cold.  
Dress warm! You won't get cold.  
You build and make a thing  
But not a bird does sing.  
And when you are cold, brrr,  
I advise you: dress in fur!

by Busy Beaver *Wilma Meerveld*



Winter Picture

by Busy Beaver *Darlene Lodder*



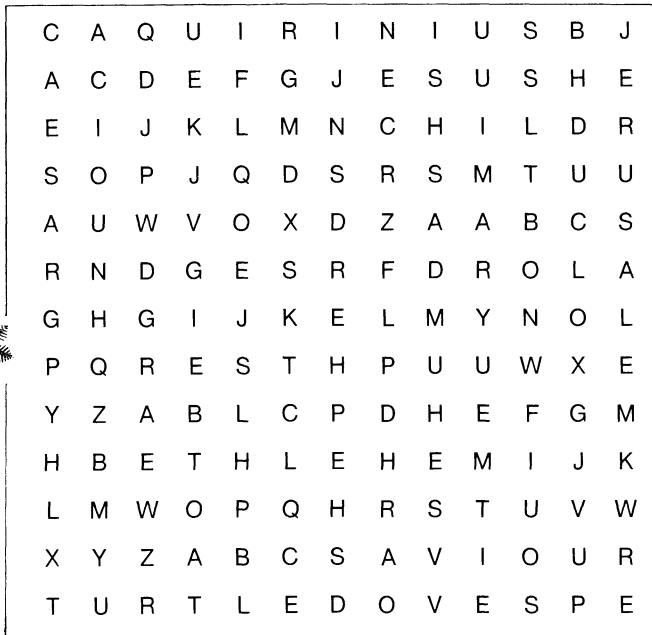
# WORD SEARCH PUZZLE

on Luke 2

## Birthday Wishes

The New Year is just about here. And that brings the time to wish all the Busy Beavers with a January birthday a very happy day and many happy returns, too! We hope you'll have a really good time celebrating with your family and friends. May the Lord bless and guide you all the year through!

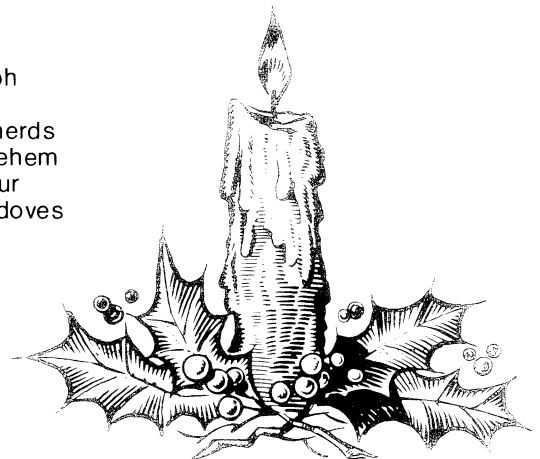
Heather Van Middelkoop	January 1
Susan Helder	3
Tim Togeretz	7
Jennifer Clark	8
Brian Vanderhout	11
Richard Lof	16
Linda De Boer	18
Marie Huttema	20
Marnix Sikkema	23
Bernard Breukelman	26
Helena Onderwater	26
Gerald Schutten	26
John Paul Van Amerongen	27
Marcella Veenman	28
Janetta Gelderman	29
Carol Witteveen	31



Look forward, backward,  
and on angles for  
these words:

- Caesar
- Qurinius
- Jesus
- Child
- Jerusalem
- Mary
- Lord
- Angel
- Joseph
- God
- shepherds
- Bethlehem
- Saviour
- turtledoves

by Busy Beaver Annette Haan



**THINGS TO DO**

Here are some things for you to try during your Christmas holidays. Have fun!

**1. Magic Tree**

You Need:

- large piece of green paper (newspaper will do)
- scotch tape
- scissors

To Do

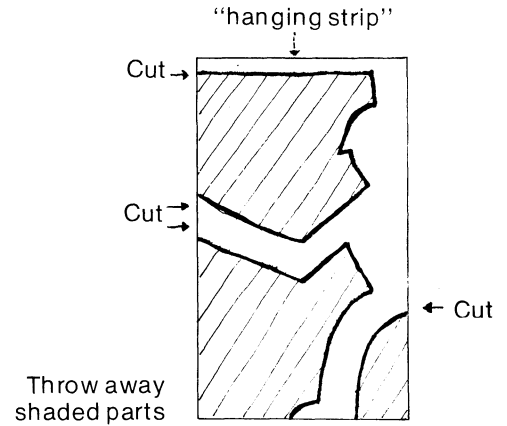
- a. Roll paper into a *tight* tube and tape the end.
- b. Cut down the tube to make strips to within about 10 cm from the taped end
- c. Keep doing this until you have cut strips all around the tube.
- d. Bend strips down and pull upwards from centre. Watch your tree grow!

**2. Cutout Mural**

You can make this from newspaper, too, or on plain paper so that you can colour or paint the figures. Try your own designs too!



- fold your paper in half left to right
- fold in half again, right to left, once; do it again, twice; and again, three times.
- put the pattern on top and cut through all thicknesses following instructions.



Busy Beaver *Cynthia Oosterveld's* Code quiz has a wish meant for all of you.

Code	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>
a — 3					
p — 6					
e — 2	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>1</u>
y — 1					
r — 8					
h — 4	<u>5</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>9</u>		
v — 7					
n — 5					!
w — 9	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>8</u>	



And happy holidays to you all, Busy Beavers!

With love from your Aunt Betty

Answers: Names and Meanings: 1. g; 2. b; 3. a; 4. h; 5. f; 6. c; 7. d; 8. e; 9. i.  
Puzzle Wheel: Isalah, David, Abraham, Judah, Jacob, Ruth, Hur.

