

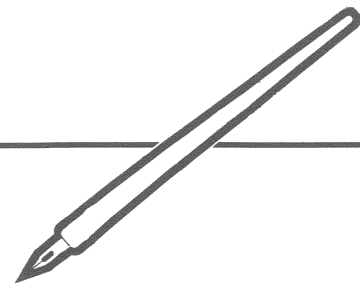


Clarion

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The Acts of Synod

Going through the different Church Bulletins, we notice that most consistories are dealing with the Acts of General Synod Cloverdale 1983. In the press releases and in private conversations all kinds of names are used for this “dealing with the Acts.” Some speak of *reviewing* the Acts, others call it *approbation* or *ratification* and again others say that they have *approved* or *accepted* a certain part of the Acts. Because questions have been raised about the proper procedure and the proper name for this “dealing with the Acts,” we will make some remarks on this issue.

Some argue that the decisions of a general synod have to be ratified by the consistory, before they are binding for a certain church. We have heard the statement that a specific decision of synod was not yet applicable to a certain congregation, because the consistory had not yet ratified that part of the Acts. Others say that every decision of synod is settled and binding from the very moment the decision has been taken, and does not need any “ratification” by a consistory. Some consider the latter point of view a matter of synodocracy, that is, giving too much power and authority to a synod, at the cost of the consistory.

What is the right approach? Does a decision of a synod become effective for a certain congregation only after the consistory has ratified the pertinent articles of the Acts? This “ratification” can take quite a while. Especially controversial issues might delay the procedure. A consistory is probably so busy with other things that they simply do not have any time at all for ratification of the Acts. Does that mean that the decisions of a synod will never become “settled and binding” for that congregation? That would be an easy way out.

We have to be careful that we do not fall in the trap of synodocracy, but we have to be on our guard for independentism as well. Independentism in this respect means that a consistory feels free to go its own way without being bothered by the decisions of ecclesiastical assemblies. To them the decisions of a synod are only suggestions they can follow, but are free not to adhere to whenever they wish not to do so.

Let us first consider what kind of issues a general synod is supposed to deal with. That is not just the regular business of a consistory. A general synod is not a kind of “super-consistory.” In Article 30 of the Church Order rules are set and restrictions are made for the agenda. In the first place it says, that these assemblies shall deal with no other than ecclesiastical matters and in an ecclesiastical way. In the second place, they shall deal with those matters only which cannot be finished in the minor assembly or matters which belong to the churches in common. In the third place, a new matter which has not been presented previously to that major assembly may be put on the agenda only after the minor assembly has dealt with it. That determines the agenda of a general synod and all other “major assemblies.” A synod cannot deal with every issue which members of a synod should like to tackle. A synod does not freely

set its own agenda, but is bound by what the churches have put on the table. The delegates have to stick to their mandate.

Basically three types of issues can be found on the agenda:

1. Matters which belong to the churches in common;
2. matters which could not be finished in the minor assembly;
3. matters of appeal.

All three points are closely related. Number 1 and 3 are special cases of number 2. A matter which belongs to the churches in common, for instance, is the Theological College. This cannot be finished in one classis or a regional synod. Appeals are also matters which could not be finished in a minor assembly because the appellant was apparently not satisfied with a previous decision.

Article 37 of the Church Order speaks about the “jurisdiction” of the major assemblies. The expression “major” in this respect does not mean more important or with greater authority. The distinctions “major” and “minor” refer to the greater or smaller *number* of churches involved in constituting such an assembly. Therefore a general synod is “major” with respect to a regional synod and a regional synod to a classis.

What kind of “jurisdiction” does a major assembly have? We believe that Christ has ordained office-bearers in His church and that therefore the consistory is the prime ruling body in the church. With authority received from Christ the Head of the church Himself. From whom does a major assembly have its “authority”? The answer is: it is based on mutual agreement. The churches are working together in a confederation. The delegates to major assemblies are appointed and instructed via the consistories. They receive their mandate, their instruction, and their restriction from the churches. In the credentials we always find a clause like: “The Consistory will abide by decisions taken in harmony with Holy Scripture, the Creeds and the Church Order” or a suchlike statement.

Article 31 of the Church Order sets rules and limits for the acceptance of the decisions of major assemblies as follows “whatever may be agreed upon by a majority vote shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proved to be in conflict with the Word of God or with the Church Order.” Although this article refers in the first place to matters of appeal, it counts for every decision. We have to notice carefully what it says! It does not say that a decision is settled and binding as soon as it has been *ratified* by the consistory, but that it *shall be considered* settled and binding. Neither does it say that a decision has to be adhered to and upheld *until* a next synod has granted the appeal. That would be synodocracy. It says “. . . settled and binding unless” That means that, when a decision has been made and a church (or a person) does not agree with it, there are basically three options.

1. One can (more or less grumbling) say: “I do not agree with it, but it is the best we can get. Within a community you have to give and to take. You can not always get your way. Sometimes you win, sometimes you loose. I have to live with it.”

2. When the matter is too important to be taken this way, a decision of a classis or a regional synod can be appealed to a major assembly, or a revision can be requested when it concerns a decision of a general synod. In the meantime the decision is considered to be valid. That can happen, for instance, with certain psalms or hymns or changes of the liturgical forms.

3. A third possibility is that a person or a consistory considers a decision to be in conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order. According to Art. 31 such a decision is not binding. It has to be disapproved or rejected. However, that is a last resort. It is a kind of "Doleantie" or "Liberation." The consequence is that, if the decision is upheld by the churches, it leads to a separation or a secession from the confederation.

We will try to come to a conclusion. We do not want to fall in the trap of synodocracy. Neither do we advocate independentism. We are living as churches in a confederation. We have to help, to assist, and to serve each other. We have made commitments and we have to honour our commitments. The prime authority lies with the consistory, but in our confederation we have promised to adhere to decisions of the major assemblies, with the exception as set out in Art. 31 of the Church Order. A decision of a general synod does not need ratification or approval of a consistory before it becomes effective. A decision

is formally valid from the moment the decision has been taken.

However, to abide by a decision you have to know the decision. All church members are provided with a copy of the Acts of a synod and are supposed to read them. Those who have sent an appeal to a synod or any other communication about a certain issue, have received a personal answer from that synod with a copy of the pertinent article of the Acts. These letters are oftentimes mailed within 24 hours after a decision has been taken. It is important that all church members, and especially the office-bearers, study the Acts. In order to give an incentive to study these matters and to do it in an orderly fashion, it is a good idea to make it a point on the agenda of the consistory to go successively through all the articles of the Acts. However, it is not a necessity. Neither does it mean that a decision only comes in effect after it has been "ratified." It stands to reason that it takes time and study to implement all decisions. It is, e.g. difficult to use the new psalms, hymns, and liturgical forms before all churches have received the new *Book of Praise*, and unfortunately that can take more time than was expected. But the validity of a decision does not depend on a ratification.

Let us be aware of both extremes in this respect. No synodocracy and no independentism, but a Reformed church life.

W. POUWELSE

“Christian” in the Creed?

General Synod Cloverdale 1983 of the Canadian Reformed Churches decided "to reinsert the word 'Christian' in Section III of the Apostles' Creed, because no weighty reasons for the removal of this word have been brought forward" (Art. 70 II C).

This decision is of importance for the life of the Canadian Reformed Churches. In the coming weeks a new edition of the *Book of Praise* will be published. Several new texts and translations reach the stage that they will be used in the churches. I think especially of the Apostles' Creed, the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism (how important for the afternoon service and for catechism instruction) and of the Canons of Dort. After they have been used in the churches, the next General Synod will certainly receive requests for changes. Also the new *Book of Praise* is in this respect still a provisional edition. The above mentioned decision to add the word "Christian" to the Apostles' Creed will certainly be challenged and deserves, therefore, to be discussed publicly and thoroughly.

The reader will notice that I speak about *adding* the word "Christian," while Synod used the word "to reinsert." It can-

not be denied, that the word "Christian" is not found in the so-called received text — the original and authentic Latin text — nor in the more than one-thousand-year-old English text.

Among the millions of English speaking Christians that profess the Christian faith in the words of the Apostles' Creed, the Canadian Reformed Churches have now accepted for themselves a text that adds one word. According to the testimony of the ages this word does not belong in the Apostles' Creed. The question immediately arises: Was the decision of Synod Cloverdale not an unecumenical action with respect to an ecumenical creed?

Before we try to answer this question in detail, we must deal with some introductory issues. Synod 1983 used the word "to reinsert," because there has been one printing of our *Book of Praise* (dated 1972) in which the word "Christian" suddenly appeared in the English text. It was removed by Synod Toronto 1974.

To the best of my knowledge, the story is as follows. The first edition of our *Book of Praise* is copyrighted in 1961. By the way, if someone has a first printing, he or she should donate it to the library

of our Theological College. I could not locate a first printing! My red booklet says "Printed in The Netherlands 1965" but that is a third printing. This 1965 edition gave the Christian Reformed text of the Creeds, Confessions, Forms and Prayers. This text has been used in the Canadian Reformed Churches during more than two decades, namely, since Synod 1958. It will now be replaced by a Canadian Reformed text of Synod Cloverdale 1983.

What about the word "Christian" in this Christian Reformed text? Already its name shows that the Christian Reformed Church is not afraid of the word "Christian." Nevertheless, it adhered to an English text of the Apostles' Creed in which the word "Christian" is not found (neither in Lord's Day 7, Answer 23 of the Heidelberg Catechism), and rightly so. The Christian Reformed Church in North America had become an English speaking church, and adhered to an English tradition of more than one thousand years old. In the English text of this ecumenical creed — as in the French text for that matter, or the Italian, Spanish or Portuguese, etc. — the word "Christian" is not found and this is in agreement with the original and authentic Latin text. The Christian Re-

formed Church did not want to separate itself from the Reformed tradition in English speaking countries: the tradition of the Church of England and the Kirk of Scotland, the tradition of John Knox and the Pilgrim Fathers, of the Puritans and of all English speaking Christians. It did, therefore, not yield to the Lutheran tradition of replacing the word "catholic" by the word "Christian," or to the compromising tradition of the Heidelberg Catechism in its German (although not in its Latin) text. As our readers know, this German peculiarity has been taken up by the Dutch version of the Heidelberg Catechism so that, alas, the beautiful adjective "catholic" is rendered by the Dutch word "algemeen," (universal) and "Christelijk" was added.

Let me immediately say that most Reformed Christians in The Netherlands — e.g. the Netherlands Reformed Church, the (synodical) Reformed Churches and, if I am not mistaken, also the Free Reformed Churches ("Christelijke Gereformeerden") — have returned to the original text of the Apostles' Creed, so that not only the Roman Catholics in The Netherlands but also the great majority of Protestant Christians now speak of "de heilige katholieke Kerk," the holy catholic Church. And as far as I know, even the Lutherans in Germany have accepted a version that returns to the original and authentic Latin text. These facts render a Canadian Reformed addition of the word "Christian" to the English translation — in which it never occurred — certainly not advisable. It is an infelicitous situation that we bring in what German and Dutch Christians discard and what should not have been in their versions to begin with.

The good English text of the Christian Reformed Church, then, was taken over in the Canadian Reformed Churches. Their deputies for an English Calvinistic Psalter acted in accordance with a decision of General Synod 1958. This second Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches did not speak about the ecumenical creeds, but recommended to the Churches the Christian Reformed text of the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dordt. It expressed thereby the expectation, that if in using them the Churches would find that if changes were to be made, they would come with proposals to a following General Synod. Sure, Synod Homewood-Carman 1958 also pronounced that for the time being only the Dutch text of the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dordt was the authentic one. What did the brothers mean by this? Older ministers in our Canadian Reformed Churches who attended this Synod, can inform our readers better, but I read this statement in this manner: Synod Homewood-Carman did not deny the signifi-

cance of the original German and Latin texts of the Heidelberg Catechism or of the Latin text of the Canons of Dordt. Synod 1958 did not make a symbol-historical statement. It wanted simply to say that if a doctrinal issue would arise, among us newly immigrated Dutch Canadians, we would deal with it according to the Dutch text of the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dordt, because this Dutch version had been our official text in The Netherlands and could be understood by all the members of the churches. They basically said: *For the time being* the Dutch text is our official one, but we recommend the English version of the Christian Reformed Church with whom in the past the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands had correspondence. Synod recommended a text of the Heidelberg Catechism in which the word "Christian" is not found in the Apostles' Creed. This text has been ecclesiastically accepted from 1958 until 1983.

Concluding my discussion of the statement of Synod 1958 that for the time being only the Dutch text of the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dordt was the authentic one, I draw your attention to the expression "for the time being" (*voorlopig*). It pictures the situation of immigrant churches. Let us not forget that the Acts of Synod 1958 were still completely written in the Dutch language. Nobody may transform this statement of authenticity into a symbol-historical decision, as if in establishing the best English version of the Apostles' Creed we are bound to the Dutch text of the Heidelberg Catechism.

Our last Synod, Cloverdale 1983, has basically made this mistake. At the same time it accepted an English translation of the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dordt which is not based on the Dutch version only, but takes into consideration the original and authentic texts in e.g. French, German, and Latin. Therefore, Synod was not consistent in regarding the Dutch text of the Heidelberg Catechism decisive for an English translation of the Apostles' Creed.

Synod Cloverdale 1983 has also neglected an important decision of Synod 1974. The Synod Toronto gave the Committee for the Doctrinal and Liturgical Forms the mandate "to scrutinize the text of the Doctrinal and Liturgical Forms as to correctness of translation from them, by Synod 1954 adopted, *Dutch Version*, the latter compared with the original languages." (Acts 1974, Art. 159, I, 3b). It is clear that Synod 1974 did not interpret the 1958 reference to the Dutch version as a symbol-historical statement. This Synod was aware of the significance of the original languages of our Doctrinal and Liturgical Forms, and for the Apostles'

Creed, original is not the Dutch or the German but the Latin language. Alas, in the Acts of Synod Cloverdale 1983 one does not find a reference to this mandate, given in 1974 and basic for the whole development of the new English texts in our *Book of Praise*.

It is irresponsible in the case of an English version of the Apostles' Creed not first of all to consider the received Latin text. It is for me unbelievable that Synod Cloverdale 1983 in its decision to "reinsert" the word "Christian" does not even refer to this original and authentic text of the Apostles' Creed. The deputies 1980 had stated in their report — alas not published in the Acts of Synod — that they had taken as basis for the new version the Latin text published by J.N.D. Kelly in his standard work *Early Christian Creeds*. But Synod 1983 probably did not even reread this report of deputies; they certainly did not consult one former deputy; they ignored completely the original Latin text and turned to a Dutch version of the Heidelberg Catechism in order to establish an English translation for the Latin creed of the early Christian Church. For one who loves the ecumenical creeds of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church it is embarrassing and deeply disturbing.

Let us return to the history of the *Book of Praise*. Since its first printing it contained the Christian Reformed text without the word "Christian" in the creed or in Lord's Day 7 and 21 of the Heidelberg Catechism. Synod 1958 had recommended this text and nobody objected and rightly so: these were good texts. Then there came one printing in which the word "Christian" suddenly appeared in the Apostles' Creed. It happened in the first complete edition of 1972. I for one reacted by publishing two articles in *Clarion*, Vol. 22, No's. 10 and 11. With a view to the original Latin text of the Apostles' Creed and the tradition in English speaking countries I proposed a return to the version in the previous editions: leave out the word "Christian" and retain the familiar words "I believe a holy catholic Church." These articles were written in Dutch with an English summary (May 19 and June 2, 1973) and I now republish them especially for our older readers.

These articles seem to have been forgotten in 1983 during the Synod of Cloverdale but they must have made an impact on the Synod that was held in 1974. For Synod Toronto 1974 made the following statement: "Since the correction of the texts belonged to the task of the Committee for the Second Half of the Church Book, the Committee on the Church Book should not have inserted the word "Christian" in the text of Article IX of the Apostles' Creed." Synod mandated the Committee on the Church Book to remove the

word "Christian" from the Apostles' Creed. As we already saw, this Synod established a committee to scrutinize the text of the Doctrinal and Liturgical Forms and to compare the Dutch version with *the original languages*.

When Synod Cloverdale 1983 now states that Synod 1974 decided to remove the word "Christian" without mentioning any grounds, it does not do justice to the fact that this Synod at the same time decided to have the English text of our doctrinal standards scrutinized in the light of their original languages and for the Apostles' Creed it means the Latin text. The word "Christian" was not in the original Latin text and had for more than one thousand years never belonged to the English version. No Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches had ever inserted it. It had only been a mistake of one or more members of the Committee on the Church Book in 1972. The Rev. W.W.J. VanOene has indicated that he can tell us about this infelicitous insertion in the 1972 edition of the *Book of Praise*. I am curious about his story, but from the Acts of synods it is clear that it had never been an official decision. The Christian Reformed text (without "Christian") had been recommended by Synod 1958. Therefore, Synod 1974 did not delete something from an official English text but corrected an error of one or more members of a committee (or was it the proofreader?). It was no "change in policy," as Synod Cloverdale 1983 asserts. It was removal of an editing error and restoration of the Christian Reformed text, recommended in 1958. You do not remove a printing error or an editor's mistake by giving "weighty grounds."

Therefore, Synod Cloverdale 1983 is wrong in its decision "to reinsert the word 'Christian' in Section III of the Apostles' Creed, because no weighty reasons for the removal of this word had been brought forward." Synod Cloverdale could not "reinsert," for the word had never belonged to the English version. Synod 1983 now added by official decision a word that is not found in the original and authentic Latin text, nor in the old English text. We now have a peculiar text of the Apostles' Creed that is not heard from the mouth of any other English speaking Christian. Is this a right action with respect to an ecumenical creed? Moreover, this new edition is no improvement in the light of Holy Scripture and the confessional tradition of the catholic Church. I hope to argue this broader in the near future.

One thing yet. Synod Cloverdale 1983 also considered: "From the Acts of Synod 1974 it does not appear that the deletion of the word 'Christian' has taken place in consultation with the sister churches abroad." I could remark that one does not consult sister churches about the

removal of a printing error or the correction of an editor's mistake. But I will not repeat myself. Let us simply realize that in 1974 no article of faith was at stake. Neither is that the case today nor will this be in the following synod when objections against the infelicitous decision of Synod 1983 will be discussed.

In this connection we listen to another consideration of Synod Cloverdale: "It is an overstatement to say that the mere removal of the word 'Christian' from the text of the Apostles' Creed is a denial of Jesus Christ being the Head of the church." I appreciate this consideration, although I would not call such saying an overstatement. It is a wrong statement. One should realize that we are not debating a matter of doctrine or an article of faith, but an issue concerning the English version of the Apostles' Creed. Nobody in our churches denies that Jesus Christ is the Head of the church. We confess this e.g. in Art. 27 ("Christ is an eternal King") or Art. 31 of our Belgic Confession ("Christ, the only universal Bishop and the only Head of the church"). And nobody proposes to take away the expression "Christian Church" e.g. in Lord's Day 27 (by baptism "ingrafted into the Christian Church"). Therefore, no article of faith is at stake and it is no matter of heresy over against truth. It is not an overstatement but a wrong statement if someone would suggest that in the Canadian Reformed Churches the doctrine of the Headship of Christ over the church is now being attacked. When a minister argues that the word "Christian" does not belong in the English version of the Apostles' Creed

and that Synod Cloverdale should never have added this word, he does not break his vow in the Form of Subscription. And precisely because no article of faith was at stake, no consultation with the sister churches was necessary in 1974. Those sister churches knew our English text even before the Liberation of 1944 because of their correspondence with e.g. the Christian Reformed Church, and they knew that our second synod had recommended this Christian Reformed text already in 1958.


Our new text of the Apostles' Creed is not un-Scriptural. In the light of the Scriptures, however, and in the light of the history of the ecumenical creeds of the catholic Church it is no confessional improvement. This is a serious thing for us and our children. The Canadian Reformed Churches will do wise to remove the word "Christian" from their new English text of the Apostles' Creed as soon as possible.

J. FABER

De tekst van het Apostolicum in ons *Book of Praise*

De Synode van Cloverdale 1983 besloot het woord "Christelijke" (weer) toe te voegen aan de Engelse tekst van de Apostolische Geloofsbelijdenis. Dit woord was ingeslopen in de uitgave van ons *Book of Praise* 1972 door een fout van de uitgever en daarom door de Synode van 1974 verwijderd.

De Synode van Cloverdale, echter, oordeelde dat voor deze verwijdering geen gewichtige redenen waren aangevoerd. Nu de zaak ongetwijfeld op de volgende Synode weer aan de orde komt,



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lijkt het me goed voor onze lezers de argumenten te herdrukken die reeds op 19 Mei 1973 in *Clarion* tegen de invoeging van het woord "Christelijke" waren geuit. Zij hebben ongetwijfeld een rol gespeeld bij de correctie door de Synode van 1974 terecht aangebracht. Ik heb de indruk dat de leden van de laatste Synode helaas deze argumenten vergeten waren. In alle bescheidenheid breng ik ze opnieuw onder uw aandacht.

J.F.

Mijn kritische opmerking betreft de tekst van de Apostolische Geloofsbelijdenis in een niet onbelangrijk onderdeel. Trouwens, elk onderdeel van deze echt oecumenische belijdenis is belangrijk. We belijden in haar woorden elke Zondag ons algemeen, ongetwijfeld Christelijk geloof "in gemeenschap met de Kerk van alle eeuwen," zoals sommige voorgangers het graag mogen uitdrukken.

Nu viel het mij op dat in de nieuwe editie van ons *Book of Praise* artikel 9 luidt: "I believe a holy catholic *Christian* Church, the communion of saints." Indien mijn ogen mij niet bedriegen is de toevoeging "Christian" later opzettelijk aangebracht. De nieuwe editie is wel consequent te werk gegaan; U vindt de toevoeging niet alleen in de Heidelbergse Catechismus (blz. 395, 403), maar ook onder het hoofdstuk "Ecumenical Creeds" (blz. 468) in de gebeden (blz. 480, 490) en in het Avondmaalsformulier (blz. 512).

Mijn voorstel is nu dat we deze toevoeging weer haastig schrappen en terugkeren tot de tekst "I believe a holy catholic Church" en dan mag het woord "Church," wat mij betreft, ook wel met een kleine c worden gedrukt. U begrijpt dat dit laatste slechts een ondergeschikte bijzaak is en dat het mij vooral gaat om de schrapping van het woord "Christian."

Waarom? zult U vragen. Wel, eenvoudig omdat het woord niet in de oorspronkelijke tekst van het Apostolicum thuishoort. Misschien kijkt U daar een beetje verwonderd van op. We zijn immers gewend in de Nederlandse taal te zeggen: "Ik geloof een heilige, algemene, *Christelijke* Kerk." Het zal ook wel de Nederlandse achtergrond van onze deputaten zijn, die hen er toe gebracht heeft het woord "Christian" in de tekst op te nemen.

Laat me direct ieder mogelijk misverstand wegnemen: natuurlijk is er geen enkel Schriftmatig bezwaar tegen de kerk als Christelijke kerk te belijden. De kerk is van Christus. Hij is haar Hoofd en Bruidegom; ze is Zijn lichaam en bruid.

Maar het punt in kwestie is of dit in de Apostolische Geloofsbelijdenis werd uitgedrukt en of dus het woord "Christelijk" in de tekst van het Apostolicum thuishoort. Dit nu is ongetwijfeld niet het geval.

Ieder die kennis neemt van betrouwbare tekstuittgaven van de zgn. ecumenische belijdenisgeschriften, kan het ontdekken. Laat me volstaan met te verwijzen naar twee bronnen. De eerste is Rooms Katholiek. In het bekende *Enchiridion Symbolorum* — een verzameling van symbolen, leerstellige definities en verklaringen van de Roomse kerk — kan men de geschiedenis van het ontstaan van de Apostolische Geloofsbelijdenis volgen. Niet alleen in de thans algemeen aanvaarde vormen, komt het woord niet voor. Oorspronkelijk sprak men slechts over "de heilige kerk"; later werd het woord "katholiek" of "algemeen" toegevoegd. Deze toevoeging stamt uit het slot van de vierde eeuw na Christus en is misschien onder invloed van de kerk in het Oosten ook in de Westerse formule aangebracht. Maar het woord "Christelijk" of "van Christus" wordt in geen enkele oude formule gevonden. 'k Raadpleegde de 33e uitgave, de zgn. Denzinger-Schömetzer uit 1965; de tekst vindt men op blz. 28.

Een tweede bron is bijv. het bekende standaardwerk van J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*. In de tweede uitgave, vierde druk, 1964, vindt men de gehele geschiedenis van het Apostolicum beschreven en ziet men de zgn. "received text" afgedrukt op blz. 369 in het oorspronkelijk Latijn en in de Engelse vertaling: Credo . . . sanctam ecclesiam catholicam; I believe . . . *the holy Catholic Church*.

Mijn eerste argument voor de schrapping is dus dat het woord "Christian" niet tot de oorspronkelijke tekst van de Apostolische Geloofsbelijdenis behoort.

Aangezien het hier een klassiek ecumenisch belijdenisgeschrift geldt, doet men goed zich aan de eeuwenoude oorspronkelijke tekst te houden.

Het tweede argument is dat indien wij het woord "Christian" invoegen, wij ons isoleren van de Angel-Saksische Christenheid. Voor zover mij bekend wordt in geen enkele "denominatie" in de Engels sprekende wereld gezegd "I believe a holy catholic *Christian* Church." Het woord "Christian" heeft in de Angel-Saksische wereld nimmer voet aan de ground gekregen in de tekst van het Apostolicum. 'k Acht het ongewenst dat wij de goede Engelse traditie doorbreken en ons en onze kinderen op dit punt zouden isoleren van de Engels sprekende Christenheid.

'k Hoorde de nieuwe Engelse tekst al gebruikt worden in kerkdiensten. Mijn advies is: laten wij terugkeren tot de oorspronkelijke tekst en het woord "Christian" op de aangegeven bladzijden van ons kostelijk *Book of Praise* schrappen.

Misschien bent U inmiddels een beetje nieuwsgierig geworden naar de oorsprong van de afwijkende tekst in onze Nederlandse gereformeerde zusterkerken.

Nu, dat is een verhaal apart. Indien het U niet verveelt, schrijf ik daarover graag een volgende maal, zo de HEERE wil dat wij leven.

J. FABER

Schools and taxes

The time has come again to prepare the receipts for income tax purposes for 1984.

At this point the court case in Ontario is under review, and many people will wonder how to go about this issue. Some legal minds have expressed their concern about the strength of the Lyle McBurney appeal.

It would seem to me that the school boards cannot be asked to take the responsibility of choosing which way to prepare the receipts. Therefore, I suggest the following details be provided on the receipt as shown in box.

Furthermore, I recommend that taxpayers then deduct the highest amount, but be prepared to be assessed on the lower deduction.

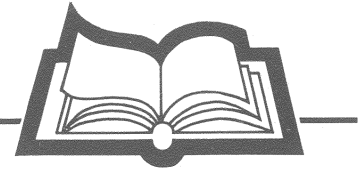
By the time the assessment mills have ground up the returns, the appeal will probably have been adjudicated.

Then, by having the reference to the

Paid during 1984	\$ _____
Less: Attributed to tuition in accordance with provisions of bulletin 75-23	_____
Balance donation according to bulletin 75-23	\$ _____

final outcome available, those who have been reassessed can likely get the deduction allowed by writing a letter to Revenue Canada, explaining the situation. That would save needless filings of Notices of Objection. Remember, however, that if such a letter is not successful, the taxpayers rights can only be protected if a notice of objection is filed within 90 days from the date of the assessment!

JOHN DE VOS
Certified General Accountant



“... I was like a beast toward Thee. Nevertheless I am continually with Thee”
Psalm 73:22b, 23a

Overruled for Good

The psalmist Asaph was struggling with what appeared to him as a serious paradox. He had long noticed how the wicked seemed to prosper, while the righteous among God's children had to suffer one hardship after another. The LORD seemed to be *near* to the rebellious and unbelieving, but *far* from those who in sincerity and truth sought to keep His Word. Asaph was so overcome by this apparent contradiction in his experience that his faith nearly suffered shipwreck . . . until he went to the sanctuary of God, v. 17. There, after a time of much trouble and weariness, he finally perceived the end of the matter, the “afterwards” of God's dealings. He saw something of the *depth* of God's judgment; that is, although it concerns this life, it also goes beyond the pale of this life, and is finalized in the life to come, the “afterwards” with God.

Having come through this struggle, Asaph's later description of it presents us with another apparent paradox which appears more gripping than the one he himself had to struggle with. Looking back on matters, he acknowledged that he was like a beast to his God, like the horse or mule without understanding (Psalm 32:9), the lower animal that blindly pursues its own will. Yet the LORD did not let him go. He ran away, but yet was held back. The original text brings out the paradoxical element even more: “I was like a beast with Thee . . . nevertheless I am continually with Thee.” How can it be possible?

What strikes us as a contradiction, however, is only a description of the LORD's sovereign and incomprehensible way with all His children. Asaph puts the struggle of every believer into words — insofar as human words can reach it. He recounts the point at which he had given up — only to be taken up by God; the point at which he finally released his grip — only to be gripped by the restraining hand of his Father; the point at which he felt himself fall into the pit — only to be carried up into the everlasting arms, Deut. 33:27. God did not let him go!

But all this is not a unique and private, personal testimony. It is a song of the *covenant*, a confession of a child of the covenant. Recovering his faith, Asaph aligned himself — and was aligned with — the “generation of Thy children,” the remnant of those who in true hope and faith sought the face of the LORD in all their ways, cf. v. 15. He had stood among the faithful, he had sought to obey the LORD's commandments, and then suffered hardships. His faith wavered, but then he saw the miracle of redemption, the miracle of the remnant which is held by grace, brought to faith and restored communion with the LORD.

As a song of struggle in the covenant, these words point prophetically to our Saviour, who more than anyone suffered unjustly, and experienced the hardships of divine rejection. Although He had done no wrong, He was cast off into the depths, forsaken by His God to outer darkness, the darkness of hell. *Nevertheless*, God held Him, raised Him up, and vindicated Him in His struggle. Although He was without sin, the voice of our Saviour speaks in these words, for “He was made to be sin who knew no sin,” (II Cor. 5:21), that we might be restored to God.

At the same time, these words speak of the spiritual struggle of every believer in the church, also in the new dispensation. As long as the final fulfilment of the promise remains outstanding, the struggle of faith is not over. And in the covenant we still can be “like a beast” with the LORD, — stubborn, unruly, unwilling to accept His will and direction. But every believer also meets with the same abiding truth: God's wonderful *nevertheless*. *Nevertheless*, He holds on to His own, and He does not let us go.

Then we see that the apparent contradiction is not a real paradox; this *nevertheless* is the miracle of God's grace, the wonder of His mercy and grace through which He keeps us standing while we have let go. At bottom, it is the “nevertheless” of God's *election* in the covenant, the surprising wonder by which He brings back the erring, and restrains His sheep who so easily wander away. Therefore, here we are beyond personal experience; the wonder of this *nevertheless* is the common property of the whole church, and every member who has found the LORD, and confessed His name.

Once gripped by the great “nevertheless” of God's choosing hand, the whole world is reordered for Asaph, and for us as well. At the end of the psalm we see how much his vision has changed. Once he thought that the LORD was far from him, and near to the wicked. Then He saw and confessed how near he was to God, how *near* God was to him, and therefore how *far* the wicked are removed from God's presence. God had overruled him — all for his good. So He does to all who seek His ways, and acknowledge His sovereign will.

That is why the final song of the church will be a song of glory to God alone, a song of praise and adoration because of the great divine “nevertheless” sealed in the eternal counsel of God, effected and completed in the gracious sacrifice of our Saviour, who bore the wrath of God that we might have peace with Him.

J. DEJONG



Knowing God's Will

At the end of the previous Press Review I promised a second instalment on the articles "Knowing God's Will" by the Rev. Donald MacLeod, editor of *The Monthly Record* of the Free Church of Scotland, for this issue of *Clarion*. I considered to shorten it, but did not know how to do that and leave the article intact. And where I have his permission "to use material from *The Monthly Record* in any way" that I "think can serve the kingdom," I take over the whole article this time. It is worth our pondering. I hope it will help the readers in leading a wise Christian life. Here it follows:

Last month we advanced two stages in our reflection on the problem of knowing God's will. We saw how questionable are all claims to personal special revelation; and we saw what we called our first reference-point — our Lord's own approach to decision-making as reflected in Philippians 2:5-8. He looked not to His own needs but to the needs of others.

We are now in a position to look at our second reference-point — a neglected but highly important statement in the Westminster Confession:

"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" (chapter I:VI).

What the divines have in view, of course, is that Scripture, despite its sufficiency as a rule of faith, cannot determine such things as the time and place of public meetings, the order of services, the language to be used (Gaelic or English?), the versions to be read, and the number of elders to be appointed. In these matters we are left to "the light of nature and Christian prudence."

But the teaching here is relevant to a much wider area of the Christian life. In fact, it gives us, in brief compass, a very comprehensive theology of guidance.

Three principles

This involves three principles.

First, we are always to observe the general rules of the Word. We can never appeal

to the light of nature or to Christian prudence or to special revelation or indeed to anything else in support of a course of action which violates a biblical principle. We cannot, whatever light we pretend to, marry an unbeliever or a man we are not prepared to obey or a woman with whom we are not prepared to have an exclusive life-long relationship. We cannot wilfully put ourselves out of a job ("he who does not provide for his own is worse than an infidel"). We cannot assume responsibilities which make it impossible for us to honour our parents or bring up our children in the knowledge and instruction of the Lord.

These things may seem obvious. But in fact many so-called problems of guidance are not problems of guidance at all. God's will is clear enough. The difficulty, for all our protests about the need for more light, is that we are not prepared to submit to it. "I can say from experience," wrote Donald Grey Barnhouse, "that 95% of knowing the will of God consists in being prepared to do it before you know what it is."

The second principle is that we are to be guided by the light of nature. This "light of nature" is a recurring concept in the Confession and indeed would merit some study in its own right. In chapter 1, section 1, we are told that *the light of nature* manifests the goodness, wisdom and power of God. According to chapter 20, the church and the civil magistrate may proceed against those who "publish such opinions and maintain such practices as are contrary to *the light of nature*." And chapter 21 tells us that it is the *law of nature* that a due proportion of time be set apart for the worship of God.

The concept is also important in the New Testament. To quote only two instances: *Nature* itself teaches that it is a disgrace for a man to have long hair (I Cor. 11:14); and the Gentiles sometimes do by nature the things contained in the law (Rom. 2:14).

Applying this to the problem of guidance. It means that we can never be "led" to do what is unnatural: God's will will not disregard our physical needs, impose intolerable psychological stress or violate deep-seated social and sexual instincts. More important still, it means that we will not allow ourselves to fall below the world's own standards. The Gentile conscience may to a large extent be darkness, but it is still offended by a man going off with his father's wife (I Cor. 5:1), by

religious meetings which degenerate into confused shambles (I Cor. 14:23), by Christians giving up their work because they think the Second Coming is imminent (II Thess. 3:11), by men neglecting their wives and families in the name of religion and by marriages between parties whose ages or cultures are incompatible. It is inadmissible to dismiss the judgment of such men on the ground of their being "unspiritual." They still have the light of nature and may be wiser, especially in practical matters, than the children of light.

Using our minds

The third principle laid down by the Confession is that we are to be guided by Christian prudence. This roots the task of ascertaining God's will firmly in the thinking of the Christian. "God's promises of guidance are not given to save us the bother of thinking," writes John Stott. Sadly, many Christians seem to think it is. As they plead for guidance what they are really looking for is a way of knowing God's will which dispenses with the need for disciplined and rigorous thought. They not only want absolute, revelational certainty. They want it painlessly, in some overwhelming, supernatural flash.

The Confession, by contrast, insists on our using our minds. This is in complete agreement with the New Testament. "Be transformed by the renewing of your minds," says Paul in Rom. 12:2, repeating the message in Eph. 4:23, "Be renewed in the spirit of your minds." Peter is equally insistent: "Gird up your minds" he writes (I Peter 1:13).

Basically, then, Christians will come to know God's will through careful reflection. But in saying this we should not forget that what we are talking about is *Christian* prudence. We are not discussing the natural human mind. We are considering the new mind of a man or woman indwelt by the Spirit, operating prayerfully and dependently and aiming for the glory of God. Such a mind will be enriched by experience, strengthened by interaction with other Christian minds and sensitive to every biblical guideline, general and specific.

This sensitiveness — this spiritual fine-tuning — is of enormous importance. If we grieve the Holy Spirit, neglect the Scriptures and cut ourselves off from Christian fellowship, our minds will become totally unreliable.

The backslider will make monumentally wrong decisions because his prudence will no longer be Christian. It will be worldly and selfish and lead to courses of action which, however plausible, will be totally contrary to the will of God.

If so much stress is to be laid on weighing up things for ourselves, what are the factors which, according to Scripture, we ought to be considering?

First, our own inclination. What we ourselves want can never be decisive. Neither, however, can it be ignored. When Paul lays down rules for the ordination of elders he begins by saying, "He who desires the episcopate desires a good work" (1 Tim. 3:1). As

us all too clearly where we stand and dramatically narrow our career options. But within the church, too, judgment of our gifts will often be in the hands of others and what we need is grace to submit to it. A candidate for the ministry who refuses the church's judgment shows by that very refusal that he is unfit for the office.

Fourth, we must weigh up the probable impact on our families of the various options open to us. What demands will be made on the wife? Is there a good school locally or will schooling involve the children being away from home? Is there a strong local church which will give rather than require support? Will our children find other Christians of their

"... many so-called problems of guidance are not problems of guidance at all. God's will is clear enough. The difficulty, for all our protests about the need for more light, is that we are not prepared to submit to it."

a general rule, if God wants us to do something He will make us want to do it. As Oliver Barclay points out, there is certainly no virtue in the idea that the most unpleasant alternative is always the right one.

Secondly, we will ponder all the advice we receive. Christian fellowship, as readers have been reminded recently by Donald N. MacLeod, is about sharing: and one thing to be shared is our decision-making. There are always others older, wiser, more experienced and more objective (about our situation) than ourselves. These friends must accept the responsibility of advising. It is no help if they simply say, "You must make up your own mind!" Of course we must: and of course it is also true that the best thing about advice is that you can refuse it. But we still need all the help we can get. In some situations, indeed, the church should make the decisions formally and officially. This was done frequently in the past. Today, the movements of ministers are too much a matter of individual whim, with far too little regard to the needs of congregations and the gifts of individuals.

Thirdly, we must consider our own gifts. Christian service, even in the secular sphere, is determined to a large extent by the abilities God has given to us. These may be manual, artistic, professional, commercial, political or ecclesiastical. It is difficult to be realistic in judging ourselves in this connection. On the one hand, we are liable to think of ourselves more highly than we ought: on the other, we are liable to disparage ourselves. The Bible prescribes a middle course: we are to exercise sober judgment (Rom. 12:3). In the secular sphere, the subjective element is hardly important. Examinations, interviews and other assessments will show

own age? Will they find employment? These — and many other similar factors — deserve to be pondered over and over again. Wives — and maybe even children — may have a right to volunteer for work in deprived or even dangerous or primitive areas. But husbands have no right to dictate to them: and even less to disregard their needs.

Fifth, we should look at the implications our decisions may have for the church. We are members of the body of Christ and our decision-making cannot ignore that. So far as our wisdom allows, we must do the edifying thing, refraining from what weakens and impoverishes, from what divides, from what might injure weaker brethren and from what would expose the church to the world's scorn and contempt. Nor is it enough merely to avoid harming the church. We must aim at what is positively beneficial — acquiring skills useful to the body, extending its influence, developing useful contacts and ensuring that particular congregations have an adequate supply of preceptors, elders, treasurers, Sunday School teachers, youth leaders and (not least) hospitable homes for informal fellowship. The conclusion that we have something to offer, something the church needs, is of course a difficult one for humility to come to. But there are occasions when we have to decide either that we are redundant in a congregation with an embarrassment of riches or that within our own limited sphere we are temporarily irreplaceable.

Three brief points in conclusion.

We must never absolutise our own decisions, as if they had the force of divine revelation. The man who claims, "God put me here" is being arrogant. So is the preacher who equates his own choice of text with God's will for his congregation (on other lev-

els, of course, he is being manipulative and exhibitionist. He wants to instil some drama into the occasion and to remind his listeners of his personal closeness to God). All we have is our own decision, in which we may be more or less confident, but which is always fallible and always liable to be falsified by events. I can never get beyond: "This is what I think is right. So help me God."

Again, we must recognize that the rightness or wrongness of our decisions cannot be judged by the events which immediately follow. When Jonah wrongly decided not to go to Nineveh, all at first went well with him. When Paul rightly — and against the advice of his friends — went up to Jerusalem, his decision led to bonds and imprisonment. There are still times when those fleeing from their God-given roles will meet with marvellous encouragement and coincidences. "The devil is apparently allowed" writes Oliver Barclay, "not only to arrange signs, but also to bring about remarkable coincidences to tempt us to evil." And just as surely there are times when those determined to follow God's will will encounter a harrowing succession of harassments and difficulties. These are the times when we have to cling to the truth of Cowper's familiar words:

Deep in unfathomable mines

Of never failing skill

He treasures up his bright designs

And works his sovereign will.

Finally, we must develop a proper attitude to our mistakes. How many Christians get into trouble on this score, as if God would never allow His children to make mistakes. He clearly does, for His own reasons. These mistakes are not signs that we are reprobates. Nor are they unforgiveable: the blood of Christ will cover the guilt of even our most ungodly decisions. Above all, the mistakes are not irretrievable. Through our own folly, we may sometimes find ourselves where we ought not to be. The temptation will be strong to conclude that we are condemned henceforth to live lives which are sterile and useless. But it cannot be so, if God works all things together for good for those who love Him (Rom. 8:28). Wherever we are, we can live meaningfully. From wherever we are, there is a road to the glory of God. "God provides light through every one of his tunnels," says an anonymous writer.

Even through those we should never have got into.

One last remark may be added. After you have read the article, do you agree with me that you can learn Scriptural wisdom from it? Let us practice this wisdom.

J. GEERTSEMA

OUR COVER

Freelton, Ontario.

Photo courtesy J. Van Eerden

Covenant and Election₂

A response to Prof. H.C. Hoeksema's critique

4. The Declaration of Principles

Let us again listen to what Prof. Hoeksema says.

This leads to the next distortion:

However, in 1950 the Protestant Reformed Churches changed their direction, and again the influence of the theory of Dr. A. Kuyper crept in. This time not in the first place with respect to his "common grace" concept but now more specifically his doctrine about "presumptive regeneration."

In 1950 the Protestant Reformed Churches drew up the so-called "Declaration of Principles."

Here you have a fundamental distortion. I get the impression that the Rev. Pouwelse has never read the Declaration of Principles, but simply depends on the distortion of the Declaration in the Rev. VanOene's *Inheritance Preserved*. For anyone who reads the Declaration and who knows anything at all about Protestant Reformed history will recognize immediately that the Declaration of Principles does not represent a change of direction. On the contrary, it just exactly represents a holding to our original direction. That original direction involved the denial of the general, conditional offer of salvation — fundamentally the same as the general, conditional promise of the covenant (both are Heynsian). That original direction is maintained in the Declaration of Principles. In fact, in its very opening paragraphs the Declaration proceeds from our (original) repudiation of the Three Points of Common Grace. This is simply an undeniable fact. If the Rev. Pouwelse does not possess our Declaration of Principles, he may write me, and I will send him a copy, so that he can see for himself.

The main grievance of Prof. Hoeksema seems to be that we suggested a change in direction in 1951. He calls that "a fundamental distortion" and he even suggests that we never have seen the Declaration. Again the Rev. VanOene gets the blame (poor colleague VanOene!). We must have depended on his distortion. Prof. Hoeksema's anger is kindled, but we have to ask whether he has reason to be angry. Of course, we have a different opinion about the Declaration, about its meaning and its validity. Some call it a continuation of an old tradition, others see it as a new direction. We will show later how and why that is possible. However, let us stick to the issue and not question each others credibility.

Prof. Hoeksema refers to Prof. Dr. K. Schilder as a "leading light." Prof. Schilder has discussed, analyzed and criticized the Declaration thoroughly in *De Reformatie*. During his visit to the USA he has discussed this matter with the brothers of the PRC. We do not know whether Prof. Hoeksema considers also Prof. Schilder as someone who never read the Declaration and who did not know what he was talking about. Prof. Schilder could, at least, not have been misled by Rev. VanOene's book. On November 17, 1951 (it was only a few months before he passed away), as soon as the final decision about the Declaration had been taken, Prof. Schilder wrote (and now we give our own translation from the Dutch):

"From America (and Canada) reached me messages, partially public, partially not-public, which compel me to write the following article. It concerns the Protestant Reformed Churches. What has taken place there the last couple of weeks gives me reason for the following remarks.

a. I do not regret for a moment what I, in the past, have written, done, and pleaded with respect to the PRC; (in favour of them, that is W.P.).

b. but because they have now changed the course (Dutch: het roer hebben omgeworpen) against all brotherly advice and theological argumentation, I accept the consequences of their change of direction (Dutch: koerswijziging) and consider it not responsible any longer to keep back the only word, that is left: it is all over, we have come to an end and say good-bye (Dutch: de kous is af, we zetten er een streep onder en nemen afscheid). With a feeling of regret. But still very determined."

It is clear that Prof. Hoeksema does not agree with Prof. Schilder. However, it is a misrepresentation of the facts to say that "anyone who reads the Declaration and who knows anything at all about Protestant Reformed history will recognize immediately that the Declaration of principles does not represent a change of direction." Prof. Schilder knew what he was talking about. He had followed the developments. He had personally spoken with the brothers in America. He had written many articles to analyze and criticize the Declaration. We do not understand how Prof. Hoeksema can suggest that everyone who speaks about a change of direction shows that he has never read the Declaration

and does not know what he is talking about. That kind of statement does not serve any purpose. There certainly are differences of opinion and interpretation between the PRC and the Canadian Reformed Churches. However, let us address the issues and not discredit each others reliability.

Before we continue our response to Prof. Hoeksema's remarks, we first have to go into more detail with respect to the doctrine of the covenant, as can be found in the Declaration of Principles, over against what we confess in our Canadian Reformed Churches.

5. What is the covenant?

The main point in the controversy is the question of how we see the covenant.

We confess that the LORD has established His covenant with the believers and their children. In the Old Testament God said to Abraham, in Gen. 17:7, "I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you." In Acts 2:39 the apostle Peter says: "For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to Him." In the Form for Baptism we confess that every covenant contains two parts, a promise and an obligation. We confess that all believers and their children are included in the covenant. They all receive the same promises and they all are under the same obligations. Still we know that not all those who are baptized will be saved. The reason is not that they did not receive God's promises, but the reason is unbelief.

In Heb. 3:13-19 we read: "... exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end, while it is said, 'Today, when you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.' Who were they that heard and yet were rebellious? Was it not all those who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses? And with whom was He provoked forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they should never enter His rest, but to those who

were disobedient? So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.”

This is a strong exhortation. Not all who received the promises enter the rest. Some are unable to enter because of unbelief.

We believe that all who are baptized are included in the covenant because baptism is a sign and seal of the covenant and of the promises of the Lord. Those who do not, in true faith, embrace the promises with a believing heart have to face the wrath of the covenant. People can, on their part, try to break the covenant by ignoring the obligations of the covenant. However, they can never undo their baptism. They remain under the same obligation of the covenant and will be punished as children of the covenant with the wrath of the covenant.

There have always been discussions about the relationship between the covenant and the election. Some say that the promises of the covenant are only given to the elect, and consequently only the elect are really included in the covenant of the Lord. This idea can be worked out and has been worked out in different directions. The doctrine of presumptive regeneration is a clear example. The reasoning goes along the following lines. According to Dr. Kuyper's theory regeneration is present in the heart of all the elect as a seed or a kernel. It will germinate or develop, when they grow up, but it is present already from the very moment of their birth, or even from conception. Baptism is a seal of this regeneration. Therefore we have to treat all children who are baptized as children who share in the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. We “presume” that all children to be baptized are regenerated. That is why this theory is called the doctrine of “presumptive regeneration.” Although we presume that they are regenerated, we know that not all baptized children grow up as believers. They are not all regenerated. Kuyper's conclusion was that they are, therefore, not all really baptized. So far Dr. Kuyper's theory.

In this way all kinds of distinctions are made. People speak about a real covenant and a not-real covenant, or an internal and an external covenant, about real promises and not-real promises or unconditional and conditional promises. We can even hear about a real baptism and a not-real baptism. We do not believe in these distinctions. The covenant of the Lord is one, it is real, true and trustworthy. The promises and the obligations of the covenant are the same for all. Certainly, not all who are baptized will be saved. Only the elect will enter the eternal rest. But that does not take away the reality of the promise and the obligation of the covenant. The covenant stands but some (or

many?) are unable to enter the rest because of unbelief (Heb. 3:13; 4:7).

The Protestant Reformed Churches do not adhere to Kuyper's doctrine of presumptive regeneration. They have explicitly rejected this theory in their *Declaration* (point III, A,1,b, Acts of Synod 1951, p. 208) where we read:

“III. A. We repudiate: 1. The teaching: . . .

b. That we may presuppose that all the children that are baptized are regenerated, for we know on the basis of Scripture, as well as in the light of all history and experience, that the contrary is true.”

However, there is still a similarity between Kuyper's doctrine and the *Declaration* at one significant point, namely, that both say that the promise of the covenant is only for the elect. We can find this line throughout the whole *Declaration*.

In point II, B, (pp. 203, 204) the Heidelberg Catechism, Q. 66 is quoted: “What are the sacraments? The sacraments are holy visible signs and seals, appointed of God for this end, that by the use thereof, He may the more fully declare and seal to us the promise of the gospel . . .” The conclusion is: “. . . it is evident that the promise of the gospel which is sealed by the sacraments concerns only the believers, that is, the elect.”

Q. 74 is quoted: “Are infants also to be baptized? Yes, for since they, as well as adults, are included in the covenant and church of God; and since redemption from sin by the blood of Christ and the Holy Ghost, the author of faith, is promised to them no less than to the adults; they must therefore . . .” Again the conclusion is: “That in this question and answer of the Heidelberger not all the children that are baptized, but only the spiritual children, that is, the elect, are meant, is evident.”

In spite of all this so-called “evidence” we are still not convinced that the promise is given to the elect only. We are wondering what baptism means after all. Or, more specifically: does baptism have any meaning for those who have not been elected? Is there a wrath of the covenant? In III, B, (p. 208) we read:

“1. That God surely and infallibly fulfils His promise to the elect.

2. The sure promise of God which He realizes in us as rational and moral creatures not only makes it impossible that we should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness but also confronts us with the obligation of love, to walk in a new and holy life, and constantly to watch unto prayer.

All those who are not thus disposed, who do not repent but walk in sin, are object of His just wrath and excluded from the Kingdom of Heaven.”

This passage gives some difficulty. Who are “those who are not thus dis-

posed”? Not the children of the covenant who have received the promise, because in the *Declaration* it has been stated over and over that the promise is for the elect only, and they will be saved. The wrath of God will certainly come upon all who do not repent but walk in sin. That counts for those who are baptized as well as for those who are not baptized. But is there a wrath of the covenant upon those who have received the promise but are unable to go in because of unbelief?

As one of the grounds is mentioned: “that the preaching comes to all, and that God seriously commands to faith and repentance, and to all those who come and believe He promises life and peace.” This does not solve the matter, because also here we read that God “promises life and peace” to those who believe, and not to all who are baptized.

We ask: why then do we baptize all the children of believers? The answer can be found in III, B, 3. There we read that “the ground of infant baptism is the command of God and the fact that according to Scripture He establishes His covenant in the line of continued generations.” In the whole context it means: the Lord establishes His covenant in the line of the generations, but He does not give His promises to all of them. Only the elect receive the promise of the covenant.

Finally we will quote point I, D, 2 (p. 201) of the *Declaration*. There we read: “the preaching of the gospel is not a gracious offer of salvation on the part of God to all men, nor a conditional offer to all that are born in the historical dispensation of the covenant, that is, to all that are baptized, but an oath of God that He will infallibly lead all the elect unto salvation and eternal glory through faith.”

Here the difference with Kuyper is clear. Kuyper says that baptism seals regeneration, therefore we “presume” that all baptized children are regenerated. Those who turn out to be not regenerated did not receive a real baptism.

The *Declaration* says: we do not presume anything. We know that not all who are baptized will be saved. We baptize infants because it is a command of God (III, B, 3) but baptism does not seal the promise of the Lord to all. It is an oath that God will lead all the elect to salvation (I, D, 2).

That, in our opinion, is not right. For the unbelievers baptism is more than an oath of God that He will lead the elect to salvation. Baptism is for them an oath of God that He will bring the wrath of the covenant upon those who ignore the promise and the obligation of the covenant.

Next time we will make a few remarks about the so-called conditional or unconditional promises.

W. POWELSE
(To be continued)

International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC)₂

Towards a conference

In the first part of this speech we dealt with ecumenical movements as WCC and RES and why the Reformed sister churches in The Netherlands did not join either of the two.

Now we come to the next question: what developments did lead towards the establishing of an ICRC, to a conference as now realized? The official request or suggestion came in 1977 from the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, suggesting an "ecumenical synod" or a (special) general synod of representatives of all Reformed sister churches. The Dutch sister churches studied this matter and the Synod of Groningen 1978 instructed deputies to consult the sister churches abroad about the preparation of a *Reformed International Synod* (RIS). By the time these proposals reached our Synod Smithville, the idea of a *synod* had been supplanted by the idea of a *conference*! This was due to criticism e.g. from Canadian side (Van Oene, Faber in *Clarion*) that a synod would be too restrictive, and that a *conference*, being less *binding* — was preferable. It was feared that through a synod — and indeed what function does an international synod have? — the difficulties of one federation would be passed on to the others. So, the original idea of a synod was abandoned, also due to terminology, and the idea of a *conference* emerged!

One thing is striking: when the "conference" was finally proposed to the churches, it was no longer a gathering of *sister churches* — but a much broader assembly than originally envisioned by the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. There are in my opinion, some reasons for this, and they have to do with developments touched upon earlier. I would list them as follows:

1. Initially, as Liberated churches — we took the stand that we could have no ecclesiastical contacts with churches abroad which had contact with the Synodical churches. Since most Reformed/Presbyterian churches somehow had contact with the Synodicals or CRC,

this *excluded* them for us. However, as the Synodical churches began to show great signs of deformation, many of these churches broke with the Synodicals or loosened the ties with them, e.g. the *Dopperkerken* in South Africa. This meant that it would be easier for us to *contact* such churches, since hereby third party relationships were diminished or eliminated.

2. A decisive step with respect to Amersfoort 1948, was taken in Amersfoort 1967 to recognize the Presbyterian Church of Korea (Koryu-Pa) as sister churches. Herewith the Westminster Standards were more or less considered acceptable. This opened the way for contacts with many other Presbyterian churches.

3. In 1977 the Canadian Reformed Churches recognized the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and offered them a form of "temporary ecclesiastical contact." Synod Groningen 1978 decided to adopt this form of ecclesiastical contact as a *standard procedure*. Contacts were made with various churches, who though still being in the RES, were considered *Reformed*.

So if we compare 1948 and 1978 we have indeed a great difference.

(a) Third party relationships (with the GKN or RES) are no longer an impediment for official CONTACT.

(b) Sister church relations have been established with churches of Presbyterian signature.

The major problem became one of practise: all the contacts were not *streamlined*. The Canadian Reformed Churches had not recognized the Koryu-Pa e.g., while the Dutch churches had no official relationship with the OPC. Since it was only a *conference* which was being planned this lack of uniformity was not seen by the Dutch churches as a problem. They invited:

(a) All their sister churches

(b) All with whom they have a temporary contact relationship.

The constituent assembly of the ICRC was set for Oct. 26 — Nov. 4, 1982 at Groningen, The Netherlands.

The Reformed basis of this conference

The Dutch sister churches invited the following churches:

1. Free Reformed Churches of Australia.
2. Canadian Reformed Churches
3. Reformed Presbyterian Church of Taiwan (Southern Presbytery)
4. The Presbyterian Church of Korea (Koryu-Pa)
5. The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland
6. The Free Church of Scotland
7. The Free Reformed Churches in South Africa
8. The Reformed Churches of East Sumba/Savu

Churches which were invited, but could not be represented for other reasons than principle ones were the Korean Presbyterian Church of Brazil, the Dutch Reformed Church of Sri Lanka, the Reformed Church of Japan and the Reformed Churches in South Africa (so-called "Dopperkerken"). Anyway, nine churches were represented by fifteen delegates.

Right after the official opening, the conference entered into a major debate on a KEY issue: what is to be the *basis* of this conference? How would the Presbyterian tradition function?

Understandably the Irish and Scottish Presbyterians stated that not only the Dutch tradition of Dordt (Three Forms of Unity) should be recognized, but also other European traditions, notably of *Westminster*. The *Three Forms of Unity* should not be the exclusive standard, they said, of what is Reformed, but the basis should be the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards, equally recognized! This applied also for church government; the Reformed and Presbyterian traditions were *both* to be recognized. The Presbyterians had not come to be *scrutinized*; they had come to be treated as equals. The Free Reformed South Africans proposed, however, that *ONLY* the Three Forms of Unity be adopted as *basis*. Our Canadian delegates were

rather critical of the Dutch proposal, especially that the OPC had not been invited. The result of all the preliminary discussions was very *Reformed*: appoint a committee to sort it out and come with a *draft constitution*.

In the meantime, Prof. Dr. L. Doekes, retired Professor of Dogmatology of Kampen presented a paper on *Harmony and Variety in the Reformed Confessions*. This was an important presentation for it would deal with basic issues. Dr. Doekes, being his usual careful self, said — on the one hand, there is great harmony between the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards, on the other hand, also “slight divergencies.” If there was any criticism to be levelled at the Westminster Standards, he felt, it was that *some formulations* of the Westminster Confession when improperly interpreted, could lead to heresies, e.g. the way in which it speaks about covenant, church and souls. A discussion on this paper followed, remarkably IN CLOSED SESSION. But at the end of it, the chairman, Rev. G. VanRongen, proposed that all the delegates rise to express agreement that both the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards serve as basis of the conference. With the exception of the South Africans all did rise. The South Africans said that they could not rise to the occasion, since their synods had never dealt with the Westminster Standards and they were therefore not in a position to judge.

When the constituting committee came with its draft, it became evident that the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards would have an *equal* place. Art. 2 — *basis* of the conference was to be the Scripture of the Old and New Testament as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards. A proposed sentence meant to clarify this basis — namely, that it *only* meant acceptance of these creeds as basically Reformed for the *purpose* of the conference, was later deleted as being confusing.

I will not bother you here with all the *regulations*, but quickly run through the constitution:

Art. 3 — *purpose*: to express and promote unity of faith, encourage fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among member churches, cooperating e.g. in *missions*, study common problems and issues, present a Reformed testimony to the world.

The conference is obviously intended as a vehicle to promote *sister church relationships* and to cooperate wherever possible and feasible. One can hardly argue with this.

Art. 4 — *membership*: those churches shall be admitted: — who are faithful to the basis and sub-

mit the proof of this

— are accepted by two-third majority
— are not members of the WCC

Here the point was raised that the RES should also be mentioned. Dual membership in ICRC and RES would be wrong. Yet this was not specified because e.g. the Canadian delegates said: we have recognized the OPC which is a member of the RES! It would seem to me that on this basis the *Christian Reformed Church* could become a member of the ICRC. I do not say this will *happen*, but technically the possibility is there.

Art. 5 — *authority of the conference*: it is *advisory* in character. It was quite clear by now that no *binding* decision could be made by this conference. Yet it was added — in order to prevent it from becoming a lame duck set up: “Member churches are urged to receive the decisions of the conference and are recommended to work towards their implementation.” So we cannot simply lay the decisions of the conference aside either.

Thus the basis, purpose, membership, and authority were decided on by the Constituent Assembly, and the various participating churches now had to decide whether to JOIN this conference on a *permanent* basis.

This brings me to the last point: The reaction of our Canadian Reformed Churches to the conference and its decisions.

Canadian Reformed reactions

When the initial proposal for such a conference was presented to Synod Smithville 1980 our Deputies for Correspondence with Churches Abroad were cautious and hesitant. They said “Let us refrain from any official endorsement as yet and send ‘observers’.” Synod Smithville indeed refrained from any endorsement, but did go farther in sending *delegates* instead of observers — obviously to have a finger in the pie.

The Report of the Deputies on the Constituent Assembly was somewhat JUBILANT, proposing to join the conference, even that the Canadian Reformed Churches act as host church in 1989, in Vancouver. Two churches, the Free Reformed Churches of Australia and the Free Church of Scotland had decided already to join on a permanent basis.

Synod Cloverdale 1983 had to deal with the matter. Synod Cloverdale did decide to *join* the ICRC, but not after considerable considerations and proposing certain *amendments* to the Constitutions and Regulations. I imagine that our joining is subject to the adoption of these amendments by the next conference.

Our synod considered that the Dutch churches — (who are way ahead of us in their ecumenical contacts and relation-

ships) — introduced the Canadian Reformed Churches to churches with which we do not have any ecclesiastical relationships. If we join the ICRC we will be faced with many “third party” relationships. Synod Cloverdale had already decided to inform the sister churches that we recognize only *correspondence* as a permanent relationship and that temporary ecclesiastical contacts (OPC) is not a rule — as in Holland — but an exception! There is a veiled warning here, I believe, that sister churches not proceed too swiftly with recognizing all kinds of churches. Synod indeed positively decided to request the sister churches:

(a) in the matter of relationships or contacts with third parties there be coordination and consultation between sister churches

(b) that in countries where sister churches are already established, contacts not be made independently but in conjunction with these sister churches. (e.g. If the Dutch Reformed Churches wish to contact the Presbyterian Church of America — they should not do so without coordinated effort and consultation with the Canadian Reformed Churches!) So we are telling the sister churches clearly: don’t go too fast and loose us in the maze of contacts. More coordination and consultation is needed here! This is a warning flag also with respect to inviting all kinds of churches to the ICRC.

Our synod further considered that it *might* be understood that all member churches of the ICRC subscribe to *both* the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards. It should be clear that if we join the ICRC this is not taken to mean that we subscribe to the Westminster Standards. We therefore proposed an amendment. The delegates subscribe *ONLY* to the Standards of the churches of which they are members. Which means: our delegates *may possibly* see much good in the Westminster Confession, depending on personal insight, but as delegates they are bound exclusively to the Three Forms of Unity!

Synod also decided that — since there are divergencies between the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Confession, the discussion of these receive *priority* at the ICRC, especially the doctrine of the *church* and the *covenant*. In other words: don’t get caught up in all kinds of practical projects, resolve basic, principle issues first!

Synod stated that even though we recognize the OPC this does not mean that we consider membership in the RES acceptable. As a matter of fact, we are trying to convince the OPC to get *out* of the RES. (This was a slight correction of the viewpoint of *our* ICRC delegates!) We proposed the amendment: that member-

ship in the RES is an impediment to membership in the ICRC. This is in my view an important amendment! The Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Christian Reformed Church etc. would have to break with the RES of course, otherwise there is a bridge from the ICRC via the RES to the WCC.

Finally our synod decided to downplay the *authority* of the conference by proposing that the member churches not be *urged* to receive the decisions of the conference, but only to *consider* them. We did not want to be bound in any way. If the matter of the subscription, the RES and the authority of the ICRC are thus amended, our synod saw no difficulties in joining! The priority of this conference would have to be indeed to discuss and remove divergencies and work toward sister church relationship with *all* mem-

bers! I am convinced that Synod Cloverdale took a *positive*, yet a cautious approach to the ICRC, especially attempted to keep this conference truly ecumenical — truly bound to the Word of God and the Reformed confessions!

In closing a few remarks!

1. It is not clear yet if the benefit of such an international conference will outweigh the cost and possible dangers. Yet it cannot be denied that we have an ecumenical calling and that as faithful Reformed churches in the world we have a calling towards each other.

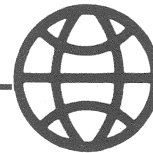
2. The conference can be of great help to young and small churches who are extremely isolated and need guidance and help from older and larger Reformed churches.

3. The conference may help to clarify

issues and lead to a greater understanding of the Reformed doctrines for many of its members. I am somewhat concerned of the trend to reduce differences between Reformed and Presbyterian confessions and church government to a difference in background and tradition (synods of 1948 and 1978). There are different backgrounds, I agree, but these are never decisive. Decisive is the WORD of God, *faithfully and clearly* interpreted. The more I study the Presbyterian church polity, the more I am grateful for the *Reformed* heritage. In the ICRC we should not lose this heritage, or compromise it, but promote it vigorously. Then, under God's blessing, it may be worthwhile.

CL. STAM

INTERNATIONAL



NO PRAYING TOGETHER

Pope John Paul II is planning to visit The Netherlands in May of this year. Invitations have been sent to attend a prayer service together with the pope.

The Salvation Army will attend, as will many of other religious organizations.

The Christian Reformed Churches as well as our sister churches have declined the invitation and given good grounds for their refusal to be represented.

The committee of deputies that represents the Christian Reformed Churches (CGK) wrote that participation in such an "ecumenical prayer service" would be in conflict with the confession of the church of the Reformation whereby various doctrinal pronouncements of the Romish church have been condemned. Besides, the Romish church has never withdrawn the pronouncements of the Council of Trent of 1541, whereby the *anathema sit* was hurled against the church of the Reformation and her Scriptural confession.

As the synod of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands is still going on, the moderamen of this synod replied to the invitation that acceptance would deprive the Lord Jesus Christ of His honour, as we confess concerning Him that He is the only universal Bishop of the church and the Head of the church. Participation in a common prayer service would be possible only if the unity of the true faith were present.

BAN UPHELD BY UNITED METHODISTS

The Judicial Council of the United Methodist Church has declared that homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching. It, therefore, upheld a ban on the ordination of practising homosexuals, although it also stated that a bishop cannot refuse to appoint an already ordained homosexual minister unless proper suspension procedures are followed by an annual conference.

TO SOUTH AFRICA

Five delegates from The Netherlands are attending the synod of the Reformed Church in South Africa (the so-called Dop-perkerk). There are two delegates from the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (Rev. H.J. de Vries and Mr. J.J. Schreuder), one delegate from the Christian Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (Rev. J. Westerink), and two delegates from the Netherlands Reformed Churches (Rev. H.J. van der Kwast and Rev. P. Veldstra). The relation to the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands and to the Netherlands Reformed Churches constitutes an important point on the agenda of this synod.

NO ANOINTING OF THE SICK

A committee of the Finnish Lutheran Church withdrew a proposal for an official form for the anointing of the sick, such under pressure from within the church.

The anointing of the sick takes place in Finland occasionally. The committee saw this as a Biblical custom and wanted to draw up a separate form for it. From within the church, however, it was stated that this was a custom alien to the Lutheran doctrine.

A POPE RETURNS

The Coptic Christians in Egypt celebrated a Christmas service with their pope, Shenouda III in their midst again, for the first time in three years. The late President Sadat banished Shenouda because he accused the latter of fostering discord between the Christians and the Islamic majority of the population. President Mubarak restored Shenouda to his position as head of the Coptic Church.

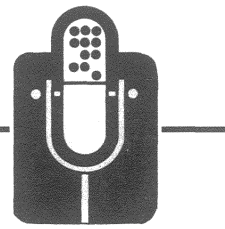
The service was attended by 11,000 of the six million Copts, who listened to a sermon by their pope. They follow the Julian calendar, and therefore celebrate Christmas on the 7th of January.

CHURCH NEWS



VO

ACCEPTED to Fergus, ON
REV. CL. STAM
of Smithville (South), ON



For this news medley I had to read through quite a stack of bulletins, and I did so with joy and interest. The only sad aspect is that of quite a few I cannot use the information at this time, because it was too old. From one church I received almost a whole volume (bulletins from March 1984 on) and from another church it was half a volume (from June 1984). And thus, with thanks for the kindness in sending them as yet, I have to leave almost all of it where it is: in the archives.

Lately I asked a few brothers from other places why I did not get their bulletins, although I had read that their Consistories decided that they should be sent to me. The simple solution was: that no one in particular had been appointed to do it. This reminds me of the story of Everybody, Anybody, Somebody, and Nobody. You must know this story as well. Everybody thinks that somebody will do it because anybody can do it, with the result that nobody does it.

There are few personal matters to be mentioned. Yet I am going to write about a few of them.

At the moment of this writing it is not yet certain that Rev. Gleason and his family will receive the necessary visa for their immigration into Canada. The Church at Toronto does its best, and the scheduled classis of January 24 — where Rev. Gleason is supposed to have a colloquium — will be held as planned, but nothing is certain as yet. It is our wish that next time we may give better tidings.

It is not my custom to mention the passing away of brothers and sisters unless they belong more or less to the whole community of the Canadian Reformed Churches. This time I wish to make an exception.

The Smithers bulletin mentions the passing away of br. Dirk Maarten Barendregt at the age of 83. Rev. Berends calls him a patriarch, and that's what he was with all the advantages and possible drawbacks of this "position."

He is the second former member of the Lethbridge consistory to be taken away by the Lord. Br. C.A. VanderGugten passed away a few years ago, and of the first consistory of a Canadian Reformed Church only br. John DeHaas is left now that br. Barendregt is no longer with us. Gradually the first generation disappears and in this respect the bonds with the first generation are severed.

Dirk Maarten Barendregt came from Baptist circles and he remained aware of the danger of remnants of the dualism between nature and grace, remnants which he also noticed with himself at times. Having learned the Reformed truth — which, by the way, is no specific, separate truth! — he struggled all his life long to grow in this Truth, endeavouring to cause also others to see and embrace it.

This was one of the reasons why he gave himself to visiting the dispersed immigrants from The Netherlands, accompanying the late Rev. Hettinga on trips throughout the West. This is why he was one of those who saw no other way than instituting the Canadian Reformed Church — then Free Reformed Church — at Lethbridge, and why, later on, when living at Barrett Lake, he was one of the leading figures with the institution of the Church at Houston and the one at Smithers.

I met br. Barendregt for the first time in March 1953, when I had to fulfil a classical appointment in Houston. In the afternoon we had to go to Smithers for the few families that were living there. Br. Barendregt drove the pickup truck which sometimes was in grave danger of getting stuck in the deep mud-

holes which dotted the road. One who drives on the Queen's Highway No. 16 in 1985, and never knew the old road, cannot visualize the many anxious moments when the truck sank almost to its axles in the mud. But we got through. It was the time of the spring breakup, as you can well imagine.

As soon as we were in the truck, the discussions started, covering a wide range of subjects. We did not always come to an agreement, but this did not hurt us nor did it hurt the relationship. There was a mutual respect which I always noticed with this brother.

A cobbler by trade, he tried his hand at farming, but in later years he returned to his former occupation.

Sometimes it is said that cobblers are philosophers, a particular brand of philosophers in their own right. I don't know whether this is true; what I do know is that br. Barendregt did some serious thinking about everything that concerned the Holy Scriptures, the doctrine of the church, and the walk of life of the children of the Lord, their "conversation among the Gentiles."

We remember with gratitude what the LORD gave to His church in this brother who now — as it is sometimes expressed — has gone to his eternal reward, a "reward" of which he himself would be the first one to confess that it is merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits.

In the meantime, we have to go on, as life goes on.

The Fraser Valley Study Center is active to the benefit of the membership there. Lectures are given on the epistle to the Romans, while also a series of lectures on Old Testament prophecies has been started. The latter series will pay special attention to millennialist interpretations.

Since all replies received by the Church at Chilliwack on its communication re an office-bearers conference were favourable, two brethren were appointed to organize such a conference. A good beginning!

It seems that most churches have received a letter containing a "Christmas Hymn" which is presented as an addition to the *Book of Praise*. I do not know what distinguishes the Church at Fergus from the other churches — perhaps the fact that I still am the minister there — but we did not get it.

The proper reaction to this submission I found in the consistory reports of Chilliwack and Cloverdale: "This letter should have been sent to the Standing Committee for our *Book of Praise*." Indeed, for when we have committees appointed for a certain task, we should not go behind their backs to the churches. This is the first thing I would wish to say about this.

The second thing is: We do not need any additions, for the new song — which is a nice one apart from some points which could be improved upon — does not add anything to what we do not yet have in our present Hymn Section. We are happy with the hymns we have, but should not increase their number, unless there are some elements in the fulfilment of the Old Testament which have not yet received sufficient attention in the songs which have now found a place in the Hymn Section. We have worked on the *Book of Praise* for almost thirty years, and the final result has been adopted by our latest general synod. It will be in the possession of the churches shortly. Now I wish to warn against suggesting all sorts of changes and additions. Leave well enough alone unless it appears absolutely necessary to change things.

There is another element against which I want to warn.

In some reports of consistory meetings I read that here and there an addition to the Church Order is suggested and will be proposed to the next general synod.

Our revision of the Church Order was in the making for several years as well. The churches received ample opportunity to come with suggestions and proposals for improvement or deletion. All suggestions were considered thoroughly and weighed on their merit(s). A conclusion was reached, and General Synod 1983 adopted the Church Order as we have it now.

It would be wrong if a church now burdens the next general synod with proposals which it could have presented much earlier but failed to do from negligence or — which would be worse — if now a consistory or a member of a consistory, seeing that he or they did not get their way at the previous general synod, tried to have the next general synod follow the course they deem necessary for the well-being of the churches.

This applies not only to suggestions regarding the Church Order. There are other matters as well that were decided upon at Cloverdale in 1983, but which apparently are not to the liking of some brothers or some consistories and which now already form a topic about which proposals may be made, proposals which simply amount to efforts to rescind Cloverdale's decisions and to follow a different course. Here, too, I say, "No, brethren, this is not proper."

What is not proper either is the following. "The consistory . . . decides to appeal the decision of Synod Cloverdale to the next synod to be held in 1986, with respect to the appeal of br. J. Werkman, C.6."

Here I say, "No, brethren, you have nothing to appeal. The only one who could appeal this decision is the brother whom it concerns or — perhaps, perhaps — the consistory of the church against whose actions he appealed, but not you. You are not bound by the decision, you cannot have been wronged by the decision. Keep out! You may disagree with the decision, but that is your privilege. You have no right to appeal, for you have nothing to appeal."

There may — and most likely will — be wrong elements in the decisions of every general synod. There will always be things of which I say, "Here the brethren went wrong and erred." But this does not give me the right to send an appeal. Article 31 Church Order does not say, "If a brother or if an assembly has done a wrong thing . . .," but "If anyone . . . has been wronged." That is different, isn't it? Please abide by what we have agreed upon, for only thereby the church is edified having all things done decently and in good order.

Well, I had to get these things off my mind before we continue.

Let us make an orderly trip.

I did already say something about the churches in British Columbia, so we had better move on to Alberta.

The Providence Church in Edmonton purchased a stretcher plus a First Aid Kit. This was occasioned by events which took place. As I mentioned before, we have the same material here in Fergus; we also have a roll away bed, in case someone has to make use of a bed. In Burlington an elderly sister had a heart attack during the service recently, and passed away right there, if I understood it well. The need for emergency equipment does not have to be proved, does it?

In Neerlandia the consistory adopted the system of wards. Now, it was not completely clear to me whether there was no division at all before this new arrangement was adopted, but as far as we have heard here in Fergus, the system works very well in these congregations that have it.

By "Ward System" apparently is meant that each elder has a number of families and single persons to take care of. He himself asks one of the other elders to go along on family visits, on the condition that none of the other brothers is asked more than twice or three times per season. This is to prevent

that one "very good" elder would be asked by everyone else to go along on every family visit. Such is not the intention.

Until now we still have arranged it in this manner, that two elders are "teamed up" for the whole season, and together they have one-quarter or one-fifth of the congregation to look after, depending on how many sections there are. Thus it can happen that these two brothers visit each family in their combined section three years in a row. Some change and variation appears desirable. If each elder has his own section or ward, and if he has the right to ask the other elders each two or three times per season, there is more variation too, and the elders learn to know more families than only those in their own section.

Recently we too, discussed the desirability of changing the system to each elder having his own section or ward, not two elders together having one section or ward. We haven't made a decision as yet, but I mention it so that everyone can think about it.

The drive for the College is over by now. I am happy to report that in Winnipeg the amount collected from the congregation succeeded the amount which was suggested to them by the Board of Governors. With a view to the size of the congregation and the burdens which they have to bear for church and school, this is something worthy of honourable mention, I should say. When the heart is willing to give, would there the hand not reach into the wallet?

In London the Building Committee submitted a proposal to the consistory to open the balcony to be used during the worship services. No, they are not proposing to build a balcony; simply to remove the boards which have been there for as long as I have known the auditorium, and thus to restore the balcony to its original destination. This means, of course, that the congregation is growing, a thing to be grateful for and to rejoice about. The consistory decided to "take first steps shortly toward making the balcony useable for worship services."

During the past months we read and heard about a "minister-at-large" whose terrain of activity is to be in the United States. For the information of our readers I pass on what I found in the London bulletin. I presume that it is from the hand of Rev. J. Moesker.

"As noted in the brief review of the consistory meeting held Dec. 20, the consistory has decided to support the Church at Grand Rapids in its intention to call a minister- or missionary-at-large. Over the past number of years the Church at Grand Rapids has come into contact with numerous concerned individuals and churches who are interested in our federation and who have expressed a desire to know more about the Reformed heritage with which the Lord has so richly endowed us. Because of these contacts and because they see a pressing need to convey this Reformed heritage to those who do not yet know about it, the consistory of Grand Rapids has decided to call upon the churches for support. With a view to ongoing and growing contacts the consistory of Grand Rapids realizes that this work necessitates full-time involvement of a brother set apart for it. Their desire is therefore to call a minister for the work at large in the USA to promote the institution of churches and the federative union of churches with the American/Canadian Reformed Churches. Such a minister would promote good relations between our churches and others who are interested in the Reformed heritage also by means of speeches and promotional literature and courses for Reformed instruction. He will be responsible to the American Reformed Church at Grand Rapids. Your consistory agreed to lend financial support to this project. Let us hope that this work may begin soon and that it may be fruitful in the church gathering of Christ."

I only pass the above on for the information of our readers, since I have not yet formed an opinion about the whole project.

What I notice more often with our brethren in the region of Ontario South is that they speak of the "American/Canadian

Reformed Churches." I gather that this is because of the fact that the Grand Rapids Church belongs to Ontario South. Hereby the brethren from the USA are made to feel more welcome and at home, I suppose.

Yet I wish to point out that it is wrong to use that expression when speaking of the federation. The name of the federation is *not* "American/Canadian Reformed Churches," but simply "Canadian Reformed Churches." That also the American Reformed Church belongs to it, does not mean that we have changed the name of the federation. And when a classis is held in London, it is Classis Ontario South of the Canadian Reformed Churches, not of the "American/Canadian Reformed Churches."

The matter of instruction for our children has resulted in the establishment of elementary and high schools. Here and there the question of a kindergarten also occupies the attention.

In Orangeville the brothers and sisters were invited to a meeting at which a discussion was to take place about the plans to set up a kindergarten.

"The question of public kindergarten for our covenant children has had our attention for several years. After sending our

oldest child, we felt a better way must be found. Our young children, aged four and five years, are very impressionable, extremely open for learning and ideas, thoughts and feelings. Teachers' words at that age are law to the child Then a public kindergarten is a very dubious atmosphere for our children, our covenant children, who need to learn about their great blessings, but also about their responsibilities as such."

We'll see what results that meeting had.

Herewith we have come to the end of the news.

Allow me one more remark.

Latin is a beautiful language, but has its pitfalls apparently.

I realize that we cannot recall everything we learned, but to write that "Anno Domini 1984 has just about sighed its last," *O amico*, — no, sorry, *amice* — seems just a bit much. I thought that the subject was always to appear in the nominative. *Amico meo* — I mean, *amicus meus* — must have noticed it himself, I hope, that the Annus Domini expires and that now we live Anno Domini 1985. Life can be complicated, can't it!

Many cheers.

VO

Mission

Communication — no simple matter!

One of the daily challenges in mission is the matter of communication. We are commissioned to bring the good news to other people, to transfer to others what we have received but how do we communicate in words, terms and symbols which are readily understood by other people? Communication is a very complex process and in order to be effective one must understand some of the techniques involved as well as the obstacles in coming across to others. Good communication requires a common system of symbols (such as words) signs or behaviour. It is therefore mandatory that we constantly verify whether we are employing a common system. In other words, does the hearer perceive the idea the speaker is trying to convey? Did the instruments of communication transfer the thought or were there obstacles because the symbols or words had different meanings or connotations for the two parties involved?

The problem

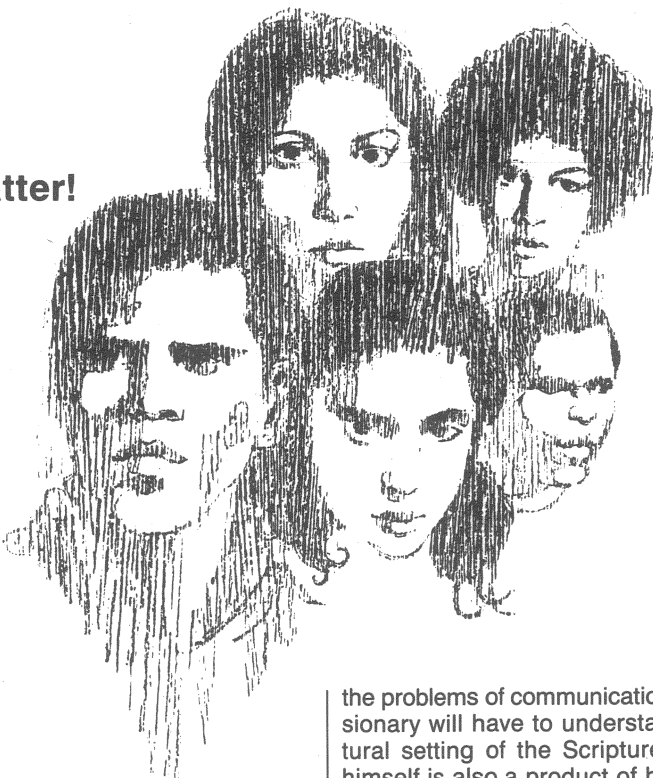
When we speak about the difficulty of effective communication we are dealing with a common problem which certainly is not limited to the mission field. There are many kinds of communication gaps. Parents, teachers, and office-bearers struggle with it. Sometimes it is a matter of difference in age, in other cases a matter of

different levels of intelligence but most of us experience the frustration of "not getting across" in one area or another.

In mission this problem is often complicated by the fact that the gospel must be conveyed in a foreign language. It usually becomes a cross-cultural communication when the missionary is of one culture and brings the gospel into the context of another culture. Add to this fact that the Bible was also written against its own cultural background of the Middle East a number of centuries ago and you begin to see some of the complexity of

the problems of communication. The missionary will have to understand the cultural setting of the Scriptures, how he himself is also a product of his own culture, and thirdly, how his message is received in the culture of the people whom he seeks to reach.

What is readily understood by people in one part of the world may not be so somewhere else. When the Bible uses the figure of a shepherd and his flock it was a very clear illustration to the people of the Middle-East. Everyone knew what the task of a shepherd was and the relationship between a shepherd and his flock. However, when we proclaim "The Lord is my shepherd" to the Inuit people living in Northern Canada, it may not convey



the message the Lord proclaimed to his people so many years ago, because these words enter a totally different cultural context. Unless much more is said and explained, the truth of Scripture is not communicated because there is no common system of symbols in this respect.

Within society there are many sub-cultures. The "street-gang" of teenagers also has its own culture. (We use the working definition of culture as being the human pattern of life in response to man's environment.) Imagine a teenage boy from such a gang who has been abused by his father, who only knows his father as the guy who gets drunk, who beats up his wife and children. He hates his father and is terribly afraid of him. When he hears that God is our Father in Jesus Christ he is not going to be interested because his image of a father is so distorted that it arouses feelings of dislike and hatred.

Apart from these problems in receiving the message communicated to them, people of other cultures may also experience the forms in which we express our faith as foreign to them. People express their joy and gratitude in different ways and also exercise fellowship in various manners. There is one, universal faith but there is a pluriformity in the ways this faith may be expressed and experienced which, for a large part, is determined by the cultural background and racial disposition of a certain people. Think, for example, how totally different the psalms are being sung by Jews, Negroes, or Calvinist Europeans. The same truth is expressed in a variety of ways forming a multicoloured mosaic all to the glory of God.

The problem arises when forms are imposed upon people which are actually foreign to them and when missionaries go out and seek to establish exact copies of their home-churches regardless of where they are from or where they are working. The risk is that such "implants" may never really take root in the foreign society, may fail to reach and transform the hearts of the people and in the end may face rejection because it remained foreign to them.

"Supra-cultural"

At this point someone may interject: "Yes, but is the gospel not foreign to all of us and does it not require a total change from all adherers whatever their background may be?" This is indeed true. The source of the gospel and our response in faith lies outside ourselves and our immediate environment. It is, so to say, supra-cultural and the Word of God changes the direction of human culture and transforms it. When Christ is truly Lord of His church the cultural design for living of its members will be different from those of the wider community. "There will be a pro-

gressive movement toward a "Christian culture" which will reflect both the universality of the gospel and the particularity of the human environment."¹

The difficulty is that another supra-cultural force is also strongly at work in human society, Satan and his demonic powers, which have been at work for such a long time that there are no neutral cultures in this world. The world is the arena of a battle between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. Christ is the Lord and Satan is dethroned but this victory is still being actualized in human history and culture, and in the meantime there is, as yet, no pure, Christian culture. The missionary must always be critical of himself in order to analyse in how far, what he does and how he does it, is Christian or Western European. At the same time he must seek to understand whether other ways and forms are Biblical responses which find their origin in a different cultural context or whether they are un-Biblical forms that need to be transformed. Such a search for the boundary may create tensions but these are bound to come when the gospel reaches the heart of man and of a human society and will assist them to make the Word truly their own.

Indigenization

This process of becoming an independent church which responds to the gospel in its own, native ways and forms is commonly known as indigenization. In many writings the independence aspect is often emphasized, the goals of becoming self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating, but it certainly also includes discovering native or indigenous ways and forms of expressing this faith in worship and service. This is a delicate and slow process. The missionary may encourage indigenization but he himself cannot do it since the native ways will always remain foreign to him. Neither will he fully understand all of the nuances and underlying feelings of certain indigenous manners and expressions. Indigenization must come from the native people themselves but to find the proper indigenous responses to the gospel it is prerequisite that there must be a basic understanding of the truths proclaimed to them. From the foregoing it is obvious that indigenization is a necessary but slow process.

Contextualization

Since the early 70s a new word has been introduced in the discussions concerning communication in mission. It is the word contextualization. What is it? "Contextuality," it is claimed, "is the capacity to respond meaningfully to the gospel within the framework of one's own situation."² Why was there a need for an-

other word besides indigenization? It was felt that contextualization is broader in its meaning than indigenization and stresses more the need of applying the gospel in the actual situation of the indigenous people in today's world. "As well as addressing the gospel to the traditional cultural values, we must take into account contemporary social, economic, and political issues of class struggle, riches and poverty, bribery and corruption, power politics privileges and oppression — all the factors that constitute society and the relationships between one community and another. Contextualization takes seriously the contemporary factors in cultural change."³ Perhaps an illustration from Al Krass makes the correlation clear: "Indigenizing concerns traditional culture, the kind of things you read about in *National Geographic*. Contextualizing, on the other hand, concerns more the kind of thing you read about in *Time*."³

The value of these discussions, in my opinion, is that it draws our attention to the fact that the gospel must also address the real, actual issues the people are daily confronted with. The preaching must be applied in their situation taking into account the current events. The prophets in the days of Israel addressed the social and political issues and John the Baptist made tax collectors and soldiers come to him with the question: "Teacher, what shall we do then?" John zeroed in on the real issues: "Collect no more than is appointed you, — Rob no one by violence or by false accusation, and be content with your wages." If I understand today's discussions correctly, we could say that here John contextualized the call to repentance. The point is, however, that we must continue to do so if we are to really communicate the gospel today wherever we may be.

One could abuse some of these concepts and drift towards a "social gospel" or lean towards the liberation theology. In the name of indigenization and contextualization they have also turned to syncretism (melting religions together). However, such negative developments should not stop us from evaluating and applying the Biblical contributions towards our understanding of mission and the process of communication.

New terms do not always bring new concepts. Abraham Kuyper already reopened the eyes of many for Christ's claims on all of life. Schilder's views on Christ and culture are all-comprehensive and if you read Holwerda's sermons it is clear, too, that the people did not have to guess as to how the Scriptures were to be applied in the context of the current events of those days, in a situation of war and occupation by foreign forces.

When we proclaim Jesus Christ as

King and Lord over all of life we will have to address the specific issues of a specific people. The new converts should not only know about the salvation of their souls but also how they are to live as a Christian in the social and political issues of their situation. Paul did not seek to solve the problems of poverty, slavery and Roman occupation but he did guide the young churches as to what their stand should be in that situation and what their responsibilities were.

All that is part of effectively communicating God's Word to other people. To summarize: one should ask himself basically two questions. First, do I speak

their language? Do I use words, terms, symbols and concepts which are understood by them in the way they should be understood? In the second place, does the message zero in on their actual life situation? Does it relate to them in such a way that it helps to give answers as to what their Christian attitude must be in all the relevant issues of that particular people? These self-examining questions should guide us in our mission abroad as well as at home, whether done by missionaries or other members of the congregation.

Effective communication is an art which must be learned by critical self-

examination as well as a true interest in other people. Great things are at stake and it is a wonderful privilege that the Lord allows us to convey the good news to other people. It therefore deserves much effort from our side, much love and dedication. Communication is no simple matter but a most rewarding gift which must be developed to the best of our ability?

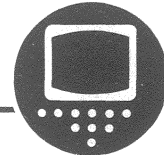
C. VAN SPRONSEN

¹Bruce J. Nicholls, *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture*, p. 13.

²Bruce J. Nicholls, *Contextualization: A Theology of Gospel and Culture*, p. 21.

³Al Krass, *The Other Side*, p. 62.

PRESS RELEASES



"Anchor" Canadian Reformed Association for the Handicapped, Inc., regional board meeting November 8, 1984.

The meeting was opened by br. J. Witten, requesting us to sing Psalm 32:1. He then read Col. 3:1-17 and prayed.

Minutes are accepted as presented. Letter to Summer Camp Committee is read.

Letter from Canadian Reformed Charitable Foundation. The board gratefully acknowledged a donation of \$481.70 collected at the Women's League Day.

The treasurer urged the local representatives to collect 1984 dues.

Copies of bylaws were handed out and a few points explained.

Next meeting will be held, D.V., December 7.

Press release is read.

Question period. After singing Psalm 32:2 and prayer, the meeting was adjourned.

A. RIESEBOSCH

Executive Committee meeting of the Canadian Reformed Teachers' College, January 4, 1985.

The chairman, br. A. Hordyk, opened the meeting by reading from Isaiah 40:1-8 and prayer. The minutes of the meeting held on December 19, 1984 were approved. An agenda was established.

The financial report was tabled. Some concern was expressed with respect to the slow income of funds. Hopefully dues from various societies will be received in the near future.

The Drive Report was tabled. The Drive Committee is busy drawing up a let-

ter to be sent to those congregations where we receive no support as yet.

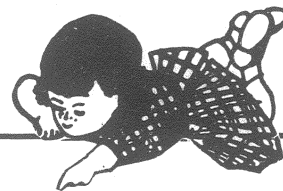
The principal reported on a number of activities taking place in the school and/or connected with the school. A letter had been received from the League of Canadian Reformed School Societies in Ontario about the training of the "Special Child" asking for some input from the Teachers' College. We are gratified that we can take part in discussing these issues and in this way assist in this necessary and important work within our schools at various levels.

A meeting is scheduled for Friday, February 8, 1985 before the annual membership meeting to be held on Saturday, February 9, 1985, D.V.

The meeting is closed with prayer.

For the CRTCA,
H.J. NOBEL

OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE



Hello Busy Beavers,

We have two stories for you today. I think you will like them!

The first one is from Busy Beaver Kerri-Anne Wierenga.



WINTER STORY

In the morning we jump in the snow.
We have snowball fights.
We make snowmen.
At school they make cars, ski-doo's, and dragons of snow.
I make a wall.
The next morning it is broken.

Busy Beaver Debbie Jagt wrote about her favourite day of 1984!

PRESENTS?

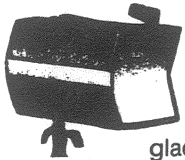
Everybody mostly forgets the true meaning of Christmas. Christmas, according to them, is a time for presents, joy, and celebration. True, but they don't celebrate the right way. Why? They only think of presents, giving and receiving.

Since my parents don't like us opening our little gifts, we decided to open them on . . . Dec. 22. Why? They don't like us thinking of our gifts on Christmas day when we should be thinking about Christ's birth. My brother was in the tub when so-called Santa Claus day came. That is: we quickly went to my Mom's closet, got the presents, brought them downstairs, and put them in the family room. We were so excited the whole day! Then we had supper and then anxiously waited for permission to open our gifts. So slowly, but surely, we managed to open them. I open them from smallest to biggest, don't you?

“Happy birthday” and “many happy returns of the day” to all Busy Beavers whose birthday comes in March! We hope you’ll have a thankful and happy day celebrating with your family and friends. May the Lord bless and keep you in the coming year.

MARCH

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From the Mailbox

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Melanie Veenendaal*. We are happy to have you join us. I’m glad you like doing our puzzles, Melanie, that way you’ll be a real Busy Beaver!

And a big welcome to you, too, *Margaret Admiraal*. We hope you’ll really enjoy joining in all our Busy Beaver activities. Did your snow last long, Margaret?

Welcome to the Club, *Gwenda Penninga*. I see you’re a real Busy Beaver already. Good for you! Are you still skating every day, Gwenda? Buye for now.

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Pauline DeRuiter*. You are a real Busy Beaver already, too! Thank you for the puzzle. Do you find it hard to practise every day, Pauline? What are some of your favourite songs?

Hello *Emily Barendregt*. I was very sorry to hear your Opa passed away. I’m sure you will miss him. But you are right. He is with the Lord and he is much, much better off there! Thanks for your picture, Emily.

Thanks for the puzzles and games, *Elizabeth Barendregt*. I see you are keeping busy. Keep up the good work! I was sorry to hear your sad news, Elizabeth.

I see you have been very busy, *Peter John Sikkema*. Good for you! Are you saving your money for something special? And are you enjoying the snow this winter, Peter John?

You had good news and sad news, *Marjorie Barendregt*. You will miss your Opa, but you know we need not be sad for him, as I wrote to your cousin. And that is real comfort to us. And congratulations on your new little cousin, Marjorie.

Thanks for your pretty card, letter, and crossword, *Jeanne Barendregt*. I was sorry to hear your sad news. May the Lord comfort you and all your family. I was happy to see that even with the sad news you had some happy news to tell.

Good idea to use a concordance to look up your answers, *Mirjam Bikker*! I think your living room must have looked nice. Thanks for your good wishes, Mirjam.

Hello *Christine Lodder*. Thank you for your letter and picture. I think you’re really looking forward to spring break, right Christine? Will you write and tell us about it when you get back from your holiday?

Thank you very much for your puzzles and jokes *Nadine Woudenberg*. It was nice to hear from you again. Have you been busy playing in the snow? Or do you like to do inside things?

I’m glad to hear about your pen pals, *Donna Pieffers*. You are very busy, I see. Keep up the good work! Thanks for the riddles, Donna. I know the Busy Beavers will enjoy them.

Congratulations on your baby brother, *Joanne Visscher*. Does he smile and coo at you when you help look after him? Is your snow fort still up, Joanne? Thanks for the puzzles!

Thank you for the story and the big puzzle, *Debbie Jagt*. I know the Busy Beavers will enjoy both. Are you having lots of winter fun, Debbie? And do you have a pen pal already?



RIDDLES FOR YOU!

(Thanks for sharing Busy Beavers *Donna Pieffers* and *Nadine Woudenberg*.)

1. Why did Silly Billy tiptoe past the medicine cabinet?
2. What is black, white and green?
3. What did Hong Kong say when his sister had a baby?
4. What day of the week do hamburgers hate?
5. Where do rabbits go after their wedding?
6. What did the carpet say to the floor?
7. How did Silly Billy break his leg by raking leaves?

Answers:

1. He didn't want to wake up the sleeping pills. 2. Two skunks fighting over a pickle. 3. Well, I'll be a monkey's uncle. 4. Friday. 5. on a bunny-moon. 6. Don't move. I've got you covered! 7. He fell out of the tree!

Quiz Time!

DIAL TALK by Busy Beaver *Marjorie Barendregt*

Use your pencil for this one!
Then you can rub out and TRY AGAIN!
It's tricky!

Question: What do you call an over-weight mouse-chaser?

1	ABC	DEF
2		
3		
GHI	JKL	MNO
4	5	6
7	8	9
PR S	TUV	WXY
★	OPERATOR	*
	0	

Answer: $\overline{2} \quad \overline{3} \quad \overline{2} \quad \overline{8} \quad \overline{2} \quad \overline{2} \quad \overline{8}$
 $\overline{8} \quad \overline{2} \quad \overline{2} \quad \overline{2} \quad \overline{9} \quad \overline{9} \quad \overline{4} \quad \overline{6} \quad \overline{7}$
 $\overline{6} \quad \overline{8} \quad \overline{3} \quad \overline{7} \quad \overline{5} \quad \overline{9}$
 $\overline{3} \quad \overline{5} \quad \overline{2} \quad \overline{2} \quad \overline{2} \quad \overline{9}$

The right letter for each number gives the answer. (Answers next time).