

Preaching Christ and experience

We have reflected upon the relation between Christ and the law in preaching. Christ must be preached. And the law must flow forth from Christ, who redeems from sin by His blood and Spirit to a new obedience. This new obedience to God's will is the fruit of Christ's work in those whom He has regenerated. It is also the fruit of faith. In their re-generation the believers are re-created after God's image. They show this image of God in their obedient service to God in which they live by His commandments, because the commandments (as part of God's Word in which He reveals Himself) show who God is. In this way we can clearly see that the commandments flow forth from God and from Christ Jesus, His Son.

Christ must be preached, and not the law in itself. The same is true for experience. Christ must be preached and not experience in itself. Like the law, so experience flows forth from Christ. And like obedience the law flows forth from living in communion with Christ, so experience is fruit of faith in Christ, fruit of living in fellowship with Him. It is not the other way around. Experience is not the basis for faith, neither for the assurance of faith.

Not everybody agrees here. There are churches and individuals who place great emphasis on religious experience. One must (first) experience the grace of God, that is the presence of the Holy Spirit, before one can believe to be saved. There are the Charismatics. They make a distinction between believers who have received the baptism with water as a seal of their faith, and believers who have received the baptism in the Spirit, who had the experience of being filled with the Spirit.

Placing great emphasis on the need for a personal, subjective experience of the work of the Holy Spirit is found also in the movement of Puritanism that came up in the churches of the Reformation in England, during the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603). This movement, in its first period, wanted to purify the Church of England from the many remnants of Roman Catholicism. It accepted the Bible as the only source for doctrine, for liturgy (no hymns, no musical instruments), for church polity (separation between church and state: no government rule in the church) and for personal piety. Emphasis was also placed on the need for personal regeneration and sanctification of life according to a very strict morality.

In Scotland the Puritan movement was called "the Second Reformation." A similar name was given to this movement as it found entrance in The Netherlands. Here it was called "de Nadere Reformatie," (the 'Continuing' Reformation). These names indicate that its adherents wanted to continue the reformation of the church, and, to a certain degree, wanted to intensify and radicalize it.

Much in this Puritan movement is attractive and appealing to us. But there was also some danger of subjectivism. Some leaders of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands around the time of the Synod of Dort were adherents of this 'Continuing' Reformation. Others, like Gomarus, the chairman of the said synod, had objections. Especially later on in its development, the stress on the need for regeneration led

to an excessive preaching of the marks of regeneration. Only if those religious experiences were present, a person could take part in the Holy Supper. But if those marks, those experiences, were not (yet) there in one's life, he was not saved (yet), and therefore not entitled to sit at the table of the Lord.

Here the certainty or assurance of faith is not based on God's covenant promises in Christ for His people, but in the subject, the believer, and his subjective, personal experiences of the Holy Spirit. We call this subjectivism.

This subjectivism became a strong current not only in English Baptist Churches but also in the Dutch Reformed Churches of the seventeenth and the eighteenth Century. The more these churches turned liberal in both doctrine and conduct, the stronger this subjectivism grew, organized in conventicles within the existing church.

In this regard, I read a very interesting historical note in an article of Professor C. Trimp in *De Reformatie* of February 16 of this year (pp. 386ff.). Describing this subjectivism, he says among other things: "... that the important question was, 'how can I know that the promise of God, as e.g. the Form for Baptism speaks of it, is also for me? How can I know that the common promise is also for me personally? Because *the* promise is actually only for the elect, certainty of faith is actually only possible via certainty regarding election.' Also on this point eventually the marks had to speak the decisive word. When the voice of these marks had become strong and loud enough, then the knowledge of faith could grow into confidence; and the faith that seeks refuge [in God or Christ's blood, J.G.] could become an assured faith."

After this description is given, professor Trimp writes: "This subjectivism never disappeared among the descendants of the Reformed people of the seventeenth and the eighteenth Century. It came along with the Secession (1834) and dominates until today the thinking in 'Gereformeerde Gemeenten' and the 'Oud Gereformeerde Kerken' [Netherlands Reformed, here in North America, J.G.]."

During a certain period it was also very active in the circle of the Reformed Churches. That became clear when in the thirties of this Century the certainty of faith was based, in a consequent way, upon the promises of the covenant that God has made with all those who received baptism.

Against this accent there rose much resistance; we call this the struggle about covenant and self-examination. The question came up whether man's being busy with himself had to serve to bridge the gap between the human heart with its doubts on the one hand and the certainty of faith on the other hand. Is this the intention of self-examination, or does it, going out from the certainty of faith and in the light of God's promises and commandments, serve to examine how one lives before the Lord? In fact, this struggle of fifty years ago [the struggle that led to the Liberation, J.G.] was a confrontation with the heritage of the 'Continuing' Reformation, (Nadere Reformatie). It is for more than one reason important to be aware of these things and have a clear picture of them in our minds.

We point at four aspects of this matter.

1. When we are aware of this confrontation of the 1930s, we see *the* background of the struggle of the 1940s about the character of God's covenant.

2. He who sees that what was taking place was in fact a confrontation with the 'Continuing' Reformation (Nadere Reformatie) will not connect this struggle from the years 1930 till 1944 exclusively with the name of Abraham Kuyper. It is without doubt that his heritage was weighed; but so was the heritage of the Secession!

3. Therefore it is less amazing than it seemed, at first sight, that after the Liberation the contact between the 'Christelijke Gereformeerden' [Free Reformed Churches, here in North America, J.G.] and us did not work so smoothly. The struggle against Kuyperianism certainly had brought us closer, but that cannot be said with regard to the breaking with the subjectivism of the 'Continuing' Reformation.

4. It is no wonder that the preaching in the Liberated Churches has reacted sharply against this subjectivism right from the beginning. We cannot find the assurance of faith in

ourselves, like a ship cannot throw out its anchor in its own hold."

Professor Trimp concludes with the remark: "It would not even be a wonder, seeing the power of the reaction, when that preaching [in the Liberated Churches, J.G.] would have gotten stuck in the trap of an *objectivism*."

Objectivism means that only the objective, written Word of God as it comes to us with its promises and obligations is preached without attention for the hearers, and for the effect that God's Word can/must have in the hearts and lives of the believers.

In a last article in the series of four dealing with this matter, Professor Trimp elaborates on this point. Is there a legitimate place in the preaching for the human (religious) feelings and emotions, for our human experience of the work of the Spirit? There certainly is.

But we shall wait till the next issue and then go further into this matter of Christ and experience in the preaching.

J. GEERTSEMA

Public profession of faith₂

5. Retarded children

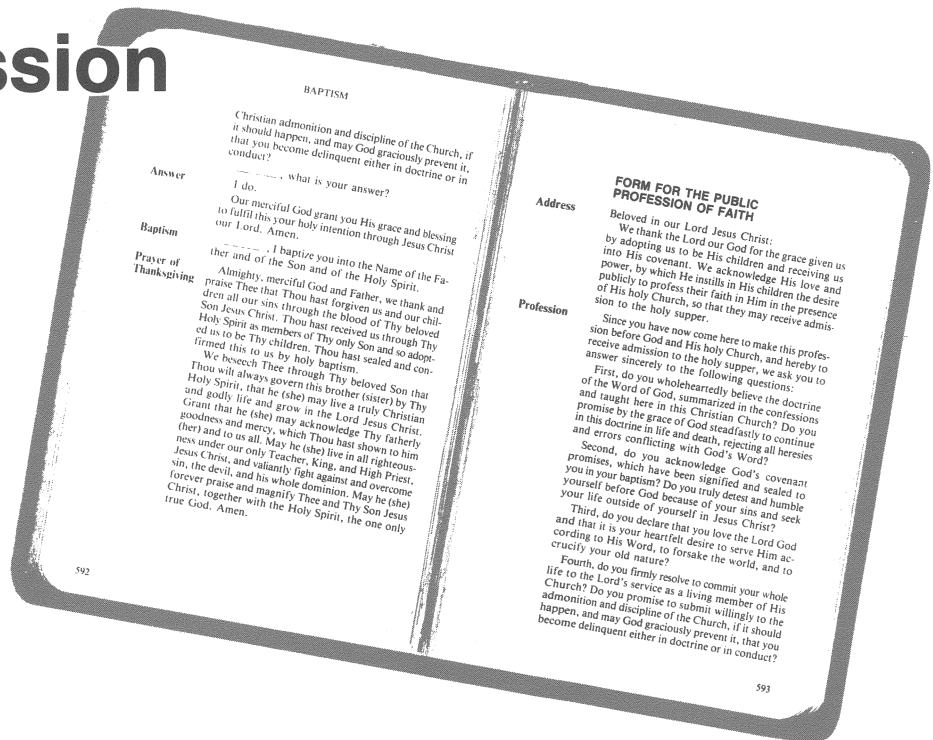
Dealing with less gifted children, children with learning problems or even retarded children, we have to apply the same rule, namely, that they have to use *all* the talents they have received. If someone has received only one talent we can not ask him to use two. The requirements for retarded children should be in accordance with their capability to understand and learn. Sometimes the question is asked whether such children can make public profession of faith at all. That depends on the circumstances. Certain minimum requirements have to be set. The basic rule is that they, although probably in a very simple way, understand what it means. Let us, by mentioning two examples, try to make clear what we mean. Once a retarded child wanted to be admitted to the Lord's Supper. Asked for the reason why, the answer was: "I like eating and especially drinking wine." Because this person did not understand the meaning of the sacrament he could not be admitted. In another case a retarded boy asked the same, saying simply: "I love Jesus and He is there, therefore I like to be there too. I belong to Him." That was all he knew. He did not understand what the doctrine of the church was all about. He could not memorize the Catechism, but the consistory had no hesitation at all to let him make public profession of faith. He used all the talents he

had and, within the limitations of his understanding, he knew why he came to the Lord's Supper.

These were two clear-cut cases. It is not always as easy to make a decision. However, a consistory has to consider each case on its own merits and decide accordingly. It is certainly not so that retarded children (or adults) cannot be admitted to the Lord's Supper. Sometimes, in the way they believe in the Lord, they can even be an example for the more intelligent members of the church. Jesus set children as an example when He said in Matthew 18:3,4, "Truly, I say to you,

unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." We often can learn from such members to trust in a childlike way in the care and protection of our heavenly Father.

We have to be careful that retarded children do not take part in the celebration of the Lord's Supper with a completely wrong perception of what it is all about. But after having said this, we should also realize that many "normal" or "intelligent" members may have a wrong perception of what the sacrament really means.



6. Preconfession class

In this section we will discuss two frequently asked questions, namely, a. Do you have to go to a preconfession class before you can make public profession of faith? b. Does everyone who goes to such a preconfession class necessarily *have* to make public profession of faith?

Our first remark is that a preconfession class should not be necessary. If a boy or a girl has attended the regular catechism classes for, let us say, six years, there should be enough knowledge of the Word of God, the confession, the doctrine, and the history of the church. This is true, provided that such a student has attended the classes regularly, and that the teacher had a systematic curriculum, covering all the relevant aspects in an orderly way. That is the ideal situation. However, it often happens that a student moves to another congregation or that the teacher is replaced by another, for instance a minister leaves, a new minister accepts a call, or a congregation is vacant. In such a situation it can easily happen that some Lord's Days have been explained three or four times and that others never have been dealt with. The same counts for church history and other important issues. For these practical reasons it has been proved beneficial to spend one season on updating and reviewing the knowledge. It is an excellent opportunity to go through the whole "curriculum" and see whether there are some omissions in the knowledge. The conclusion is therefore that, although a preconfession class should not be necessary, to all intents and purposes it appears to be a worthwhile custom. Still there is always the opportunity to ask for public profession of faith without attending such a class, if sufficient knowledge can be shown.

The other question is whether someone who attends a preconfession class *has* to make public profession of faith at the end of the season. This question, although quite often brought to the fore, is based upon a wrong presumption. A preconfession class is for those who have expressed their intention to make public profession of faith. It gives them an opportunity to update their knowledge and to review the whole program. That implies that someone who joins such a group, has already made a decision. The point is not whether they *have* to make profession of faith but that they are coming because they have expressed their *desire* to do so. There might be exceptions. During the course of the season someone may change his mind. In such a situation no one has to be *forced* to make profession of faith. However, the preconfession class should not be considered as an alternative for the "older" members, who

do not feel at home in the regular class because of their age, and therefore would rather go to such a "special" class, *without* the intention of making profession of faith. That brings us to our next point, namely, the question of *when* someone is "ready."

7. Not yet ready?

Some young people postpone their public profession of faith because they say they are "not ready" for it. What does that mean and how do we have to deal with such cases? If it means a lack of knowledge, the only remedy is to study hard and gather knowledge, and that is precisely what the regular catechism classes are for. We mentioned already that every consistory has to consider the talents of the student and the way he is using these talents. Therefore, the preparation for public profession of faith should not be too much for the average boy or girl. They should have to work hard and put some effort into it, for the Bible teaches us clearly that we have to prepare ourselves for the battle. The apostle Paul says in Ephesians 6 that we have to put on the whole armour of God in order to be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. Moreover, nowadays young people seem to have no problem in studying and learning all kinds of things in no time. Most of them easily pass the test for a drivers licence, they take part in all kinds of competitions, they are getting familiar with computers and what have you. Would it be too much for them to put some effort into studying the Word of God and the confession of the church? The main question is what are the priorities.

Another reason for postponing the confession of faith is that they feel that their way of life is not in accordance with what can be expected of communicant members. However, this is totally wrong thinking. Not making public profession of faith never provides an excuse for continuing a way of life which is not according to the Word of God. It only makes things worse. Two wrongs do not make a right. If someone's life-style is not in accordance with the Word of God, it should be changed without delay. The law of the Lord is the same for communicant members as for non-communicant members. They all have to obey His commandments. They all are living under the same rules of the covenant, with the same promises and the same obligations. The Lord asks us to confess His Name in this world, and to "remember His death until He comes," at the table of the Lord. Not coming to the Lord's Supper without a good reason is a matter of disobedience. When people are mature enough to carry

a great responsibility in their daily life, in their business, or in their job, they should also be mature enough to make a choice and a commitment with respect to the service of the Lord. It is absolutely wrong when young people quit going to the catechism classes because they feel too "old" for it and still do not make public profession of faith. That brings us to another point which needs some attention, namely, the matter of adult non-communicant members.

8. Adult non-communicant members

About two years ago I wrote a series of articles about discipline. In these articles I paid attention to the status of non-communicant members. From different sides I have received the request to deal with this matter again. Therefore I will elaborate on it, especially with respect to public profession of faith. I will repeat a few things which have been mentioned two years ago, because not everyone has readily available all the previous issues of *Clarion*.

The status of non-communicant members has been a point of discussion for centuries. The famous Prof. G. Voetius was of the opinion that adults who fail to make public profession of faith are, for that reason, considered not to be members of the congregation any longer.

The Rev. J a Lasco, the well known leader of the refugee churches at London (England) in the middle of the sixteenth Century, preferred an explicit statement of the consistory that they had forfeited their membership, rather than a more or less automatic loss of membership. Young people who, at the age of fifteen years, were not willing or ready to make public profession of faith, had to be admonished. If they, by the age of eighteen or twenty, still had not made public profession of faith, they were cut off from the church.

The first official statement of the Reformed Churches concerning this matter was made by the General Synod at Dordrecht in 1578. This synod advised to continue the admonition, instruction, and training, as long as such members had not rejected the covenant of the LORD.

In the course of the years many decisions have been made, some have been retracted, others have been ignored. In the next instalment we will mention a few noteworthy points with respect to the developments in The Netherlands, to show how complex, sometimes confusing, and always difficult this matter has been and still is.

— *To be continued*
W. POUWELSE



Questions of Guidance₂

Again our Press Review is not a review in the real sense of the word. It is more like a guest article. The author is Rev. Professor Donald MacLeod, professor in Systematic Theology at the Theological College of the Free Church of Scotland. He is also editor of The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland. What follows here is a fourth article on "Questions of Guidance." We thank Professor MacLeod for his kind permission to take over in our magazine what he writes in The Monthly Record. It is not only interesting. It is instructive. Many people use those so-called revelations and the assumed direct guidance of the Holy Spirit in order to feel free to do what they like to do and to get what they desire to get. The Holy Spirit and His so-called guidance is so easily used to serve human self-interests. These articles of Professor MacLeod are taken over in Clarion in order to help its readers not to fall in the trap of this mystical, subjectivistic religion of self-service. May the LORD bless also this article.

J. GEERTSEMA

We saw last month that the Holy Spirit's involvement in our personal lives is real, persistent and decisive. It falls short, however, of His furnishing us with special, direct revelation.

Some readers obviously find this last point deeply offensive. In fact, as far as they are concerned, to argue that the Holy Spirit does not give direct, personal guidance is to deny the reality of experiential religion altogether.

Historical bearings

Let's get our historical bearings, however. This mystical view of guidance may now be virtually universal among Christians. But it was not always so. The Westminster Confession, for example, states categorically that "those former ways of God's revealing His will unto His people have now ceased" (Westminster Confession, I.I). Later, it asserts the perfection of Scripture: "The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for man's salvation, faith and life is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence, may be deduced from Scripture" (I.VI). It then adds,

on the basis of this perfection, that nothing is to be added to Scripture, "whether by new revelations of the Spirit or traditions of men." Whether the Confession is right or wrong, these words show very clearly that the classic theology of the seventeenth Century regarded any claims to additional revelations as inconsistent with the sufficiency and finality of Scripture.

In the last 150 years, the Confession's position has been largely discarded. Swedenborg and Joseph Smith, the founders of great modern sects, both claimed to have had special revelations. Pentecostal "prophets" claim to receive them continually. And even Dr. John Kennedy's *Days of the Fathers in Rosshire* portrays (and commends) a mystical experientialism which it would be very difficult to reconcile with the teaching of the Confession.

But there have been other voices. Professor John Murray, for example, writes: "The Word of God is a perfect and sufficient rule of practice. The corollary of this is that we may not look for, depend upon or demand new revelations of the Spirit." He goes on to speak of "the error of

thinking that while the Holy Spirit does not provide us with special revelations in the form of words or visions or dreams, yet he may and does provide us with some direct feeling or impression or conviction which we are to regard as the Holy Spirit's intimation to us of what His mind and will is in our particular situation."

Professor Paul Woolley shared Professor Murray's view. There is, he says, one very important consequence of the sufficiency of Scripture: "God does not today guide people directly without using the Scriptures. There are no divinely given 'hunches'. God does not give people direct mental impressions to do this or that. People do not hear God's voice speaking within them. There is no immediate and direct unwritten communication between God and the individual human being. If the Scriptures are actually sufficient, such communication is unnecessary. On the other hand, if such communications were actually being made, every Christian would be a potential author of Scripture."

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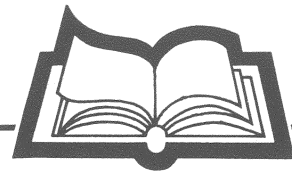
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“And your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it,’ when you turn to the right or when you turn to the left.”

Isaiah 30:21

A Voice from Behind

Having announced the coming judgment upon unbelieving Judah on account of their reliance upon Egypt, the prophet now holds forth the promise of the LORD to the faithful remnant who repent and turn back from Judah’s evil course. For those who return to the LORD’s rest, many blessings are promised. They will hear the voice of the LORD whispering to them from behind, guiding, leading, and pointing out to them the way they should go. But who shares this voice, and who does it really point to?

The obvious focus of the passage is on instruction in the law of Israel, the *torah*, which pointed out the way to life and well-being, *shalom*, for the people of the LORD. Moses had said to the people: “You shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left,” Deuteronomy 5:32; cf. 17:20. Israel was called to walk the straight path to the inheritance, the path of unconditional obedience to all the commandments of the LORD. But Moses was a distant mediator. He came down from the mountain, and his face shone. And while the people could bear to hear his voice rather than the voice of the LORD, Deuteronomy 5:22ff., Moses’ speaking was certainly not like the speaking described here. He was still a distant figure, a teacher *above* the people. Therefore Israel’s history is a history of *sin*: the chosen people, repeatedly turned away from the LORD, first one way, then the other.

Isaiah therefore points to a new and better time, a time when instruction in the holy law of God will flow easier, and will enter the *hearts* of men. The period after the exile saw a beginning, a foretaste of this new day. The LORD gave scribes and instructors who were able to teach God’s people the ways of the LORD. The nation was reunited, the ceremonies were revived, but, above all, the law was read and taught among God’s children, cf. Nehemiah 8. What a time of rejoicing this was!

Yet the greater joy was still to come. The Teacher who was promised does not really appear before the eyes of Israel until Jesus Christ comes to earth, and appears in the flesh. He is the *Immanuel*, God with us, and He taught and spoke to the people of God face to face. He taught the law perfectly, Matthew 5:17ff. And those who believed in Him received the promised gift: the Voice from behind. Who then is the Voice? None other than the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of victory, through whom we are instructed after the inward man in the law of righteousness and life.

Indeed, Pentecost implies a crucial and important change in the church. No longer is the law the stringent and impending command “out there”; now it may be written on our hearts, implanted in our minds, worked into our consciences, all by the same supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, who now lives and dwells among us, in our hearts and lives. Is not this what the prophets spoke of so long ago, when they said that the law would be written upon the hearts? Is not this the writing that occurs within? (cf. Jeremiah 31:33, Ezekiel 36:25ff.)

Therefore we may give thanks for the gift of the Spirit. We may be assured of God’s guidance on all our ways. He gives all we need to see the way. We are instructed “before and behind,” protected on the right and the left. All sides are covered, all we need is given. We may have the direction of an enlightened conscience, the inner voice whispering to us, guiding our feet on God’s pathway. And what is the inner voice? Nothing but simple obedience to the LORD, humble acceptance of His will, humble submission to His command. “He has showed you O man, what is good!” Micah 6:8.

Of course, this does not preclude many failings and shortcomings, and many stumbles on the way. But with all the weaknesses, this now may be a mark, a *seal*, visible among those who are called Christians, *viz.* that they “neither turn aside to the right or the left,” Article 29, B.C. The new beginning is here, thanks to the victorious Spirit of Pentecost, the Spirit of the risen Christ! The way is open, and the Guide ushers us in.

Yet even a voice from behind can be sublimated, rejected and resisted. And a living Voice rejected will soon disappear. Shall we not heed the living Voice? Shall we not open our hearts to the gentle, whispering injunctions of the Holy One, the gentle beckoning call to a new tomorrow where righteousness dwells and sin no longer holds sway?

A gentler, more persuasive appeal is not possible. Here the LORD has given His “all.” A more urgent appeal will never come; a deeper, richer, and fuller Voice — which all the while leaves us free — will not appear. For the Spirit has come! Let all accept His whispers of love, and so live in reconciliation with the only Father all their days.

J. DEJONG

Questions of Guidance — *continued*

It is important to notice what exactly it is that evangelicals regard as revelation. When the Confession says that “those former ways of God’s revealing Himself have now ceased” it is referring to theophanies, dreams, visions, prophetic utterances and apostolic tradition. When evangelicals today claim direct revelation they are not thinking of any of these. They are thinking of states of consciousness, of complexes of feelings, which, they say, indicate the will of God. The mental impression itself is the revelation of what God wants them to do. A proposed sermon or a proposed move or a proposed resignation *feels* good. There is nothing wrong with having such feelings nor indeed with acting upon them. As Professor Murray points out, we must not let ourselves be trapped into the view that “a strong or overwhelming feeling or impression or conviction is necessarily irrational or mystical.” Because our minds are limited this may be the way that all the relevant considerations focus themselves in our consciousness. But it remains only a feeling or impression nonetheless. Even when it is absolutely right it is not a revelation. A man who says that one plus one equals two will have an overwhelming impression that he is saying exactly the right thing. But then so will some who say the earth is flat. The correctness of their respective convictions cannot be decided by the way they feel about them.

Guidance in the Early Church

Behind the idea that believers are still guided by direct revelation there appears to lie the assumption that whatever people enjoyed during the apostolic period we ought to enjoy today. But if we look closely we find that in those early days things were not exactly as we suppose.

For one thing, the very reason why there had to be prophets and apostles in the Early Church was precisely that all believers did not enjoy special revelation. Men like Agabus were needed both because there was no completed canon and because the Spirit’s ministry, intimate and decisive though it was, left large areas of uncertainty.

It is intriguing, too, that at critical moments in the church’s development no special divine guidance was given. In Acts 1:21-26, for example, when the disciples decide to appoint a successor for Judas, there is no revelation. They have to resort to a lot: and it is far from clear that God’s will was expressed in the lot (except in the general sense that the fall of the dice always lies within the divine decree). We certainly hear no more of Matthias.

We find the same thing in connection with the appointment of the Seven in Acts 6:1-6. The decision marked a major step forward in the organization of the church. But it was prompted by a simple emergency arising out of the Hellenists’ complaints that their widows were being neglected. Throughout, the church’s leaders are guided by nothing more than “the light of nature and Christian prudence.” They argue, simply, that it is inappropriate for them to waste their time in administration, that the tasks must devolve upon others and that those appointed must be men full of the Holy Spirit and of wisdom. The final decision is taken on the basis that the proposal “pleased the whole multitude.”

When Paul arranges for the appointment of elders in Galatia (Acts 14:23) they are appointed by popular election: and when Titus appoints them in Crete he is directed to look out for certain qualities and base his decision on these (Titus 1:5-9).

It is surely significant that in such an obviously charismatic community as the Early Church decision-making should so often have been a matter of mere common sense.

It is more fascinating still to notice that even when specific divine guidance was given the details were left to be worked out according to the judgment of the people involved. The commissioning of Saul and Barnabas is indeed a matter of direct revelation, which is hardly surprising considering that it marks the effective beginning of the Gentile mission. But once the missionaries are ordained, all the evidence suggests that they have to work out the details for themselves: what towns to visit, whom to take with them, how to travel, how long to stay. As they take these decisions, they are, of course, Spirit-filled men, but there is little hint of special revelations and none at all of an inclination to regard their own feelings as synonymous with the will of God. All the ordinary problems of missionaries are there, even the bitter blow of John Mark abandoning them at Pamphylia.

The same situation is repeated in Acts 16. They are forbidden by the Spirit to preach the Word in Asia. They then, most humanly, attempt to go to Bithynia, but are again frustrated: whereupon they make their own decision to go to Troas. At Troas, Paul receives the vision (not a mental impression) of the man from Macedonia: “Come over and help us!” High drama! But from then on the story is a mundane one of sailing to Samothrace, thence to Neapolis and finally to Philippi. Once at Philippi, they decide (without any revelation) to go down to the riverside on the Sabbath Day. As a result of that decision, Lydia is converted. But when, without any direct guidance, Paul rebukes the demon-possessed girl, apparent disaster

follows. They are imprisoned and eventually expelled.

Paul’s visit to Athens brings out the same principles. It is no revelation that brings him there: merely the fact that that is where he is escorted by the brethren from Berea (Acts 17:15). At Athens, he preaches his great sermon before the Areopagus: not, however, because some message is “given” to him but because his soul is provoked by the idolatry and superstition he sees all around him. The sermon itself is a model of the judicious application of Biblical truth to a particular, and even peculiar, audience.

Remarkable stories

The argument we have put forward in these articles is often countered by anecdote. Everyone knows remarkable stories of men and women who had an overwhelming sense that they must follow a certain course of action. They obeyed the feeling and the outcome vindicated them gloriously.

It is dangerous to allow theology to be guided by extra-Biblical narrative. But allowing the relevance of such incidents for the moment, it is surely clear that they could be paralleled many times from non-Christian sources. Every detective has hunches: and Winston Churchill had an overwhelming sense that he was on the right course when he wrote in 1939, “I felt as if I were walking with destiny, and that all my past life had been a preparation for this hour and this trial.” Furthermore, for every hunch which turns out to be correct there are many more which do not. “That people have hunches is obvious,” writes Paul Woolley: “That many of them work out very well and others quite poorly is also obvious.” But only the successful ones are related.

Then there is M’Cheyne’s advice: “Get your text, your thoughts, your words from God.” This may not be as harmless as it looks. When is the preacher’s word from God? As far as we are concerned, whenever it is based four-square on Scripture. How we feel in relation to it is immaterial. We certainly need wisdom to decide which part of Scripture to expound in a given situation. In fact, the possession of such wisdom is an indispensable part of the call to preach. But even when our judgment falters, God’s Word remains God’s Word, deserving reverent exposition and responsive hearing. The authority lies in the Scriptures themselves, not in our mental impressions.

But have we ourselves not known situations where we were sure God had *given* us the word? No, because before we ever began to preach we had come to hold the very opinions on this subject which we hold today. But what we have known is this: A fair measure of confi-

dence that we had prepared something we could preach *with liberty*. We could sleep well the night before. But as often as not (indeed, more often than not) the thing didn't work and it was agony to deliver. On other occasions, we have had the opposite experience: a sermon in which we had no confidence and a night without sleep. But when the day came, it worked, at least to the extent that the actual preaching of it was an enjoyable and even an exhilarating experience.

The feelings we have before preaching and the feelings we have during preaching are not important, except to ourselves. What matters is the truth of what we preach: and what we should pray for is not assurance before we preach it or liberty as we preach it but wisdom and courage to declare the whole counsel of God.

The place of the mind

Let us not forget that the church still enjoys revelation. The Bible is the living Word of God, still giving us abundant and clear guidance. But when it comes to deciding how to get from Edinburgh to Lakhnadon, we are in the same position as

Paul seeking to get from Troas to Samothrace. We have to think. In fact, it is quite astonishing how much emphasis the Bible places on the role of the mind in the Christian life. We are to be transformed through the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:2). We are to gird up the loins of our minds (I Peter 1:13). We serve the law of God with our minds (Rom. 7:25). We are to be renewed in the spirit of our minds (Eph. 4:23). Obviously it is not in the abandonment of the intellect that we are to serve God but in its consecration and application. Coming back to the model with which we began: we are to *think* what Christ *thought*.

That intellect itself, as we have emphasized repeatedly, is not ordinary. It is indwelt by the Spirit and doesn't think or judge in the same way as the intellect of a natural man. But the newness of the regenerate intellect is not the only charismatic element in the Christian's decision-making. We must also reckon with the gift of wisdom: "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask it of God" (James 1:5). This is more than common sense and more even than the day-to-day insight of the born-again man. It is a special charisma,

enabling men like Solomon and Stephen to lead the church and to solve the problems which arise in counselling and administration. It does not involve God *revealing* solutions to us but it probably does involve an instinctive knowledge of the right thing to do. The gift is available to all of us and as we look at the intractable problems facing both church and society we should be more and more conscious that nothing short of supernatural sagacity will meet our need.

Many people will say that the line we have taken on this subject is discouraging, because it calls in question the experience of many of God's people. To that, we can say only one thing: Think how discouraged many ordinary Christians become when they hear others talking of these marvellous experiences which they themselves have never had. Our own reflections arose, many years ago, precisely out of such discouragements. It was a mighty uplift then to find that we were not alone in our deprivation. If anything we have said helps someone else to accept himself before God, despite lacking voices, visions and overwhelming certainties, we shall be happy.

Evaluation of divergencies

I. INTRODUCTION

Mandate

The General Synod of Cloverdale 1983 charged the Committee for Contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church "to publish, for the benefit of our churches, a detailed evaluation of the confessional and church-political divergencies, showing proof that these divergencies do not form an impediment in recognizing the OPC as true Church of the Lord Jesus Christ," Acts, Art. 55.

According to Article 29 of the Confession of Faith the true and the false church are easily recognized and distinguished from each other. The true church is to be recognized by the following marks: it practices the pure preaching of the gospel; it maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them; and it exercises church discipline for correcting and punishing sins. In short, it governs itself according to the pure Word of God, rejecting all

things contrary to it and regarding Jesus Christ as the only Head.

Prehistory

The Synod of Coaldale 1977 recognized with thankfulness the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as a true Church of our Lord Jesus Christ as confessed in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession.

This recognition was in line with statements of several previous synods. Already in 1965 Synod Edmonton declared that the OPC as a Presbyterian Church is a fruit of the Calvinist Reformation. It has confessions and a church polity which are of a Calvinist character. In this century it has decidedly chosen for orthodoxy and against modernism.

In 1967 the General Synod of our Netherlands sister churches accepted the statement of the Regional Synod of Groningen that the Westminster Confession of Faith is a completely Reformed confession ("een voluit Gereformeerd belijdenisgeschrift").

Synod Orangeville 1968 of our Cana-

dian Reformed Churches expressed its gratitude that it is evident that in many respects the good fight of the faith is being fought in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Synod New Westminster 1971 gratefully acknowledged that the OPC is a group of churches that commit themselves to the Scriptures as the infallible Word of God and that wish to maintain the Creeds, based on this Word of God. The OPC desires to regulate and order the government of the church in accordance with the Scriptural confession, namely, that in accordance with the Form of Government, Chapter I,7 all its decisions should be founded upon the revealed will of God.

But what about the divergencies in confession and church polity?

Synod Coaldale 1977 considered that these divergencies, notwithstanding the fact that continued discussion of them is desirable, are to be explained from the different origins of the confessions of the Canadian Reformed Churches and the

Westminster Confession of Faith with its related Doctrinal Standards of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

This Synod of Coaldale, that recognized the OPC as a true Church of our Lord Jesus Christ, had access to a letter of the OPC Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations of April 14, 1976. This letter confirmed that the OPC wholeheartedly adheres to the Westminster Confession of Faith and maintains the rules for church polity as laid down in the Form of Government. It also confirmed — according to a consideration of our Synod — that the divergencies having been discussed in this letter do not form an impediment to recognize the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as Churches of our Lord Jesus Christ. Among others, this consideration led Synod Coaldale 1977 to its recognition of the OPC.

Although Synod 1980 upheld this recognition of the OPC as a true Church, it expressed regret that the evaluation of the divergencies, as discussed in the letter of April 1976, was not explained in detail. It mandated our Committee to perform what Synod 1977 should have done. Synod 1983 renewed this mandate.

General remarks

Before we now enter into a detailed evaluation of the confessional and church political divergencies, we make some general remarks about the application of Article 29 of our Confession of Faith.

Although there are differences between a person and a community, it is remarkable that Article 29 speaks not only of the true church but also of those who are of the church. True Christians are not perfect in this life — “great weakness remains in them” — but they fight against it by the Spirit all the days of their life. By way of parallel one might say that the confession does not state that a true church is perfect. It rather presupposes that great weakness remains in a true church as it remains in true Christians of whom it is a congregation or assembly (Art. 27). Our confession is not only directed against Roman Catholicism but also against Anabaptism which revived the schismatic tendencies of Donatism.

In this context we may also mention the fact that the Confession acknowledges that hypocrites are mixed in the church along with the good. They are not part of the church, although they are outwardly in it.

In Book IV of his *Institutes* Calvin, who had great influence upon the formulation of our Confession of Faith, writes as follows:

The pure ministry of the Word and pure mode of celebrating the sacraments are, as we say, sufficient pledge and guarantee that we may

safely embrace as church any society in which both these marks exist. The principle extends to the point that we must not reject it so long as it retains them, even if it otherwise swarms with many faults. What is more, some fault may creep into the administration of either doctrine or sacraments, but this ought not to estrange us from communion with the church (IV.1.12).

There are articles of doctrine disputed among the churches which still do not break the unity of faith. Calvin reminds us of the apostle's words, “Let us therefore, as many are perfect, be of the same mind; and if you be differently minded in anything, God shall reveal this also to you” (Phil.3:15), when he writes,

But since all men are somewhat beclouded with ignorance, either we must leave no church remaining, or we must condone delusion in those matters which can go unknown without harm to the sum of religion and without loss of salvation.

In agreement with our Confession and in the line of Calvin's instruction concerning the holy, catholic church Synod 1980 rightly considered the fact that a church may be called a true church according to Article 29 of the Belgic Confession, while this does not mean that it is a “pure” or “perfect” church (cf. Revelation 2 and 3). A true church can still have weaknesses but yet fight the good fight of faith and listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd.

In the context of these general remarks about doctrinal and church political divergencies we also refer to Article 50 of our Church Order that states, “With foreign churches of Reformed confession a sister church relationship shall be maintained as much as possible. On minor points of the Church Order and ecclesiastical practice churches abroad shall not be rejected.” Although there may be a difference of opinion about the question what constitutes “minor points” (or “non essentials” in the old text of Art. 85), it is clear that also with respect to Church Order and ecclesiastical practice the Reformed Churches never adopted an absolutist or rigoristic approach which would prevent us from acknowledging that the grace of God has also been given to others.

II. DOCTRINAL DIVERGENCIES

1. Visible and invisible church

The Westminster Confession Ch. 25 par. 1,2 speaks about the catholic or universal church which is invisible and about the visible church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel (cf. Larger Catechism, Q. and A. 64-66).

In their report to Synod 1971 our deputies made the remark that the terms

visible and invisible church, used in these articles, are not derived from the Scriptures but they give expression to a Scriptural distinction, namely, the distinction between the whole number of the elect and all those who profess the true religion with their children. This distinction is rooted in the Scriptures, Eph. 1:4, Acts 13:48, John 15:2, I Cor. 1:2 and is in agreement with the contents of Heidelberg Catechism Answer 54 and Belgic Confession Article 29. The former confesses that the Son of God gathers a church chosen to everlasting life of which I am a living member, and the latter distinguishes the true believers from the hypocrites who are mixed in the church with the good, yet are not of the church.

Our deputies concluded already in 1971 that this divergency in confession is not of such a nature that it should prevent the Canadian Reformed Churches from recognizing the OPC as a true Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In addition to this examination and evaluation we may remark that the use of the term “invisible” goes back to Augustine. In his work *On Baptism, against the Donatists* he speaks about false Christians who are enemies of the brotherly love, whether they are openly without, or appear to be within. “While they seem to be within, they are severed from that invisible bond of love.” (NPNF IV, 445). Augustine refers in this context to I John 2:19 and II Tim. 2:16-21.

In the Middle Ages similar expressions were used by Wycliffe and Hus and this led to the use of the terms “visible and invisible” with respect to the church in Luther, Zwingli and Calvin.

As far as Calvin is concerned, he makes a distinction between the visible church and all God's elect (IV.1.2) and says that the article of the Creed also applies to some extent to the outward church (3). This is “the church visible, which falls within our knowledge.” He writes,

For we have said that Holy Scripture speaks of the church in two ways. Sometimes by the term “church” it means that which is actually in God's presence, into which no persons are received but those who are children of God by grace of adoption and true members of Christ by sanctification of the Holy Spirit. Then, indeed, the church includes not only the saints presently living on earth, but all the elect from the beginning of the world. Often, however, the name “church” designates the whole multitude of men spread over the earth who profess to worship one God and Christ (IV.1.7).

Calvin makes thus a distinction between that which is invisible to us and visible to

the eyes of God alone, and that which is called "church" in respect to men. He explains,

Just as we must believe, therefore, that the former church, invisible to us, is visible to the eyes of God alone, so we are commanded to revere and keep communion with the latter, which is called "church" in respect to men (7).

Our deputies have rightly warned against a *polarization* of the visible and invisible church. It results in a low esteem for what is called the visible church, a weakening of church-consciousness, a lack of understanding of the seriousness of the calling to separate from the false church, and the rise of the "theologoumenon" of the pluriformity of the church which is neither taught by the Scriptures nor by the Reformed Confessions and which proved to be an undermining factor in the fight against the sins of the church and for the reformation of the church.

This warning against a polarization, however, should not blind us for the fact that the Westminster Confession does not show a low esteem for what is called the visible church. It is called "the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation." In the following section (Art.25.3) the Westminster Confession declares:

Unto this catholic visible church Christ hath given the ministry, oracles and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints, in this life, to the end of the world: and doth, by His own presence and Spirit, according to His promise, make them effectual thereunto.

The following Articles 26-31 all deal with the church: the communion of saints, the sacraments, baptism, the Lord's Supper, church censures, synods and councils.

In Art.25.4 the expression is found, "This catholic church hath been sometimes more, sometimes less visible." It reminds us of what we confess in Art.27 Belgic Confession: the holy catholic church sometimes for a while may look very small, and as extinct in the eyes of man. Although the terminology "visible — invisible" is not used in our Belgic Confession — for which we may be thankful, the distinction between the church in the eyes of God and the church in the eyes

of men, as stressed by Calvin, is certainly present. It shows that in this respect there is no real contrast in the doctrine about the church between the Westminster Confession and our Confession of Faith.

Further, it must not escape our attention that the Westminster Confession knows of the dreadful possibility that churches "have so degenerated, as to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan" (Art.25.5). The letter of the OPC Committee d.d. April 14, 1976, pointed out that the Westminster Confession does distinguish between the true and the false church.

Finally, this letter spoke about the distinction between "the church visible and the church invisible" as "the covenantal understanding of church with its focus on the church as visible" and "viewing the church from the perspective of election." The Orthodox Presbyterian brothers tried to make clear that they do not think of two separate churches but of two *aspects* of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church. When they defined the church "in part, in terms of election," they wrote, "Since the identity of the elect is known only to God, this church is, to the human eye, invisible."

Undoubtedly our General Synod 1977 must have recognized in this description the reference of Augustine to II Tim. 2:19 ("The Lord knows those who are His") and the manner in which Calvin spoke about the church *coram Deo*, "in God's presence." This must have led this Synod to the consideration that the divergencies, "notwithstanding the fact that continued discussion of them is desirable, are to be explained from the different origins of the confessions of the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Westminster Confession of Faith with its related Doctrinal Standards of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church," and to join our deputies in their 1971 conclusion that the divergencies in confession are not of such a nature that they should prevent the Canadian Reformed Churches from recognizing the OPC as a true Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In concluding this part of the evaluation of the doctrinal divergencies we may add that our Synod of Edmonton 1965 already declared that in this century the OPC had decidedly chosen for orthodoxy

and against modernism. This choice with its accompanying church struggle was not impeded by the Westminster Confession but stimulated by it, e.g. by what it states concerning the purity of particular churches which are members of the catholic visible church. The OPC itself is fruit of church reformation in the twentieth Century, not in spite of the Westminster Standards but because of faithful adherence to them.

2. The covenant

The 1971 Report of Deputies drew attention to an ambiguity in the Westminster Standards with respect to the question with whom the covenant of grace was made. The Larger Catechism, Answer 31 states that it was made with Christ as the second Adam and in Him with all the elect as His seed.

Our deputies rightly remarked that the texts to which Answer 31 refers — I Cor. 15:22,45; Eph. 1:4; II Tim. 1:9 — do not speak of the people with whom the covenant was made, but of them who become partakers of the covenant-goods.

The Larger Catechism itself, however, confesses in Answer 166 that "infants descending from parents either both or one of them professing faith in Christ and obedience to Him, are in that respect within the covenant, and are to be baptized." Our 1971 deputies were of the opinion that in distinction from Answer 31, this Answer 166 agrees with the Scriptures which teach that the covenant was made with the believers and their seed, Gen. 17:7; Acts 2:39; I Cor. 7:14.

The OPC Committee in its letter of April 1976 acknowledged that there is dual emphasis in the Westminster Standards regarding the covenant, parallel to the distinction between the church as visible and the church as invisible. They pointed out, however, that there is no doctrine of the covenant in the Three Forms of Unity except by implication.

One could take this remark as to remind us that, although the Reformed Churches (liberated) have rejected the binding to the Kuyperian doctrinal pronouncements of Synod Sneek-Utrecht 1942 concerning covenant and baptism, they have not denied that within the Reformed and Presbyterian Churches there has been freedom of different approaches with respect to the relation between God's election and His covenant.

The OPC Committee rejected "the error of a doctrine of presumptive regeneration of the children of the covenant" and assured us, "Together with you, we would seek to avoid this misappropriation of the doctrine of election by proper attention to the doctrine of the covenant of grace which is made with believers and their seed."

We may add some quotations from

OUR COVER

Fort Garry Gate
Winnipeg, Manitoba
Photo courtesy of Manitoba Government

the 1975 edition of *The Standards of government and worship of The Orthodox Presbyterian Church*. In the Form of Holy Baptism (pp.74 ff.) we do not read of a covenant with the elect, but we encounter these expressions: "It (baptism) is a sign and seal of the inclusion of the person who is baptized in the covenant of grace . . . (B)aptized persons are called upon to assume the obligations of the covenant . . . (T)he promise of the covenant is made to believers and to their seed, as God declared unto Abraham . . . In the new dispensation no less than in the old, the seed of the faithful, born within the church, have, by virtue of their birth, interest in the covenant and right to the seal of it and to the outward privileges of the church."

In the principles of public worship it is stated: "Public worship differs from private worship in that in public worship God is served by His saints unitedly as His covenant people, the body of Christ. For this reason the covenant children should be present so far as possible as well as adults." (68).

The directory for public profession of faith speaks about "classes in Christian doctrine for the covenant youth" and the Form begins with the words:

Beloved in the Lord Jesus, we thank our God for the grace which was given you, in that having come to years of discretion, you have accepted God's covenant promise which was signified and sealed unto you in your infancy by holy baptism (81).

One may conclude from the Directory for Worship that in practice in the OPC the doctrine of the Larger Catechism Answer 166 functions as an acknowledgement of the covenant of grace that God made with the believers and their seed.

Although also in this respect continued discussion is desirable (as Synod Coaldale 1977 stated) since weaknesses and imperfections in the Westminster Standards could benefit from a careful emendation, the divergency now discussed was not an impediment to recognize the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as a true Church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. Assurance of faith

The Westminster Confession Ch.14.2 gives a description of faith, while Ch.18.3 speaks about the personal assurance of grace and salvation in these words, "This infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties before he be a partaker of it." Also Answer 81 of the Larger Catechism states, "Assurance of grace and salvation not being of the essence of

faith, true believers may wait long before they obtain it."

The 1971 report of our deputies aired the opinion that this confession regarding the lack of full assurance in the believer agrees with Article 16 of Ch. 1 of the Canons of Dordt which speaks of "those in whom a living faith in Christ, an assured confidence of soul, peace of conscience, an earnest endeavor after filial obedience, a glorifying in God through Christ, is not as yet strongly felt."

The OPC Committee in its 1976 letter referred also to the Canons of Dordt, Fifth Head, Article 11 which says "that believers in this life have to struggle with various doubts, and that under grievous temptations they are not always sensible of this full assurance of faith and certainty of persevering." The OPC Committee

Farewell to our lecturer, the Rev. W.W.J. VanOene

*We've gathered together, on this fine April day,
To say farewell to our prof. who's moving away.
His name is VanOene, and he's quite unique,
He's come here from Fergus, every Tuesday, each week.
His game is Ecclesiology, of that we are sure,
For he does his utmost to keep the Church Order pure.
He's not quite as anxious Church Hist'ry to tell,
But that's o.k., want wij weten't toch wel.
He has some pet peeves, and one is poor Latin!
If ever he finds some, he asks, "Who put that in?"
The way you write these words, and mix up these plurals,
They've got places for you, the other side of the Urals."
"Meeting of classis," likewise draws his ire,
See, just the sound of these words fills his eyes up with fire.
He's an amateur welder, and a bookbinder, too;
If you've got the wallpaper, he'll bind books for you.
He writes a column which he calls the "News Medley" —
He's got so many things going, he must be working quite stead'ly
He's been an example for all students to follow,
Though his taste in ties is not as easy to swallow.
As soon as he's packed, he'll be off to "The Valley,"
So if you're not finished your paper, don't dilly-dally.
He's going down under, when summer is over;
In his retirement, he'll be quite a rover.
He has great love for the churches, that's clear,
That will be attested by those far and those near.
We've learned many things in the hours he's taught us,
From Church Order ignorance, he's certainly brought us.
But there's one thing outstanding; it's the best, it's the top.
And that is to eat pepermunten with drop.*

A student
April 30, 1985

recognized the dangers of subjectivism and mysticism, but pointed out that they are also found among Reformed people in The Netherlands and on the North American continent oriented to the Three Forms of Unity. They appreciated our testimony to the fact that the hope and joy of the believer is rooted and grounded in Jesus Christ and His promises, and not in his own personal experience.

Although the expression about "the essence of faith" could be amended, Synod 1977 could also in this point not deny that a church that adheres to the Westminster Standards can be called a true church.

— To be continued
The Committee for Contact
with the OPC

Report

of the Fifty-first General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, held May 31 - June 7, 1984, Geneva College, Beaver Falls, PA USA

The undersigned attended the 51st General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) from Monday, June 4, 1984 — Wednesday, June 6, 1984, as delegate of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

He hereby submits the following report:

1. Your delegate was well received and he was introduced to the Assembly by the stated clerk, the Rev. John P. Galbraith. On motion he was enrolled as corresponding member. As such he addressed the Assembly once to thank the Assembly for the cordial reception and to convey our brotherly greetings.

He assured the Assembly of a keen interest within the Canadian Reformed Churches as to the life and activities within the OPC.

He informed them about the completion of the Anglo-Genevan Psalter, the *Book of Praise*, and the appointment of Dr. K. Deddens as the fourth professor at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

He further mentioned that in the coming years the OPC may be undergoing some deep testings in view of the invitation issued to the OPC by the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) and also as to determining the position of the OPC in the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES).

He expressed the expectation that in these matters which are also important for the Canadian Reformed Churches, the OPC would seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit in obedience to the Word of God. He also requested them seriously to consider what effect decisions to be made in these matters may have on the already accepted relationships with the Canadian Reformed Churches and others.

2.a. The 51st General Assembly (GA) received a letter from *the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)* which officially extended the invitation to the OPC to join the PCA under the same plan agreed upon by the churches in 1981.

b. Little attention was given to this matter by this 51st GA, since it was agreed that this invitation of the PCA will be brought before the 52nd GA in 1985.

c. The GA did instruct the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations (CEIR) "to inform the church regarding the principles, procedures and issues entailed in the question of responding to the invitation to join the PCA, and any other material that would be considered relevant, during the year preceding the 52nd GA."

The Assembly allowed the editor to devote an entire issue of *New Horizons*, if needed to this matter.

d. In the meantime it can be reported from a letter dated December 28, 1984 sent by CEIR to all sessions of the OPC, that much time has been devoted to the study of Biblical principles of church unity and that the CEIR has recognized certain areas of importance for considering the invitation as:

The Book of Church Order of the PCA; Organizational structure; Method of supporting denominational benevolences; Faith and Life Character of the PCA; Deacons and Trustees functions; Presbytery boundaries.

In meetings of representatives of both churches the following matters of concern were inquired about and discussed:

Principles and practices of foreign mission work; Principles and practices of home mission work; Methods of supporting missions; Free Masonry; Particular sections of the Book of Church Order; Church discipline; Charismatic issues; Status of baptized children, etc.

e. Although the CEIR has endeavored to make a recommendation to the next GA (1985) it has found it impossible to assemble, distill, and publish the information concerning the invitation to join the PCA, needed by the churches and the presbyteries, to consider this invitation responsibly. CEIR is continuing its work and plans to submit a report to the 1985 GA. However, it will present a recommendation for action by the 1985 Assembly only if this report can be in the hands of the churches by February 1, 1985. Therefore it is highly unlikely that CEIR will submit a specific recommendation to the 1985 GA.

f. It is noteworthy, according to your

reporter, that the Presbytery of Northern California sent an overture to the 51st GA to the effect that, in the event both churches approve of the invitation of the PCA, the OPC does so with the following provisions:

— that arrangements be made by the GA for a continuing church to be known as "The Orthodox Presbyterian Church";

— that a fair and equitable distribution of the assets be allocated to the continuing church;

— that the GA make whatever provisions and arrangements are necessary to insure the continuing of a church known as "The OPC" for those who for consciences' sake are unable to join with the PCA.

The GA referred this overture to the CEIR to report to the 52nd GA (1985) concerning the matters raised.

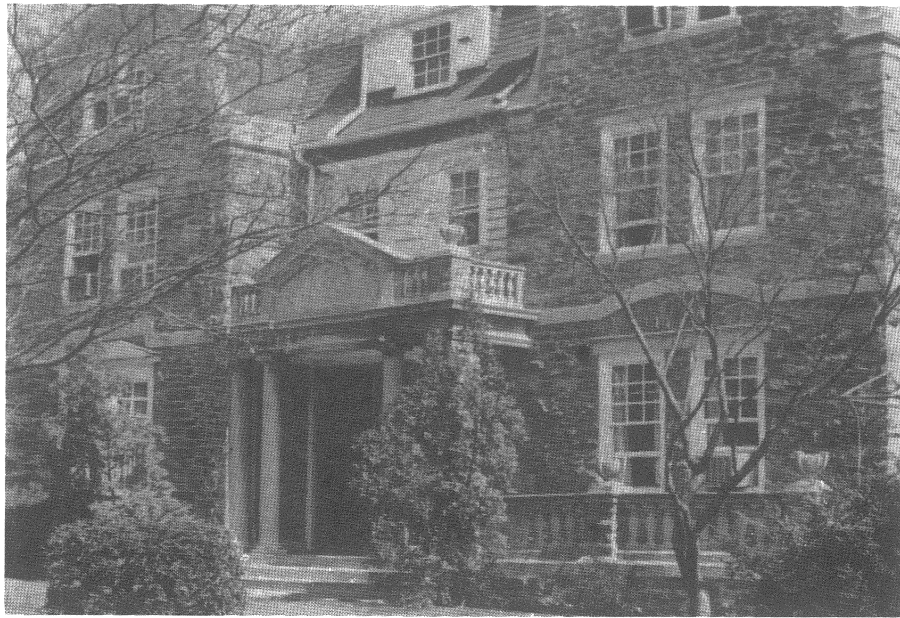
g. It appears that the OPC is seriously considering the invitation to join the PCA but wants to make sure that all sessions have the opportunity to evaluate fully and carefully the invitation of the PCA before a decision is made.

3.a. The Committee on *Reformed Ecumenical Synod Matters* (CRES) reported to the 51st GA that it had carried out the instruction of the 49th GA (1982). Since the RES Interim Committee did not recommend that the membership of "De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland" (GKN) in the RES be terminated, the CRES sent (February 28, 1984) to the RES Chicago 1984 the OPC Assembly's request that the RES "declare the GKN . . . to be not eligible for continued membership in the RES."

The CRES told the RES in this letter that this drastic conclusion was not reached hastily nor on the basis of one or two issues. Some of those issues are: — membership in the World Council of Churches;

— women in teaching and ruling office; — retention in teaching office of men who openly deny the central doctrines of the Reformed confessions;

— the admission of homosexuals to the Lord's Supper and to ecclesiastical office; — the report on Scripture ("God with us") that in spite of stated intentions, under-



Administration Office Building of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

mines the inspiration and authority of Scripture; — the coming reunion with the Hervormde Kerk.

In this letter to the RES the CRES emphasized that these departures from Scripture of the GKN are occurring in an unbroken line year after year, in spite of the extended advice of member churches. The OPC therefore pleads for “firm action” of the RES Chicago 1984 in order to preserve the RES’ Reformed character.

b. The same Committee sent also a letter (dated February 28, 1984) to all the churches that are a member of the RES, pleading with them to support the OPC at the RES 1984 in its endeavour to prevent the RES and its member churches of losing their Reformed character. They write, “. . . Obviously a course has been set in the GKN. . . that diverges from the Word of God, from the Reformed standards. . . . If the GKN will not change its course — and they have proved they will not — then the RES must. In a way the choice is very simple: will the RES be a Reformed body, or will it not. . . ? All the evidence shows that the GKN will not go the RES’ way. The RES cannot go the GKN’s way.”

c. Earlier already (September 20, 1982) the CRES had sent a letter to the GKN to tell them “how gravely it felt about. . . your deviations, over a number of years, from Reformed (i.e. Biblical) teachings. . . We plead that you will, by God’s grace, come back to the faithfulness to the Word of God from which your Reformed brethren of the RES believe that you have departed on so many occasions. . . . As long as you follow the course that you have begun and, at this juncture seem determined to con-

tinue, you are destroying the existence of the RES as a Reformed body. . . .”

d. The 51st GA dealing with this part of the report decided to request the RES 1984 to place consideration of the membership of the GKN in the RES as the first order of business of the Synod.

One of the grounds for this request was: “the GKN’s continued membership in the RES is of such prominence and importance to the future of the RES that it will hang over all the other business of the Synod until that question has been settled.”

e. In the meantime it can be reported that the RES Chicago 1984 (to which the GKN sent two women as part of their delegation) did not grant the OPC’s request to “declare the GKN not eligible for continued membership in the RES.”

A minority advisory report asked the RES to request the GKN — to withdraw its so-called pastoral advice on homosexual practice, or else — to withdraw from the RES by December 31, 1986.

This recommendation failed by one vote (28 — 28, with one abstention).

The RES decided to request the GKN to withdraw its pastoral advice concerning homosexual practice, or — “If it is unable to comply with this request to seriously consider the fact that several churches would find it difficult to stay in the RES with the GKN.”

f.i The RES membership of the OPC has been a point of discussion and an obstacle to full unity since the beginning of the contact between OPC and the Canadian Reformed Churches.

ii However, according to your reporter, it must be stated that the OPC has taken its membership very seriously and for instance has warned the GKN and

other member churches in a Scriptural way, and called upon them to return to faithfulness to the Word of God.

iii Since the RES Chicago 1984 did not take the “firm action” the OPC considered necessary to preserve its Reformed character, the OPC would seriously jeopardize its own Reformed witness by continuing its membership in the RES.

4.a. The Committee on Reformed Ecumenical Synod matters as well as the CEIR informed the 51st GA in their reports about *the International Conference of Reformed Churches*. The main items of the tentative constitution concerning the basis, membership, and purpose, were passed on to the GA.

It was noted:

i that an invitation had not been issued to the OPC to participate in the first Constituent Assembly of the ICRC in 1982;

ii that the Canadian Reformed Churches in their Synod 1983 declined to propose that the OPC be invited to the meeting of the ICRC Edinburgh 1985, although such action was proposed to their 1983 Synod by one of their committees.

iii that not enough was known at this moment about the ICRC to make a recommendation either to apply or not to apply for membership.

iv that the OPC should continue to observe the development of the ICRC and report at a later GA about it.

v that observers should be sent to the meeting of the ICRC in Edinburgh, Scotland.

b. The 51st GA decided indeed to authorize the CRES, in consultation with the CEIR, to appoint two persons to attend the next meeting of the ICRC, to be held September 3 — 13, 1985, in Edinburgh, Scotland. They will be sent as observers or some other non-delegate status acceptable to the ICRC.

One of the grounds for this decision was that if at the time of the 1985 GA the sending of observers seems unnecessary or undesirable the Assembly could cancel the authorization without harm or prejudice to the persons involved.

5.a. In its report to the 51st GA the CEIR informed the GA about the continuing contact with the Canadian Reformed Churches. The decisions of Synod Cloverdale 1983 concerning this contact were reported in full to the Assembly.

Also the subjects regarding their standards of faith presently under discussion were mentioned and the GA was informed that these subjects and others will be further discussed in future meetings of the CEIR and our Committee for Contact with the OPC.

b. The CEIR also reported that it has

correspondence with several churches abroad for the purpose of exploring the possibility of a relationship of some nature. These include the Free Church of Scotland, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland, and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland; also "the Netherlands Reformed Church, which separated some years ago from the "Article 31" Reformed Churches, and with which we have had contact through their observers at the meetings of the RES, and through members associated with our missionary work in Ethiopia and now in Kenya."

6.a. Another matter of interest for our churches was the report of a committee appointed by a previous GA (1980) to study *the Scriptural principles of the diaconal ministry of the church*.

This was the third year that the OPC discussed the extent of the church's diaconal concerns.

The Study Committee presented a majority and minority report.

b. The majority report, "Scriptural Principles Relevant To World Diaconal Involvement," defends the position that also non-Christian individuals should receive help, encouragement and if necessary the direct assistance of the church's deacons.

c. The minority report recognizes that the Bible focusses diaconal aid on church or covenant members (with whom we are in covenant relationship) and it upholds that the family and individual in the church is first in line to exercise care and assistance.

Although under certain circumstances also "non-covenantal" persons should receive diaconal help, cf. Gal 6:10, this report cautions the church to use this aid as a major evangelistic tool "since neither Jesus nor the Early Church did this, Mark 1:37-38; John 5:3,5-9."

d. The result of the lengthy discussion was that the GA decided to refer both reports to the churches for their study.

A motion to continue the study was voted down thereby disbanding the Study Committee.



60th Wedding Anniversary



Leendert and Josina Lodder were united in marriage on May 28, 1925 in Barendrecht, The Netherlands. In 1950 they emigrated to Canada with their five sons and one daughter-in-law. They worked for a farmer in Exeter, but after one year bought a farm in the Orangeville area. Since their retirement they have been living in Guelph. Their sons and families have all settled in Guelph. They are blest with thirty-two grandchildren and forty-three great-grandchildren. Mr. and Mrs. Lodder have been active members of the church. Due to ill health Mr. Lodder has been unable to attend worship services in the past four months. Mrs. Lodder enjoys reasonably good health. They are thankful to the Lord for each day He grants them together.



The GA decided further to inform the RES Chicago 1984 that the Assembly has given diligent study to the principles of diaconal ministry, but that it is unable to send conclusions to the RES at this time.

7. The 51st GA decided that the 52nd GA will convene Thursday, May 30, 1985, on the campus of Eastern College, St. Davids, PA.

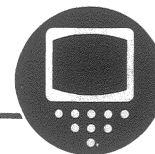
8. In conclusion your delegate may report that especially during intermissions there was ample opportunity for personal conversations; several commissioners re-

quested clarification concerning some decisions of General Synod Cloverdale 1983 regarding our contact with the OPC, our position with regard to the supervision of the Lord's Supper, the involvement in the so-called "Hofford-case" and related matters.

This personal contact was most enjoyable and instructive.

Humbly submitted by your delegate,
J. MULDER

PRESS RELEASE



Classis Pacific, Chilliwack, BC, April 10, 1985

1. *Opening.* On behalf of the Church at Chilliwack, Rev. C. Bouwman opened the meeting. The delegates sang Psalm 8:1, 3, 4, and listened to the reading of Isaiah 40:12-26. The LORD was called

upon for His blessing. The delegates were welcomed.

2. *Credentials.* The delegates of the Church at Abbotsford reported on the credentials. All the churches were duly represented. The Church at Langley had an instruction regarding the Orthodox Christian Reformed Church at Ripon, CA. The

Church at Lynden came to Classis with instructions regarding a counselor, classical preaching arrangements and support. The Church at Chilliwack had the request for continuing preaching arrangements for the Okanagan Valley.

3. *Constitution of Classis.* The Classis was constituted. Rev. W. Pouwelse served

the meeting as chairman; Rev. J. Geertsema as vice-chairman; and Rev. E. Kampen as clerk. The chairman spoke a word of thanks to the Church at Chilliwack for preparing the meeting. He mentioned that Rev. J. Geertsema received and declined a call to Lincoln, and welcomed especially the delegates of the recently instituted American Reformed Church at Lynden, Washington, USA, expressing the gratitude to the LORD that He made the institution of the second American Reformed Church possible.

4. *Adoption of the Agenda.* After some additions, the Provisional Agenda was adopted as the definitive agenda.

5. *Correspondence.* A letter was received from a brother studying at the College in Hamilton with a request for support according to Article 20 Church Order. The letter was accompanied by a letter from the Faculty of the Theological College, and by another one from the consistory of the Church at Langley. The matter was dealt with later on in connection with a report of the Committee for Needy Students.

6. *Proposals and Instructions:*

a. *Proposals of the Church at Chilliwack.* It was proposed to change the Articles 3 and 7 of the Classical Regulations and to bring them in accordance with the new Church Order as adopted at the Synod of Cloverdale, 1983. Article 3 would then read: "A Classis shall be held four times a year." And Article 7 would say: ". . . It is the duty of Church Visitors to visit each church once a year" These proposals were defeated. A motion "to appoint a committee to deal with the Classical Regulations and bring them in accordance with the new Church Order" was adopted. The brothers P. Blom, Rev. C. Bouwman and Rev. W. Pouwelse were appointed in this committee.

b. *Instructions of the Church at Lynden.* The request to appoint Rev. M. VanderWel as counselor was granted. A request for three services per month from the Classis was granted as well. The third request was for financial support from the Classis churches, so that the Church at Lynden might be enabled to call an own minister of the Word. The amount requested is US \$450 per month. In principle, also this request was granted.

c. *Instruction of the Church at Langley.* The consistory of the Church at Langley has granted Rev. D. VanderBoom "permission to preach and support the members of the Orthodox Christian Reformed Church in Ripon, CA, for a period of six months, including the administration of the sacraments." It also decided "to advise Classis Pacific of April 10, 1985 of our decision and to inform the Orthodox Christian Reformed Church to seek and establish contact with Canadian and Amer-

ican Reformed Churches." This decision is brought to the attention of the Classis. Rev. VanderBoom gives further information regarding this congregation in Ripon. The matter is discussed and the following motion is adopted: "Realizing our duty to help those in need, Classis gratefully receives the decision of the consistory of the Church at Langley for information and encourages the consistory to do all in its power to assist the brothers in Ripon further."

d. *Instruction of the Church at Chilliwack.* The consistory requested the continuation of pulpit supply from the Classis for the house congregation in the Okanagan Valley. This request was granted.

7. *Reports.*

a. *Report of the treasurer.* The treasurer, br. A.H. Lubbers, gave his report with financial statements over the years 1983 and 1984, still made up by the previous treasurer, br. P.A. VanEgmond. The balance as to date is \$3,198.88. The report was received with thankfulness for the work done.

b. *Report for the Inspection of the Archives.* The report was given. Some documents were missing. Copies of the missing documents were made, with one exception, since the document is not in the archives of the Church at Smithers either.

c. *Report of the Committee for Needy Students.* The request mentioned sub. 5 was dealt with. Rev. M. VanderWel, on behalf of the committee, reported on the matter. The committee recommended to grant the request. This was adopted.

8. *Question Period ad Article 44 Church Order.* None of the churches made use of it.

9. *Appointments.*

a. *Counselors:* Rev. M. VanderWel has been appointed counselor for the Church at Lynden.

b. *Deputies for Examinations:* Revs. J. Geertsema and J. Visscher.

c. *Examinations:* Rev. E. Kampen was appointed as examiner in the Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures and Rev. B.J. Berends as examiner in Church History. Otherwise it remained the same.

d. *Church Visitors:* Rev. B.J. Berends was added as Church Visitor. The Church Visitors are: the Revs. B.J. Berends, J. Geertsema, W. Pouwelse, M. VanderWel (co-ordinator). Rev. J. Visscher. Alternates: Revs. C. Bouwman and C. VanSpronsen.

e. *Church for Taking Care of the Archives:* the Church at Smithers.

f. *Church for Inspection of the Archives:* the Church at Houston.

g. *Treasurer:* br. A.H. Lubbers, PO Box 3448, Smithers, BC V0J 2N0.

h. *Church for Auditing the Books of the Treasurer:* the Church at Smithers.

i. *Committee for Financial Aid to Students for the Ministry:* Rev. C. Bouw-

man, br. K.F. Huttema, Rev. M. VanderWel (convener).

j. *Committee for Needy Churches:* brs. E.C. Baartman, H.A. Berends, (convener), and G. Boeve.

k. *Deputies for Preaching Arrangements:* Revs. J. Visscher and M. VanderWel.

10. *Arrangements for the Next Classis.* Convening church is the Church at Cloverdale. Suggested officers are: Rev. J. Geertsema, chairman; Rev. E. Kampen, vice-chairman; and Rev. B.J. Berends, clerk. This Classis will meet, D.V., October 9, 1985, and begin at 9:00 a.m. in the Cloverdale church building.

11. *Question Period.* A question was asked concerning the Special Classis, held in February 1985 in connection with the institution of the Church at Lynden.

12. *Censure at Article 44 Church Order.* There was no need to exercise censure.

13. *Adoption of the Acts and Approval of the Press Release.* The Acts are read and adopted. The Press Release was read and approved.

14. *Closing.* The delegates sang Psalm 19:1, and the chairman closed the meeting with thanksgiving and prayer.

For the Classis,
J. GEERTSEMA, vice-chairman, e.t.

**Consulaat-Generaal
Der Nederlanden
CONSULATE GENERAL
OF THE NETHERLANDS**

One Dundas Street West
Box 2, Suite 2106
Toronto, Ontario M5G 1Z3
Phone: (416) 598-2520

OPSPORING ADRESSEN:

MEIJLER, Johannes, geboren op 30 januari 1920, laatstbekende adres in Nederland: Heemskerkstraat 58, Rotterdam, naar Canada vertrokken op 20 november 1950.

POGGE, Edmond, geboren op 31 maart 1936 te Amsterdam, naar Canada vertrokken op 14 september 1964, laatstbekende adres: 70 Worthington Ave. St. Vital, Manitoba

VAN BEEK, Gerardus Augustinus Vincentius Maria, geboren op 18 juli 1946, laatstbekende adres in Canada: 95 Main St., Ottawa, Ontario.

De Consul-Generaal
voor deze:-
Mevr. G. SCHNITZLER
Fgd. KANSELIER

ABC BIBLE COLLECTION - by Mrs. John Roza

Hh



H-harp
(I Samuel 10:5)

Colour me!

Quiz Questions

1. Sarah could not give Abraham any children. Sarah gave Abraham her maid to bear him children. What is this maid's name? _____ (Genesis 16)
2. When God made the earth, He also made the _____. (Genesis 1)
3. Christians who believe in God will go to heaven when they die, but sinners and evildoers that do not believe in God will join Satan in _____.
4. This woman was very upset that she could not have any children. She was also to become the mother of Samuel. What was this woman's name? _____ (I Samuel 1)
5. After Samson killed a lion, what did he find in the carcass of this lion? _____ (Judges 14)

Answers for the letter "G"

1. God 2. Goshen 3. Gideon 4. Goliath 5. Gethsemane 6. Good Samaritan



Hello Busy Beavers,

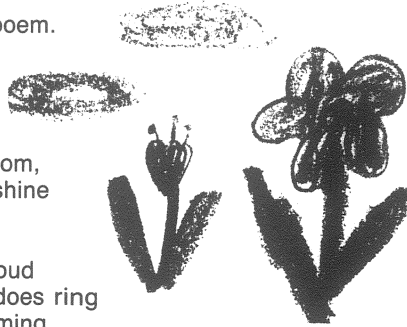
I see you have been very busy again, sending in all kinds of "goodies" to share. Thank you very much! Keep up the good work!

Let's start with a poem.

SPRING

The birds do sing
The flowers do bloom,
The sun starts to shine
Into my room.

The trees start to bud
Fun and laughter does ring
All to show the coming
Of glorious Spring!



Picture by Busy Beaver
Jennifer Siebenga

Busy Beaver *Janina Barendregt* has a story for you.

SPRING BREAK

During the spring break I had a lot of fun. We made a fort that used to be a dog house (It isn't anymore) with my brothers Dirk and Robby, and my sisters Beth, Emily and Marya. We fixed it up really nice. My sister Lori put rug all over it so now it looks nice and cozy. My Dad landscaped our hillside so we were very busy picking big rocks so we could plant grass. On February 9 we got a baby brother named Arthur James. He is doing fine. He is already trying to talk and sucks his thumb pretty much.



From the Mailbox

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club *Julia Jonker*. We are happy to have you join us, and hope you'll join in all our Busy Beaver activities. Living in the country in spring is great, don't you think, Julia? Write again soon.

Welcome to the Club, *Hanneke* in Watford. Thank you for a big letter, and the colourful picture, and the riddles, too! I'm looking forward to hearing from you again. Will you send me your address very soon, please? Then I can send you your Club membership card!

I'm glad you have your pen pals, *Cherie Schulenberg*. And I hope you'll keep practising your music. It will help you make up nice things on your own! What will you do this summer, Cherie?

Hello, *Tonya Beintema*. It was nice to hear from you again. How is Michael's scarf coming along, Tonya? Thank you very much for the puzzle. Bye for now.

How was your birthday party, *Sylvia VanBodegom*? I think you had a good time, right? And it was fun getting new kids at school, right? I hope you get the pen pal you want, Sylvia. Have you been watching Our Little Magazine for one?

It must keep you busy writing all your pen pals, *Carol Witteveen*! And how is your bowling average? Bye for now, Carol. Write again soon.

Have you ever eaten Turkish Delight, *Kimberley Vander-*

Zwaag? Yes, I like the book, too. Have you read the other books in that series, Kimberley? Thank you very much for sharing the jokes and riddles, and puzzles.

Hello, *Michelle Roodzant*. It was nice hearing from you again. Maybe you have been too busy to write us? Thank you for the puzzle and picture, Michelle. Bye for now.

You have been very busy, too, *Wendy VanderVeen*! Keep up the good work! Thank you very much for the puzzle, riddles, and poem. Write again soon.

By this time the vegetables and flowers will be nicely started in your greenhouse, *Cornelius Leffers*. Do you help look after them? Has your weather straightened around, too? Bye for now.

Looks to me as if you've been very busy, *Hilda Buitenhuis*! Good for you! Keep up the good work. What are you planning to do this summer, Hilda? Any ideas?

Hello, *Michelle Oostdyk*. Are you keeping busy, too? Thanks very much for your entry in the contest. It will be a little while, I guess, Michelle, before all the entries are in. So we'll have to be a little patient!

I'm glad you got your pen pal *Debbie Jagt*. That's great! And thanks for your spring poem. I'm looking forward to your story, Debbie. Bye for now.

Did you have a good time at Edie's house, *Amy Hofsink*? And is your lily growing again? Thanks for sharing your spring quiz, Amy! Write again soon.

Busy Beavers we need pen pals for two people today. Who will exchange letters with these two Busy Beavers?

Aimee Jagt (age 9)

21 Carl Crescent
Waterdown, ON L0R 2H0

Sylvia VanBodegom (age 11)

24 Homeland Court
Bramalea, ON L6S 1R8



Picture by
Busy Beaver *Hanneke*

RIDDLES FOR YOU

from Busy Beaver *Kimberley VanderZwaag*

1. If April showers bring May flowers what do May flowers bring?
2. To what question can you never answer "yes"?
3. What is the longest word in the English language?
4. What has 3 feet but cannot walk?
5. What is the best thing to put in pies?
6. What word is always pronounced "wrong"?
7. What question do you have to answer "yes"?
8. Why is "T" like an island?

Answers:

1. Pilgrims 2. "Are you asleep?" 3. Smiles. There is a mile between the first and last letter. 4. A yard. 5. Your teeth 6. Wrong. 7. What does Y-E-S spell? 8. It is in the middle of "water."