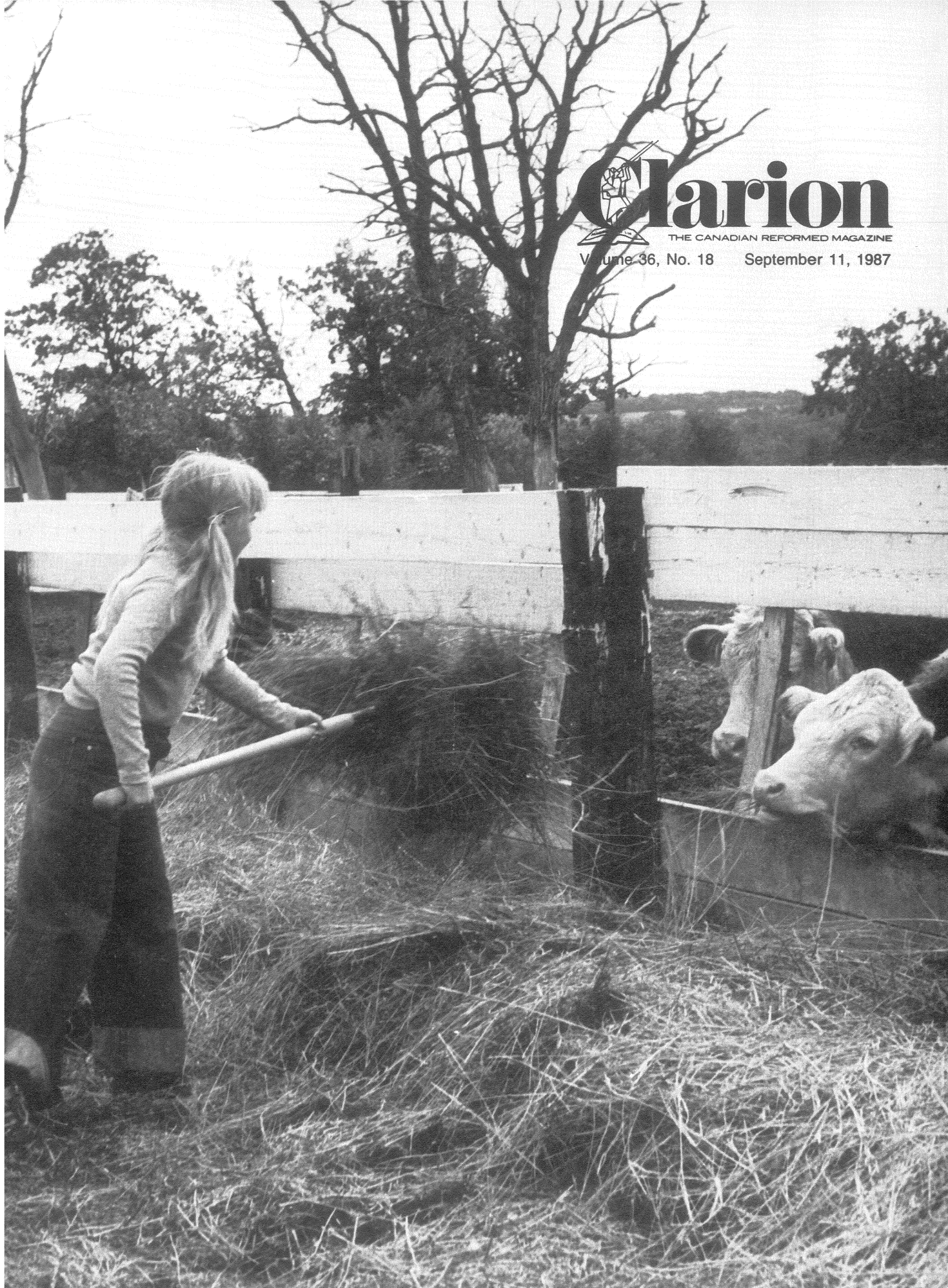


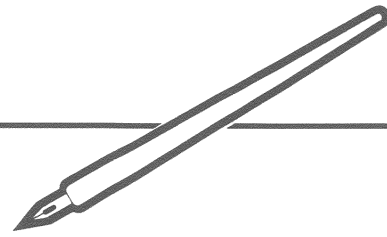


Clarion

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Labour Day

— idols deceive, but Christ redeems

Is Japan conquering our world?

Some time ago I had a conversation with a Japanese student. She had studied and worked in the United States for a number of years and was now working and studying in Canada. She identified the white people of the Western world with Christianity and had nothing favourable to say about us. Her testimony was very negative. White people, the Christians, are all corrupt. What she had so far experienced was that white people, Christians, are deceiving, greedy, immoral, selfish.

She said these things on the morning that the radio broadcasted the news that soon a number of American car factories had to be closed. Her comment was: We Japanese are taking over. Forty years ago we lost the war in which we tried to conquer the world with weapons. Now we are winning that war with peaceful means of economic power. Even the American government is buying our steel, because it is cheaper and of a better quality. Moreover, the North American car makers have to close their factories, because they cannot compete with us; one of the reasons is that the unions demand wages that are too high. In this way the unions work the American car makers out of the competition. We have a different manner of working. We work together as a family; we work together for building up our businesses. That is how Japan is now successful in conquering the world.

It is remarkable that not so long ago a number of Saturday issues of the *Globe and Mail* discussed the growing economic power of Japan in our present world.

Recently we had a strike of the letter carriers demanding the retention of work conditions under which every private business would go bankrupt in a very short time. That is how I understood the information in the papers. I also read that soon the inside postal workers will strike. We can read and hear about strikes now here and then there.

In this 1987 situation, in the beginning of September, Canada celebrates another Labour Day. It is meant to promote the cause of the labourers and to honour and glorify the Labour movement. My Japanese spokeswoman was not ready to take part in speaking honouring words regarding the modern (secular) Labour movement. In fact, her words meant that, in her view, the unions are economically digging their own grave by their demands. Must we say: idols deceive, because they cannot save those who worship them, since they are idols?

Is secular unionism idolatry?

The present labour strife shows that management and labourers still have not come to a lasting peace, and that the

hostility goes on to keep the two groups apart. We shall not put the blame for the strife on one side only. We can also read in the papers about salaries and bonuses for executives which ordinary people are inclined to call outrageous. Perhaps we must still say that, in general, employer and employee fight for their own direct interests.

The Labour movement can be characterized as a struggle for (redeeming) power, although it seems that there was a difference between the European and the North American branches. Both have a different date on the calendar for their celebrations. In Europe and other parts of the world Labour Day is on the first of May and has a very strong socialistic and communistic stamp. Here the day is celebrated on the first Monday in September. Some have said that in North America the emphasis was more on improvement of labour conditions. Whatever is the case, one can notice a strong socialistic way of thinking in the modern movement. There seems to be a close relation between unions and the New Democratic Party. One can read about protests of union members who do not want part of their dues to go to the support of a political party or other political and modern social causes, and therefore either do not want to pay those dues or only part of them.

Now such economical and political aspects are not our first and main objections against secular unionism. Our objections are first of all of a philosophical, or rather, of a confessional, religious nature. It is, principally, a matter of faith over against faith, of true faith over against idolatry.

In order to get a clear picture here, we have to look at the background of the Labour movement. That background is not only the improvement of labour conditions, a social and economic matter. There is also a philosophy behind it. That philosophy is socialistic, which means, humanistic. We find that socialist ideology as the dominating force in the thinking of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and Vladimir Lenin, the fathers of modern communism and, to quite an extent, socialism. They called on the labourers to unite and in that union to overpower their arch-enemies, the capitalists. In this way of revolution, the proletarians of the world would bring about their deliverance or liberation from oppression, their freedom, and they would establish a kind of classless paradise for all the proletarians of the earth.

It can be clear that we have to do here with a philosophy, an ideology, which we can call religious. The terminology points at a religious doctrine of redemption. But it is a doctrine of self-redemption. The labourer is his own redeemer. If he follows certain rules, pointed out by the leaders, he will work his own salvation. In this light it is no wonder that unions were often called a "brotherhood." As brothers, the members of a union

have to pledge total allegiance to each other, that is, to their organization, their "brotherhood." This total allegiance includes total obedience to the rules and decisions that are and will be made. The (leadership of the) brotherhood has almost absolute authority.

Three things must be seen here. They are very important. The first is the faith that the labourers, by uniting, can and will redeem themselves; the second aspect is, that they seek to redeem themselves in the way of revolution. And the third aspect is the requirement of total allegiance or obedience. Man does not need God as Helper in the social and economic sphere and relations in life. Perhaps for his soul and for eternal life man needs God, but for his earthly existence he needs to help himself in his own way, by force and power, and by promising absolute allegiance in the matters of the brotherhood. Here the labour organization demands absolute authority in matters of the brotherhood, because the brotherhood can only then deliver its members when they stay united. These things point at idolatry. Man is his own redeemer and man is the goal of everything.

Our confession

When we place the Word of God, that is, the gospel of Christ, over against it, we find as its doctrine that only the triune God can claim total allegiance and absolute obedience. We find further that the gospel forbids revolution as means to reach one's goal; and we find that we, as Christians, have the calling to confess Christ Jesus as the only redeemer and Lord, not only for the soul, for eternity, but also for this life here on earth in all its aspects and relations.

In the letter to the Colossians Paul writes against a dangerous false, syncretistic doctrine which taught that, in order to become one with God and be saved, man needed to believe in Christ, but besides that he had to observe all kinds of rules and regulations. Paul opposes that teaching and maintains that Christ Jesus is the one and only Saviour and a complete redeemer; he who has Christ has salvation. This salvation in Christ is not only for eternity and for spiritual things; it is a salvation for all of life that God has created. Christ is also the Saviour for the earthly relations, for marriage and family and labour relations. We can find that in ch. 3:18-4:1 in connection with the preceding verses, ch. 3:1-17, read in the context of the whole letter. "If then you have been raised with Christ" (3:1), "put on love which binds everything together in perfect harmony" (3:14), "and let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts" (3:15), and "let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly" (3:16), and "whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (3:17).

Paul works this out, practically, for three relations in life: marriage, family, and employer-employee. "Slaves," Paul says, "obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not with eye service, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever your task, work heartily, as serving the Lord and not men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive your reward; you are serving the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality" (3:22-25). Then the admonition follows, "Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven" (4:1).

It is quite obvious that labour relations today differ from those in the days of Paul as they are indicated in the above-quoted texts. Workers are not in the legal position of slaves anymore. We can be thankful for that change. Employees are now free men and women who can make labour contracts with their employers, either on their own or collectively. Nevertheless, the principles, the truths of the gospel, written down here by Paul, remain the same. Those truths are that Christ

is redeemer also for both our daily labour and our labour relations.

Christ is in the first place the redeemer of our daily work. When Adam was created and placed in the garden of Eden, he received the charge from His heavenly God and Father, "to till and to keep" that garden (and so the earth). That was man's cultural mandate. He had to fulfil his daily task on earth in the service of God to sustain and develop, and to guard, the earth as its prophetic and priestly king under his God. When the Apostle Paul addresses the Colossian Christian slaves, and so all believers, he shows that in Christ as redeemer that truth of paradise was restored for them. Both the employee and the employer have the same Lord and Master in heaven whom they may serve in what is their daily work. That gospel sheds paradise light, the light of salvation, on all daily work. Christ is its redeemer. How wonderful must this gospel have been for the slaves in those days. How wonderful must this gospel still be for those who love the Lord. They may do their daily work for Him who saved them.

Of course, this truth brings along consequences for the Christian believer. He has to confess this truth in the way he views his daily work and in the manner in which he works. He has to confess Christ as his Saviour and Lord for whom he fulfils his daily work. That work will now be done in obedience, where that is applicable, in singleness of heart or from the heart, not with eye service but in sincere loyalty, because it is for the Lord.

Here the Christian is called to show that he is radically different from those who do not follow Christ with a true faith. The humanist works for himself or some other goal. Whether he is himself that goal, or whether he has some other ideal, when daily work is not done in the service of the Lord, it is idolatry. But if the work of a Christian is a matter of serving the Lord, of obeying His Word in that work and in the manner in which he does it, how can he work for the union? How can he fit a going on strike and walking the picket line in into the service of the Lord? Being a union member, and having to obey its demands, can mean doing those things that are in conflict with confessing Christ as redeemer of our labour.

Christ is also our redeemer in our labour relations. He brings harmony, loving care, in human relations, where selfishness, hunger for power, even hatred, destroys good relations. He brings unity of faith, unity in serving the same Lord, also in the relation between Christian employers and Christian employees. Together they acknowledge Christ as their Saviour and Master; therefore they care for and serve each other as well, the one seeking the well-being of the other, also in and with their daily work in a certain business. And again we can say that this is a wonderful gospel of redemption. It is joy to work in, and to build up, a business in this faith, seeking the good of one another, serving one another as employers and employees, and in this way to confess, not only with the mouth, but also in the practice of daily labour relations, that Christ is your Saviour and Lord.

We also understand that a situation in which an employer or an employee is not a fellow-believer does not free the Christian from his calling to confess Christ as redeemer. Whether employer or employee, he has to continue his confession, also over against unbelief. When an unbelieving party in a labour relation acts unjustly or is unfair, that does not give the believing party the right to respond to wrong with wrong, to injustice with injustice. A Christian will acknowledge the owner of a business in his position. If need be, he could leave, but he will not respond with revolutionary action. In meekness, he keeps confessing Christ and serving Him.

It can be clear that a binding membership in an organization that can compel a Christian to disobey his Lord, and to deny Him practically, is unacceptable for those who believe

in Christ as Saviour and want to confess Him as their Lord.

Our labours done in Christ

September brings Labour Day. September is also the month in which schools and colleges and universities open their gates again for a new season of study, of work. A new winter season for church work in home visits, in catechetical instruction, and in society meetings. I mention those activities that came to a halt during the summer months. Let us, as Christian believers, in specific church work as well as in our daily labours, confess

Christ as our Saviour and Lord, Saviour also of our daily labours and the relations in which we are placed, so that we are living letters of His redeeming gospel, His image, and promote His honour. And may He bless us in our work. Idols cannot redeem. Let us then, whether employer or employee, teacher or student, office bearer and congregation, show the world in which we live, by the manner in which we live and work, that there is only one true redeemer and Master, Jesus Christ, our Lord.

J. GEERTSEMA

THE OLD TESTAMENT AND ARCHAEOLOGY

Abram, Sarai, and surrogate motherhood

The celebrated case of "Baby M." has recently focused public attention on the reality and problems of surrogate motherhood in modern society. In that particular instance, a married woman with children agreed to be artificially inseminated so that she would bear a baby for a child-

less couple. However, when the due date arrived the hired mother did not want to give up her newborn infant as the contract had stipulated. It took the courts to resolve the matter (in favour of the father, i.e. the childless couple).

Such phenomena were unthinkable

when traditional views of marriage, consistent with a Christian outlook, prevailed and they remind us that we are in a post-Christian era and are entering what is essentially an age of modern paganism. Yet here, too, the words of Ecclesiastes 1:9 are applicable: "there is nothing new under the sun. Surrogate motherhood was also known in the days of the patriarchs, as the actions of Abram with respect to Hagar show (Gen. 16:1-4; cf. also Gen. 30:1-13). It may be instructive to consider this situation briefly.

Abram and Sarai's dilemma and action

The LORD had promised Abram that he would become a great nation (Gen. 12:2). His offspring would be like the dust of the earth, "so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your descendants also can be counted" (Gen. 13:16). However, as time passed doubts rose in Abram's heart whether he and Sarai would ever receive a child and he saw no way out but that Eliezer his servant would be heir. This would have been in accordance with the customs of those days by which a childless man could adopt his most trusted servant or slave so that he would receive the inheritance. But God assured him: "This man shall not be your heir; your own son shall be your heir. And He brought him outside and said, 'Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.' Then He said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.' And he believed the LORD and He reckoned it to him as righteousness" (Gen. 15:4-6). So Abram went in faith.

But the life of faith did not go without struggle and stumbling. Abram and Sarai became 85 and 75 years old respectively.



It had been ten years since they had left Haran and God had promised them offspring (cf. Gen 12:4; 16:3). Still the LORD had not given them a child. Now God had clearly indicated that Eliezer was not to be the heir so that avenue was cut off. There was, however, another route open for childless couples at that time who desired offspring; namely, the custom of surrogate motherhood, whereby a female slave was to be given by the childless wife to her husband to provide offspring. For example, a second millennium adoption and marriage contract in part reads: "if Kelim-ninu [the bride] does not bear children, Kelim-ninu shall acquire a woman of the land of Lullu [where slaves were obtained] as wife for Shennima [the bridegroom]." (See J.B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 220.) Certain sections (144-147) of the famous eighteenth century B.C. law code of Hammurabi reflect similar and related customs (*Ibid.*, 172).

It was this route that Sarai followed and so hoped to receive the child of promise. "Sarai said to Abram, 'Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children; go in to my maid; it may be that I shall obtain children by her'" (Gen. 16:2). Abram complied. As a child of his times he was familiar with this custom. The slave's name was Hagar and she conceived. What happened here is what happened elsewhere in the ancient Near East. In principle it is also identical to surrogate parenting as practised today. A significant difference is that not a stranger, but a member of Abram's household was involved.

As can be expected when the marriage relationship is violated and maternal feelings are aroused in a third party, miseries developed (cf. also Gen. 30:1-13). In the case before us, Hagar began to despise Sarai, who in turn humiliated her slave so that she ran away. In effect she chose death rather than continued servitude, for as a pregnant woman she fled into the wilderness (cf. Gen. 16:7).

The LORD's response

In mercy God worked for the restoration of the original relationships and clearly indicated that Abram was not to receive the promised seed by a surrogate mother in the person of Hagar. He had to live by faith in God's promise of seed.

The angel of the LORD told Hagar to return to her mistress and to submit to Sarai (Gen. 16:9). He also said, "I will so greatly multiply your descendants that they cannot be numbered for multitude" (v. 10). These words are important for they indicate that the child that had been conceived is to be considered Hagar's ("your descendants") and not Abram and Sarai's in the first place. Thus Hagar's identity as surrogate mother for Sarai is denied.

Yet, the relationship with Abram is not overlooked. The child was also Abram's and through this child Hagar will share in Abram's blessing. She too will have an innumerable offspring, but it will have its own identity (v. 12; cf. also Gen. 17:20, 21; 21:13). Abram apparently was not aware of all this and assumed that Ishmael was the promised seed (cf. Gen. 17:18).

both as good as dead (cf. Heb. 11:11, 12; Rom. 4:18-21), that God fulfilled His promise and gave new life so that Sarah conceived and bore Isaac (Gen. 21:1-7). He was born by the power of the Spirit (Gal. 4:29) in faith (Heb. 11:11, 12). So Abraham became father, the father of all believers.

We who are also children of Abraham by the same life-giving Spirit may likewise

"We who are also children of Abraham by the same life-giving Spirit may likewise live by faith in this the last age."

Ishmael was born because Sarai and Abram wanted to realize the promises of God in their own way, according to the human wisdom of the day. This was the way of the flesh. Apparently because of the early stage in the history of revelation and the times in which they lived, the LORD tolerated and did not specifically condemn this disruption of the marriage bond (cf. Ex. 21:4). Indeed, He even used this custom in his own sovereign way (cf. also Gen. 30:1-13!). It was not until fifteen years after the Hagar affair, when Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90,

live by faith in this the last age. That also means that we will regard current surrogate parenting as a regression to the customs of heathendom, to the ways of the former "times of ignorance" (Acts 17:30). Although God tolerated much then, today our and our civilization's responsibilities weigh much heavier, since we have received His full revelation and we know full well how our Lord hates any weakening of the marriage bond (cf. also Matt. 19:4ff.).

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Analysis of an interpretation₃

(Synod 1986 on Art. 28 of the Confession)

“Forever shall remain”

I believe that no one who cannot say (sing): “*of which I am and forever shall remain a living member*” (Cat. answ. 54) should talk about the church (a blind person should not talk about colours!). You cannot “believe the holy, catholic, christian church” without that “forever shall remain.” We may say this because we know that the LORD has started a work with us, and thus will finish it, *Psalms 138*.

That is assurance of faith.

But now, do you know whether there will be a Canadian Reformed Church in your hometown 25 years from now? You do not. But you know that Jesus Christ will complete the work given to Him by His Father: “to gather the elect.” If someone calls that “nebulous, devoid of meaning,” then we do not understand each other anymore.

If that “believing the church” would be considered (I’m quoting!) a “*nullifying*” and an “*undermining*” of the Confession, then it is time to wake up!

Of which church “am I and forever shall remain a living member?”

Of the Ebenezer Canadian Reformed Church in Burlington?

When I professed that “forever remain” as a young man, I was a member of *De Gereformeerde Kerk te Kampen*, Netherlands.

I left Kampen. I was for three years a member of de Geref. Kerk te *Mussel*. “. . . forever remain. . . .”

In Wezep we were sent out of De Geref. Kerken (Syn.) in the Netherlands. “. . . forever remain. . . .”

After eight years in *Enschede*, certainly not “forever,” we left for Canada, most certainly “remaining members” in that overlanded, ice-covered plane. . . . We became (“. . . remaining forever. . . .”) in *Orangeville* what we had not yet been before: members of a Canadian Reformed Church.

Suppose that plane had crashed into the ocean. . . we would not have been in the register of any local church on earth — and, yet, “. . . forever remain.”

Whatever the future will bring for the Canadian Reformed Churches, and whatever these Churches will bring to the future generations, I will “forever remain.”

I am not that young anymore. Even

if this is the last thing I write for publication, “. . . I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever,” *Psalms 23*.

“Nothing will be able to separate me from the love of Christ,” Romans 8.

Even if you, dear reader, reject from the heart everything I wrote, I must remind you: when you die, you will stop being a member of a Canadian Reformed Church. And thus you cannot get away from the conclusion that “forever remaining a living member of the holy universal church” includes more than your present, temporary, membership of a local, true and faithful church.

Or does this “only comfort” now also have to fall flat before the hegemony of Art. 28 as Synod ’86 read it? Do we, maybe, now “believe *IN* the church?”

Before we are going to read this Article together the way, I am deeply convinced, it should be read, I must mention *two* more examples of this “hegemony of Art. 28.”

First, Synod referred, in an off-hand way, to the well-known text *Deut. 29:29*: “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”

Usually this text has, be it by arminians or calvinists, been taken out of context: an exegetical “sin” of first order.

You hear it already coming! Synod wanted us to hear the distinction between Art. 27 and Art. 28 of the confession. The *former* speaks “in general terms” of that “nebulous” universal church; the *latter* tells us and our children to join the true church. We wholeheartedly agree with that duty, of course.

But I do not believe that *Deut. 29:29* solves any “problem” here, in the shadow of Art. 28.

No one, I am sure, claims that he can point out who has been elected from eternity: “this one here, another there. . . .” That is, indeed, a secret, although let us not forget our *Canons*: God’s election and predestination are of great comfort for His people!

But let no one say that Christ’s worldwide gathering of the elect is a secret, as though the Lord had not revealed that! The whole Bible is filled with that! The LORD God Himself revealed that to our first parents after their fall. He promised

it to father Abraham: as the sand on the seashore. . . . Think of the “universal” *Psalms*. Yes, every page of the New Testament speaks about it. “Go to all the nations. . . .”

No one should call that something that does not belong to the revealed things! As though we know nothing about it, and as though we know nothing about those true believers, who have — for whatever reason — not, or not yet, joined a local true church.

Prof. B. Holwerda said, in a sermon on Lord’s Day 21 (vol. 2, p. 132): “Christus heeft alle gelovigen deel gegeven aan Zichzelf en zijn schatten en gaven. Dus niet alleen de gelovigen in de Gereformeerde kerk, maar evengoed die in de Hervormde, de Christelijke Gereformeerde, de Oud-Gereformeerde, de Lutherse Kerk; ja ook in de Rooms-Katholieke, de Grieks-Katholieke Kerk, all gelovigen ook in de kring van Buchmann, Johannes De Heer, het Leger des Heils. Zij hebben evengoed als wij deel aan de schatten van Christus, want wie door Christus vergaderd wordt (N.B. gathered by Christ! VD) ontvangt de toegang tot al zijn schatten, zoals wij die genoemd hebben.”

Yes, then Holwerda continues to speak about the calling of every believer to maintain the unity of the church (Art. 28), but he does that *on the basis* of what we quoted from him. I hope that you can understand Dutch!

Who are we to speak about “other believers” the way one hears it more than once. . . .?

“Lest you be judged. . . .”

We call (do we?) others to the “here and now faithful church” *exactly because they are believers*, as Holwerda said it! We do not call unbelievers to join the church!

From this unwarranted reference to *Deut. 29:29* it was for Synod ’86 only a small step to condemn the “*use of election and regeneration as a starting point for . . . definition of the church.*”

I do not care about what someone may have concluded from the presence of true believers in various “churches.” Such a someone may have said foolish things. Some may have concluded that the presence of believers in a “denomination” turns that “denomination” into a (true) church.

That is wrong as much as it is wrong to conclude from the presence of hypocrites in a true church, that it is not a true church.

What a confusion!

Art. 29 should have cured us: "we are not speaking here of the hypocrites (. . . but . . .) of the *body* and the *communion* of the true Church."

But there is that (binding?) statement of "our" recent General Synod: "*It is wrong to use election and regeneration as a starting-point for the definition of the church.*"

Thus, even election as starting-point for the definition of the church is "flattened" before synod's interpretation of Art. 28!

But *there is no other starting-point but election!*

"Blessed is he whom Thou dost choose, and bring near, to dwell in Thy court," *Psalm 65:4*. "All that the Father gives me, will come to me," *John 6:37*. The angels will "gather his elect," *Mt. 24:31*. Read *Ephesians 1*. Read the *Canons*, that living comfort.

THAT IS THE ONLY STARTING POINT: H. Cat. L.D. 21: "the Son of God gathers a church chosen to everlasting life." Check the references. Mind you, synod was not talking here about the preaching of the Gospel! There we do not start with "election." But the issue was and is: a definition of the (holy catholic) church, which is the in-gathering of all the elect.

On norms

The reader may again ask: "what, then, about Article 28!?" I am hastening toward it.

Thus only as an aside something about the use of the term "norm(s)."

Appellants may also be blamed — I do not know about that. But I sympathize with a colleague who complained the other day that Synod '86 is so difficult to understand, when it spoke about Art. 28.

Of course, Art. 28 has to do with norms; so have Art. 29 and 30, 31, 32 . . . etcetera, as well as Art. 27 and all the articles before it.

When all references to "*the norm*" are put together, it gives indeed a confusing picture.

P. 99: ". . . appellants with their 'theological construction' neglect the norms mentioned in Art. 28." (must be norms for man).

P. 100: "Lord's Day 21:54 indeed gives an overview of Christ's work of gathering. . . . The *norms* (by the Spirit and Word in the unity of the true faith) are included." (These cannot be norms for us ["Spirit and Word!"]); then they must be

norms for Christ. But why then not say what we confess in Cat. 21: His norm is the Father's election: "a church chosen to everlasting life?")

P. 101: Now we find both combined: "Synod of Cloverdale accented the *norms* which *apply to the believers* and which *Christ maintains* in gathering His Church."

P. 103: A whole section uses the term "*norm*" five times, singular and plural, plus the addition *true norms*."

Confusing indeed.

Reading Article 28 together

We are now going to read this Article 28, this beautiful article of faith, that *wants in INclude* every true believer, instead of what nowadays seems to happen, on both sides of the ocean: *to EXclude* most of them.

1. Only the *text* of our Confessions is binding, and not their historical background and meaning. Yet, even with the text of the Bible, as with all texts that come to us from the past, we try to understand them within their historical context and against their historical background.

To treat Art. 28 as a nearly-inspired, infallible and inerrant text, apart from that background, etc., would lead to unacceptable conclusions. Thus a minister used the well-known words, "*and there is no salvation outside of it*" (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*) to preach and teach that there is no salvation at all (*nulla salus*) outside the federation to which his congregation belongs. Thus denying the truth, that we discussed earlier: "believers, all and everyone, as members of Christ have communion with Him and share in all His treasures and gifts," H. Cat. answ. 55 (remember Holwerda's sermon!).

Let us therefore proceed on our way with asking what Art. 28 together with 27, 29 ff. wanted to be in the sixteenth century, and thus what it still wants to say in the twentieth century.

In his Confession *Guido de Brès*, together with all reformers, was testifying against the Pope and his "Roman

church." You "smell" that everywhere: Romanist theologians asked them: "Where was your church in the Middle Ages?"

De Brès followed *Luther*, when he said: "In the Middle Ages the church was hidden, just like in the days of Ahab, when even Elijah did not see the church anymore."

"We are the church of the apostles and prophets," said *John Calvin*.

Thus the old slogan "*Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus*" entered the debate.

The Romanists said: "*outside the Church of Rome no salvation!*"

Was it, then, not unwise of Guido to use the same words in his confession?

The answer is: "when two say the same, it is not the same!"

The Reformation did *not* counter: "outside the Church of Calvin, Luther, no salvation. . . ." but: "*Outside the church of Jesus Christ no salvation!*"

Thus we understand Art. 27 better. "This church of Jesus Christ has existed from the beginning of the world." This church is not confined to one particular place" (Rome) or to certain persons" (Pope and priests).

"I believe that the *Son of God* . . .," Cat. 21. Not the church of the Pope. But the church of Jesus Christ. Now it is clear that Art. 28 in its opening words refers back to this "holy assembly and congregation" as "spread and dispersed throughout the whole world." Outside this church, which certainly is not "nebulous," there is no salvation.

And then all the sheep of Jesus Christ, having been delivered from "hirelings, wolves, and robbers" (John 10), joyfully confessed: "and we belong to His Church, for we have tasted the good Word again! His Spirit has changed our lives and brought us together in the unity of faith: "joined and united." We have been transferred from darkness into light! When we meet together, the heavenly Jerusalem descends in our midst. We would not know where else we could find salvation. Certainly not in our good works, in Mary or the saints. We have been united by the Voice of the Good Shepherd!"

And thus there stood clearly over against each other, the true, the real church as the congregation of the believers, and that papal empire that persecuted, tortured, and killed them. Never mind! They died singing!

But they knew that several fellow-believers had stayed behind in that prison of the pope. For what reason? Fear? Little faith? Scared to lose their job, even their life? (You can read all this in Art. 28).

Thus they wrote their "*Evangelical Manifesto*," Art. 28!

Not to scare away other believers, but to *attract* them. To attract other believers. They wanted them to also be-

OUR COVER

Farm Vacations

Photo courtesy of
Travel Manitoba

come rich in Christ: *sola fide, sola Scriptura, sola gratia*.

Yes, Art. 28 uses strong medicine. "No one ought to withdraw. . . ." "All and everyone are obliged. . . ." "Bend your neck under Christ." But that is not a burden! "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me . . . and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and by burden is light," *Matthew 11:28-30*.

If anyone would twist this Art. 28 to make it into something different from this invitation of our gentle Saviour, we should all refuse to have anything to do with it.

One needs not fear that in this understanding of Art. 28, the *urgency* is undermined of the call to join the church that (Art. 29) "governs itself according to the pure Word of God, rejecting all things contrary thereto, and regarding Jesus Christ as the Only Head." A church that sends out this invitation to other believers, must then also, "locally and temporally" show to the world that it is a joyful and faithful flock of Christ's sheep. If not, what's the urgency behind the invitation?

We do not have the marks of true church and true believers (Art. 29, a and b) in our name or in our documents, Creeds and Church Order, etc. These *in themselves* guarantee nothing. "We" were thrown out in 1944 "on the basis of Confession and Church Order. . . ."

A truly Reformed Church must (said K. Schilder) re-form and re-institute itself time and again. And as members of a real and faithful church we must "be recognized by the marks of Christians."

Then, when we today hold up the *Manifesto of Art. 28*, we do so with trembling hands. Do others recognize that "we are different?" We can loudly claim that "we are the true church," but what if none but we say it? And what, if we with this claim "bite and devour one another," so that Paul must warn us: "take heed that you are not consumed by one another," *Gal. 5:15*?

The history of the Romanist church around the slogan, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, be a warning to us.

2. *Do not follow the example of the popes.*

We have heard how they understood and applied this slogan. All who did not belong to the church of Rome were excluded from salvation, in this life and the life to come.

Then this proved to be "impossible" in the presence of millions of "Protestants" who believed their Bible and tried to live accordingly. Thus Pope Pius IX softened the "extra-nulla." Yes, the Roman Church remained the only "ark" in the world, but he declared in 1854 that those who never heard of the R.C. would be saved. In 1863 he even added that those would be saved who had obeyed the law of nature and lived

a decent life. Towards the end of the 19th century attempts were made to get rid of those "awkward" words: "*nulla-extra*." Though that did not succeed, from now on R.C. theologians spoke about believers outside the church of the pope as "potential members" and "erring brothers."

The picture today is a bit confused and confusing, for different reasons.

But all seem to agree that we must "leave it to the mercy of God" what happens after this life. Or, should we say with the Romanists that the spiritual blessings received by those outside the church of the pope are due to the intercessions of the "Mother-church?"

Are we to follow this example?

And then wriggle, twist and turn to maintain what cannot be maintained: to let the worldwide gathering by Christ, *Lord's Day 21*, coincide completely with, let us say, the Canadian Reformed Churches?

3. "*Become what you are.*"

Some have trouble with the understanding of Art. 28, that true believers in other "denominations" are "members of Christ and His Body." One should keep in mind, that this is not the only case in which a Reformed Confessor combines "*be*" and "*become*."

We were born as Covenant-children. Or if you prefer: children of the kingdom. But because the Lord warned us that many children of the kingdom will be cast out, we had better realize that, *being* a child of the kingdom, we must *become* real children of that kingdom. John Calvin wrote about two kinds of Covenant-children. Because we are Covenant-children, we must by faith and new obedience *become* what we are; otherwise we break the Covenant, and will suffer its curse. Being a new creation in Christ, we must more and more be renewed after His image. The same goes for being a member ingrafted by the Spirit, of the holy universal church. But that must then reveal itself in acting upon "the ordinance of God," Art. 28.

Our "fathers" in the 16th century did not say to believers who still stayed behind in the church of the pope: "*come, join us, otherwise you do not belong*," but rather the other way around: "*you do belong to the church of Christ; therefore come and join.*"

Nothing of Art. 28 is here "*nullified*" or "*undermined*" (see Acts '86). The reader may remember why I disagree with the new heading of Art. 28: "Everyone's duty to join the Church." The old heading is more in agreement with the "vocabulary" of Art. 28 and 29: "*Everyone is bound to join himself to the true church.*"

Although one gets the impression that Art. 28 was viewed as "inspired," Synod '86 seems to have overlooked its variation in terminology. First there is the

heading: "*true church*" (in those days the church of the Reformation). Then: everyone has to "*maintain the unity of the Church*" (capital C). Then to the believers in the church of the pope: "*separate yourselves from those who do not belong to the Church* (capital C). After that: "*to join themselves to this congregation, wherever God has established it.*"

That is how de Brès and his contemporaries saw it and said it! Why "separate yourselves from those who do not belong to the church?" Because you, believers, belong to that church and therefore "join this congregation!"

Are we going to fight each other to the death as to whether "other true believers" belong to the church as Christ is gathering it, or not?

I fear that none of those "other true believers" would then be interested in "joining this congregation." That would, then, be our fault.

And that would be terrible, because not a single true believer ingrafted into Christ by the Holy Spirit belongs in and to: — a "church" where the pope is the boss and not Christ "the only Head" (Art. 29);

— a "church" where a general synod has arrogated supreme power (in the forties);

— a "church" whose leaders play a role in the so-called World Council of Churches that is going to embrace all religions;

— a "church" where Bible-criticism is permitted and central truths, like that of "God the Father and our creation," atonement by Christ's blood, are being denied;

— a "church" where the "New Hermeneutics" robs God's people of their Bible, of the Virgin Birth, Christ's Resurrection and Return;

— a "church" which condones the "new morality" and thus plays mockery with the commandments of the LORD;

— a "church" that permits heresy and calls those who rebuke her, trouble-makers

— and so on —

"Come out, my people!" It is dangerous over there! ". . . come out from them and be separate from them, says the LORD . . .": *II Cor. 6:16-18*.

"Save yourselves from this corrupt generation," Acts 2:40, because you *belong to Me!*

That is the call of Art. 28.

That is Art. 28 of our Confession.

That is the Voice of the Good Shepherd; the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out . . . for they know His Voice . . .," *John 10:3ff*.

Is His voice sounding forth through our voices?

G. VANDOOREN

Response₃

1. Br. VanDooren works strongly with the words of the Catechism, where we confess as our faith that we are and “shall forever remain a living member” of the church of Christ. He then writes, “If that ‘believing the church’ would be considered (I’m quoting) a ‘nullifying’ and an ‘undermining’ of the Confession, then it is time to wake up!” Rev. VanDooren then writes about membership of the local (true) congregations or churches of which he has been a member and about dying and not being a member of a local Canadian Reformed Church anymore.

I find the whole reasoning here again one of driving the pronouncements of the synod into consequences which this synod did not state. When one says that the holy catholic church is not just a whole invisible total number of believers or elect, but is gathered in all the local, true, church gatherings, gathered by Christ, does that then mean, per consequence, that when a person moves from the one local church to the other, with an attestation, he during that time is not a member of a local church and therefore not of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ? In my opinion, that is pressing the matter.

On the one hand we say: the infants of believing parents must be baptized, or, by baptism be incorporated into the church, on the other hand we say: this is so because they belong to, are members of, the church. And in my view, we do not mean two different churches here, a visible and an invisible. I see in both cases the church of Christ as He visibly gathers her in a local true church.

The synod will not at all take away from br. VanDooren or any other member of a true church, the comfort that he is and shall remain a living member of the church of Christ. Br. VanDooren is a member. But it is another matter when it regards a person who is and remains a member of a false church or a sect. Can a member of a sect or of a false church say, on good, valid, Scriptural grounds: “I am a member of the church of Christ,” which He gathers for Himself in the unity of the true faith? He had better say: Let me get out of here!

Br. VanDooren finds support for his view that all the believers are members of the church of Christ in what Prof. B. Holwerda wrote in a sermon on Lord’s Day 21 in the series “De Dingen Die Ons Van God Geschonken Zijn.” (The Things given us from God). VanDooren quotes, “Christ has made all believers partakers of Himself and of all His treasures and gifts. Thus not only the believers in the Reformed Church, but also those in the Dutch Reformed Church, the Christian

Reformed Church (Free Reformed), the Old-Reformed Church (Netherlands Reformed), the Lutheran Church, yes, also in the Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Catholic Church, all believers also in the circle of Buchmann, Johannes de Heer, the Salvation Army. They are, just as we, partakers of the treasures of Christ, for he who is being gathered by Christ receives the access to all His treasures, as we have mentioned them.”

Let me quote what Holwerda says on the next pages: “Christ gathers for *Himself* a congregation; He has the only authority in His church; He exercises authority only through His Word. The Roman (Catholics) forgot this when they put the pope on the chair of Christ; the Dutch Reformed forgot this when they rendered to their regulations more authority than to the Word of Christ. I do not say, then, that there are no believers there. . . . The believers are there, but there is not the church of Christ which He gathers for *Himself*. It is there the church of the pope, the church of the synod. . . . Thus there is also that other aspect: Christ gathers in the unity of the true faith. And so we must honour Him in His work of gathering the church. He does not gather the believers and the unbelievers together, but He gathers the believers and separates them by true faith from the unbelievers. And exactly because it is never our church but the church of Jesus Christ, because only He has the authority to say how things have to be with the church, we have to honour Him in this law for the church gathering work. . . . If, then, unbelievers are openly admitted into the communion of the church . . . , if they are admitted to the table of the Lord, if children of unbelievers are baptized, and modern (liberal, J.G.) ministers are admitted to the pulpit, then there the law of Christ for the gathering of the church is despised; and with that I am not allowed to have communion. If I was allowed to do what is the easiest, then I would stay there; there are true brothers in that church; I have old ties with them; and a separation means a lot of contempt and persecution and misery and sleepless nights. But as a living member, I am bound to the law of Christ for the gathering of the church. That is why I am not allowed to stay there any longer. It is not so that suddenly all those who are there are unbelievers, fortunately not; but when believers and unbelievers are gathered together, then that is not the church, for Christ gathers in the unity of the true faith; and if I am faithful to Him, then I have to separate from those who are not of the church. At the same time I am called to exercise the unity of faith with all the believers; not in this way,

that I visit them once in a while; or that I attend another church denomination; in that case I lightly dance over all the problems, over the question of obedience; also not in this way that I simply call them all true churches, because then I ignore that Christ gathers in the unity of the true faith. . . .”

VanDooren asks special attention for the fact that Holwerda writes that Christ *gathers all* the believers. But no one has ever denied that fact. Both synods of 1983 and of 1986 have clearly stated this very same truth. The *Acts of Synod 1986*, p. 102, acknowledges “Christ’s work of gathering all those whom the Father has given Him and whom He regenerates. This gathering-work of Christ is broader than the local, true churches.” Thus, it is correct to say “concerning the holy, catholic church that it is the gathering of those who are chosen and by regeneration are ingrafted into Him.”

Christ gathers all the elect. Certainly. The doctrine of election has been revealed to us as a great comfort for those who believe in Christ Jesus with a true faith. Absolutely. Election is the basis for Christ’s church gathering work. He gathers all the elect. There is no doubt about that. In this sense, certainly, it all starts with election.

But let me now ask br. VanDooren a question. If one says that the holy, catholic church is the gathering of the elect (while no person on earth knows the elect), and all those elect together are the true, invisible, church of Christ, is, then, not the consequence that the church becomes the total number of the elect? Is, then, the church not a totality of individuals, a total number? Sure, br. VanDooren does not want to say that either. That is what K. Schilder fought against, because the church as gathered by Christ is much more than just a total number. It is a gathering and assembly here on earth.

But if we agree that it is not totally correct to say that all the elect together are, here and now, the true church, can we then say that all those who are regenerated, who are believers, are together the church of Christ? Do we, in that case, not again come to a definition of the church as an invisible, total number? Do we, in that case, not create a true, invisible, church behind all the different visible, church institutions?

I have no problems with saying that all the believers belong to the church, belonging in the sense of “they ought to be there, because that is where they belong.” Some are in, others are outside; but they all are called to maintain the unity of the true faith in Christ’s true church. Let me take an example. Imagine that in

the days of the early church there was someone who believed in Christ. But, for fear of the Jewish leaders, that person did not leave temple and synagogue. I find it hard to believe that one must say: that person believed and through his faith He was ingrafted into Christ, and therewith he was a member of the church of Christ, even though he did not join the church of the apostles, which was the church of Christ. And in that line: if someone is and stays in the Roman church, of which Holwerda said that it is not the church of the Lord Jesus Christ which He gathers in the unity of the true faith, but he is a true believer who sincerely seeks to serve the Lord, although he refuses to join there where Christ gathers in that unity of the true faith, does he then, nevertheless, together with all the other true believers, wherever they are, form the catholic church of Christ?

I shall not go into every point that follows, although more remarks could be made. However, the discussion must not become much longer. Two little points I would like to touch yet before discussing the main issue. As for the point of the "norms," I may refer the Rev. VanDooren to what I wrote in the 1986 Year End issue of *Clarion*.

And with respect to the expression that outside the church gathering work of Christ there is no salvation, it saddens me that br. VanDooren again, in his opposition to the pronouncements of Synod 1986, comes with an unwarranted suggestion, how that this synod (let me say it carefully) gives the impression of teaching that outside the federation of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches there is no salvation. Br. VanDooren, the 1986 Synod, as well as its predecessor, have clearly stated the opposite, in line with the Synod of Heemse in the Netherlands, that it is incorrect to confine the grace of the church gathering work of Christ to the federation of the Liberated Reformed Churches. I may refer to page 101 of the *Acts*, sub 2, where we read, "we reject such a narrow view." When our "own" people suggest, without ground, that the synods of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches teach that there is no salvation outside these churches, they do not do anybody a good service. Let me state it very clearly again: our churches do not teach this. The last two synods have clearly stated that Christ gathers all those whom the Father has given Him, all the elect; in them He works faith and regeneration. All of them He brings into that one flock that will be His people on the new earth, the Bride of Christ. These believers are not confined to members of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches.

Let me again quote from the 1986

Acts, page 102, "On the one hand, there is the general aspect of Christ's work of gathering all those whom the Father has given Him and whom He regenerates. This gathering work of Christ is broader than the local, true churches. It is therefore within the bounds of Scripture and the confessions to say concerning the holy, catholic church that it is the gathering of those who are chosen and by regeneration ingrafted into Him. Calvin calls this the church as God sees it." Why does Rev. VanDooren completely ignore this part in the considerations of the 1986 Synod?

When I make up the balance, I think I can say that both the synod and the Rev. VanDooren agree that Christ gathers all the believers into His flock; that all the believers are ingrafted into Christ by a true faith that is worked in them by the Holy Spirit. The difference is that the Rev. VanDooren calls all these believers together the invisible, holy, catholic church, the body of Christ, while the synod says that Christ gathers this holy, catholic church in visible, local, true churches.

Let us conclude with paying attention to the words for church in Scripture. The Old Testament uses two words that are important here, *edah* (assembly) and *gahal* (congregation). *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Colin Brown, editor), Vol. I, pp. 292ff, writes concerning *gahal*: "The word stands here (in Deuteronomy, J.G.) for the people which Jahweh has summoned, which is bound by the rules he has given . . . and whose participation in Jahweh's Covenant is only maintained by obedience. Thus *gahal* had also a religious element alongside that of a special, solemn assembly" (p. 293). On the previous page it says, "*gahal* . . . means a summons to an assembly and the act of assembling." Our conclusion is that the word *gahal* is the visible assembling of the people of the Lord, the congregation as it assembles.

The same dictionary writes concerning the meaning of the word *edah* on page 294, "The *edah*, mostly without further qualification but sometimes with the addition 'of Israel' (e.g. Exod. 12:3; Num. 16:9) or 'of the sons of Israel' e.g. Exod. 16:9; Num. 1:2; Lev. 4:13 . . .) can be defined as the expression coined for the people . . . gathered before . . . the tent of meeting (Exod. 33:7ff.). . . The *edah*, the congregation, appears to have been constituted with the command to leave Egypt. . . ." It is pointed at Exod. 12:6, where both words occur, and where the New English Bible translates, the "assembled community of Israel." The RSV has the "assembly of the congregation of Israel." It is clear from this use that these two words indicate the visible congregation or people of the Lord as they are

assembling or assembled.

In the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, *gahal* is often translated with the word *ekklesia*, while the word *edah* is rendered by the Greek word *synagoge*. In the Greek pagan society the word *ekklesia* is basically used for the assembly or meeting of the citizens of a city, as we read about it in Acts 19, while the word *synagoge*, which can mean "the collecting or bringing together of things . . . and also of troops and people," has a more "specialized and most clearly defined meaning in the activities of the guilds. Here it was used . . . for the regular, mostly festive assembly, linked with meal and sacrifice, of the guilds, which are almost without exception to be understood as cultic fellowships."

The word *synagoge* is used in the New Testament for the assembled meeting and meeting place of the Jews, while the word *ekklesia* is used for the assembly, the gathering of those who believe in Christ. I shall give a few more quotes from the same dictionary. Under the heading "Paul" it says, "When he speaks of the church . . . , Paul's starting point is the proclamation of Christ. . . . The *ekklesia* appears as the event in which God fulfills his election through his personal call (Rom. 8:29ff.). For this reason he can speak of the *kletoi*, the called, when he means the Christian community. . . . For the same reason he addresses his early letters to Thessalonica to the *ekklesia* of the Thessalonians . . . in God the Father . . . , a formula which links the idea of the church as event with that of the local church. It is not difficult to recognize the basic idea of the O.T. *gahal*. But the *ekklesia* of the Thessalonians also introduces to the Greek mind the claim that the call of God, which has gone out through the apostle and other preachers in the form of the offer of reconciliation (cf. II Cor. 5:11), has brought together this assembly. . . ."

"Where the *ekklesia* is an event, the institution of the *ekklesia* comes into being and will continue to do so in the expectation that (the) Lord will continue to make His presence real. Coming together (*synagoge* as in the LXX (Septuagint, J.G.) must be reckoned as essential element in *ekklesia* (cf. I Cor. 11:18). Hence the *ekklesia* can be thought of in purely concrete terms, and any spiritualizing in the dogmatic sense of an invisible church (*ecclesia invisibilis*) is still unthinkable for Paul.

"The idea of the invisible church is found in Augustine, *City of God*; Wycliffe, *De ecclesia*; Luther, *Preface to Revelation*; Calvin, *Institutes* IV 1 7; and many other writers. . . . The *ekklesia* has its location, existence and being within definable geographical limits. . . ." So far the dictionary.

Herewith I would like to conclude my response to, and discussion with br. VanDooren. I am sure that the last word has not been spoken on this subject. We see that the concept of an invisible church being all the elect, or all the true believers, all those regenerated, was followed in the days of the Reformation and their fore-runners, like Wycliffe and Huss, in opposition to the claims of the pope and his followers in the Roman church. It is, therefore, not strange to see this concept also expressed in the Belgic Confession and read it in this way. However, fortunately, our confessions do not use this word at all. And where so very many have accepted it and believed it also in the Reformed Churches, we should not now call it a heresy. Doing this would mean that so many of our Reformed fathers were, on this point, heretics. On the other hand, when Dr. K. Schilder and others warned and fought against this concept, and pointed out that when Scripture speaks about the church(es) of Christ Jesus, it speaks about a visible entity, they had good grounds for doing this.

And what our churches in its consistories and major assemblies have warned against is explanations and applications of the confession that lead back to a pluriformity concept and an ecumenism in which the norms (Holwerda speaks of the law of Christ for the gathering of His church) are practically put aside. Dr. K. Schilder struggled to lead the churches in the way of the obedience of faith, also on the point of being church and seeing the church. That very same effort I taste in VanDooren's concluding application of Art. 28 in a plea to those who are and remain in churches where a pope or hierarchical board or "New Hermeneutics," and so on, rule. At the same time, if an invisible church concept and a pluriformity thinking leads us in the direction of a superficial ecumenism in which the confessed law for the gathering of the church is not maintained, we will lose that attraction of which br. VanDooren speaks. It is this broad ecumenism that does not abide by God's law for the church which is a strong component in leading many a church astray, and from which others separate to remain faithful.

Let us so continue the struggle of faith together with all those who love, and abide by, the truth.

J. GEERTSEMA

NOTE: We apologize that, in the first and second installment "Article" and "Response" do not synchronize.

Point 4 of my first "Response" should be read with the beginning of the second installment of VanDooren's article.

In the second place, the second paragraph of the third and last column of the first "Response" on page 349 is not completely clear and needs some correction. What I meant to

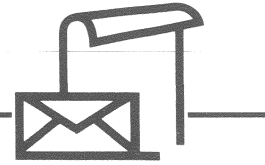
say is this: "Rev. VanDooren, as I see it, your reasoning is the following: all those who believe are by faith ingrafted into Christ, and with that, they are also, automatically, members of the church of Christ. This is namely the work of the Holy Spirit.

Seeing things in this way, you consequent-

ly conclude: "If the Synod denies that one who is ingrafted into Christ by faith and thus is a member of His body, that is, of His Church, the Synod denies herewith the first and foremost importance of the work of the Spirit of Christ. (However, . . .)

J. GEERTSEMA

LETTER TO THE EDITOR



Dear Editor,

Reverend VanOene's "Renewed Reflections" (*Clarion* of May 22, 1987) on the correct interpretation of Art. 31 C.O. did not quite convince me. In the same *Clarion* on page 233 the Press Release of Regional Synod-West (March 1987) shows in Art. 2 that Rev. VanOene's view on Art. 31 C.O. is already being put into practice by the churches. In other words: the matter is of more than just academic interest. I trust that you agree, Mr. Editor, that for that reason continued public debate has some merit. Allow me therefore to raise the following "renewed objections."

1. Rev. VanOene insists on interpreting Art. 31 C.O. exclusively according to the apparent meaning of the literal text of the article. However, by dismissing the historical background and origin for the interpretation of Art. 31, he in fact dismisses the historical and original meaning of this article. It is a significant breach with the past.

In the recent past, other churches of Reformed origin have reformulated Art. 31. "Renewed Reflections" gives as example the revised Church Order of the C.R.C. The intention of such reformulations was to have Art. 31 more properly reflect the true and historical meaning of this article: in a new formulation the old classic meaning was preserved. Rev. VanOene seems to be doing the exact opposite: while maintaining the old classic formulation, he changes the old classic meaning. In his interpretation the article is made to say what it never meant to say. Only in wording the inheritance is preserved, not in content.

2. "Renewed Reflections" urges us "to bear in mind all the time that the decisions of the Dutch sister churches "collected in the course of almost one hundred years" are not the decisions of the Canadian Reformed Churches. However, my letter went back beyond the last one hundred years. It went back to the decisions made in the 16th century. And those decisions constituted the very birth of Art. 31 C.O. is as it was born. Or otherwise let the churches give birth to a new article.

3. In the meantime, the Can. Ref. Churches are collecting their own deci-

sions now, in the course of almost forty years. Those decisions at least are binding. Synod Toronto-1974 (*Acts* Art. 123, consideration 2) decided to adopt the following consideration: "It should be admitted that Art. 31 of the Church Order does not prevent any church member from appealing if a decision of a minor assembly is contrary to the Word of God, the Confession or the Church Order, even if the matter does not pertain to his own person. However he may not meddle in something that does not concern him." (*Acts*, Art. 123, consideration 2).

Admittedly, a synodical consideration is not the same as a synodical decision. However, careful reading of the decision of Toronto-1974 reveals that the Can. Ref. Churches have decided that as long as no *proof* is given for the restricted interpretation of Art. 31 (as now propagated in *Clarion*), the rule by which the churches apply Art. 31 should be stated in consideration 2. In my opinion the historical interpretation of Art. 31 is binding on the Can. Ref. Churches as long as no proof is given that the scope of this article must be restricted to the individual church member who feels that he has been personally wronged.

4. The added clause "However, he may not meddle in something that does not concern him" (Art. 123, consideration 2), is precious. It maintains the right and freedom of the major assemblies to declare certain appeals inadmissible, f.i. on the ground of meddlesomeness. There may be other grounds, like improper tone or form or presentation. But according to Toronto-1974 the ground for inadmissibility cannot be the fact that the appellant was not personally wronged.

5. I also object to the statement that Art. 31 does not deal with the matter of the binding character of the decisions of the major assemblies for the churches of the confederation. Rev. VanOene writes that an article which would state this binding character for the consistories belongs in a hierarchical system of church polity, not in a Reformed system. Is Rev. VanOene of the opinion that the Church Order of 1578 in Chapter II Art. 8 reflects a hierarchical system? And was

Dr. F.L. Rutgers hierarchically inclined when he taught his students that Reformed Church Polity rests on two pillars: the first one is Art. 74 (no church shall in any way lord it over other churches) and the second one is Art. 31 (all churches shall abide by the decisions of the major assemblies, unless . . . etc.). According to Rutgers Art. 31 is needed in the C.O. to counterbalance Art. 74, which article otherwise might lead the churches into boundless independentism. Together these two articles form the backbone of Reformed church polity: anti-hierarchical in Art. 74, and anti-independentistic in Art. 31.

6. According to Rev. VanOene, the duty of the consistories to consider decisions of major assemblies binding, is a "matter of course," it is given with the nature of the confederation as a covenant of churches. It is selfevident. Regulating this selfevident duty in an explicit article is undesirable (see above under 5), and also unnecessary. But is what is stated in Art. 74 not equally selfevident? And what about Art. 32? Actually, for people with perfect minds and, above all, perfect hearts, every good thing is selfevident. They always know to do the right thing in any given situation. They need no law and regulations. The trouble is, we are not yet perfect. Take Art. 32, for argument's sake: delegates to major assemblies shall have no vote in matters in which either they themselves or their churches are particularly involved. A "matter of course," we would say. Impartiality in the administration of justice is a fundamental Biblical principle, also recognized in the world. So why put such a selfevident principle in the Church Order? Nevertheless, it is in; and even so we hear of Regional Synods where delegates cheerfully vote along in matters in which "their churches" (Art. 32 C.O.) stand accused and for which these delegates themselves sometimes bear personal responsibility! "Their churches" (Art. 32 C.O.) are of course the churches of these delegates as *delegates*, that is: the churches which they *represent* or to which they belong as *delegates*. That is selfevident in the light of the principle of impartiality in judicial matters, but even that may have to be spelled out. So much for perfection!

7. In my opinion Rev. VanOene owes it to the churches to openly acknowledge that his interpretation of Art. 31 is a departure from our Reformed history and the introduction of something new. Is he prepared to state that consistories in the time of the Liberation (1944 ff.) did wrong by liberating themselves from the decisions of Synod with reference to Art. 31 C.O.? Was it a church political blunder when they added to their name of "Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland" the postal

notation "onderhoude Art. 31 K.O. (observing Art. 31 C.O.)"?

8. Switching back to the central issue in our debate: the question whether the individual church member has the right also to appeal decisions by which he was not personally wronged. Rev. VanOene denies this right. He refers the church member to his consistory "if he wishes to see a trend reversed or a wrong decision made undone." Excellent, — as a first step. Rev. VanOene sees as the result of the discussion with the consistory two possibilities: *a*: the member becomes convinced that he had the wrong concept; *b*: the consistory becomes convinced that action is required, initiating proceedings which may, hopefully, lead to the correction of the evil. But Rev. VanOene does not mention the third possibility: *c*: the member is right, but his consistory is not convinced, and consequently does not take the required action. I believe, therefore, that the excellent first step cannot be the last step or the whole story. Rev. VanOene does leave room for the possibility that the member approach other consistories, be it hesitantly ("perhaps other consistories"), but the question is: which consistories, and how many? Must possibly all the consistories of the whole confederation come into action and seriously study the member's complaint and send him their decision, him, and however many more members with different complaints about other matters? According to me, the churches have their assemblies in which to deal with such matters, through their delegates.

9. The real problem arises however when no consistory can be found able or willing to take over the member's complaint, while he nevertheless may be right in his complaint. He is right, but he has no access to the major assemblies, the decision making bodies. The consistories (the "clericals") have effectively blocked his way. Yet, whereas *individual* churches may fail to see the rightness of the member's complaint, the churches *together*, by a *combined* effort of their best qualified representatives (plus expert advisors!) may very well come to the conclusion that the member is right, through their deliberations *together*. I thought that that was the reason why we have major assemblies: what individual churches are less able to do individually, they may be very well able to do together.

10. The above scenario may seem far fetched. Still, Ecclesiastes 9:13-16 tells us the story of a poor wise man who by his wisdom saved the besieged city. He was not one of the officials, the responsible experts. He did not belong to the "clericals" so to speak. Fortunately, they had the good sense to listen to him. And so the city was delivered. The gifts of

the Spirit (a.o. wisdom and knowledge) are not located in the circle of the office bearers to the *exclusion* of others. Once again I refer to what we confess to be the mark of the true church (Art. 29 B.C.), namely that it "governs itself by the pure Word of God," and by nothing else. That is at stake. The Word of God must govern, and therefore every voice which claims deficiencies in that respect, must be admitted to the decision making bodies. It may save the besieged city.

11. Indeed, it is surprising that Dr. Nauta, of all people, warns against clericalism in the restricted interpretation of Art. 31 now propagated by *Clarion*. I would say: if this view is too hierarchical even for the hierarchist, it must be hierarchical indeed.

12. I share Rev. VanOene's concern about the workload of the major assemblies. However, these concerns should be addressed in different ways than the way now promoted in *Clarion*. By no means all letters of appeal are automatically admissible. Improper tone, form, presentation, motives or still other considerations may well be good grounds for rejection. But hierarchy is too easy a way out. It always was. It brings order, it streamlines proceedings, but at too high a cost.

13. Dear Editor, I am afraid that my letter has become longer than all of us would have actually liked. If you nevertheless would decide to place it this long, I guess that a little addition will hardly make any difference. The damage has been done anyway. It is about another matter lately promoted in your columns, and also already being put into practice by the churches. It is the view that the only way by which the churches are to be informed of the decisions of the major assemblies is by way of the *Acts*. Would not this create an unnecessary time-gap during which lawful and binding decisions cannot be implemented? I would like to see room left for the possibility to send a letter to the parties concerned as soon as possible after certain decisions have been made. This is important, in particular in urgent cases which concern the peace and wellbeing of a local church or classis ("classis" here is meant in the sense of that permanent and well-defined body of churches which four times per year meets in classis). If help is requested of the confederation, this help should be given at the earliest possible convenience.

14. Finally, where we sometimes disagree with Rev. VanOene, we have at least been forced by him to think; and where we, more often, agree with him, we have been learning much. On either score he served the churches well. May he continue to do so.

With brotherly greetings,
J.D. WIELENGA

Reflections continued

Although we might incur the anger of our editor because of the length of Rev. Wielenga's rebuttal, yet we publish it because of the importance of the point in question.

At the same time, however, we have to state that this is the last time that such a lengthy "Letter to the Editor" is published. We should neither stifle dissenting voices — that's why we did publish Rev. Wielenga's letters — nor monopolize available space — that's why this is the end of it.

In an accompanying personal letter, Rev. Wielenga wrote, among other things, that his reply "gives you the opportunity to once and for all destroy the last arguments put into the field against your position, or otherwise give up a lost position. May what is best for the churches prevail."

It is for the benefit of the Churches that we are seeking the proper answer to the questions also with respect to Art.31 C.O.

Apparently Rev. Wielenga is convinced that mine is a "lost position," but his arguments have not convinced me at all that such is the case.

In a decision by the latest Regional Synod West, he sees that my "views" in this respect are already bearing fruit.

If the latest Regional Synod West was letting itself be guided by what I wrote and advocate in the decision meant by my colleague, I can only be thankful for this and express the wish that this course may be followed by all following major assemblies.

I would like to quote a few decisions which show that what I set forth is not as brand-new as may be thought by some.

When adducing some facts from the past, I do not do so in order to prove the correctness of my conviction, but only to show that also in the past decisions were made in the line of the above mentioned regional synodical decision.

Classis Ontario South of July 28, 1965 declared a letter of a brother inadmissible, "since this request is not an appeal . . . against a decision of the consistory."

Classis Alberta/Manitoba of June 29-July 2, 1965, declared an overture from a church inadmissible, since this church "neither stated nor proved that it had

been wronged by the decisions of these classes."

The same Classis declared inadmissible the part of this same church's letter in which objections were raised against the grounds for the suspension of the Rev. C.De Haan, since "according to Art. 79 C.O. — now 71 C.O., VO — only the Church at Carman was called upon to judge these grounds." Classis made this decision even though it did have to judge these grounds, as appeals were received from Winnipeg and it also had to judge whether Rev. De Haan should be deposed from office.

Classis Ontario South of September 12, 1973, declared a letter from a member inadmissible since the member did not prove that he himself had been wronged.

I do realize that no two situations are the same; that examples of different decisions can easily be found and brought to the fore; and that the fact that something was done before is no ground to declare similar action in the present correct.

What I quoted above does prove that I am not advocating something brand-new.

Breach?

Did I, in my defense of the thesis that only someone who complains that he himself has been wronged is allowed to appeal, come to a breach with the past and did I thereby dismiss "the historical background and origin of Art. 31," so that I "in fact" dismiss "the historical and original meaning of this article?"

Let us retrace our steps somewhat and see what the point was. Otherwise we get from the one thing into the other and, as they say in Dutch, run the risk that because of the trees we don't see the forest any longer.

In my "original" article on synodical decisions, I stressed, among other things,

a. No communications should be sent by a general synod to a regional synod or a classis, as the assemblies which submitted matters no longer exist and the agenda of the next ones is determined by the minor, not the major assemblies.

b. Individual church members' proposals may not be dealt with by the broader assemblies.

c. No "appeal" is permitted unless the brother or sister complains — and proves, of course — that he or she personally has been wronged by an ecclesiastical decision. Being of the opinion and complaining that something is wrong is an entirely different matter. Submissions in that vein are no appeals and should not be dealt with. The address for such complaints is the consistory.

In his reaction to those remarks, Rev. Wielenga wrote that he no longer read anything about the binding character of major assemblies' decisions.

To this I replied that it is not necessary and would even be dangerous. Such a provision, I said, belongs more in an hierarchical system.

Did I thereby dismiss the historical and original meaning of this article?

I did not. There was not a hint in what I wrote that such a provision in the 1500's was undesirable or wrong. The situation was different then from what it is today and, besides, we have gone through a history.

That in the 1500 and 1600's the Churches had to maintain their independence from the civil authorities and that this cost quite a struggle is known to everyone acquainted with the situation at that time. The Churches correctly maintained that they did not need the authorities' stamp of approval for their decisions and that they were "masters of their own house," so that every one living in it had to abide by the rules of the house, without interference from without.

Our situation is different. We no longer have to uphold the validity and binding character of ecclesiastical decisions over against an usurping civil government, although the time may come when — for that reason — we have to insert a provision in order to state explicitly the Churches' right to manage their own affairs and to demand of the members that they shall abide by the decisions made. I think here of all the clamour about equal opportunities and the alleged right of lesbians and homosexuals.

However, when I stated that *as far as the Churches themselves are concerned* we do not need such a provision and that it would even be dangerous to have one, did I then make a break with the past?

I emphasized that accepting and abiding by decisions of major assemblies is a *matter of course* within the federation. I stated that decisions of broader assemblies do not become binding via a provision in the Church Order but are binding when they have been made in accordance with the conditions of the covenant of Churches, called the federation.

Indeed, I do not believe that the previous Art. 85 and Art. 31 are each other's "counterweight" to prevent hierarchy on the one side and independencism on the other. For this I may refer to my previously mentioned farewell-address.

With a view to the hierarchical developments we have seen, e.g. in the 1940's in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands as well as later on in the Christian Reformed Church in the USA and Canada, I repeat the warning: a separate article stating that decisions of major assemblies are binding is dangerous. A provision in that vein would only strengthen a claim that "submission" to such decisions is obligatory.

Does taking the historical development into account amount to a breach with the past?

Does not the changing historical situation demand of us that we shall be extra careful with projecting the present into the past, vice versa?

Previous decisions

Indeed, Rev. Wielenga did refer to decisions made long before the one hundred years which I mentioned. However, does this make any difference regarding the point I made: "They are not binding upon us?"

Only our own decisions are binding upon us, however much we can learn from previous centuries.

But, Rev. Wielenga writes, there is a consideration of Toronto 1974! That is, at least, our own decision.

Let's repeat it here.

"It should be admitted that Art. 31 of the Church Order does not prevent any church member from appealing, if a decision of a minor assembly is contrary to the Word of God, the Confession or the Church Order, even if the matter does not pertain to his own person. However, he may not meddle in something that does not concern him." Acts, Art.123, consideration 2.

In connection with this consideration a few points have to be considered.

In the first place: There is still the general misunderstanding as if a decision may be appealed only when it is considered to conflict with the Word of our God, with the Confession or with the Church Order. Unless one can prove, it

is sometimes thought, that this is the case, no appeal is allowed. Do I taste some of this in the above consideration?

Someone is allowed to appeal if he complains that he has been *wronged*, and he does not necessarily have to prove that the relevant decision conflicts with God's Word, the Confession or the Church Order. We should not make it difficult or complicated. When I am convinced that I have been wronged by a decision, I have the right to go to the major assembly with my complaint, asking that the wrong be condemned.

Secondly: If a consistory makes decisions in a certain case in which there is a clear deviation from Holy Scripture, when the Confession is clearly violated or where there is an obvious conflict with the Church Order, no one can justly be denied the right of appeal "even if the matter does not pertain to his own person."

However, the question is how to go about it.

Seeing unfaithfulness with the consistory, one has the duty to call the consistory back to obedience to God's Word. This is the first step. The original decision and course of action do not necessarily have to "pertain to his own person," although deviation by the consistory will affect the whole congregation.

If the consistory does not wish to return from its wrong course, I certainly would have the right to go to the next classis with my complaint, even though the (original) decision did not "pertain to my own person."

The big question here is, however, whether even Toronto's consideration would give any one the right to "appeal" a classical decision which does not pertain to his own person if he is convinced that the above-mentioned unfaithfulness is there.

Reading Toronto's consideration within the context certainly does not give that impression!

It is my conviction that no one can base any such right on Art. 31 C.O.

At the risk of repeating myself, I stress that brothers from one's own Church were at that classis and were co-responsible for the decision. That is the place where I have to be with my concerns.

In the third place: There are only relatively few decisions of broader assemblies which are binding upon all members or even upon all Churches.

Decisions in individual cases, e.g., do not affect me at all or, to use Toronto's terminology, do "not pertain to my own person." And, as Toronto stated, "he may not meddle in something that does not concern him."

A decision made by a classis in the

case of a brother in Chilliwack does not concern me in the sense of Toronto 1974, as I am a member of the Abbotsford Church.

Of course, via a lengthy reasoning one could make it sound and seem as if it does concern me; but then, you could even "prove" that there is a connection between the leaning tower of Pisa and salmon eggs in the Capilano River in North Vancouver, if only you talk long enough.

Even the fact that I may be concerned about a classical decision does not mean that now it concerns me, i.e. pertains to my own person.

And, as Toronto 1974 stated correctly, no one is allowed to meddle in something that does not concern him.

Regional Synod Chilliwack 1987 correctly declared a submission, mentioned by Rev. Wielenga, inadmissible, even though it was presented as an "appeal."

What Rev. Wielenga did not prove in any way is that the "historical interpretation of Art. 31 binding on the Canadian Reformed Churches" is: *that one may "appeal" any decision of any broader assembly while he does not complain or show that he has been wronged by that decision, but simply because he is convinced that such a decision is wrong or because he disagrees with it.*

Unless one wishes to claim that this is the "historical interpretation," he must concede that I did not break with the past and that I was not as far out as the impression given may have suggested.

As for declaring a genuine appeal inadmissible on the ground of "meddlesomeness. . . improper tone or form of presentation," I say, "No!" Here a very subjective element is introduced which is utterly dangerous.

A matter of course

Above we already dealt with the question of having to have a special provision stating that decisions by major assemblies are to be accepted and observed.

One more remark.

I did not deny any such need on the ground that this is supposed to be "self-evident," but because it is in the nature of a covenant that whatever is done or decided in accordance with the conditions of the covenant is binding upon the parties. That is my argument.

This matter is on a level different from that of Art. 32 and 74, mentioned by my colleague.

Definitely, we sometimes have to state the "obvious." We are not perfect — far from it — and do not live in a perfect community, even though it is the communion of saints.

We should, therefore, maintain also the articles mentioned by my colleague.

They belong to the conditions of the covenant of Churches, called the Federation.

Maintaining Art. 31 C.O.

Did the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands “in the time of the Liberation (do) wrong by liberating themselves from the decisions of Synod with reference to Art. 31 C.O.?”

Here a few things have to be borne in mind.

In the first place: Decisions had been made which basically concerned all church members.

Doctrinal pronouncements had been made which all ministers were expected to adhere to, which all office-bearers were to promote, and from which no deviation was permitted.

When parents came to the baptismal font and had to say “I do” to the question whether they acknowledged the doctrine taught in this Christian Church “to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation,” they knew that this implied the theory set forth in the pronouncements.

Thus these decisions concerned all consistories, yea, basically all church members.

This in the first place.

Secondly: What was the issue then as far as Art. 31 C.O. is concerned?

If Rev. Wielenga’s mentioning of the 1944 history is to have any force of argument, the issue must have been: “Synod denied — in the line of VO — one the right to appeal unless he complains that he personally has been wronged, but we as Churches stand up for the right of appeal, even if the matter does not pertain to his own person.”

My colleague knows just as well as I do that this was not the point at all.

What was the point?

Let us quote literally from a synodical document.

“This living together in a federation permits a church to have objections of a church political nature against synodical decisions, as well as that these objections are tabled at a subsequent general synod . . . but in the meantime such a church is bound *de facto* to recognize above-mentioned decisions as binding.”

In other words: you may have objections to general-synodical decisions, you may even try to have them changed at a following general synod, but in the meantime you have to submit to them and to execute them.

Thus Art. 31 C.O. was surreptitiously deprived of its meaning.

Art. 31 C.O. says: you are bound to accept a decision on your appeal *unless* you prove that this decision conflicts with God’s Word, the Confession or the Church Order.

The general synod of 1943 said: you

are bound by it until it has been changed by a following synod.

Then many consistories and members said, “Art. 31 give us the right **not** to consider decisions settled and binding of which we can — and do — prove that they are contrary to God’s Word and that the Church Order has been violated.”

I, too, declared, together with the consistory, that we were “liberating our-

“It is for the benefit of the Churches that we are seeking the proper answer to the questions also with respect to Art. 31, Church Order.”

selves, according to Art.31 C.O. from the above-mentioned pronouncements and suspensions.”

This was completely correct. Our protest as a Consistory against the unlawful suspension of Dr. K. Schilder had been wiped off the synodical table with a wrap over the knuckles and we, too, were expected to accept it that this faithful servant of the Lord together with many others, was deemed unworthy to be an office-bearer in Christ’s Church.

Our agreement in Art. 31 C.O. gave us the right *not* to accept that decision.

But this was a completely different issue from the point raised in the discussion with Rev. Wielenga.

“Was it a church-political blunder when they added to their name of ‘Reformed Churches in the Netherlands’ the postal notation . . . ‘observing Art. 31 C.O.’?”

Yes.

Mind you, I write this more than forty-two years after the facts, and do not put the blame on anyone in particular.

At that time I was serving the Church at Oud-Loosdrecht.

If our readers have access to the Acts of the Provisional General Synod of 1945, they will find the original Dutch text of an overture by the Church at Oud-Loosdrecht which, via Classis and Region-

al Synod, came to this General Synod. This overture read,

“a. That no discussion is needed about the name of our Churches, since this name has been from of old ‘The Reformed Churches.’

“b. That, however, it may be added ‘Liberated according to Art. 31 C.O.’ in order to distinguish them from those Churches which have not yet liberated themselves.” Acts, Art. 29.

Unfortunately, Synod decided that the term “maintaining Art. 31 C.O.” was to be used. Acts, Art. 75.

I still consider this a mistake, and now even have doubts about the wisdom of the second part of our own overture.

At one of the Ecclesiastical Congresses which were held in late 1945, namely, the one at Amsterdam, I made the same point when the late Rev. D.K. Wielenga spoke about the continuation of the mission work: when we justly claim to be the legitimate continuation of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, we should not even talk about looking for other fields but maintain our right and duty to continue the work where it was in progress.

Perhaps one could call this youthful enthusiasm or lack of awareness of all the consequences, I only mention it to show that my conviction in this respect was not born yesterday or the day after receipt of my colleague’s letter.

Which consistories?

What is to be done if a consistory does not take over a member’s arguments and objections?

Does it ever dawn on someone that at times we have to say, “I have warned, I have tried to convince the consistory, but my warning was not heeded; now the responsibility is no longer mine, but theirs?”

I do not mean it in the sense of “shaking off the dust,” of “washing one’s hands off it,” as Pilate did.

What I mean is: is it really the responsibility and task of the members to mobilize the whole federation all by themselves, or is it permitted to say, “I have done my part, now it is up to the consistory?”

I have the impression that this is found too little among us. One more often gets the impression that there is quite a quantity of what the Germans call “Rechthaberei,” = I want to have it my way.

Let there be the case when one is convinced that a certain decision was completely wrong.

Which consistories should be approached?

First of all one’s own consistory. Then the possibility exists to discuss the

matter and to try to convince the brothers that action should be taken to correct the wrong.

In case the local consistory cannot be convinced, it appears proper to write to the other consistories in that classis.

If the "complainant" — no insult meant — cannot find a willing ear among them, should he then not stop and leave it for the responsibility of the consistories whether anything at all should be done?

The poor wise man of whom Rev. Wielenga reminds us at least was able to convince the inhabitants of the city which course to take.

The point there was that no one gave him the credit due to him.

In ecclesiastical life it happens, too, that others take credit for something to which they perhaps were even opposed in the beginning.

I am convinced that — if it is considered necessary to approach the consistories — those in the same classis will constitute a sufficient number.

It is at the consistory-level that any action has to start.

If the absolute rule of God's Word is at stake, it will be necessary to write to *all* consistories.

However, if the situation is that serious, would one then not receive sufficient support in one's own congregation or, at least, some of the classis-churches?

Our readers know my serious objections to the change made in Art. 13 C.O. by the 1986 General Synod. I did not approach any consistory about it. Yet even so I read of two consistories in different parts of the country that they will send an overture to the General Synod of 1989 to return to the proper text as adopted in 1983 and found in our *Book of Praise*.

Could we not expect consistories to take action when approached by a member regarding such a serious matter as the absolute rule of God's Word being at stake?

The gifts of the Spirit are certainly not restricted to office-bearers. However, among the gifts of the Spirit are also self-control and modesty as well as considering others more excellent than oneself.

Hierarchy?

Hierarchy is too easy a way out. I agree with Rev. Wielenga.

The question is, however, whether Rev. Wielenga is correct in suggesting that what I still claim to be the proper procedure, promotes hierarchy. He has given no proof, just the suggestive statement.

What I see as promoting hierarchy is what my colleague mentions as possible good grounds for rejection, such as "improper tone, form, presentation, motives."

If this were correct, a completely legitimate appeal could be wiped off the table on the ground of "improper tone, form," or even "motives."

Could a major assembly ever correctly determine what a person's *motives* were or are and on that basis declare a genuine appeal inadmissible? This brings a subjective element into the field which has no standard to be measured by. This would lead to injustice.

Synod 1986 should, therefore, not have declared a certain document inadmissible "on the basis of its harsh, unbrotherly, and therefore un-Christian, language."

I do not wish to claim that Synod should have declared the above submission admissible. As far as I understand

it, it was an effort, via a document, to be heard in a discussion without having been delegated to Synod. As such it was inadmissible, as were other submissions of the same nature, even though their language may have been "kind, brotherly, and very Christian."

When one has not been delegated to a major assembly, one should not try as yet to have a voice in the discussion by sending a letter with all sorts of arguments pro and con.

This is different, and does not lead to arbitrariness as my colleague's suggestion undoubtedly would, if followed up.

Letters

A last point.

Letters conveying decisions by broader assemblies.

Rev. Wielenga "would like to see room left for the possibility to send a letter to the parties concerned as soon as possible after certain decisions have been made."

This would be necessary in case a brother or sister sent a (genuine) appeal. They have to have their reply as soon as possible. Their consistory should also be informed without delay.

I would raise no objection if it were decided at a general synod to send a "personal" reply to all Churches that submitted matters for the agenda.

Here, however, I would use "selective judgment," so to speak, and leave it up to the second clerk's discretion which decisions should be conveyed without delay. There are usually scores of decisions which may be learned from the printed *Acts* without any harm resulting from the time of waiting for them to appear in print.

If all the Churches of a classis are affected, these Churches should all be notified.

What is completely wrong, however, and should certainly never be done is: sending a letter with decisions to a classis or a regional synod to be held at some future date.

No regional-synodical communication should be on a classical agenda and no general-synodical letter disgrace that of a regional synod.

Conclusion

Thanking Rev. Wielenga for the opportunity to elaborate on the matter and for the kind words with which he concluded his letter, I express the wish that also this discussion may result in the upbuilding and the peace of Jerusalem.

Psalm 122:3

*Let peace be found within your walls
And in your palaces repose;
May blessings be conferred on those
Who dwell within your favoured halls.
For friends and brethren I will say,
"Let peace abide in you for aye;
May nought disturb you now or ever."
By reason of God's temple fair
And for the mercy proffered there,
I will invoke your good for ever.*

By Rev. W.W.J. VanOene

This was the way in which things went also in the Liberation of 1944. The autonomy of the local Church was stressed. Thus the Reformed Church was continued in each and every place where a Reformation came about.

We do not deny that also during the Secession nothing new was established: the brothers and sisters simply continued the Reformed Church in every place where there was a return. The method as such does not determine the character of what is done.

Because of their method, however, the Seceded Churches for all **practical** purposes, were something new.

With the Doleantie Churches it became much clearer that they claimed to be the continuation of that local Church as it existed. They felt responsible for the whole congregation and saw it as their duty to take the whole congregation along.

This was one of the reasons why they did not join the Christian Reformed Church at that place where a return became a fact.

As can be understood, this made a bad impression on many in the Christian Reformed Church, who saw therein a slighting of the work of God in freeing His people in 1834.

Some are of the opinion that here we find the basic difference and difficulty between the men of the Secession and those of the Doleantie.

The Seceded brothers were convinced that the Netherlands Reformed Church was a false Church in the sense of Art.29 B.C. For those of the Doleantie this was something they did not want to admit or even hear. They were willing to speak of a false institute in which the true Church was found, but that was all.

For Kuyper and the men of the Doleantie the Netherlands Reformed Church was still the true Church with which the Secessionists should not have broken.

This amounted to nothing less than a principial condemnation of the Secession, and the men of the Christian Reformed Church were well aware of it. They argued that Kuyper's whole construction of the boards as being the false element, and the believers as constituting the essence of the Church being the true element, so that one could not speak of a false Church for as long as there were true believers there, in fact amounted to a letting go of the confession of the Church. The whole differentiation between false boards and true Church within a false institution is a pure fiction.

It is, therefore, claimed that the next point of difference mentioned, the Regulation of 1869, was a welcome diversion from what was the main objection of the Doleerenden, mentioned above.

When discussing the differences we are also to bear in mind that in the days of the Doleantie there were far more academically trained persons who could give leadership than in the days of the Secession, even though this is not always an advantage. It applies far more to the Secession than to the Doleantie that there were not many rich, not many noble, not many who had a prominent place in society.

We think here not only of a man as Dr. Abraham Kuyper. He may have had a prominent place, he certainly was not the only one. He did have great influence, not in the last place through his weekly *De Heraut* and his daily *De Standaard*. His editorials and articles were spelled and discussed in thousands of families. To many Kuyper's word was the last word.

Never did the Churches of the Secession have anyone who wielded so much influence and who could boast of so many followers.

This is not to say that they did not have men who were able to provide leadership or that they were and remained on a lower level of development and education. Not at all.

What we are pointing to at this point is the difference in manpower and leadership between the days of the Secession in 1834 and of the Doleantie in 1886.

The Second Point

The second point, already mentioned above, is the Regulation of 1869.

We spoke about it before and pointed out that, in spite of the provision that the Dort Church Order was to be followed "insofar as circumstances do not prevent it," the basic concept is that of a country-wide body with "locals."

This did not sit well with the men of the Doleantie who stressed the autonomy of the local Church and the voluntary nature of the federation. They were not prepared to bow the neck under a third hierarchy, a central board and a body with local parts.

Removal of this barrier was to them an indispensable condition for a possible reunion.

On the part of the Christian Reformed Church there was no specific desire to retain the 1869 document. They were quite willing and prepared to do away with it. It may have been mentioned repeatedly in the negotiations, it did not constitute such a barrier that a possible merger would have to be scuttled because of it. The first point, basically, was of far more importance.

And so was the third one.

The Third Point

Of more importance than the 1869 Regulation was the point of the training for the ministry. It was a point that was to remain the cause of much friction and controversy even after a merger had been effectuated. Without exaggeration it even has to be said that it remained so until, at the Liberation of 1944, the Theological College in Kampen again became the sole institution where the training for the ministry took place.

The Churches of the Secession established their "Theological School" in 1854. This institution was an instrument whereby these Churches were drawn closer together, and it was held in high esteem by them.

Dr. Kuyper was aware of this when he stated that there "beats the heart of the Christian Reformed Church" and that "its teachers enjoy the confidence of the brethren."

For the Christian Reformed Church there was a principle involved that they did not wish to give up: that the Church had to take care of the training of its future ministers. This training should be done by the Church and should at all times be under the control of the Church.

The Doleantie, on the other hand, received their ministers mainly from the Free University at Amsterdam. This university had been founded by Dr. Kuyper and had provided the Church at Kootwijk with its minister, as we saw before. The Theological Faculty was only one of the faculties, and the supervision over it was in the hands of a board of directors. The Churches had no supervision over it at all.

To this the men of the Secession objected. The supervision and control was in the hands of private persons and there were no sufficient guarantees for the purity of doctrine. The principle that the Churches should have their own institution was to be maintained and this institution was to be preserved.

Overagainst this it was adduced by the Doleantie men that anabaptist isolationism should be avoided. The theology has a place in the midst of the other scholarly disciplines. The revelation which the Lord has given seeks to influence everything, not only theology. Besides, what is needed is not just an institution for training for the ministry, but for the study of theology as an academic discipline. Ministers are called upon to preach to people in all walks of life and should be trained within the framework of university studies. We should never abandon the principle that theology is a scholarly discipline which has its own rightful place at a university.

The Free University was Kuyper's baby and it could be expected that he was not prepared to give it up for the sake of a merger with the Christian Reformed Church.

On the other hand, the Christian Reformed Church could not be expected to be willing to abandon its conviction that the training for the ministry was to be done by the Church and under total control of the Church, although the brothers did not deny that the work at this institution was of a scholarly nature.

It was to be foreseen that this point would be a ticklish affair in the years ahead.

Initial Contact

It was a smart move when, undoubtedly upon Kuyper's suggestion, the deputies appointed by the Synodical Convent "for the promotion of the ecclesiastical re-union with the Christian Reformed Church" took up contact with the professors at the Theological College in Kampen.

Actually, we should not yet speak of "professors" and of "Theological College." At that time the professors were still called "docents," and the institution bore the name of "Theological School."

By engaging the faculty of the Theological School the Doleantie deputies right away made an effort to come to an agreement with the men whose influence and authority within the Christian Reformed Church would be decisive for the success of the negotiations or their failure.

The docents replied that they were certainly willing to have a discussion but that it should be borne in mind that they have no mandate or authorization to do so from

anyone. The meeting could, therefore, not have an official or even a semi-official character: it would be just a meeting of brothers.

On Thursday, October 6, 1887 the meeting took place in Utrecht. Three docents met with three deputies.

The result was the decision to have a meeting of all docents with all deputies, which meeting was held in Kampen in November of the same year. Twelve points had been put on the agenda for that meeting, each worked out and commented on for further discussion.

Six brothers were appointed to formulate the result of the conference and to word a series of new theses which should express the agreement noticed at it.

It is clear to the careful reader that the newly formulated theses carry to a large extent the "trademark" of Dr. Kuyper and his theory of an invisible Church which "manifests" itself here and there. They speak of "the Hierarchy" which the Reformed fathers exposed as the false Church under which, locally, the true Church continued to exist here and there!

When, on Feb. 17, 1888, a second meeting is held of all deputies with the docents — except A. Brummelkamp, who was ill — docent Lindeboom states as his impression that "these theses in their totality are not in agreement with what the Confession confesses concerning the true and the false Church and concerning seceding from the latter and joining oneself to the former."

Overagainst the thirty-one theses in all, Lindeboom has formulated twelve theses of his own.

Some of them may follow here.

"1. According to the Reformed Confession there is one true Church.

"2. This true Church is to be well distinguished from the false Church and all sects; by the pure preaching of the Gospel, by the pure administration of the sacraments, and by the exercise of discipline, according to the Word of God.

"3. No one is allowed to secede from this true Church or to remain outside of it.

"4. Those who are of the true Church, must secede unconditionally from the body as well as from the Boards of the false Church.

"5. According to the marks, mentioned in the Confession on the basis of the Holy Scripture, the Netherlands Reformed Denomination in the Netherlands with its Boards has become apparent as false Church."

Both the Christian Reformed Church and the Doleantie Churches are to be regarded as the true Church of God in the Netherlands. All believers still in the Netherlands Reformed Church are therefore obligated to secede from the false Church and to join themselves to the true Church in whatever place the Lord has put them. The Secession Churches as well as the Doleantie Churches are obligated by the Lord to show their unity by living together as the true Church in the Netherlands.

These words are not liable to be misunderstood.

As a result of the deliberations and discussions the thirty-one theses were taken out of further negotiations as it was felt that they could not serve the unity or function as a basis for it.

— *To be continued*



WASHINGTON (RNS)

The Supreme Court ruled unanimously June 24 that Congress did not violate the Constitution 15 years ago when it exempted churches from complying with a federal ban on job discrimination based on religion, even when the job is non-religious in nature.

Writing for five of the nine members of the Court, Justice Byron R. White quoted from another church-state decision earlier in the current term: "This court has long recognized that the government may (and sometimes must) accommodate religious practices and that it may do so without violating the Establishment Clause." (CN)

GRAND RAPIDS, MICH.

The Presbyterian Church in America has approved a 17-page document defending the use of nuclear weapons to protect the United States from communism.

Eight hundred of the conservative 168,000-member church based in Decatur, GA., passed the statement by more than a two-thirds majority during the PCA's annual General Assembly, held at Calvin College. (CN)

ROMANIA

The United Bible Societies (UBS) has sent paper to Romania for printing 10,000 Bibles for members of the Baptist Church there.

The Baptist Union of Romania has been given official permission to publish the Bibles on behalf of its own members and the members of other Protestant churches.

The Bibles will be in the so-called Cornilescu translation, which is named after its main translator Dumitri Cornilescu. This translation was first published in 1921 and has become the most popular version among the Romanian Protestant churches. (QN)

At its May meetings Citizens for Public Justice adopted a statement on capital punishment, part of which reads as follows:

"Citizens for Public Justice urges Members of Parliament to vote against the restoration of capital punishment



because it is unwarranted and undesirable for Canada at this time.

"CPJ understands the central message of the Bible to be one of reconciliation based on the redeeming power of Christ's death and resurrection. God's reconciling work opens the possibility for reconciliation among people and motivates CPJ to work for a society more and more characterized by peace, freedom and justice.

"Revenge is not a legitimate understanding of the biblical teaching of justice. Vengeance, in the Scriptures, belongs to the Lord. Therefore, revenge, no matter how sophisticated, is not legitimate and violates the goal of justice, which is the restoration of right relationships." (Cat.)

Our readers know now clearly that support of this organization with its liberation theology-based pronouncements and its misinterpretation of the Scriptures appears unwarranted.

BARNEVELD, THE NETHERLANDS

The Reformed Congregations (Gereformeerde Gemeenten) in the Netherlands are struggling with a lack of elders. In various places the consistory consists of deacons only. Their Synod dealt with the matter. On the one hand fear was expressed that too easily persons would be made a candidate for this office, on the other hand, they realized that this office should be maintained.

The Reformed Congregations also have a lack of ministers. This year the board of governors for the training for the ministry did not admit any new candidates for their training. (ND)

Poor sheep that are being barred from the Gospel of salvation by self-righteous and self-made judges who appear to have never understood the

slightest element of the mercies of a God who gave Himself in the Son of His good pleasure.

NEW YORK (RNS)

Statements affirming that Christianity has not superseded God's covenant with the Jewish people — a controversial issue in interfaith relations — have been adopted by national conventions of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the United Church of Christ.

The UCC document, adopted June 30 in Cleveland, made the 1.7 million-member body the first major Protestant denomination in the United States to affirm the continuing theological validity of Judaism. The Presbyterian statement, adopted June 16 in Biloxi, Miss., was a study paper rather than a formal affirmation of the 3.1 million-member church.

The UCC statement said: "Judaism has not been superseded by Christianity; Christianity is not to be understood as the successor religions to Judaism; God's covenant with the Jewish people has not been abrogated. God has not rejected the Jewish people; God is faithful in keeping covenant."

The July 4, 1987 *St Louis Post Dispatch* said in a report on the UCC statement: "In its declaration, the church asks for God's forgiveness for a long radiation of anti-Semitism. The statement files in the face of that tradition and of the beliefs of ultra-conservative Christians, who assert that Jews must become Christians in order to find salvation." (CN)

When man can work his own salvation, Christ is no longer needed. Then it does not make any difference whether one is a "Christian" or a Jew or belongs to some other so-called faith. It will be a rude awakening!



Hello Busy Beavers,

Orange pumpkins, red and gold leaves, bright back-to-school clothes, purple asters, yellow school buses, green, green grass — it's time for a

Colour FALL Picture Contest!

Use your markers or your crayons.
What do you like doing best in fall?
What do you think looks prettiest?
Put it in your picture and send it to:

Aunt Betty
c/o Premier Printing Ltd.
One Beghin Avenue
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R2J 3X5

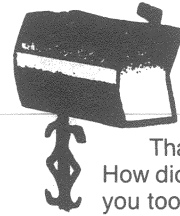
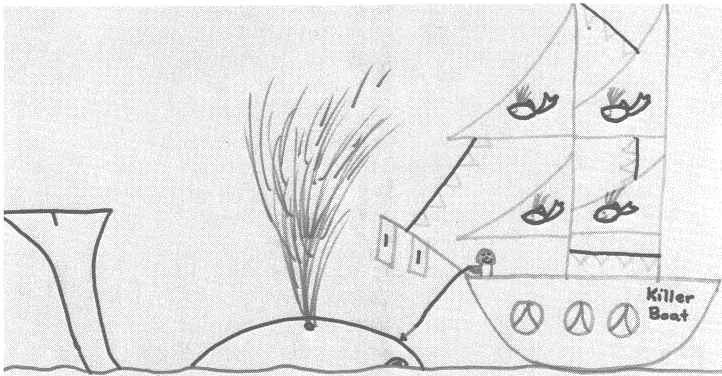
FOR YOU TO DO

1. Can you FIND OUT why the month of August has 31 days instead of following the rule and having 30 days?
2. Carefully press thin pretty flowers and leaves between paper towels in your fattest book. Later you can use them to decorate your own cards and letters!

Thank you, Busy Beaver *Linda Stam* for sharing your picture and poem.

The Whale

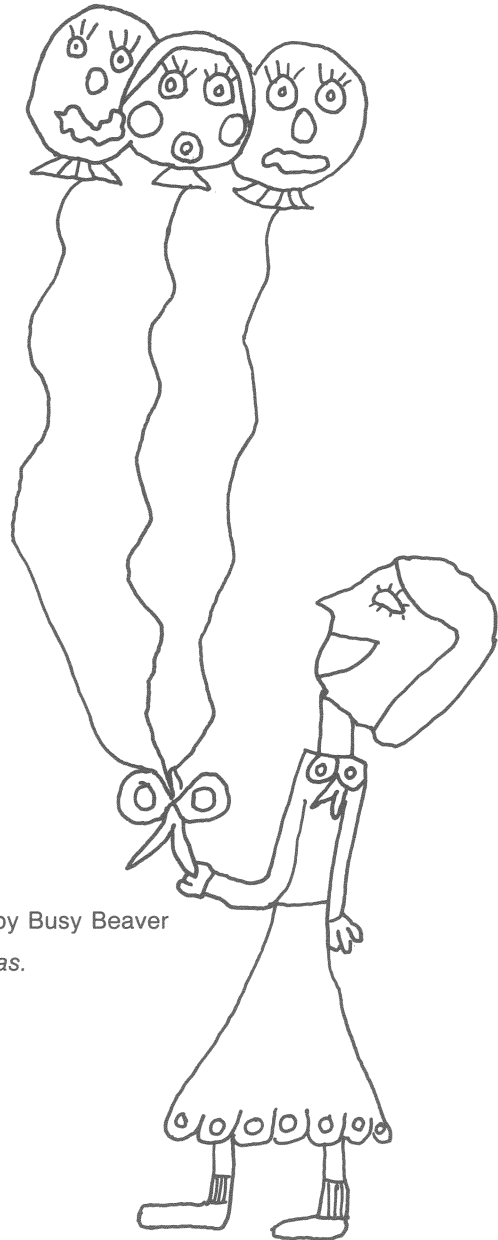
The biggest mammal is the whale
Splashing her big and slippery tail
The sound of man
She'll dive under again
The harpoon she is dead soon.



From the Mailbox

Thank you very much for the flowers, *Lisa De Haas*. How did you know they are my favourite kind? Thank you too, for the neat letter and the picture to colour. I know the Busy Beavers will enjoy it. Write again soon, Lisa.

Hello, *Alisha Stroop*. It's nice to hear from you again. Have you enjoyed the summer? And have you joined in our summer Quiz Contest? How do you feel about going back to school, Alisha?



Colour Me by Busy Beaver
Lisa De Haas.