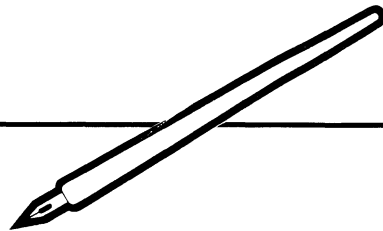


 **Clarion**
THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

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Our contact with the OPC

This issue

In this issue of *Clarion* we are focussing our attention on the relation which we have with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC hereafter). The forthcoming Synod of Winnipeg has to deal with this matter. There is division among us in this regard. The report of the Committee for Contact with the OPC speaks in favour of the continuation of the relationship. One of the churches, the church at Hamilton, proposes to the churches to discontinue it in the present form, and one can hear voices declaring agreement with this view.

For the information of the readers, we publish a somewhat shortened report of the committee as well as written interviews of Dr. C. Van Dam with Rev. J.P. Galbraith and with Rev. J.J. Peterson. From these interviews we can learn how these leading members of the OPC think about certain matters. Then there is an article written by the Rev. R.F. Boersema, asking the question: "Has the OPC changed?"

The difficulties which quite a few in our midst have with a continued official relationship with the OPC stem, on the one hand, from personal experiences which some had when visiting the U.S.A. and attending a worship service in one of the OPC congregations, and, on the other hand, from two main issues, which are mentioned in the article of the Rev. Boersema. Now others speak about positive experiences. It is hard to judge by the standard of personal experiences, although they do have an impact on the impression which is formed in the minds of our members. They do play a role. The one local congregation is not like the other, while also the visitors do not all think alike. It is therefore better to look at the issues.

One issue (although I have the impression that it is not at this point a major issue) is the matter of the differences between the Westminster Standards and the Three Forms of Unity. On this point I may refer to what the report to the Synod of New Westminster, 1971 said (*Acts*, p. 66):

Deputies conclude on the ground of these considerations [given on pp. 64-66, J.G.] that the divergencies in confession between the C.R.C. and the O.P.C. are not of such a nature that they should prevent the C.R.C. from recognizing the O.P.C. as a true church of the Lord Jesus Christ and from entering into correspondence with this church.

The 1971 Synod did not take this conclusion over in its considerations or judgments. It did conclude

that divergencies in confession and in Church polity are serious enough to remain the subject of further and frank discussion (*Art. 92*, sub: Synod further conclude, 7; p. 44).

The Synod of Coaldale took over a statement from the Dutch sister churches, saying

The General Synod of our Netherlands sister Churches in 1967 accepted the statement of the Regional Synod of Groningen that the Westminster Confession of Faith is "een voluit Gereformeerd belijdenisgeschrift" (a fully Reformed Confession; *Acts*, *Art. 91*, II, Considerations d.; p. 40).

The preceding Consideration (c) reads:

From the letter of the Committee on Ecumenicity and Inter-church Relations of April 14, 1976, it appears that the divergencies in confession and church polity, notwithstanding the fact that continued discussion of them is desirable, are to be explained from the different origins of the confessions of the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Westminster Confession of Faith with its related Doctrinal Standards of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

This matter of the divergencies plays a role, at present, in our sister churches in Australia, which, in 1987, confirmed a synodical decision of 1983 stating that the Free Church of Scotland "was to be recognized as a faithful church of the Lord." The Rev. C. Bouwman found this statement premature, in connection with the fact that a similar statement was not made regarding the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA). I only mention this to show that the matter of relationships with Presbyterian Churches is not only an issue in our own midst. Hopefully sometime in the future we can come back to this point. The Reformed Churches since the Secession in 1834 have considered the Westminster Standards to be Reformed Standards and have not seen them as an impediment to the recognition of any churches as true Reformed Churches of the Lord. After the Liberation in 1944 this judgment was maintained. I am strongly convinced that these divergencies should remain a matter of discussion, but also that they in themselves should not be an impediment to recognition and relationship.

There are, however, two other issues which by some are seen as practical consequences of the divergencies and are mentioned in the article of Rev. Boersema and which played a role in the separation of the Blue Bell and the Laurel congregations from the OPC: the matter of "confessional membership and close communion." I suppose that Rev. Boersema means a closed communion table. It is especially these two issues which are a matter of great concern in the midst of our churches. About the matter of the closed Lord's Supper table I have written in *Clarion* in March/April, 1986. I would here like to address the matter of confessional church membership.

Confessional church membership

The Rev. Boersema points in this connection to "what was decided by our famous Reformed Synod of Dort." Without quoting he writes that this synod ruled that "If a person confesses the Reformed faith but does not accept a certain point of doctrine he may be received as a member if he submits to the discipline of the church, is willing to be further instructed in this matter, and does not make propaganda for his divergent viewpoint." Rev. Boersema claims the OPC deals with "some one who holds an Arminian position on one point of doctrine" "in a way that is similar to" the decision of the Synod of Dort. This suggests that the demand of the church at Blue Bell for confessional membership is a deviation from the decision of the Synod of Dort.

It is so that the Canadian Reformed Churches have and want to maintain the rule of confessional membership, which means that those who are members by baptism and become communicant members through public profession of faith declare that they "wholeheartedly believe the doctrine of the Word of God, summarized in the confessions and taught here in this Christian Church." It makes no difference if we use the older formulation: "the doctrine which is contained in the Old and New Testament and in the articles of the Christian faith and which is taught in this Christian church." It is, with either formulation, the same doctrine taught in this Reformed Church, which has bound itself to this doctrine expressed in the Three Forms of Unity as the summary of the true biblical doctrine. Those who join from outside declare the same. That is why we maintain the necessity of solid confessional catechetical instruction before public profession of faith. This is the rule. But are we not also pastoral? If a consistory knows that one of the members did not receive the gift of normal intelligence and understanding, but loves the Lord, and would like to be a communicant member, even though he is not able to understand all the points of the Reformed doctrine, such a consistory can and will take such a situation into consideration. Does such an exception now mean that the rule is not maintained? Certainly not.

Now many in our churches understand that the rule in the OPC is that a binding to the Standards of the church is only required from the office-bearers, not from the membership in general. If this understanding is wrong, our members would like to hear it. And now the point is: is Rev. Boersema correct when he states that the OPC, with its rule, is in line with the great Synod of Dort? Or must we say that this suggestion goes against the facts and is not true?

To begin with, I did not find the decision as mentioned in the Acts or in the Post-acta of the Synod of Dort, but it is quite possible that this synod made such a decision. What I did find comes from a booklet *Doctrinal Discipline regarding the Members of the Church* written by Rev. Joh. Jansen and published by Kok, Kampen in 1936. On page 19ff. he writes that the General Synod of 's Gravenhage, 1914, had to deal with the question whether "Someone who agrees in everything with the Reformed Confession, except that he rejects infant baptism, and promises not to make propaganda for it" can be admitted to the table of the Lord.

The synod answered

that it could not make a decision in regard to this special case, because it did not have the necessary data and that it is not desirable to make the general pronouncement that deviation from a certain point of doctrine (een bepaald leerstuk) of the Church does not have to be an impediment to admitting someone to the communion of the Church.

The synod added to this

that it was willing to say that our Reformed Churches always have judged that, according to the example of the Apostolic Church, tolerance can be exercised regarding brothers who in good faith (ter goeder trouw) err in some doctrine, if only this does not regard any fundamental part of the truth, and if the erring persons are willing to receive further instruction and promise not to make propaganda for their views, whereby it is a matter of course that such brothers, as long as they abide by their views are certainly not eligible for any office in the Church (Acts, Article 138).

This synodical pronouncement goes back to the time of the Synod of Dort. After the Arminian teachings had been judged as contrary to the Word of God and therefore were rejected, and when the Reformed doctrine was maintained and more elaborately confessed in the Canons of Dort, the churches were confronted with the question what to do with Arminian office-bearers and members. The Rev. Jansen informs us (p. 27ff.)



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how the Regional Synod of Leiden 1619 dealt with this question. It made "a distinction between the stubborn and the submissive" (tusschen de hartneckige ende tusschen de gesegelijke). The stubborn "are to be diligently admonished by the consistory . . . to abandon their views, but further actions are to be postponed till the next regional synod." The next Regional Synod of Gouda, 1920, decided that if these "stubborn" ones still abide by their views and stay away from the preaching of God's Word, while they are members, the consistory has to proceed with discipline.

"... the Canadian Reformed Churches have and want to maintain the rule of confessional membership, which means that those who are members by baptism and become communicant members through public profession of faith declare that they 'wholeheartedly believe the doctrine of the Word of God, summarized in the confessions and taught here in this Christian Church.' "

The synod said regarding the "submissive" who because of simpleness, misunderstanding or weakness cannot yet understand, or assent to, the doctrine of the Reformed churches or cannot yet completely reject the view of the Arminians, but who show themselves willing to learn and begin to accept instruction and abide by the good things they have already learned and wish to grow further in the truth, (that) those shall be further instructed and can be admitted to the communion of the church, on condition that they keep quiet and work on it that they increase in the knowledge of the truth more and more; and, at the same time, *declare that they hold the doctrine of the Reformed church to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation, and have the intention to abide by it through the favour of God* [italics added].

The Regional Synod spoke also about those who had remained members of a Reformed Church but were Arminian in their views and openly declared that they disagreed with the Reformed doctrine, speaking evil about it and about the manner in which the Synod of Dort had dealt with the matter: they could not be admitted to the Lord' table (p. 31).

We must keep in mind that the Reformed Churches were in a specific situation in which they had just gone through, and still were in, a struggle for the truth. In other words, the situation was exceptional. It was in that exceptional situation that the Regional Synod did not want to be legalistic, but show pastoral care. This pastoral care meant that the churches were advised to act with patience with regard to those who had been misled and were willing to be corrected, while *declaring "that they held the doctrine of the Reformed church to be the true and complete doctrine of salvation,"* even though they could not understand everything yet. This seems contradictory, but it is not. This declaration underlined the willingness to continue to learn to understand the (Reformed) truth better. Those who refuse

to accept the Reformed doctrine were placed under discipline.

We see here clearly that the rule, namely that all the members of the Reformed church acknowledge the Reformed doctrine to be "the true and complete doctrine of salvation," is maintained, while in an exceptional situation patience is recommended regarding those who are willing to accept, learn better, and abide by the Reformed doctrine. Making an exception confirms the rule, also here. Therefore, it was and is a good rule in the Reformed churches that those who are or seek to be members declare that they hold the Reformed doctrine to be "the true and complete doctrine of salvation," since the doctrine contained in the Three Forms of Unity is a summary of the doctrine contained in the Old and New Testament.

Why do some in our midst have difficulty with the OPC? They see as consequence of accepting a permanent relationship with the OPC that we (have to) accept for our own churches the situation that the Lord's Supper can be an open or fenced but not a closed table; and that also among us it should become acceptable that only office-bearers are expected to stand fully behind the confessions of the church, while the general membership does not have to do so. This is the concern. And these things they would like to have discussed and talked through. This concern should be the concern of all of us: how do we remain a federation of Reformed Churches in which all stand united behind the faith delivered to the saints. But the continuation of contact with the OPC, as well as continued contact with Reformed and Presbyterian (Reformed) churches in the International Council of Reformed Churches (ICRC) does not mean that we have to give up what we (try to) hold on to. It means: recognition of the work of Christ and an effort to take care of each other and help each other to remain, and to be confirmed upon, the right track.

Also the question in how far all those who make, or have made, public profession of their (Reformed) faith in our churches really thoroughly know the Three Forms of Unity, cannot undermine the rule, although a question like this should make us humble. It is not a matter of being better than others. We simply are not. But again, that is not the point. The point is here: what is the good, Reformed way of looking at and doing things. And, indeed, then one of the things we should continue to struggle for is that we remain Reformed churches, not just Reformed consistories.

It is therefore my conviction that we should not break off the contact with the OPC. They have taken the correct, confessional, stand with regard to the Reformed Ecumenical Synod. This was not an act that characterizes a false church. It was, on the contrary, an act of faithfulness to God's Word and the confessions of the church. At the same time, continued contact should not mean that we keep silent about the issues that live in the churches and are of great concern.

Therefore we should also continue in the International Council of Reformed Churches (ICRC). Calvin and his followers, also very strongly so Dr. K. Schilder, have always fought for the unity of true Christian believers. This meant for them also international unity between national and regional church federations, to serve the unity, the mutual upbuilding and preservation for which Christ prayed and Paul worked: a unity in the true faith that was delivered to the saints. Being a hand and a foot for each other is first of all a calling for the local congregation; it is also a calling for those congregations together. For that reason the Reformed Churches have formed a federation of churches in a national context. It is for that same reason that Reformed Churches have seen their calling across the national borders, see e.g. the Synod of Dort. We are to help each other to remain churches, not with a general evangelical, but with a confessional Reformed face (faith).



Report of the Committee for Contact with the OPC

By C. Van Dam

The report of the Committee for Contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) to the upcoming General Synod set for Winnipeg this spring has now been released and sent to the consistories. This subject is important enough to warrant attention in our magazine and we have great appreciation for the manner in which this Committee has served the Churches. Regrettably, due to the length of this report, it cannot be printed in its entirety in these pages. Let us therefore note some highlights which are not elaborated on in the final parts of the report and then listen to those last sections of the report itself, namely, its evaluations and recommendations.

The ICRC

The International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) was reported on extensively at the 53rd General Assembly of the OPC. Our Committee report notes (p.2f.) that: it was decided to keep observing the ICRC with a view considering membership. This report also examined the differences among the churches in the ICRC, noting particularly the difference between the European continental churches and Presbyterians; the continental churches (e.g. Canadian Reformed Churches) see only the local congregation as church, whereas Presbyterians recognize the church as existing not only locally, but also regionally, nationally, and universally; thus the continental brothers feel that Presbyterians hold to a form of hierarchicalism, whereas Presbyterians feel that the continental brothers tend to congregationalism. This report also noted that the Liberated churches of 1944 have a highly articulate doctrine of the covenant and demonstrate its far-reaching implications for Christian life and thought; a concern was expressed at the ICRC of the danger of using one doctrine as the architectonic framework for the whole of theology.

In Dr. Faber's address to the General Assembly he tried to show how the doctrine of the covenant is indeed connected with all of life. He also corrected a mistaken allegation that the Canadian Reformed Churches teach "that there can be only one true church in each nation." There is a distinction between "can" and "should": there *should* only be one true church in each nation.

Our Dutch sister churches and the OPC

The report of our deputies noted that the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad of our sister churches in the Netherlands have been in touch with the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations of the OPC (CEIR). They have expressed "on behalf of their previous Synod a desire 'to look into the possibilities with you of a closer relationship in the future'" (p.5). This Dutch committee also remarked that "they would like to deal with the OPC 'in close deliberation' with the Canadian Reformed Churches" (p.5). As a result, our committee was sent a copy of their letter to the CEIR.

Biblical Principles of the Unity of the Church

In 1986 the CEIR submitted to the 53rd General Assembly of the OPC a statement entitled "Biblical Principles of the Unity

of the Church." This document was affirmed by the 54th General Assembly in 1987 which body also instructed the CEIR to send a copy of it to our Committee for Contact with the OPC for their response.

Our Committee expressed deep appreciation for the fact that the OPC in this statement does not take the easy way out with respect to the church's ecumenical task by fleeing into fantasies about an "invisible church." The OPC understands that two true churches of Jesus Christ may not exist alongside each other without seeking ecclesiastical union, but at the same time acknowledges that *union* of churches can only come about on the basis of *unity* of faith. (p.5)

Our Committee also had some critical remarks which were well received by the OPC brothers of the CEIR in their meeting with them.

Fencing the Lord's Supper

According to the mandate of Synod 1986 our Committee conveyed the concerns of the Canadian Reformed Churches with respect to the doctrine of the covenant, confessional membership, ecclesiology and the autonomy of the local church. They did so especially by dealing with the issue of the fencing of the Lord's Table.

The CEIR reminded us again of the clear statements of the Westminster Confession (XXIX.8), the Form of Government (XII.7) and the Directory for Worship (V.4), quoted in our evaluation of the Hofford Complaint (Acts 1986, p.133). They explained that local sessions use different methods to prevent the Lord's Table from being profaned. They stressed that Holy Scripture does not prescribe one specific method. 1 Corinthians 11:28 ("Let a man examine *himself*") emphasizes the personal responsibility.

Our Committee covered the areas mentioned in our previous report:

- The need for direct supervision of guests by the overseers who should determine who may attend the Lord's Table.
- The desirability for using (travel-) attestations.
- The need to see to it that certain conditions are met by guests who are to be admitted to the Lord's Table.
- The need for corporate responsibility with respect to attendance at the Lord's Supper.

In connection with the last point we asked when and whence the difference between the methods in e.g. the Free Church of Scotland and the OPC came about. One may think of the old system of handing out "tokens" for admission to the Lord's Supper. We also wondered whether the variety in methods within the OPC and the most frequently used method of issuing only a general warning is not due to the influence of American individualism. The personal responsibility, expressed in 1 Corinthians 11, does not exclude the corporate responsibility as 1 Corinthians 5 shows in agreement with Acts 20:28.

Our Committee was assured that the OPC would study this matter further and discuss it again with us in the near future.

"The Blue Bell Situation"

The CEIR asked us for

"any further information about the Blue Bell situation so that we may try to put the matter to rest. Apparently a point of in-

terest is the question of schism on the part of the Blue Bell congregation, whether your classis received them without consultation with our presbytery, and if so, whether your churches thus fostered the alleged schism. We do not feel that this should be a barrier between us but there seems to be the need for final clarification." (letter December 14, 1988)

The CEIR pointed out that, when the Blue Bell congregation had decided to accept the Three Forms of Unity as its secondary standards and the Church Order of Dordt as its form of government, the presbytery of Philadelphia, upon request of the Reformation Church at Blue Bell, could have arranged for an orderly transition to the confederation of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

Our Committee received this for information and emphasized the limits of its mandate and furthermore the responsibility of the churches in classis Ontario South (pp. 5-6).

Ecumenical relations

Gratitude and appreciation was expressed for the manner in which the OPC withdrew from the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES). See the full statement of resignation of the OPC from the RES (June 10, 1988) elsewhere in this issue.

With respect to the relationship that the OPC has with the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), our Committee expressed concern.

Presently the OPC and the CRC send fraternal delegates to each other's assemblies, work together on certain issues, comment on each other's practices and cautiously exchange pulpits Our Committee expressed concern that the OPC has too optimistic a view of the CRC.

The brothers of the CEIR explained that in reality they do not have too optimistic a view of the CRC. In fact they have experienced the very same thing as our churches, namely, that the CRC is not receptive to warnings and exhortations. If the OPC presently did not have a fraternal relationship with the CRC, they would not start one. But they have such a relationship and are maintaining it for the sake of the many believers who are still in the CRC (p.7).

Regarding the relationship that the OPC has with the Canadian Reformed Churches, we read, "The OPC brothers pleaded that we continue the contact which our churches have together because they, the OPC, feel very much enriched by our Reformed background and they believe that it is the Lord Jesus Christ's command to seek ecclesiastical union where there is a unity of faith" (p.7).

What follows now are the Committee's evaluations and recommendations as found on pages 7-10 of their report. (C.V.D.)

Evaluation

Evaluating the present situation, our Committee recommends to maintain the ecclesiastical contact of the Canadian Reformed Churches with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

1. The fact that the OPC has the Westminster Standards and a Presbyterian church government can not be a reason for terminating this contact. Reformed churches have always acknowledged faithful Presbyterian churches as churches of the Lord Jesus Christ. Our previous Committee gave an evaluation of the confessional and church political divergencies and came to a similar conclusion. This evaluation was received by the previous synod as the argument for the statement of General Synod 1977 that these divergencies "do not form an impediment to recognize the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as churches of the Lord Jesus Christ."

This decision of 1977 has never been revoked and still governs our present relation with the OPC.

2. The previous Committee considered that the General Assembly "has not allowed deviation from their standards, nor has it sanctified heresy such as would require to break off our relations with the OPC" (Acts 1986, p.136).

The present Committee is of the same opinion after the 53rd and 54th General Assemblies.

3. Our membership in the International Conference of Reformed Churches and the recognition of its basis leads to the same conclusion. Divergencies between Reformed confessions and church orders of the European continent and those of Great Britain do not form an impediment for this Council either. Therefore, it is consistent to maintain ecclesiastical contact with the OPC in April 1989 and to act as host of delegates of e.g. the Free Church of Scotland and of observers of the OPC in June 1989.
4. Although modest, the ecclesiastical contact with the OPC reminds us of the greatness of the ongoing church gathering work of our Lord Jesus Christ. We need these contacts: they may keep us free from sectarianism. Termination of the ecclesiastical contact with the OPC (and of the membership of the ICRC for that matter) would impoverish the Canadian Reformed Churches.
5. Our Committee speaks of *modest* contacts with the OPC. Their confederation and ours are small in number and sparsely spread over the vast North American continent. Moreover, our contacts are limited. We should not expect too much from the mutual influence on the life of the churches of Christ in these two confederations, neither do we have to be overly afraid of some imperfect expressions or practices.

In this context the Committee also reminds the churches of Art. 50 of our Church Order: "With foreign Churches of Reformed confession a sister-Church relationship shall be maintained as much as possible. On minor points of Church Order and ecclesiastical practice Churches abroad shall not be rejected."

While Art. 50 speaks of sister-Church relationship, we are here still dealing with a more limited relationship of ecclesiastical contact as defined by Synod 1977.

6. As far as the membership of the OPC in the RES is concerned, our Committee recommends that our General Synod 1989 gratefully acknowledges the Scriptural witness that the OPC delegates have given within the RES—especially with respect to the apostasy in the synodical Reformed Churches in the Netherlands—, the exemplary manner in which they have spoken the truth in love (Ephesians 4) and the clear manner in which they finally terminated their membership in the RES.

The Canadian Reformed delegates should convey this acknowledgement to the ICRC in Vancouver 1989 and recommend to receive the OPC wholeheartedly, if they would apply for membership after the Vancouver meeting.

As far as the relationship with the CRC is concerned, the CEIR repeated the statement that there are no plans to strengthen this historic bond, while our Committee again declared that it is a stumbling-block on the road to full correspondence. We urged the brothers at least to use their limited contact for a stronger testimony against the tendency within the CRC of following the lead of the (synodical) GKN.

In regard to the relationship with the PCA [Presbyterian Church in America, cf. *Clarion* (Jan. 2, 1989) p.7, C.V.D.] the following remarks can be made: the CEIR understood that our official contact with the OPC is not transferable to another body. It is clear that this relation to the PCA is one of the most important issues for the OPC at the moment. It was especially with a view to this relationship that the 1987 General Assembly affirmed the statement "Biblical Principles of the Unity of the Church." At present the PCA has stipulated that certain principles of ecumenical relations be approved by both churches before further action on union may be taken. In the meantime some sessions and ministers have chosen locally or individually to realign with the PCA.

On the other hand there is the relationship of the OPC with the Reformed Presbyterians (the "Covenanters"). Some brothers in the OPC would rather strengthen the bond with the Reformed Presbyterians than with the PCA.

Our General Synod could again advise the Canadian Reformed Churches to remember the OPC in their prayers as they struggle to come to a decision in these matters. In this time of

trial for the OPC the Canadian Reformed Churches should use the opportunities given to support and assist the OPC in their search for ecclesiastical union in the unity of faith, wherever and whenever possible.

7. The Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations requested a discussion and critique on the OPC statement "Biblical Principles of the Unity of the Church." Our Committee complied with this request. In the combined meeting of January 1989 both papers were discussed. The CEIR would like to continue this discussion. They promised to give a response to our remarks and to consider changing some expressions in their statement. This response would be one of the agenda items in the meeting planned for February 1990. In this discussion several issues of mutual concern, mentioned in the decision of our 1986 General Synod will again play a role. The Canadian Reformed Churches first requested this discussion, then entered into it and may not abandon it prematurely now that the CEIR is eager to pursue it.
8. Our Committee would like to urge our Canadian Reformed Churches to be patient. Some may be inclined to break off ecclesiastical contact, if within a few years and after some discussions it does not lead to "the sister-Church relationship" of Art. 50 C.O. or the "full correspondence" of which the rules for ecclesiastical contact speak.

Should we not be aware of the fact that these rules for ecclesiastical contact also speak of "continued discussions" as the means to reach full correspondence?

Further, we may remind the churches of the fact that since 1965, when the Canadian Reformed Churches requested the OPC to start discussions with them, we could thankfully note that some major barriers for establishing such a sister-Church relationship have been removed. In 1973 the OPC decided to terminate the sister-Church relationship with the GKN (the synodical churches in the Netherlands). In 1975 an invitation from the same churches to enter into the relationship of "churches in ecclesiastical fellowship" was declined "in view of the fact that the reasons leading to the decision of 1973 are still valid" (Minutes 42nd General Assembly). In 1988 the OPC terminated its longstanding membership in the RES.

In our last meeting the CEIR was receptive to our plea to use their contact with the Christian Reformed Church for a stronger testimony against the tendency of following the unscriptural lead of the (synodical) GKN.

Finally, should we not also remember the fact that discussions between e.g. our sister churches in the Netherlands and the "Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken" have taken decades? These are confederations of churches with the same three Forms of Unity and the same Church Order of Dordt. Even if we would entertain similar discussions with the Free Reformed Churches of North America, we would have to exercise similar patience. How much more is this requirement of patience and endurance needed in a relationship as that of the Canadian Reformed Churches to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The gathering of God's Church is not a matter of a few years.

Recommendations

On the basis of this evaluation the Committee recommends that General Synod 1989 of the Canadian Reformed Churches decide

1. to acknowledge gratefully the Scriptural witness that the OPC delegates have given within the RES—especially with respect to the apostasy in the synodical Reformed Churches in the Netherlands—, the exemplary way in which they have spoken the truth in love (Ephesians 4) and the clear manner in which they finally terminated the membership of the OPC in the Reformed Ecumenical Council.
3. to convey this acknowledgement to the International Conference of Reformed Churches in Vancouver 1989 and to

recommend that it receive the OPC wholeheartedly, if they apply for membership.

4. to receive the statement on "Biblical Principles of Church Unity," affirmed by the 1987 General Assembly of the OPC, and the written remarks made by the Committee.
5. to continue the Committee with the mandate
 - a. to maintain the contact with the OPC taking into account the rules for "Ecclesiastical Contact";
 - b. to include in the "continued discussions" on "issues of mutual concern" (Synod 1977, p.42) the statement on "Biblical Principles of Church Unity";
 - c. to send the report 1989 of the Committee and the decision of Synod to the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations of the OPC and to the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad of "De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland";
 - d. to serve the following General Synod with a report, to be sent to the churches at least three months before the beginning of this Synod.
6. to advise the churches to remember the OPC in prayer that God may give insight with respect to the principles and practice of the unity of His Church.

Conclusion OPC report 1988

Coming to a conclusion the committee is aware of the fact that some in the Canadian Reformed Churches want to terminate the contact with the OPC.

Frankly addressing this issue, the committee makes the following remarks:

1. The fact that the OPC has the Westminster Standards and a presbyterian church government should not be a reason for terminating the contact. Reformed churches have always acknowledged faithful presbyterian churches as churches of the Lord

Jesus Christ. Our previous committee gave an evaluation of the confessional and church political divergencies and came to a similar conclusion. This evaluation was received by the previous synod as the argument for the statement of General Synod 1977 that these divergencies "do not form an impediment to recognize the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as churches of the Lord Jesus Christ."

This decision of 1977 has never been revoked and still governs our present relation with the OPC.

2. Our membership in the International Council of Reformed Churches and the recognition of its basis leads into the same direction. Divergencies between Reformed confessions and church orders of the European continent and of Great Britain do not form an impediment for this Council either. Therefore, it would be inconsistent to break off contact with the OPC in April 1989 and to act as host of delegates of e.g. the Free Church of Scotland and of observers of the OPC in June 1989.
3. Termination of the ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC (and of the membership of the ICRC for that matter) would impoverish the Canadian Reformed Churches. These modest contacts remind us of the greatness of the ongoing church gathering work of our Lord Jesus Christ. We need these contacts: they may keep us free from sectarianism.
4. Our Committee speaks of *modest* contacts with the OPC. Their confederation and ours are small in number. This becomes certainly clear if we compare their numbers to the millions of people in the United States and Canada who call themselves Christians. Moreover, our contacts are very limited. We should not expect too much of mutual influence on the life of the churches of Christ in these two confederations. As long as we consciously can accept one another as churches of Christ nobody in the two confederations does have to be overly afraid of contamination with some less desirable expressions or practices (the "issues of mutual concern").
5. Our Committee received the mandate to continue the contacts about the relationships which the OPC entertains with others expressing the following concerns:

**"... that they may
all be one;
... so that the
world may believe
that Thou hast
sent Me."**

John 17:21

- a. that the relationship of the OPC with the CRC and their membership in the RES remain stumbling-blocks in reaching full correspondence;
- b. that in the event that the OPC joins and is received into the PCA the official contact with the OPC is not transferable to the PCA (Acts 1986, Art. 128).

The Committee expressed these concerns by sending the Acts 1986 to the CEIR of the OPC and by discussing these issues in the meeting of January 1989.

As far as the membership in the RES is concerned, our Committee recommends that our General Synod 1989 gratefully acknowledges the Scriptural witness that the OPC delegates have given within the RES—especially with respect to the apostasy in the synodical Reformed Churches in the Netherlands—the exemplary way in which they have spoken the truth in love (Ephesians 4) and the clear manner in which they finally terminated their membership in the RES (See the Appendix).

The Canadian Reformed delegates should convey this acknowledgement to the ICRC in Vancouver 1989 and recommend to receive the OPC wholeheartedly, if they would apply for membership after Vancouver.

As far as the relationship with the CRC is concerned, the CEIR repeated the statement that there are no plans to strengthen this historic bond, while our Committee again declared that it is a stumbling-block on the road to full correspondence. We urged the brothers at least to use their limited contact for a stronger testimony against the tendency within the CRC to follow the lead of the (synodical) GKN.

In regard to the relationship with the PCA the following remarks can be made: The CEIR understood that our official contact with the OPC is not transferable to another body. It is clear that this relation to the PCA is one of the most important issues for the OPC at the moment. It was especially with a view to this relationship that the 1987 General Assembly affirmed the statement *Biblical Principles of the Unity of the Church*. At present the PCA has stipulated that certain principles of ecumenical relations be approved by both churches before further action on union may be taken. In the meantime some sessions and ministers have chosen locally or individually to realign with the PCA.

On the other hand there is the relation to the Reformed Presbyterians (the "Covenanters"). Some brothers in the OPC would rather strengthen the bond with the Reformed Presbyterians than with the PCA.

Our General Synod could again advise the Canadian Reformed Churches to remember the OPC in their prayers as they struggle to come to a decision. But precisely this time of trial for the OPC is not a time in which the Canadian Reformed Churches should even consider to terminate the limited relation of ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC.

6. The Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations requested a discussion and critique of the OPC statement *Biblical Principles of the Unity of the Church*. Our Committee complied with this request (see Appendix). In the combined meeting of

January 1989 both papers were discussed. The CEIR would like to continue this discussion. They promised to give a response to our remarks and to consider changing some expressions in their statement. This response would be one of the agenda items in the meeting planned for February 1990. In this discussion several issues of mutual concern, mentioned in the decision of our 1986 General Synod, play a role. The Canadian Reformed Churches first requested this discussion, then entered into it and may not abandon it prematurely now that the CEIR is eager to pursue it.

7. The CEIR asked us for "any further information about the Blue Bell situation so that we may try to put the matter to rest. Apparently a point of interest is the question of schism on the part of the Blue Bell congregation, whether your classis received them without consultation with our presbytery, and if so, whether your churches thus fostered the alleged schism. We do not feel that this should be a barrier between us but there seems to be a need for final clarification."

In discussing this point our Committee emphasized the limits of its mandate and of the available information and further the responsibility of the churches in classis Ontario South. The CEIR pointed out that, when the Blue Bell congregation had decided to accept the Three Forms of Unity as its secondary standards and the Church Order of Dordt as its form of government, the presbytery of Philadelphia could have arranged for an orderly transition to the confederation of the Canadian Reformed Churches. The Committee received this for information and would like to remind the churches that the ecclesiastical relationship with the OPC obliges us to an orderly conduct with respect to congregations in the two federations.

According to the mandate of Synod 1986 our Committee used the discussion of the Blue Bell controversy to convey the concerns of the Canadian Reformed Churches with respect to the doctrine of the covenant, confessional membership, ecclesiology and the autonomy of the local church. They did so by especially dealing with the issue of the fencing of the Lord's table.

The CEIR reminded us again of the clear statements of the Westminster Confession (XXIX.8), the Form of Government (XII.7) and the Directory for Worship (V.4), quoted in our evaluation of the Hofford Complaint (Acts 1986, p.133). They explained that local sessions use different methods to prevent the Lord's Table from being profaned. They stressed that Holy Scripture does not prescribe one specific method. 1 Corinthians 11:28 ("Let a man examine *himself*") emphasizes the personal responsibility.

Our Committee covered basically the areas, mentioned in our previous report:

- a. The need for direct supervision of guests by the overseers who should determine who may attend the Lord's Table.
- b. The desirability for using (travel-) attestations.
- c. The need to see to it that certain conditions are met by guests who are to be admitted to the Lord's Table.
- d. The need for corporate responsibility with respect to attendance at the Lord's Supper.

In connection with the last point we asked when and whence the difference between the methods in e.g. the Free Church of Scotland and the OPC came about. One may think of the old system of handing out "tokens" for admission to the Lord's Supper. We also wondered whether the variety in methods within the OPC and the most frequently used method of issuing only a general warning is not due to the influence of American individualism. The personal responsibility, expressed in 1 Corinthians 11 does not exclude the corporate responsibility as 1 Corinthians 5 shows.

However, the previous Committee considered that in "the Hofford Case" the General Assembly has not allowed deviation from their standards, nor has it sanctified heresy such as would require to break off our relations with the OPC" (Acts 1986, p.136).

The present Committee is of the same opinion. With respect to this issue of the fencing of the Lord's Table it also reminds the churches of Art. 50 of our Church Order: "With

CHURCH NEWS

CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCH OF ELORA, ON

The time of the afternoon Worship Service will be changed from 3:00 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. effective April 2, 1989.

* * *

CALLED to Chilliwack, BC

REV. M.H. VAN LUIK of Watford, ON

* * *

ACCEPTED to Neerlandia, AB, and DECLINED to Edmonton, AB (Providence)

REV. G. WIESKE of Lincoln, ON

foreign Churches of Reformed confession a sister-Church relationship shall be maintained as much as possible. On minor points of Church Order and ecclesiastical practice Churches abroad shall not be rejected.”

8. While Art. 50 speaks of sister-Church relationship, we are here still dealing with a more limited relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship as defined by Synod 1977.

In this context the Committee would like to warn the Canadian Reformed Churches against the danger of impatience. Some may be inclined to break off ecclesiastical fellowship, if within a few years and after some discussions it does not lead to the sister-Church relationship of which Art. 50 C.O. speaks.

Should we not be aware of the fact that discussions between e.g. our sister churches in the Netherlands and the “Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken” have taken decades? These are confederations of churches with the same three Forms of Unity and the same Church Order of Dordt. Even if we would entertain similar discussions with the Free Reformed Churches of North America, we would have to exercise similar patience. How much more is this requirement if patience and endurance needed in a relationship as that of the Canadian Reformed Churches to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The Church of God is not completely built up in a few years.

Coming to a conclusion, the Committee proposes that

General Synod 1989 of the Canadian Reformed Churches decide

1. to thank the Committee for Contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church for the fulfillment of its mandate.
2. to gratefully acknowledge the Scriptural witness that the OPC delegates have given within the RES—especially with respect to the apostasy in the synodical Reformed Churches in the Netherlands—, the exemplary way in which they have spoken the truth in love (Ephesians 4) and the clear manner in which they finally terminated the membership of the OPC in the Reformed Ecumenical Council.
3. to continue the Committee with the mandate to maintain the contact with the OPC taking into account the rules for “Ecclesiastical Contact” which include “continued discussion on ‘issues of mutual concern’.”
4. to receive the statement on *Biblical Principles of Church Unity*, affirmed by the 1987 General Assembly of the OPC, and the written remarks made by the Committee, and to charge the Committee to continue this issue of mutual concern.
5. to advise the churches to remember the OPC in prayer that God may give insight with respect to the principles and practice of the unity of His Church.

STATEMENT OF RESIGNATION OF THE OPC FROM THE RES, JUNE 10, 1988

Mr. Moderator,

The General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church has given its delegation to this synod full authority to act on behalf of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church at this meeting of the RES. We therefore speak on behalf of our denomination.

First of all, we wish to express our deep appreciation for the blessings that God has given us over a period of nearly 40 years, as members of the RES. We have experienced a wonderfully enriching fellowship with believers from all parts of the world. Our horizon has been increased, and we have learned much. Relationships have been established over these years, and we hope that we may continue some of them in the years ahead. So much have we valued this fellowship that nothing could bring us to relinquish it but the strong conviction that we must do so in order to be faithful to the Word of God.

We leave because of the persistence of the (synodical) GKN in holding positions well known to the RES over a period of 25 years, that the RES has judged to be out of accord with Scripture and because the RES is unwilling to enforce its own qualifications for membership. We leave also because for us to remain in an organization that harbors a church in such a condition as the GKN so implicates our church in its sin that we have no choice but to separate ourselves from it.

We have now become *another* church that feels itself forced out of the RES by the Synod’s decision to continue the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (GKN) in the RES membership, and we hereby resign the membership of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church from the RES, effective immediately. Until yesterday we could not leave the RES because of conscience; today we cannot remain because of conscience.

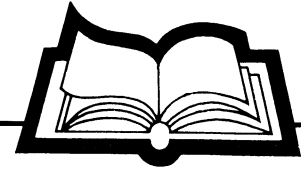
But we assure you, Mr. Moderator, that we do not leave this organization in pride or bitterness. We are too sinful ourselves to be proud, and because God is sovereign we

cannot be bitter. We are all losers because of the decision yesterday. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church loses because we shall not have the benefit of the close fellowship with many of you who want to be faithful to the gospel and the Reformed Confessions. The GKN loses because it has been deprived of the blessing of much needed correction. And the RES loses because it has again demonstrated its unwillingness to maintain the Basis which requires member churches to “profess and maintain” the Reformed faith, has lost its credibility as a Reformed body, and thus becomes more akin to such organizations as the WARC and the WCC. Yet we know that though we lose, Christ the king of the church, will triumph.

We wish you to know that we do not depart with an inward-looking focus. Our zeal for international ecumenicity among Reformed churches worthy of the name is stronger than ever. And we can assure you that we will seek, now, in some other way to have such fellowship. If the RES should, in future days, return to a credible maintenance of its Basis we would certainly feel obliged to consider returning.

We close with some pastoral advice which we hope the RES will be willing to receive. The RES must face up to the enormity of what it has done and is doing to churches seeking to be faithful to the Word of God as the RES by its decisions, *not* the GKN, has forced nine or ten churches, *so far*, out of the RES and has kept other faithful churches from joining. And you must face up to your responsibility to member churches to keep the disease that infects the GKN from spreading to those churches. Some of them live in fear of that spread, and we plead with you to help protect them from it.

Mr. Moderator, we shall continue to pray for all the churches that remain with sincere love in our hearts. We hope that you will understand that we cannot participate further in the schedule of this Assembly. As others have already said, we bid you farewell, may God help you — and us.



By J. De Jong

“For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered Him up.”

Matthew 27:18

The Bottom Line

It did not take all that much questioning before Pilate understood why the Jews had brought Jesus to him. He had found no fault with Jesus, and saw no reason in Him why He was brought to trial. But the reason was written all over the faces of His hostile accusers. Pilate — who had no training in the divine law — saw that *envy* lay at the bottom of the charges against Jesus.

Envy is a sin with a two-fold character. On the one hand, one desires to have some advantage, gift or possession of another; on the other hand, one is resentful because of the possessions and gifts of another. Envy implies that one desires to have what another has; at the same time one is angry because he does not have it. Envy is classically defined as “a secret repining at the welfare of another.” Here it had become public, and clear enough for the secular Pilate to recognize it immediately.

Envy is a sin found on the first pages of the Bible. It is also defined in our creed as the “root of murder” (Lord’s Day 40). Envy lay at the root of Cain’s murder of Abel. Cain desired to have the special privileges that Abel had; and yet he was resentful against Abel because Abel had something he had to do without. So it was with the Jews of Christ’s day, His accusers before Pilate. They recognized that He was a special Son of God’s favour, and they desired what He had; on the other hand, they were bitter and resentful against Him, because He had something not given to them. They rejected the absolute claims inherent in His office, and what those claims called them to do. They claimed that *they* were God’s chosen sons.

Scripture draws a two-fold line with regard to envy’s two-fold character. One line shows that one desires something that is withheld from him. That is the line of God’s *decree*. The LORD had regard for Abel’s offering, but no regard for Cain’s offering, Genesis 4:4. Even if Cain had believed, he would have had to recognize special gifts and favours given to Abel which were withheld from him. Just as Ishmael was called to place himself in true faith in subservience to Isaac and his offspring, so Cain was to submit himself to God’s special choosing of Abel.

To Cain the call to faith was offered. God said, “If you do well, will you not be accepted?” Genesis 4:7. But here we see a second line in Scripture, the line of human *responsibility*. Cain refused to acknowledge special privileges given to Abel. He was the firstborn, was he not? So he became resentful because of God’s special gifts and privileges given

to Abel, and he became so angry at him that he murdered him. John says, “And why did he kill him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother’s righteous.” 1 John 3:12.

This is the sin of the beginning, and it returns here at this most dramatic moment in which the Son of God stands before the judgment seat of the world. The Jews rail at Christ because they denounce the God-given honours bestowed on Him. Pilate recognizes the envy. But what does he do? He falls into the same sin. For he cannot tolerate the idea of a Jew having a kingdom greater than Caesar’s or more powerful than his own. He begins to sport with Jesus and the Jews because of his intense contempt and hatred for their special privileges and special claims to divine revelations. And when Pilate hands Him over to be crucified, anyone can see that envy has won the day.

But this envy, too, has a two-fold line: on the one hand, Pilate remains responsible for his sin, the sin that shows the sin of the world, and our sin as well. On the other hand, what happened shows God’s decree for our salvation. So Peter says that Jesus was “delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God,” Acts 2:23, so that by faith in His name we might have eternal life. Envy is the sin that brought Him to death. But sin never wins the day! This envy is exposed for what it is in the death of Jesus, and at the same time, God gives a way of deliverance from this sin through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and through the proclamation of life in His name! Envy is the bottom line in the murder of Christ. But the mercy and love of God for the world is the bottom line in Christ’s resurrection! That is why this is the sprinkled blood, “that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel,” Hebrews 12:24.

We may share the proclamation of the risen One to this very day! By God’s free choice, we, too, may be partakers of His blessings. He gives His word to us daily according to the riches of His sovereign grace, and according to the means He has ordained. But the dangers of evil are still present with us. Sin lies couching at the door, and envy can still take possession of us. Has it not been shown to be in our nature? And this affects not simply our relationship to our fellowmen, but especially to God who freely gives gifts to men.

Let us who are called to the table of life be diligent to make our call and election sure. How? By resisting sin at the door. And by acknowledging openly the honours bestowed on the Son of God because of His sacrifice for us. If we do this we may know that we will never fall!





By W.W.J. VanOene

At first I thought, "Let us go alphabetically this time," but then I considered that this might mean a jumping back and forth across the country with little connection between the one paragraph and the other. Thus the plan was abandoned.

The multitude of advertisements for applicants to fill the position of teacher received sufficient attention in a previous *Clarion* and for this reason we shall not talk about it this time. The matter itself came to the attention, however, via a piece in the *Church Herald* of the Elora/Fergus churches.

A meeting was scheduled, we read there, "at Credo elementary school in Brampton to discuss the feasibility of instituting a secondary school serving the Canadian Reformed Churches in the areas northwest of Toronto. Guido de Brès High School in Hamilton is outgrowing its facilities and an ad hoc committee is considering a major expansion to meet the expected student growth for the next ten years. By that time the student population is expected to double."

However much we are to express our gratitude for the growth and for the taking care of future needs, I have serious questions here.

It is a well-known fact that I am a fervent opponent of centralization and concentration. Not much good of this has been experienced in the course of history.

This was also one of the reasons why a high school was established in Guelph which, unfortunately only for a few years, taught up to grade twelve. Lack of teachers compelled the board to reduce the number of grades so that for the higher grades the students had to attend other high schools in order to receive their complete secondary education.

It was and still is the endeavour of the board and society to return to the early situation: our society provides schooling for all of the elementary and secondary years. The acquired property provides sufficient room for a high school building and action in this respect has been undertaken.

Now I read of an ad hoc committee which is "considering a major expansion." Am I to understand that this is a committee which has ties with the Guido de Brès High School? The word "expansion" certainly gives this impression. I shall be most happy if I am mistaken in my conclusion, but if I am not, I express grave concern.

My impression was strengthened when I read the following paragraph:

"Please read the ad hoc report as published in the last issue of the Guido De Brès magazine, under the principal's report, in preparation of this meeting A member of the committee will be present at the meeting For the Toronto local board, Guido de Brès, (w.s.) A."

If another high school is to be established, fine, beautiful, a thing to be applauded and to be thankful for.

But existing high schools should keep their fingers out of this pie and only provide advice when asked for it. Perhaps teachers can be shared if the one school does not have a sufficient number of hours in a particular subject to provide a proper position and salary, so that both the financial obligations and the benefits can be shared, but this is a different story.

This will be a question of consultation between two *existing* schools or societies.

May the above be an element to be considered in the further discussions.

We mentioned Elora. There the committee of administration came with a report about a property, and the consistory

discussed it with the congregation. Result? "The consistory has instructed the committee of administration to take steps which are necessary to obtain this property." Another way of raising money is hereby passed on. The *Church Herald* tells us "As most people have heard by now, we have been going in to clean the windows and hallways once a week for the last month. They have asked us to continue this through the month of February. For every half day we come in we make \$120.00." The windows and hallways are those of a condominium.

In nearby Orangeville a "discussion is held on how we can improve our singing of some unknown tunes." The consistory was to bring this point to a congregational meeting.

The Town's Planning Advisory Committee was told that "The manse is allowed under the institutional designation." A hearing was scheduled for March, but no difficulties are anticipated.

Coming to Burlington, we first pass on with regret what Rev. Mulder wrote in the bulletin of Burlington West, that the Rev. D. De Jong of Burlington East has requested early retirement as of September 1, 1989, and such for health reasons. At the classis Ontario North of March 10th the request was to be dealt with and, as the consistory already acknowledged the necessity, the sister churches will accede to the request as well, we trust.

This is the fourth minister in our midst who has to be relieved of his duties for health reasons. The previous ones were the Revs. G.Ph. Pieffers, W. Loopstra and H. Scholten who, after their early retirement, received still quite a few years from the Lord. It is our sincere wish that Rev. DeJong's health may also improve when he has been relieved of the pressures of the office and that the Lord will give him, too, more years. Perhaps he will still be able to help out on Sundays, and this will be quite a help already.

Meanwhile, this means another vacancy coming up in the churches, a vacancy which comes earlier than anticipated.

Rev. Mulder also told the congregation something about the discussions which our committee had with the committee of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. "Another time perhaps more about the contents of the discussions. Or should we arrange a special 'congregational meeting' some time in March to preview and discuss some matters which will be dealt with in our forthcoming general synod?"

This sounds like an excellent idea. In the previous medley we already deplored the fact that so little is known among our people of the matters which will be dealt with at the Synod of Winnipeg. It is a good thing when ministers who have access to the proposals which have come in and to the provisional agendas which have been received tell our membership about these things.

Burlington South's bulletin reveals that the Board of Governors of the Theological College "is recommending that there be a rotating principalship as of January 1, 1990."

In the same bulletin we read that the committee of administration "reports that the rental agreement for the current year has been signed and returned and that the rent has not changed."

Another time we mentioned the course "A Gift from Heaven" which was to be made available for all who are interested in it. Burlington South informs us that thus far ten requests for this course have been received. A meeting will be held of all members in that region who have expressed their

willingness to answer questions which may come in and to check written work.

Another worthwhile item is that "also 'The Voice of the Church' is now broadcasting over seven radio stations."

In this connection we do have to make a jump to the other end of the country, namely to the Fraser Valley. The *Church News* contains a piece from the Broadcasting Committee in which we are told that the one half-hour broadcast will be changed to two fifteen-minute programs and that contact has been taken up with the Ontario committee in order to see where cooperation would be possible and what could be achieved by united efforts. For a little over three years the Committee received the cooperation of the Reformed Broadcasting Association in the Netherlands, but apparently it is felt that we should work with programs which are put together here, in our own country.

And now to Burlington East.

Rev. D. DeJong wrote in the bulletin: "It may interest you to know that, the Lord willing, from February till September, I may solemnize ten weddings so far of the eleven planned in our congregation. By way of comparison, in the past six years the average number was six weddings per year, about half of them solemnized by me."

In Burlington East they are more successful in obtaining subsidy for an elevator than they were in Lincoln. Burlington East's bulletin contained the following news: "From the Minister responsible for Disabled Persons, a letter informing us that our request for a grant from the Access Fund Program has been approved in the amount of \$23,163.00. This grant is to be used for the installation of an elevator and making two washrooms available."

In Lincoln, on the other hand, the request for a grant for the elevator was turned down. "A. There was a heavy response to this program, hence they had to be more selective; B. there was a lack of programs for the general community occurring in our church (e. g. bingo, scouts, local AA meetings)" In spite of this, Lincoln expects the elevator to be operational in May.

Let no one draw the conclusion from this that in Burlington East they do have "bingo, scouts, local AA meetings." They don't as far as I am aware!

It is not all that long ago that it was a common conviction among us that the Church should pay its own way and that subsidy from the authorities in every form was taboo. Also in the Netherlands ample discussions were held about the question "Subsidy or Not?"

Gradually the tide seems to have turned, and now all sorts of subsidies are being accepted in the old country as well, even for the erection of church buildings.

I do not dare to say that it is wrong to ask for and accept all sorts of subsidies, especially not for such worthwhile projects as elevators for handicapped members, and so on. However, I question whether the danger of such subsidies is seen and realized among us and whether it would not be better to "pay our own way" so as to retain the independence of the Church of Christ and to show that we are different from all sorts of organizations which almost push each other over in order to be able to draw from the common trough.

I am afraid that in more than one respect the socialist line of thought has made inroads into the church; we are to be aware of this and to watch out for it, taking care that we do not fall into this trap, for a trap it is.

The total of the Lincoln "Cash for Trash" stands at \$17,118.00. I like that much better.

Nearby Smithville decided "not to introduce the singing of the Apostles' Creed at this time. In our midst it is an issue on which the opinions are quite divided. It has been suggested to discuss it at a congregational meeting."

I fully appreciate the carefulness and caution of the consistory and agree that we are to do our best to prevent division

in the congregation. As was done in other congregations, too, so Smithville will discuss it at a congregational meeting. Splendid.

On the other hand, however, we are to prevent that we are being blackmailed or "held hostage" by a few members who threaten with all sorts of actions or who, by their attitude, render things miserable for the rest of the congregation. I do not say that this is the case in Smithville. I do not know the situation there. But I do know that in the past I myself did let such a blackmailing attitude determine the course to be followed in more than one respect, and I deplore this. If I had to do it again, I would not give in, *for the sake of the congregation*.

We are to prevent difficulties, for the sake of the congregation, but we are also to refuse to let ourselves be pushed into a corner, and this *for the sake of the very same congregation*. One or two members, sufficiently vociferous, can hold up progress for a considerable time and thus do much damage to the congregation.

Forgive this brief "meditation" on the occasion of Smithville's decision regarding the *Credo*.

On the other hand, there is Hamilton, where it was decided that "Hymn 1A will be sung in the afternoon services on alternate Sundays." A gratifying development, as you will understand.

Also in Hamilton, the Committee of Administration provided "recommendations to enlarge the consistory room and to provide better nursery facilities and an improved classroom for catechism instruction." This will be most welcome.

In many congregations there are Vacation Bible Schools. It is always a question how to keep contact with the children from outside who attended such sessions. The Evangelism Committee of Hamilton reported that "since summer and our Vacation Bible School, we have maintained contact with the children and their parents by means of regular newsletters; the *Mini-Link* for the children and the magazine *Evangel* for the parents."

Back in Smithville, we learn that "Your minister and his family have received oral confirmation that visas for Australia will be forthcoming."

Don't shout "Hurray!" too soon, though.

The Kelmscott section of the bulletin of the Western Australia Churches in the Perth area has some discouraging information: "Daughter A. may have to apply individually and separately."

And in the *Church News* of the Fraser Valley, Dr. J. Visscher, writing about the visa applications by the Jake Kuik family, has some disconcerting news. "May the experience of the Rev. C. Bosch family not unnerve you. (They had all of their papers relating to their immigration to Australia stolen. Most likely the consulate has duplicates, but if not, that's alright with us too. The time has come to reverse the Australian ministerial exodus — has it not? No racial or national slur intended.)"

I realize that by the time these lines reach our readers, it may be ancient news. Our previous medley, sent several weeks ago has not even been published yet.

Crossing over into Alberta, we visit Coaldale.

Coaldale's bulletin passed on a provision made by the Alberta Government which gives a person the right not to join a labour union when the practices and principles of the trade union are contrary to one's Christian beliefs. This is something for which we are to be very thankful.

Rev. Wielenga writes about the question which pops up once in a while when candidates for the office of elder or deacon have to be presented to the congregation. He writes under the heading "School and Nomination for Office."

"The Church Council has every year to deal with objections against the nomination of brothers for the office who choose and support another school rather than the one established and maintained by the members of our own congregation. Some members are of the opinion that such brothers

are not able to give leadership in the church and do not qualify for eldership.

"It may be helpful for the proper understanding of this issue to draw the attention to the following:

"1. Acts Synod Homewood-Carman 1968, Article 134;

"2. Reformed opinion in the past;

"3. Article 58 Church Order." Rev. Wielenga came to the conclusion that examination of the above three points results in the conclusion that brothers may not be barred for the sole reason that they support another school rather than the one established by members the congregation.

In order to prevent misunderstanding, he adds the note that "Personally, as a parent, I am very thankful for the Coaldale Christian School. Over the years, its confessional faithfulness and academic standards have been more than adequate. I do not hesitate to consider this school as a gift of the Lord to parents to help them in difficult times, to bring up their children in the ways of the Covenant."

It will be a well-known fact that I agree with Rev. Wielenga's conclusion, as may be evident from what I wrote in a genuine appeal to the Synod of Homewood-Carman in 1958, as well as from other writings in later years.

On the other hand, I find it difficult to understand that even after so many years there apparently are still brothers and sisters who prefer another school over and above the one established by members of our own congregations.

The question is not whether distance prevents them from sending their children; whenever there are compelling circumstances not to send the children to our own schools the question raised in the above should not even come up.

The situation has changed considerably since the early years when we had to do with makeshift facilities and when our teachers in many respects were faced with almost insurmountable difficulties, having to teach several grades and being remunerated in a manner which was nothing to write home about, although they probably did write "home" about it!

How things have changed, in every respect!

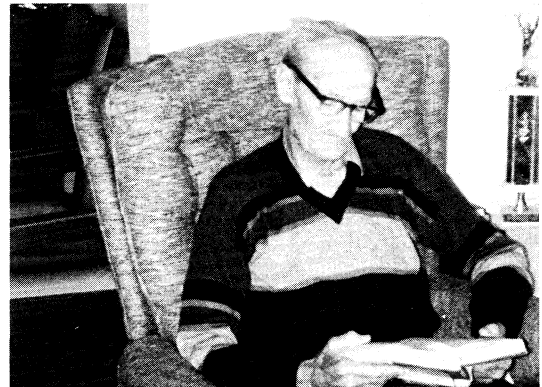
This is the more a reason why I cannot understand it when parents are not a member of our own school societies and do not send their children to our own schools. And, all things being equal or even a wee bit unequal, I certainly would vote for the brother who with me and the other parents, grandparents, and single members, has established and maintains schools where the whole instruction is based on the infallible, inerrant Word of our God, where the children are together with the same boys and girls with whom they gather together on Sundays. Does experience not teach the parents that, when their children attend other schools, there is the distinct possibility that their children are more or less left out on Sundays as well as from all sorts of activities in the midst of the congregation? They do their children more harm than good by choosing that course while another, proper course is open to them. Another "meditation," one might remark. Let it be so, as long as it does make clear where we stand.

Going up to Calgary, we pass on from the bulletin that at the consistory meeting an "Overture to General Synod re use of Dutch language in Synodical overtures, appeals, reports is read and approved. The consistory submits this overture because it has noticed continuing use of Dutch sources in synodical materials without proper English translation."

Speaking of bulletins, the consistory of the Immanuel Church in Edmonton held "an extensive discussion . . . concerning the bulletin, as to what should go in, as well as what should be handed out. The council favours the policy that the bulletin should contain only those matters directly related to our church life as congregation and to matters pertaining to our life as church in the federation. As far as things being handed out, this should be restricted to things like the Church News, Mission News, or PICS news. The reasoning for this is that the



95th Birthday



On February 26, Gerrit Noordhof celebrated his 95th birthday. He is the oldest member of the Chatham Canadian Reformed Church, and lives in a rest home in Ridgetown, ON. He immigrated to Canada in the twenties and lived most of the time in Ontario with a brief period in Saskatchewan. Four brothers who also came to Canada have passed away. One sister lives nearby. Even though he never married he feels blessed with "family" in the church. Widely read and with a very keen mind, he enjoys the visits of the brothers and sisters in the LORD, to their mutual enjoyment.

We wish him the LORD's blessing for the future.

Mr. G. Noordhof
The Village, 9 Myrtle Street
Ridgetown, ON N0P 2C0



bulletin should not be seen as a convenient tool, nor the worship services as a convenient occasion for all sorts of organizations and groups to promote and advertise their actions." Rev. Kampen wrote that they hoped to be able to move into the parsonage at the end of February. Hopefully this is a fact by the time our readers take note of this expectation.

From British Columbia's Bulkley Valley comes some Smithers news.

"The Acts of Classis Pacific October '88 have been scrutinized. There were no objections to the contents of these Acts."

Without wishing to ride a well-known horse, I point out various correct expressions in this brief piece of information.

There is a date with this classis, as is proper. That's how we should say it all the time.

Smithers does not speak of "meeting of classis," which would have been wrong.

And: Smithers solely scrutinized the Acts to see whether there was any action or decision by that Classis which were objectionable and had to be changed.

That is the proper way of "ratifying" the acts of a broader assembly.

The Smithers consistory also discussed "A proposal no longer to sing 'Heere Zie God' after the service on Christmas Day. Because of more and more 'English only' speaking people it is decided that this tradition will no longer be followed."

If I ever saw a justification for this decision, it was the manner in which the title of this "song" was spelled. Whoever was responsible for this spelling proved the point better than anyone else ever could do it.

We end our journey this time in the Fraser Valley plus Okanagan Valley. The *Church News* provided a few items.

Preparations are being made for the International Conference of Reformed Churches which will meet in Langley from June 20-29. Anywhere from 30-50 persons are expected to come for this Conference.

The Vernon consistory received an update "on the possibility of renting the Presbyterian churchbuilding." But at the congregational meeting, Rev. Van Sponen wrote, "ideas are already tossed back and forth about the possibilities of building our own facilities, rather than renting something else for the time being." This was occasioned by the fact that "the outstanding debt on the property is diminishing rapidly, thanks to the generosity of many."

"Encouraging, indeed."

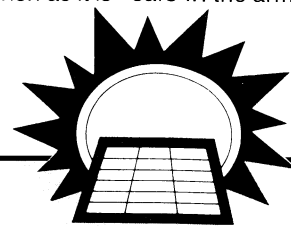
A while ago someone asked me why I never mentioned anything about the church this member belonged to.

I do not purposely leave out any congregation nor do I choose any specific church about which to mention something. I take things as they come every time.

If, therefore, "your" church is never mentioned, this is only because I do not receive its bulletin and therefore am unable to include it in our column. Very simple.

In closing, we wish to extend our heartfelt sympathy to the family of the Rev. P.K. Meijer, now that the baby they were expecting has been taken Home by the Lord. The sadness is there, of course, but the Lord has also relieved them of a great responsibility and a heavy task. Besides, they have the comfort that this child can never perish as it is "safe in the arms of Jesus."

RAY OF SUNSHINE



C

By Mrs. J. Mulder

*Set your mind on the things that are above,
not on the things that are on earth.*

Colossians 3:2

Dear brothers and sisters,

What does the apostle Paul mean with these words? Do we as members of the church have to withdraw ourselves from this world and distance ourselves from all worldly affairs?

The context shows clearly that this certainly is not Paul's intention.

In this letter Paul had warned the Colossians already against those teachers who said that Christ Jesus alone was not sufficient to be saved. He had told them that in order to gain the victory over sin and obtain the fullness of salvation, it would not be necessary to observe all kinds of outdated rules and regulations. For they had died with Christ, but they also were raised with Him to begin a new and clean life in the Lord.

Therefore Paul says, "do not seek the things that are on earth." Do not try to work your own salvation apart from the Lord Jesus Christ as some teachers urge you to do. For that is not only impossible, it would also be a great insult to Him who says, "Salvation is already yours, it is all in Me and through faith you have Me and all My benefits."

Seek the things that are above. Hold on to the Lord Jesus Christ who is now in heaven. Only in Him redemption from our sins and the renewal of our life is to be found.

Let your life be governed by Him!

Paul makes it very clear what that means for our everyday life.

"Things that are on earth" are: impurity, evil desire and covetousness, anger, wrath, slander, foul talk, lying to one another, putting up a nice front, being hypocritical.

"Things that are above" are: compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness and patience, forbearing one another and forgiving one another. As the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.

Put off those earthly things, and put on those things of above. Let the peace of Christ rule you. Let the Word of Christ dwell in you and let the Name of Christ direct your words and deeds.

We still have our daily struggle against our sinful nature. The "things that are on earth" come natural. The "things that are above" we have only through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. What we have in Christ should be used!

Then we may experience the powers of death every day. But the day will certainly come when Christ who is our life shall appear and the promise is that we then also will appear with Him in glory.

But I, when I awake, shall see
Thy face in righteousness and glory;
O with Thy likeness then before me,
How rich and full my joy shall be!

Psalm 17:6

From the mailbox

Mary VandeBurgt thanks all who sent her cards on her birthday. "I am now living in a nice girls group home in Clearbrook." I am happy to hear that you enjoy your new "home," Mary! Thank you for your letter.

Our birthday calendar for April:

DEREK KOK

160 Park Street, Strathroy, ON N7G 3V8
Derek hopes to celebrate his 19th birthday on April 2nd.

MARINUS FOEKENS

"Epic North" Communication Unit SW
Regional Centre, Box 1000, Blenheim, ON N0P 1A0
Marinus will be 37 years old on April 19th.

ARLENE DEWIT

Barnston Island, Surrey, BC V3T 4W2
Arlene's 28th birthday is on April 19.

Congratulations to all our April birthday people!

Who trusts in God, a strong abode
In heaven and earth possesses;
Who looks in love to Christ above,
No fear his heart oppresses.
In Thee alone, O Lord, we own
Our hope and consolation,
Our shield from foes, our balm for woes,
Our great and sure salvation.

Hymn 43

Greetings to you all from

MRS. J. MULDER

1225 Highway 5, RR 1
Burlington, ON L7R 3X4

THE OPC AND THE PCA: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

A written interview with the Rev. J.P. Galbraith

By C. Van Dam

One of the areas of interest to the Canadian Reformed Churches in their contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) is their relationship with the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). The PCA is a fast growing and dynamic church which has its origins in the 1973 secession from the liberal Presbyterian Church in the United States. In 1978 the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, joined the PCA. The OPC and the PCA however have not (as yet?) gotten together. There is no unanimity in the OPC on this issue. (See e.g. "The Realignment of some OPC congregations" in *Clarion*, January 2, 1989). Our Committee for Contact with the OPC gave ample attention to this matter in their report to General Synod Burlington 1986 (see Acts 1986, pp. 123ff.). In order to keep the readers of *Clarion* informed as much as possible, we are here publishing a written interview on this issue with the Rev. J.P. Galbraith, chairman of the OPC Committee on Ecumenicity and Inter-church Relations. We wish to take this opportunity to thank him for consenting to this interview and for preparing the responses to the questions that follow. (At a future date, we hope to hear also from an OPC spokesman on their no longer being involved with the Reformed Ecumenical Council.)

Question:

The last General Assembly of the OPC "reaffirmed its commitment to continue to move toward union with the PCA and instructed its Committee to continue to work diligently in that endeavor" (*New Horizons*, Aug.-Sept. 1988, p. 4).

Could you briefly summarize past attempts to such a union? Could you also summarize the reasons behind this commitment to move to a union with the PCA?

Answer:

The history of the endeavor to seek a union of the OPC and the PCA goes back many years — to even before the PCA was organized. It goes back to the historic OPC understanding of Scripture that the church that Christ purchased as His own peculiar possession is one

church. All those, we believe, who accept the first-promised-then-historic Saviour are members of His church. They are one in Him. We also believe that the fruits of the Spirit in God's people will manifest themselves in love for our brothers and sisters and seek to express our unity in Christ as fully as possible. We believe, further, that churches also should seek such unity in the faith; if churches' creeds express unity with those of other churches the churches should not be divided. In fact, if churches believe differently they have an obligation to search the Scriptures together to learn where they may be in error, seeking the "unity of the faith" of which Scripture speaks (Ephesians 4:13). These principles are stated in our document, *Biblical Principles of the Unity of the Church*.

It should be noted that unity and union are not synonymous. Unity expresses oneness in faith and life; union has to do with the joining of organizations. We must seek unity first, then union. One can have union without unity; one might even have union in order to have diversity, as in the case of the merger of corporations. The other side of the coin is that if there is unity, union should follow. That truth is manifest in such a denomination as your own — your congregations have a common commitment to your interpretation of God's Word (unity), so you form one body (union). Here a difficult question must be faced and dealt with: since no two believers, much less two churches, have precisely the same beliefs and practices in all details, there is diversity within each body, so then, How much diversity, and in what areas, is allowable?

The doctrine of the unity of Christ's church, then, moved us, on the basis of a perceived large measure of unity with the PCA, to seek a union of the OPC and the PCA. The movement took concrete form in 1980 when the PCA General Assembly sent a proposal to its presbyteries (i.e., classes) to invite the OPC and the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod (RPCES) to join the PCA. That is, the two churches would give up their standards and accept the PCA standards and be received into the PCA. (The

OPC and PCA doctrinal standards are identical, but the standards of government, discipline, and worship differ somewhat.) The OPC Assembly voted favorably in 1981, but before our presbyteries had voted the PCA presbyteries had disapproved; so our presbyteries did not vote, and the churches did not join. The PCA presbyteries approved reception of the RPCES, and they were received into the PCA. Since then various approaches have been made by each of the churches. At present the PCA has stipulated that certain principles of ecumenical relations be approved by both churches before further action on union may be taken.

I give you this background before answering your question because it is essential to an understanding of the action of our 1988 Assembly quoted in your question. Also, over the years as the two churches have learned more about each other, their perceptions have varied, and evaluations of union have swung back and forth.

Our principles of church unity require us not to ignore division — especially from those who seem to be closest to us — but to seek diligently to heal the breach. The General Assembly's action was neither more nor less than a reaffirmation of our duty to do that and an instruction to work with the PCA to try to bring about conditions, if they do not now exist, that would make union both mandatory and possible.

Question:

Why is there opposition to the union within the OPC? Could you summarize the differences that exist between the OPC and the PCA?

Answer:

I should like to respond to this question from the affirmative as well as the negative side. And I should indicate that it is not possible for one person to know what is on the mind of everyone else. Beside, there are many shadings of what may be the main points held by many people. With that understood I shall mention a few on each side. But I should em-

phasize that everyone wants to have union in order to further the unity of Christ's body.

Among reasons given for joining the PCA now are: it has the same Reformed doctrinal standards as the OPC; it is a larger, stronger, church and has a wider witness; it has a more active missions program and stresses church growth.

On the other side of the question, I should rather not refer to "opposition" — because everyone wants to work toward union — but to hesitancy, or not yet. Reasons for hesitancy relate, among other things, to: policy differences on government and discipline; a PCA policy of cooperation with non-Reformed parachurch agencies, especially in foreign missions; uncertainty as to the

PCA's priority of Reformed commitment *vis à vis* growth; the need to clarify these matters before joining; and the perception that the OPC simply joining the PCA before these matters are clarified means that while the PCA has nothing to lose the OPC will have lost all of its 50-year effort to build a Reformed church if the PCA's presently-developing priorities minimize the Reformed character of the church. The so-called "bottom line" for both sides is the importance of the PCA's commitment to being a Reformed church, obedient to its standards.

Question:

Would those opposed to union refuse under any circumstances to join the PCA?

Answer:

The answer to this question, as asked, is an unqualified, No. The OPC is committed to unity on the basis of the Word of God. No one wants to preserve the OPC *per se*. So under the right circumstances everyone would join. At the same time, an affirmative vote of two-thirds of the General Assembly, the presbyteries, and the following General Assembly does not guarantee that everyone is persuaded that such a decision is not premature. In that case such people would have to struggle with their consciences, and some might be unwilling to accept the church's decision.



THE OPC AND THE RES (REC): QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

A written interview with the Rev. J.J. Peterson

By C. Van Dam

The membership of the OPC in the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (RES; now the Reformed Ecumenical Council — REC), has long been an impediment in our relationship to the OPC. As our readers know, this obstacle was removed with the departure of the OPC from the RES last fall. This was a very important event. Among other things it enabled the OPC to consider alternatives in ecumenical forums. Observers from the OPC will therefore be attending the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) again this summer when it meets in the Fraser Valley. Their presence as observers will help them to evaluate whether they would be able to join this organization. (Our Committee for Contact with the OPC has proposed that our delegates at the ICRC recommend that the ICRC receive the OPC wholeheartedly, if they apply for membership.)

Since the issues surrounding the departure of the OPC from the RES are of great interest to us, we are here publishing a written interview on these matters with the Rev. J.J. Peterson, who is the chairman of the Committee on RES Matters. We wish to thank him for providing us with these answers to our questions.

Question:

The Orthodox Presbyterian Church has been a member of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (since Harare 1988,

the Reformed Ecumenical Council) almost since its beginning. Could you tell our readers of the events leading up your withdrawal from this organization in 1988?

Answer:

The OPC has been a member of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod since 1949. We have enjoyed our fellowship with other Reformed churches around the world in that body. The ties with those churches have been enriching to our church. However, the presence of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Synodical) in the RES began to be a problem in the 1960s and finally culminated in our leaving the RES in 1988.

The OPC had a relationship of full correspondence with the GKN (Synodical) from 1954 to 1973. We really did not adequately understand the relationship involved at that time nor were we as well acquainted with the GKN (Synodical) as we should have been. During that time we addressed the GKN (Synodical) expressing disapproval of their joining the International Missionary Council (1960, 1961 and 1963). In 1965 we sent them a statement setting forth the "Biblical Principles of Separation." Subsequently we addressed the issues of their joining the World Council of Churches, their opening of ecclesiastical office to

women, the lack of adequate discipline in the cases of Kuitert and Wiersinga. These were also pursued through the Reformed Ecumenical Synod.

The issues came to a climax in the 1979 so-called pastoral advice which allowed "homosexual believers" to be members in good standing in the church, to partake of the Lord's Supper and even to hold office in the church. This was followed with the hermeneutical justification of this "pastoral advice" in the publication of "God with us" [a synodical, official document legitimizing a liberal view on the Scriptures, ed.]

The RES meetings in 1980 (Nimes) and 1984 (Chicago) spent the bulk of their time on the GKN (Synodical) issue. In 1984 and in 1988 we requested the RES to declare the GKN (Synodical) ineligible for membership in the RES. In spite of the fact that the RES declared that "all homosexual practice is sin," they refused to take any action that would lead to the removal of the GKN (Synodical) from the RES.

Question:

Only some withdrew, others stayed. For example, the Christian Reformed Church is still a member. Indeed, in a recent editorial, Rev. A. Kuyvenhoven defended continuing membership in the REC in *The Banner* (September 12, 1988). With respect to the OPC position

he wrote "Although I respect the OPC's convictions, it gained nothing by its decision to leave, and it may have lost much. In a dialogue within the Reformed Ecumenical Council no church has to compromise" (p. 7). He also suggested that the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN) [Synodical] need critics like the OPC concerning the issues of homosexuality etc. What is your response to this?

Answer:

We left the RES because we felt that if we stayed, our witness to the gospel of the Reformed faith would be compromised. There comes a time in the battle against unbelief (yes, I do mean the GKN [Synodical] in some of its decisions has expressed unbelief) when there must be a separation from that unbelief. In the RES, the OPC and the RES have witnessed to the GKN (Synodical) about their deviations from the gospel, the Reformed confessions, for many, many years. Not once has there been any change in the GKN (Synodical) that we could see. Never, in the almost 30 years that we as a church have been addressing the GKN (Synodical) about our concerns, has there been any movement away from error toward the truth!

The GKN (Synodical) is not a church that "maintains" the Reformed confessions as is required by the Constitution of the RES for member churches. There-

fore, the RES has become an organization that has failed to uphold and enforce its own Constitution by keeping in its membership a church which does not maintain the Reformed faith.

I certainly agree that the GKN (Synodical) need critics like the OPC. But that criticism now must be done from the outside. To have stayed in the RES would have compromised our stand for the gospel. To have stayed in so that we could continue our criticism — a criticism which has never produced any change in the GKN, but only an increasing expression of unbelief and rejection of the clear witness of the Scripture — would have meant a denial of our responsibility to separate from unbelief and the toleration of unbelief.

Pastorally speaking, the sheep are in the hands of shepherds who are leading the flock astray. To be associated with that is wrong.

Question:

The OPC magazine *New Horizons* reported in its August-September 1988 issue that "the Committee on RES Matters is authorized to investigate membership in the International Conference of Reformed Churches or the possibility of forming a new international organization" (p.4).

Could you tell us what the OPC would be looking for in the International Conference of Reformed Churches

(ICRC)? Under what circumstances would there be enough reason for the OPC to seriously consider the possibility of forming a new international organization?

Answer:

The OPC sent three observers to the ICRC Edinburgh 1985 and hope to be sending four observers (the Committee on Reformed Ecumenical Synod Matters) to ICRC Vancouver 1989. We enjoyed the fellowship of 1985. We have had prior contact with the Free Church of Scotland and the two Irish Presbyterian churches in the RES; we have had continuing contact with the Canadian Reformed Churches; and it was a delight to broaden those contacts to include others of the "liberated brothers."

We are looking for international fellowship among the Reformed churches. What we are looking for in the ICRC is to see if we are acceptable to you; to see if the organization is broad enough to recognize a presbyterian/Westminster Confession church in the fellowship of the world-wide Reformed family of churches. We don't want to be just tolerated or to be second class citizens. We want to be recognized as full brothers in the faith and work with you side-by-side.

If that is impossible, then we must seriously consider the possibility of forming a new international organization.



Has the OPC changed?

By R.F. Boersema

In 1977, the synod of Coaldale judged that the Orthodox Presbyterian Church was a true church of Jesus Christ and decided to offer an ecclesiastical contact to this church. It was felt that there was a communal base between our two church federations and that there was hope that we could eventually come to a sister church relationship. Since then, the majority of the church in Blue Bell, PA, and a part of the church in Burtonsville, MD, have withdrawn from the OPC and have been received into the federation of Canadian Reformed Churches. Naturally the question arises whether the OPC has changed and whether, therefore, we have to change our relationship with them. Some are suggesting that the OPC should now be compared to the synodical Reformed churches after the *vrijmaking*.

In this article we want to ask whether the comparison with the *vrijmaking* is valid and whether the OPC has changed.

Let's begin by briefly noting what brought about the necessity for the *vrijmaking*. What were the issues in the Netherlands in 1944?

1. A personal theological formulation had been elevated to the position of official church doctrine;
2. Office-bearers were required to teach a doctrine that could not be clearly proved from Scripture;
3. A synod was arbitrarily claiming powers that went beyond its jurisdiction;
4. The churches as a whole were clearly confronted with the issues. These were not localized problems;
5. Faithful office-bearers were being suspended from their office.

As we now consider the developments in the OPC, let us first take a brief look at what happened to Blue Bell. The main issues in discussion were confessional membership and close communion.¹ Blue Bell was requiring the OPC to adopt the position that for someone to be received as a member of the church he may not hold a conscious, thought-out position contrary to the standards of the church. For example, if someone holds an Arminian position on one point of doctrine, Blue Bell insists that he cannot become a member of the church. In this matter, Blue Bell was asking the OPC to adopt a new position which the church did not previously support. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church deals with such people in a way that is similar to what was decided by our famous Reformed Synod

HYMN 26

Soilt' ich meinem Gott

Johann Schop, 1641, alt.

The musical score is written on ten staves. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of one flat (B-flat), and a 4/4 time signature. The melody is simple and hymn-like. The lyrics are printed below the notes on each staff.

1. Christ has ris-en! Hal-le-lu-jah!
 He is our vic-to-rious Head.
 Sing His prais-es! Hal-le-lu-jah!
 Christ has ris-en from the dead.
 He has con-quer-ed sin and Sa-tan.
 Where, O death, is now your sting?
 Je-sus Christ a-lone is King!
 Christ has ris-en! Hal-le-lu-jah!
 He is our vic-to-rious Head.
 Christ has ris-en from the dead.

of Dort who gave us the Canons of Dort. If a person confesses the Reformed faith but does not accept a certain point of doctrine he may be received as a member if he submits to the discipline of the church, is willing to be further instructed in this matter, and does not make propaganda for his divergent viewpoint.

At a certain point Blue Bell was left without any office-bearers. The presbytery (comparable to our classis, although not identical to it) appointed an interim session (consistory) of elders from outside of the congregation. In doing so an error was made in that the approval of the congregation was not sought. The interim session was supposed to carry out the oversight of the congregation until elders could be elected from the congregation. Some of the members of the congregation objected strongly to the preaching provided by the interim session and much disagreement arose between the interim session and the candidates for eldership, mainly with regard to the question of these candidates' understanding of confessional membership. After one

year, while a committee of presbytery was still studying the complaints brought by some members of Blue Bell, the majority of the congregation voted to withdraw from the OPC.

Did the OPC change? No, the OPC merely maintained their position. The Philadelphia presbytery was not persuaded by members of Blue Bell that the practice in the OPC with regard to membership should be changed. An interim session dealt with the matter, but the Presbytery was not yet finished with complaints that were brought to it and the issues were never brought to a General Assembly. It should be pointed out, however, that the decision to withdraw from the OPC was partially based on the decision of the 1983 General Assembly with regard to a complaint brought by Rev. Barry R. Hofford and others. Let us therefore now turn to this complaint.

Rev. Hofford had been concerned about the possibility of an ungodly visitor partaking in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. He felt that the session of Covenant OPC, Burtonsville, where he was the

pastor, was not safeguarding the Lord's table with enough care.² Because of his concerns, the session of the church adopted an interim method for administering the Lord's Supper while the matter would be studied further. The interim method provided that "(a) All communicant members in good standing of Covenant will be invited to participate, and (b) All communicant members in good standing of other congregations of the OPC will be invited to participate upon certification in advance by our Session. (Ordinarily, this certification will require a letter of standing from the church of which they are members.)" This interim method limited participation in the Lord's Supper to members of the OPC. This was a new position for the OPC.

On September 30, 1982, the session decided to return to administering the Lord's Supper in the same way as before the interim method was adopted. This method had been formulated as follows: "The table will be verbally fenced but open to members in good standing with their Churches. It will be requested that those who partake will sign communion cards. The visitors' home Churches will be notified of their participation. Continued eligibility of adherents of Covenant Church will be considered by the Session on an individual basis." With this decision Covenant church returned to a policy that is common in the OPC. The minister administering the Lord's Supper verbally explains who are admitted to the Lord's table and warns all those who live ungodly and unrepentant lives not to partake. He also invites those visitors who are faithful communicant members and not under discipline in their home churches. Further, the participants are required to sign communicant cards. In this way the session is informed of the names of those who partake and of the churches to whom visitors belong. If such a church is not an evangelical church, the session can deal further with the person and since the church to which the visitor belongs is informed, if this person is under discipline, his church can deal further with the person.

Rev. Hofford and others brought a complaint against the session's decision to cease using the interim method of administering the Lord's Supper. The session denied the complaint. When it was brought to the Presbytery, it was again denied. Then it was brought to the 1983 General Assembly of the OPC. The complaint argued that the session's method of administering the Lord's Supper allowed visitors to exercise the final judgment as to their eligibility for admission to the Lord's Supper and that this is contrary to the teaching of Scripture that the elders have been given the keys of the kingdom

and must exercise the final judgment.

In this article we cannot do justice to the complaint and the General Assembly's response. I urge the reader to study the whole matter. The materials can be found in an appendix to the Acts of Synod 1986 of the Canadian Reformed Churches. Our concern here is to consider whether the OPC has changed. For this purpose it is helpful to quote a small portion of the decision:

The sessional action complained against does not abdicate, deny, or nullify the Session's prerogative of admitting to the sacrament. Rather, it states the rule as to who shall be admitted, invites those who meet this qualification to partake, and provides a means of determining if this invitation has been abused. The issue, therefore, is whether the rule adopted by the Session and the means chosen to apply it are adequate to be a responsible exercise of sessional obligation.

The General Assembly did not find in favour of the complaint. What does that mean? It means that the Assembly did not believe that the session in Burtonsville did not have the right to return to the former method of administering the Lord's Supper. It does not mean that the OPC is not open to re-considering their method of admitting visitors to the Lord's Supper. The General Assembly commended to the church for its study a report prepared by a special committee of the Mid-Atlantic Presbytery. This report concludes with the following:

It is noted that the great diversity of belief and practice among the various denominations and Churches, the alarming increase in apostasy, and the general failure to exercise Church discipline all demand that the Church Session follow the more restrictive methods of admitting applicants to the Lord's Table. This argument has merit. It would be well for Church Sessions, which must assess local conditions and decide which procedures should be followed in their particular circumstances, to give serious attention to these trends in the Church, and determine whether the practice being followed at present truly meets the situation in accordance with the requirement of the Lord, that all things be done decently and in order, and not to give that which is holy to the dogs.

From what we have seen concerning the problems the churches in Blue Bell and Laurel have had and how the OPC dealt with these matters, it is clear that any comparison with the *vrijmaking* is far-fetched. None of the reasons that made the *vrijmaking* necessary are present in the OPC. It is also clear that the OPC has not changed. We have two cases in which the OPC was asked to change its position and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church only decided not to change.

Now the reader may admit that the OPC has not changed since 1977, but may wonder whether we now know things about the OPC which would lead us to conclude that the 1977 decision was premature. In this connection I recommend the reading of the materials presented

“The minister administering the Lord's Supper verbally explains who are admitted to the Lord's table and warns all those who live ungodly and unrepentant lives not to partake.”

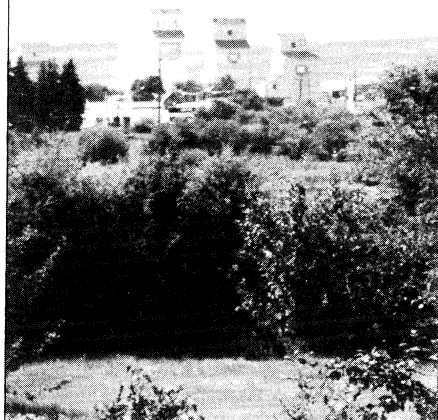
to Synod Burlington 1986 by the Committee for Contact with the OPC. This committee of four of our ministers, including two from Classis Ontario South, presents a careful review of our contact with the OPC and an evaluation of the differences. Unfortunately, materials that end up in appendices are often neglected. For this reason I quote here the last part of the *Evaluation of Divergencies*:

We hope that our evaluation has underlined this conclusion that truly Presbyterian Churches acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as the only Head of the Church and accept His Word as the only rule for faith and order. A true Church governs itself according to the pure Word of God, rejecting all things contrary to it and regarding Jesus Christ as the only Head. Presbyterian Church government as such does not prevent recognition of

OUR COVER

Minnedosa, Manitoba

Courtesy:
Travel Manitoba



a Church as a true Church according to Article 29 of our Belgic Confession . . .

In conclusion we would like to add a historical note. Last year we commemorated the sesquicentennial of the Secession in the Netherlands of 1834 (the "Afscheiding"). During this commemoration it was mentioned that the Synod of Leiden 1857 sought ecclesiastical contact or fellowship with the Free Church of Scotland and that Deputies of the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland visited Kampen. The Rev. A. Brummelkamp and the Rev. S. Van Velzen were delegated to Scotland. At the Synod of Hoozevee in 1860 the Churches of the Secession received official delegates of the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland. Brummelkamp Jr. writes that the Seceded Church in the Netherlands then and later owed much to its correspondence with the Scottish brethren and to their rich experience. In 1877 Brummelkamp and Van Velzen participated in the Pan Presbyterian Council which intended to establish communion or fellowship between Presbyterian Churches.

It shows that the fathers of the Secession, who firmly adhered to Articles 27-32 of the Belgic Confession, recognized faithful Presbyterian Churches as true Churches of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Canadian Reformed Churches are in the line of this tradition of Reformed Churches on the continent of Europe, when they in their contacts not only with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church but also within the International Conference of Reformed Churches recognize in Presbyterianism a fruit of the Reformation that God graciously gave to His Church in the sixteenth century.

Permanent contact in the unity of true faith and continual discussion of the divergencies may express the catholicity of the Church of God and enrich the body of Christ by the grace of the Holy Spirit, until we all attain to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.³

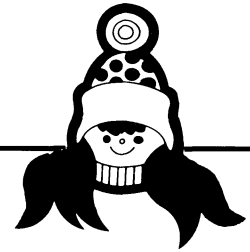
Anyone wishing to have an informed opinion about the OPC should read the careful, serious work presented by this Committee appointed by our churches.



¹ The information about the Blue Bell situation is taken from the correspondence dated 1 February, 1988, sent by the American Reformed Church in Blue Bell to all the consistories of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches.

² All information relating to this case is taken from *Acts General Synod Burlington, ON 1986 of the Canadian Reformed Churches*, pp. 160-170.

³ *Acts General Synod Burlington, ON 1986 of the Canadian Reformed Churches*, p. 131.



By Aunt Betty

Dear Busy Beavers,

Easter will soon be here.
Let's start, then, with an Easter "story."

EASTER MORNING AND US

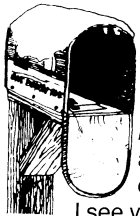
<p>Oh, the women were so sorrowful. Their beloved Master lay dead in the tomb. Carrying their load of precious spices they hurried toward that tomb. On this day of surprises they too were surprised by two angels. Standing by the tomb they kindly asked the women, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" Yes, why look for the Son of the living God among the dead? The Lord had told them many times that He would rise from the dead.</p>	<p>Even the Scribes and Pharisees remembered. But the Lord's own disciples had not understood Him. Death could not hold Him because the Lord Jesus is the Son of the LIVING God. Also today, also for us. He is the living God. He said to the disciples and to us, "I am with you always." In thankfulness and joy, but also in sorrow, in trouble and loneliness He is the living God and He has promised "I am with you always."</p>
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"Happy birthday" and "Many happy returns of the day" to all our Busy Beavers celebrating an April birthday. Here's hoping you have a great day celebrating with your family and friends. May our heavenly Father guide and keep you in the coming year.

April

Janine Vanderhoeven	1	Margaret Admiraal	17
Clifford Vandersluis	2	Angela Kippers	18
Jennifer Van Pykeren	4	Jessica Beintema	19
Jessica Vanderugten	6	Diana Flokstra	22
Evelyn Vanderpol	6	Bonnie Van Laar	22
Shannon Hoogstra	9	Jim Spoelstra	23
Melanie Peters	10	Alida Knol	24
Alisha Stroop	10	Sara Harsevoort	27
Emily Vegter	11	Barbara Kobes	30
Henry Sikkema	14	Kerry Roodzant	30
Wendell Huttema	14		

Design by Busy Beaver
Lydia Viersen.



FROM THE MAILBOX

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Jeremy Koopmans*. Thank you for your letter. Will you write and tell me your birthday? Then you can be included in the birthday list. Bye for now, Jeremy.

I see you've been very busy, *Diana Flokstra*! Thank you for your nice chatty letter and the riddles too. I hope your tree didn't get blown down, Diana. And what happened to the owl with the heart-shaped face?

Hello, *Melanie and Michelle Peters*. Yes, you're right. That was an unusual letter you sent me. Thank you very much, also for the pictures and puzzles. Did you enjoy your snow day, girls? And I do hope that water hasn't given you anymore trouble!

How did your basketball game go, *Barbara Kobes*? And how did you do? Are you looking forward to Spring break? Do you have some plans? Bye for now, Barbara. Write again soon.

"The Living God"

Can you fill in the blanks? Helps are given.

1. And Joshua said, "Hereby you shall know that the living God is _____ you" Joshua 3:10
2. "Your servant has killed both lions and bears; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be like one of them, seeing he has _____ the _____ of the Living God." 1 Samuel 17:36
3. . . . the words of the Rabshakeh, whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to _____ the living God 2 Kings 19:4
4. But the Lord is the _____ God, He is the living God and the _____ King. Jeremiah 10:10
5. For I know that my _____ lives, and at last he will _____ upon the earth. Job 19:25
6. "O Daniel, servant of the living God, has your God, whom you serve continually, been able to _____ you from the _____?" Daniel 6:20
7. Simon Peter replied, "You are the _____, the _____ of the living God." Matthew 16:16
8. "I am the living _____ which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for _____" John 6:51
9. For to this we toil and strive, because we have our _____ set on the living God. 1 Timothy 4:10
10. Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I _____ and behold I am _____ for evermore Revelation 1:17, 18

Send your answers to Aunt Betty for a reward.

Quiz Time!

Wordsearch

By Busy Beaver Michelle Peters

BY FAITH

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R D E A R B U A B R A H A M J A C O B S S Y
A S T E P H E N B E A V E A R S T H Y S A I
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A L E U E A E E S R E H C A E R P I A E S E
B S M A B P I O U S K I N G S O U T I U O T
T H A E M O R A S T E H P O R P N Y T E N I
P E T O P S L E E W N O E D I G H H H I O L
H A S V L T E L A L I V E D A P A U L L N E
D D E I E L E E D C A A S I B Y O F A E I A
L T T A I E H U F R H O M T H E N O L B D R
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B N E R A E W A T E S T R A M E N T S B Y I
A M N P D I C S H M O S E S E D A V I D L E
    
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LOOK FOR: By faith, Adam, Eve, Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Israelites, Rahab, Gideon, Samson, David, Samuel, pious kings, prophets, Daniel, apostles, Stephen, Peter, Paul, preachers, believers, Old Testament, New Testament

There is a little note after all the words are found.