

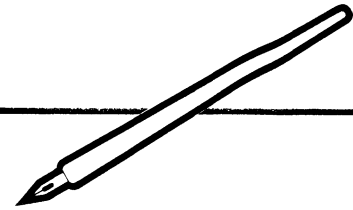


Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

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Once again the OPC

The OPC issue brought some reactions. We publish two letters to the editor. My colleague, Dr. C. Van Dam responds to part of what the Rev. K.A. Kok wrote in reaction to what he stated. I shall react to what the Rev. R.F. Boersema wrote in a letter to the editor, printed elsewhere in this issue, as a reply to what I said in my editorial. In a separate article I shall react to what the Rev. D.G.J. Agema wrote in the Attercliffe and Smithville Church Bulletin of April 2 (Vol. 33, no. 14).

Confessional Membership

The issue is that of confessional membership and the (degree of) difference on this point between the OPC and us. Rev. Boersema writes that "in the OPC there is greater variety of practice concerning what is expected of those who make public profession of faith" and "some kind of classes in the doctrine of the church are followed." In my opinion, although meant to defend the OPC, in fact the remarks of Rev. Boersema underline the weakness in the OPC on the point of confessional membership. He admits, first of all, that it is not the same in all the OPC churches. In other words, some OP churches may promote or suppose agreement of the membership with the confessional standards while others don't. Further, what is the cause of this "variety in practice"? Is it not the very fact that the first question in the OPC Form for the public profession of faith, speaking about the doctrine, speaks about the doctrine of the Bible without further precision? Baptists, Arminians, and so on, will all say that they believe the doctrine of the Bible. Therefore, just as in all the centuries of the history of the Christian church this "doctrine of the Bible" needs further specification over against errors and heresies.

When Rev. Boersema writes that "some kind of classes in the doctrine of the church are followed," my reply is that this sounds again rather vague and not strongly committal. Imagine that such classes were not even held. That would be plain unfaithfulness on the side of those who teach in those classes, especially office-bearers. Is it not so that office-bearers in the OPC are bound, and bind themselves, to the Standards of the church? Does this not imply that they bind themselves in their teaching to the doctrine of Scripture as confessed in these standards? For me this is a matter of course. And I surely hope that Rev. Boersema's "variety of practice" does not mean that this teaching the doctrine as confessed in the Westminster Standards is neglected. However, the point at issue is: it is not officially asked of those who make profession of faith to declare that they "wholeheartedly believe the doctrine of the Word of God . . . taught here in this Christian church" while what is taught in this Christian church is summarized in its confessional standards. This is the difference with our churches.

Now it is good that Rev. Boersema can write regarding what was expected of Mrs. Boersema when she made profession of her faith. And it is also a positive point when the parents, at the baptism of their children, have to promise that they will instruct their child(ren) "in the principles of our holy

religion as revealed in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and as summarized in the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of the Church." Let us appreciate this. However, there is quite a difference between *expecting* someone to do something and asking him to *declare* that he *does* that very thing. Besides, is not, practically, the "greater variety of practice" devouring the "expectation"?

Further, in my opinion, the word "principles" is vague. I take this "principles" to mean, practically and realistically, that it is not demanded from all the OPC parents to instruct their children in every minute detail of whatever the confessional standards say, so that "principles" means the contents of "our holy religion . . ." But could one not interpret this word "principles" in this sense: only the major points? And what is then major and what is minor? Is here an opening for the legitimation of saying that one agrees with the doctrine of the church on the basis of his subjective judgment "in as far as," and not "because," it agrees with the Word of God? Understand me correctly, I do not say that this is the intention. Here the sympathetic reader could say that the difference is "partly linguistic." Nevertheless, this word "principles" is again vague and gives opening to the legitimation of deviation.

The reader knows that our Reformed Form of Subscription for office-bearers uses the word "because": we, office-bearers, bind ourselves to the confessions *because* they agree with the Word of God, not: *in as far as* they agree with it. This "because" was changed into "in as far as" in the Dutch Reformed Church before the Secession in 1834 to legitimize all kinds of deviations and errors, and to annul in fact the binding to the Reformed, scriptural doctrine. The Reformed Churches of both the Secession and the Doleantie went back to the "because." In the question in our Form for the Baptism of Infants that vagueness is not present, since it simply speaks of teaching "this doctrine."

The Rev. Boersema continues his letter with saying: "The difference between our views with regard to confessional membership is partly linguistic." A quotation of what Dr. Bouwman wrote follows, and Rev. Boersema mentions as example of such an exception that the church in which he grew up. Then he asks:

An Orthodox Presbyterian brother reading about the Canadian Reformed position might say, "I have no difficulty at all with your position as such. I share that position. But, if you also, as an exception, admit as a member someone who does not hold to infant baptism, and you recognize that those who make profession of faith do not always thoroughly know the Three Forms of Unity, I cannot understand why you call that confessional membership, etc.

Rev. Boersema has not convinced me that the difference is just "partly linguistic." The quote from Bouwman as characterization of the practice of the Reformed Churches is too generalizing, as I tried to make clear in my previous editorial.

But my real disagreement is that Rev. Boersema misuses

this quotation and the whole matter of the exception by diminishing and minimizing the difference on this point between the CanRC and the OPC. This minimalizing does not help anyone. The crucial point is that our Form asks those who desire to make public profession of faith to declare that they "wholeheartedly believe the doctrine of the Word of God, summarized in the confessions and taught here in this Christian church", and that they "promise by the grace of God steadfastly to continue *in this doctrine* in life and death." On the other hand, the OPC speaks only about the doctrine of the Word of God without confessional specification. The point is that therefore the CanRCs show in their formulation that they do have confessional membership, while the OPCs show with their formulation that this confessional membership is not a stated requirement.

Again, it does not help anyone to speak and act as if there is practically very little difference. Rev. Boersema has himself shown with his own formulations that there is "variety of practice" and vagueness in the OPC. Therefore such minimizing does not help the membership in the CanRC by giving a wrong impression, but it does not help the members of the OPC either. Their formulations and "variety of practice" does not promote a strong Reformed character, but rather weakens it. And if they hear from us: the difference on this point between our two church groups is hardly present and "partly linguistic", why do the CanRC members make such a fuss? Why should we discuss this point at all? What do we seek? Is it a CanRC and an OPC who both have and maintain a strong Reformed character? Or do we want both to take it easy as far as these things are concerned? I don't think that this builds up either of us.

This detrimental minimizing of the difference we see continued further in the letter. Let me make a slight change in the formulation used above by Rev. Boersema. "An Orthodox Presbyterian brother reading about Rev. Boersema's position" can hardly see any difference. Why is this so? This is so, because my colleague minimizes the difference by misusing the point of the exception. In the reasoning of Rev. Boersema the exception becomes, kind of, the rule. But the exception is not the issue.

Besides, also this point of the exception is weighed quite differently (!): I ask: how is it possible that someone who makes profession of faith, who declares the Reformed doctrine as found in the confessions to be the true doctrine, and who promises to abide by it and to submit to the Reformed consistory, maintains with an honest conscience that it is wrong to have his infants baptized? How can a Reformed consistory "admit" such a person who asks to become a member and states his baptist point of view? However, we shall leave this for what it is. The issue is that in our churches those who make 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"; and they promise to abide by it through God's grace. The issue is that this is *not* asked from, nor declared by, those who make profession of faith in the OPC. This, and not the exception, is the point of difference. And I repeat: no one is served with building on an exception, while this principle is made into a "partly linguistic" difference. Also the word "partly" jumps out toward us because of its vagueness.

A last, and very important point is, when the brothers in Blue Bell and in Laurel tried to work for confessional membership and so increase the Reformed confessional strength in their congregations, in opposition to evangelical broadness and vagueness, was this positively received or did they meet with objections and obstructions from the side of those who sought to maintain such a broader evangelical stand? Rev. Boersema states that an "Orthodox Presbyterian brother . . . might say, I have no difficulty at all with your position as such." My response is: why did the brothers in Blue Bell and Laurel, then, meet with opposition in their presbytery. I have the impression that there are in the OPC members who re-

ject the confessional membership as we have it. With his reasoning of building on exceptions, Rev. Boersema runs the risk to weaken confessional membership, and he does not help the brotherhood in Laurel and Blue Bell either. I would like to help the OPC in maintaining, in strengthening and in further building up a strong Reformed *confessional* character on this North American continent where evangelical broadness and vagueness is such a powerful feature. Our confessional Reformed heritage, and this counts for both the CanRC and the OPC, should be kept and safeguarded and not be weakened. Indeed, I also do not want to exaggerate, or blow up, the difference, but neither should we minimize it.



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By J. De Jong

"And when He had said this, as they were looking on, He was lifted up and a cloud took Him out of their sight. "
Acts 1:9

Eyes Upward!

It was undoubtedly a dramatic moment, unexpected for the disciples. It was also a majestic and overpowering revelation for them. Having charged them to be His witnesses to the end of the earth, Christ was lifted up, and departed from earth to heaven. They looked upward until the cloud of God's presence took Him out of their sight. It was overwhelming, and yet quite ordinary. Here there was none of the furor and drama of Elijah's journey to heaven. This was a revelation of absolute sovereignty and control. It was all unexpected — and yet right on time.

Ideally the disciples would have known and anticipated the ascension event. The Lord Jesus has instructed them concerning His imminent departure. He had said, "No one has ascended into heaven but He who descended from heaven, the Son of man," John 3:13. In His controversy with the Jews, Jesus had said, "Where I am going you cannot come," John 8:21. And to His disciples He said, "I came from the Father and have come into the world; again I am leaving the world and going to the Father," John 16:28. Although the disciples claimed they understood, apparently they did not fully understand.

This shows how great a blessing they received in being witnesses to the ascension, and how much of a blessing and comfort this is for the church. Indeed, the fact that the ascension was witnessed and actually seen makes it unique. No one saw the incarnation. And throughout His life on earth the glory of Christ was hidden from them. Only a few saw the transfiguration, and that was an incidence of momentary glory. No one saw the resurrection, even though the disciples all shared the revelation of the risen Saviour. Indeed, even the reality of the cross — the bitter struggle with the wrath of the Father — was hidden from human view. But here in the event itself, everything is plain to the human eye. The disciples actually see the Lord ascend, and see Him taken up into glory through the cloud of God's presence.

Comparing His coming and departure shows the progress in Christ's work. When He descended, "He came to His own home, but His own people received Him not," John 1:11. No one knew or recognized Him! When He ascended, He was surrounded by those who had believed in Him. And they are now able to see something of the glory of their King! The church shares a greater measure of the realities of heaven because its eyes have been trained through repentance and faith to look upon and understand these realities. This is the fulfillment of Christ's promise to Nathanael: "Truly, tru-

ly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man," John 1:51.

All this points to the reconciliation of the church given through the cross of Christ. We are permitted to share the reality of the ascension because new harmony exists between God and man through the sacrifice of the cross. Christ takes His church with Him so that, whereas no one was able to witness the fullness of His coming, we are enabled to witness and recall the reality of His glorious departure. Whereas before the cross, no one could look up to heaven to see God, and no one could see God and *live*, now the disciples see and are made witnesses of the reunion between the Father and the Son. What Jacob saw in fear and trembling is now witnessed openly, in greater fullness, and with greater confidence by the apostles of the church. Reconciliation has come through the cross!

Still there remains a limitation to what the disciples were able to see at the ascension. Even though they continued gazing into heaven, Jesus was hidden from them. As He entered the cloud, He was taken from their sight. Human eyes could not yet witness the full glory of the Saviour from their place on the earth.

Yet progress has occurred, a development from not seeing to seeing. Eyes have been lifted upward in faith. And the ascension calls us to keep our eyes heavenward! For He comes again! From heaven we await a Saviour who will change our mortal bodies to be like His glorious body, Phil. 3:21. And we may share that which the apostles saw, the firstfruits of the heavenly glory which they experienced.

So the return of the Lord Jesus promises even greater vision for the church. John later says, "Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye shall see Him, every one who pierced Him." Rev. 1:7. The eyes of unbelief will shrink back in fear and shame. But those trained in faith will lift up their eyes heavenward, and see even greater realms of glory in the coming of the Son of man!

So we may be comforted in the knowledge of Christ's ascension. And we may keep our eyes heavenward. For the King of glory will come in! Blessed are those who may witness this day! The church that has its eyes upward can expect to meet the Lord in the air, 1 Thess. 4:17. Then all believing eyes will be so transformed that we may witness the final glory of the Son who inherits the first and most glorious place in the Kingdom of the Father. Keep eyes upward to His day!



Criticism on *Clarion's* OPC issue

By J. Geertsema

In *The Family Post*, the church bulletin of the churches at Attercliffe and Smithville, of April 2, 1989, the Rev. D.G.J. Agema reacts to what was written in *Clarion* of March 17, 1989. This was the OPC issue. The Rev. Agema is quite critical. He has nothing positive to say. Now this can be right when everything is wrong. Is everything wrong?

The negative remarks begin with the report of the Committee for Contact with the OPC. Perhaps one of the members of the Committee is willing to write about this. The next part deals with the two interviews. The Rev. Agema writes:

I realize that the format of these articles make it difficult to comment. Yet I believe that some critical remarks should have been made about these answers. For reading these interviews I missed in the answers the whole matter of faithfulness to God's Word. It is alluded to in the second (Petersen), but does not clearly come out.

Indeed, if one asks a person to answer a few questions in an interview, and this is done, is it then fair to criticize what is said? I did not think so. That is why I wrote that "from these interviews we can learn how these leading members of the OPC think about certain matters." It is Rev. Agema's right to criticize. However, is this criticism well-founded and fair? I cannot help but get the impression that Rev. Agema wants to criticize and look for things that must be wrong. For my colleague does not do justice to what Rev. Petersen wrote, and to the OPC. Rev. Agema "misses in the answers the whole matter of faithfulness to God's Word. It is alluded to in the second (Petersen), but does not clearly come out." How differently can two people read the same text!

The readers may wish to go through the interviews again. I cannot repeat all of it here but only point to a few things. The first question asked what the events were leading up to the withdrawal of the OPC from the RES. Rev. Petersen replied that since 1960 the OPC has admonished the Synodical GKN in a number of matters, and that in 1965 the OPC sent them a statement setting forth the "Biblical Principles of Separation." In

fact the whole answer to the first question is a report of this constant admonishing for many years. Last year the OPC said: we warned enough. We separate from this deviation from the Scriptures, this unbelief, and unfaithfulness regarding the confession, on biblical grounds. Asked why the OPC did not

"One can minimize what is wrong. One can also minimize what is good. Neither is correct."

stay in the RES, Rev. Petersen replied, a.o., that staying would have meant that "our witness to the gospel of the Reformed faith would be compromised." It "would have meant a denial of our responsibility to separate from unbelief and the toleration of unbelief." In the (synodical) Reformed Church in the Netherlands [GKN] the "shepherds . . . are leading the flock astray. To be associated with that is wrong." Wrong on

what basis? There is only one answer: on the basis of Scripture and Confession. That is the norm.

Now one can say: here the very words "faithfulness to God's Word" are not used. This is true. But when all that Petersen wrote can only get an "it is alluded to," I just do not understand this. Everything said here by Rev. Petersen about what the OPC did breathes the desire to be and remain faithful to God's Word. A formal use of a certain word is not the only way in which one can show that what such a word means is done. Acts of faithfulness do not need the addition of the words, "Behold, I am faithful!" One can minimize what is wrong. One can also minimize what is good. Neither is correct.

We can say: this separating should have been done earlier; we have urged them to do this for quite a number of years, cf. Art. 92, p. 44, Acts Synod New Westminster 1971. I agree. However, can we not speak positively about this withdrawal from the RES which we said was one of the "impediments" preventing us from "enter[ing] into correspondence"? (ibid.)

Rev. Agema continues:

Also, in that first interview (Galbraith) I miss any reference to the marks of the Church. Why does the OPC want to join with the PCA. The answer is that the PCA has the same doctrinal standards, — and then it comes, — because the PCA is a larger, stronger church, has a wider witness, it has more active mission programs and stresses church growth. What about the marks of the church as the Confession gives them? If these are the criteria then we could make a case for seeking affiliation with the Christian Reformed Church. The matter of faithfulness to God's Word is brushed aside. The editors should at least have indicated this.

When Rev. Agema writes, "In that first interview (Galbraith) I miss any reference to the marks of the Church," I agree that speaking the language of the Belgic Confession, Art. 29, in the matter of churches joining each other offers the valid ground. But Rev. Agema's main criticism is the answer to the question

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"Why does the OPC want to join with the PCA?" He asks our attention for what follows ("and then it comes"): "because it [the PCA] is a larger, stronger church," to "and stresses church growth," see above. Now when I read these points as reasons for joining the PCA, I thought two things: in the first place, I appreciate that Rev. Galbraith presents here to the Canadian Reformed readers (of whom he is aware that many are quite critical regarding the OPC) an honest picture of the situation in the OPC. He does not make things nicer than they are. My second thought was: the grounds for joining given here are not valid, Scriptural and confessional grounds. Especially when one hears that "church growth" is a reason, while this "church growth" concept as it is presented by the church growth movement simply is not Reformed.

However, does Rev. Agema present a fair and correct picture here of "the OPC" and of what Rev. Galbraith wrote? I must say: he does not. There is a difference between what the interview says and the way in which Rev. Agema renders it. Galbraith said: "Among reasons given for joining the PCA are . . ." This means: *some* in the OPC, *not the* OPC as a whole, practically every one, as Rev. Agema renders it: "Why does *the* OPC (emphasis added) want to join?" From the interview itself it is clear that a number of OPC members strongly oppose this joining the PCA. It is said carefully: "some might be unwilling to accept the church's decision" viz., to join. I know that such persons are there in the OPC; and many of these are seeking closer contact with us. What is positive should be acknowledged as such. It has been said before that in the OPC a struggle is going on between a more evangelical and a more Reformed part. This is so in more church groups.

Rev. Agema also reacts to my editorial. The first criticism deals with the question why *Clarion* takes sides and publishes an article of Rev. Boersema and not others. Similar accusations have come from different sides. At this moment it can be clear that *Clarion* is taking up an article from Rev. Boersema as well as the reaction of Rev. Kok; that "*Clarion*" reacts to what Rev. Boersema writes and to what Rev. Agema said. Now I speak for myself: It can be clear that I find that Rev. Boersema is taking things too easy, not acknowledging the struggle of the brothers in Blue Bell and Laurel, see my editorial. However, it is also my conviction that others, as Rev. Agema, go too far to the other side. I shall try to show what I mean. Rev. Agema wrote the following:

Prof. Geertsema also asks the question why some have difficulty with the OPC. His answer is because they are afraid that things which are now allowed in the OPC will gradually enter

the Can. Ref. Churches. And I agree with him that this is indeed a danger. Especially when it comes to discipline, which is one of the marks of the true church, and to the binding of the confession. Synod 1977 in its Considerations reduced the differences in confession to a matter of historical origins (Acts Art. 91, II). However, the confession is not just an historical document, but a statement of what we believe and confess today. I think the whole development of the ICRC is a proof that this danger of which Prof. Geertsema writes is not a phantom.

Most likely Rev. Agema refers to Consideration c), cf. Acts New Westminster, 1971, p.40, which reads:

From the letter of the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch 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 divergent 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. [See for this letter the same Acts, pp.95-101.]

What is wrong with this statement? The Belgic Confession is from 1561, the Heidelberg Catechism was taken over after 1566. Art. 16 B.C. deals briefly with election, while Q.A. 54 of L.D. 21 use the word "chosen" in connection with the church. The historical development continued and in 1619 the Synod of Dort formulated the Canons of Dort against the Arminians in which God's sovereign grace and justice in election and reprobation is the central theme. The same struggle against Arminianism was fought in England, and in the years

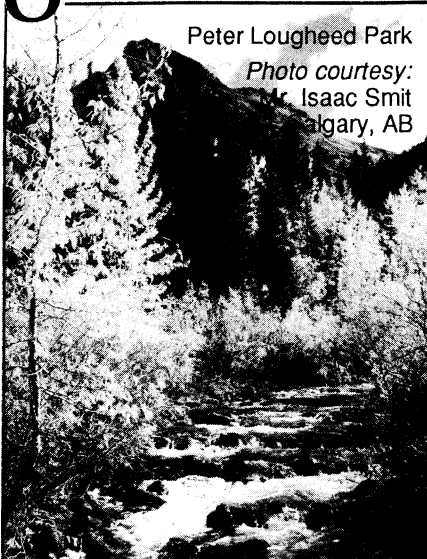
1643 to 1646 the Westminster Assembly drew up the Westminster Confession and Larger Catechism. In this confession the Calvinistic, biblical doctrine of God's electing, sovereign grace is much more a central theme, like in the Canons, than in the Belgic Confession. This is, as I see it, why there is spoken about the covenant with the believers and their children as well as with the elect, and why the term "invisible church" is used, which we find also in the writings of Calvin.

The wording of Rev. Agema states, that Synod 1977, in its Consideration, mentioned above, "reduces the differences in confession to a matter of historical origin" and suggests that this synod herewith denied that the confession "is a statement of what we believe and confess today." This reading of the Acts of 1977 is, to say the least, totally unwarranted. My proof is the very clause in this same Consideration, saying that "continued discussion of them [the divergencies in the Confession] is desirable."

When the OPC committee assures us that we must not read expressions in the Westminster Confession in the light of their Kuyperian explanation in the forties in Holland, see the letter of the OPC committee, referred to above, we must accept this. It does not mean that we have to accept those formulations as such. Further discussion is desirable. But we must now also not say that, because of the existing divergencies, the Westminster Standards are not Reformed Standards, and that Presbyterian Churches which have, and adhere to, these standards are not (Presbyterian) Reformed churches. When a church is not Reformed anymore when it speaks at one point about God's covenant with the elect or about an invisible church, is, then, this not the consequence of our reasoning that Calvin was not Reformed, that the churches of John Knox in Scotland with their Scottish confession were not Reformed, yes, that also many in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in this and in previous centuries were not really Reformed, because they used the same terminology? Is not the consequence that the truly Reformed church began in 1944 in the Netherlands? I don't think that Rev. Agema wants to draw this consequence. We should not give this impression either.

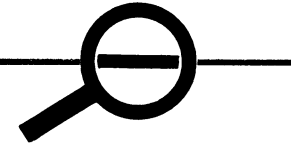
Now Rev. Agema does not mention the confessional divergencies anymore after his reference to the Synod of 1977, but speaks about confessional membership and the open Lord's Supper table as points of difference. They are not mentioned in the considerations of Coal-dale. On this point and what follows in Rev. Agema's article I hope to react in the next issue.

OUR COVER



Peter Lougheed Park

Photo courtesy:
Mr. Isaac Smit
Edmonton, AB



Publications from the Valley

There has been concerted hard work behind the scenes that continues to bear fruit as recent publications from the Fraser Valley show. Since these laudable efforts have not received much coverage in *Clarion*, I would like to draw special attention to them.

Diakonia

The March issue of *Diakonia* (volume 2, number 3) has appeared and like its predecessors once again offers a variety of very good articles. In an editorial, Dr. J. Visscher pleads for the establishing of an office-bearer resource centre by every consistory so that elders and deacons can have important study material at their disposal. This is followed by a first instalment by Prof. J. Kamphuis entitled "Concerning the Holiness of the Congregation (I)" in which the topic of church discipline is broached. Prof. C. Trimp discusses "Old and New Liturgy" and, on the basis of a historical overview, offers some rather interesting wishes for liturgical change and improvement. A broader topic of some importance is addressed by Dr. A.N. Hendriks in an article under the title "The Kingdom of God and the Church," in which he enters upon some of the difficult by ultimately very practical questions that come with this topic. Finally this issue continues with another instalment from P.Y. De Jong's *The Ministry of Mercy*, namely, the chapter "The Qualifications for the Ministry of Mercy." Since this valuable book is out of print, these reprints are most welcome.

There is such a wealth of good solid instruction and information here that not only should each and every office-bearer read this magazine which is especially meant for them, but every member of the church who is interested in studying matters of vital importance for the church and building up his knowledge should subscribe. Here is one excellent way in which young men can prepare themselves should the Lord call them to the special office one day.

Up to now most (but not all) of the articles have been translated from Dutch. However, I do not consider that a real drawback. The translating is well-done, the issues addressed are basically the same here as in the Netherlands, and the articles are well-chosen. Previous editions of this quarterly dealt with topics such as family visitation, counselling and psychiatry, the diaconal task, preaching, evangelism, the work of elders, etc. This publica-

tion is heartily recommended! With so much good material being published, it would be a shame if this magazine were only known inside the consistory rooms. It can be obtained by writing to Brookside Publishing, 3911 Mt. Lehman Road, Abbotsford, BC V2S 6A9. Back issues are still available and the cost of subscription in Canada is \$12.

A Gift from Heaven

This is an evangelistic course (consisting all together of four sections, Bible, Redemptive History, Prayer, and the Apostles Creed) which is designed to be done at home. Our sister churches in the Netherlands have developed this course and the response to it has been quite positive. The Reformed Evangelism Taskforce (P.O. Box 1008 Station A, Surrey, BC V3P 4P5) has made it available in English and evangelistic campaigns using this course have been initiated by several home mission committees in the Canadian Reformed Churches. The suggested advertising is low key and no overt pressure is exercised when those interested are enrolled. People taking the course are not visited (the course is done via mail) and only contacted if they request assistance. According to *Nederlands Dagblad* (8 March 1989), the Dutch churches have now also expanded into giving oral courses in public meetings. But the response has been much more limited.

My purpose in mentioning this course here is not only to draw attention to the useful and apparently quite effective tool of evangelism for those who may not yet be familiar with it, but also to pass on the fact that this course has now become available in Spanish and Hungarian as well. According to the same *Nederlands Dagblad* referred to above, a German edition is now also being prepared for use in Austria. In the Netherlands, a fifth national campaign advertising and offering the course to the general public will get underway this fall. It is gratifying that the Lord is pleased to use such efforts for the spreading of the gospel and the gathering of His church.

Reformed Music Journal

A new quarterly devoted to music has made its debut under the editorship of Peter Janson, B.Mus., M.A., and Norma Vanderpol, B.Mus. In the editorial it is noted that good material in our Reformed heritage with respect to music is available

in French, Dutch, and German. However (to quote P. Janson's editorial),

both in terms of language and availability, such studies are not readily accessible to the average reader. Yet it is imperative that everyone of Calvinistic background becomes acquainted with the essential and underlying philosophies of music. Without a historical knowledge of the origin of the Genevan tunes, and without an appreciation of the doctrine that called them forth, we risk losing them altogether.

In order for us to gain an understanding of musical matters, and in order to form a well-balanced opinion, we need English-language articles of a historical nature and articles that address the philosophical aspects of musical forms and styles. Only then can we begin to understand what Calvin's reasons were for choosing modally constructed Psalm tunes; only then can we consider what differences there may be between sacred and secular music; only then can we assess the *raison d'être* for rock music.

This is one of the goals of this magazine: to provide articles on the Genevan Psalter, and to provide thought-provoking articles about (church) music from a Reformed perspective. Other objectives are articles that provide organists and choir directors with practical information and materials for the realization of their tasks.

This first issue looks promising. Major articles include Pierre Pidoux, "The History of the Origin of the Genevan Psalter (I)," Norma Vanderpol, "The Psalms, the Organ, and Sweelinck" and S. Vanderploeg on Calvin's theory of music (which is also very practical!). Furthermore, Rev. J. Van Rietschoten meditates on Psalm 22:3, J. van Westering reflects on Jan Zwart, S. Vanderploeg offers a Partita Psalm 143 for organists, and P. Janson gives some suggestions to choirs looking for music.

We wish this publication well. Consistories may want to give their organists a subscription. Music teachers and choirs will also want to subscribe. Indeed all those interested in music will want to get a subscription. (Write Brookside Publishing at the address mentioned above). At \$15 a year, the price is reasonable for this type of publication.

General Synod — prayerful beginning

By M. Werkman

Prayer service

Well before eight in the evening of Monday, April 17, numerous brothers and sisters from the congregations of Winnipeg and Carman are filling the pews of Winnipeg's church building, together with the sixteen delegates to synod, and some other visitors.

After pronouncing the votum and salutation, Rev. M. van Beveren asks us to sing Psalm 124:1,2,3. Before we rise to sing the Apostles Creed with the words of Hymn 1A, we read part of Romans 8. Rev. van Beveren then leads in prayer, thanking the Lord for bringing us all safely here and praying for open eyes and ears to see the riches of God in Jesus Christ.

The Scripture reading is Acts 5:17-32 with the verses 33-42 as the text for the sermon. Rev. M. van Beveren points out that it is a great blessing of the Lord that the churches have the freedom to come together in a general synod without any hindrance or persecution. It is even a greater blessing that the churches can come together in the unity of the faith in Jesus Christ the Lord, and are able (that is the purpose of a synod) to assist each other in order that we may build the church in accordance with the Word of God.

We are here tonight to ask the Lord to give wisdom to the brothers who are sent by the churches to make decisions for the well-being of the churches in accordance with the Word of God. They need our prayers because they need obedience to God's Word. They need the enlightenment by the Holy Spirit, because all their deliberations and decisions should stand the scrutiny of God's Word. Only then can this synod be a blessing to the churches, when we abide by God's revealed Word, and so glorify God's name.

In our text we read that the council and the senate of Israel (reverent men and leaders of Israel) are together in a meeting, to decide about the direction Israel as a nation should go. For after the day of Pentecost there is great tension among the Jews. The disciples are no longer afraid but speak publicly of Jesus Christ, risen from the grave, the Christ as promised in the Scriptures. More and more people believe the preaching of the apostles. And the leaders of Israel are forced to make a decision for or against Jesus as the Christ.

In that meeting Gamaliel (a well-known and learned man) gives guidance. He delivers a speech. He makes observations

and considerations and in his recommendation he shows his conclusion. That is a good method.

In most cases, when the observations and considerations are correct, the conclusion or decision is correct as well. Our general synods through the years have almost always used this method and we expect this coming synod to do the same. In an observation we try to find out what are the facts. Then in the consideration the facts and circumstances are compared with a norm or standard. Then we come to the conclusion or decision. If we do not have the facts straight or when the norm or standard is wrong or even absent, we can hardly come to a correct conclusion.

Gamaliel delivers a speech and makes a proposal which is adopted by the council. The question is: is his reasoning correct or not? Is his mind subject to the Word of God or not? Are his words words of wisdom from God or not?

The theme of the sermon is:

The Lord Jesus Christ gathers His church in spite of the resistance of worldly wisdom.

Our text shows us:

1. an observation that is biased
2. a consideration that is unprincipled
3. a recommendation that is inconclusive
4. a decision against Christ
5. the victory of God's Word.

The apostles have been captured and brought before the council of the Jews. There the apostles testify clearly about Jesus the Savior. Hearing this beautiful testimony, the leaders are enraged and in their anger and hatred against Jesus they want to kill the apostles. The meeting becomes noisy and disorderly. At that moment Gamaliel rises from his seat. He is a learned teacher of the law, held in honour by all the people. He is expected to be a leader, especially in a situation like this.

The question is: what will the council do? In what direction will they go? Gamaliel knows that more than 5000 people follow Jesus. Much depends on the council's decision now. He calls the disorderly meeting to order and moves that the apostles be moved outside. Then he begins his speech, in real style.

He starts out urging the council to think! Take care what you do with these men! Remember what happened in the past history of the church! Remember Theudas! He was followed by 400 men. But he was slain and his followers were dispersed and

came to nothing. After him there was Judas the Galilean. But he also perished and all who followed him were scattered.

What Gamaliel says is true. He knows the history. And yet Gamaliel is misleading the council. He is biased. He compares Jesus and His disciples with fanatics and rebels, people who are fighting for a revolution. Gamaliel means to say: don't worry about the followers of Jesus. They will be destroyed and will disappear soon. He places them on the same level with revolutionaries. He compares apples with oranges, so to speak.

Gamaliel sounds impressive when he says: we had a case in the past; this is what history teaches us. But he has made up his mind already. This is evident from the way he chooses his facts.

It is a beautiful thing to know the history of the church. But how do we use it and take the facts? If we are biased and prejudiced beforehand, we may take examples and facts favouring our own view. That is a danger in synod's decision-making: to choose the facts and draw conclusions when we are biased. Also the members of a general synod need the Lord's guidance.

Gamaliel's observations are biased. And his considerations are unprincipled. He has no principle, no norm, no standard! He says: if it is of man, it will come to nothing. If it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them.

Some people have praised Gamaliel for these words. You cannot fight God. Gamaliel says: it is even possible that God uses these men. But it is not yet that far that God has shown His power. In Gamaliel's opinion God has not yet been clear enough. It is not time for a decision yet. As a member of the council Gamaliel has taken responsibility for sentencing Jesus to death and for that watch over the grave. He knows all about Jesus' teaching. Now through the preaching of the apostles Christ is standing before the council!

Gamaliel has all the information. But he refuses to use the only standard, the norm, the Scriptures. The professor of the Old Testament refuses to open the Bible. He fails to be a teacher of the people. He keeps talking about his own knowledge and experience. He gives the impression of wisdom but he confuses the issue!

With the Belgic Confession (Art.5) we confess that we receive nothing but the Scriptures for the regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith. We receive the Scriptures as the only norm, the only

standard by which we make decisions. Our considerations have to be compared with the Bible.

May that also be the practice of our General Synod and may it always be shown publicly that not human wisdom or our experience (not even our Canadian Reformed experience) is used, but the only norm — God's Word. Then only the issues will be clear.

Is Gamaliel's reasoning really inconclusive? Does it not lead to a clear conclusion? His recommendation to Council is to leave these men alone. Many have praised Gamaliel for that recommendation. His advice saved the apostles from going to prison. It perhaps even saved their lives. Does it not show that Gamaliel is a reasonable man who may have had some sympathy with the apostles? In the early Christian church rumor had it that Gamaliel was a hidden Christian like Nicodemus. Not long ago a well-known Reformed author wrote that we should not forget that Gamaliel managed to get the apostles released!

We can understand why Gamaliel is in favour of setting the apostles free. Gamaliel knows that the apostles are not violent revolutionaries. He is aware of the fact that they are held in honour by the people. Therefore, rather than risking a stir among Israel, he advises to let them go.

Or do we have an indication that Gamaliel is favourably inclined to the apostles, that he takes their teaching serious? Not at all! Let them go! They don't do much damage. Not for now anyway. Council should not make this such a big issue. Keep them under your watchful eye but let them talk. They amount to nothing — so far!

Gamaliel's wisdom is the wisdom of the world, a world which purposely chooses to ignore the church of Jesus Christ as long as that church is harmless. The church may preach in their worship services all they want, as long as they don't have too much influence in the world. That is the general attitude to the church! Let those people thrive in the corner of their own little world. The church is a negligible entity we don't have to reckon with.

So the council does not have to make a decision at all. Let them go. The more attention you pay to them, the more dangerous they will be.

This is the wisdom of the world. We should not expect the decisions of General Synod to make the front pages of the newspapers (not even in Winnipeg), except perhaps if they can ridicule this synod.

In many cases the preaching of Jesus Christ is ignored. Just like Gamaliel, people refuse to make a decision on the real issue, the great question: What do you think of the Christ? Gamaliel evades that question: it is not relevant to us. It is not relevant to the world.

The council accepts the recommendation and lets the apostles go free. But they first, together with the senate, make a decision against Christ! They do not officially decide whether the preaching of the apos-

tlés is from God or not. They cannot conceal their hatred against Jesus and His followers. They find it wise and convenient now already to suppress the truth of Jesus Christ. They first beat the apostles and charge them not to speak in Jesus' name anymore. They do not want the preaching of Jesus Christ. They oppose and resist God.

It is clear that Gamaliel and the leaders of Israel are not neutral to Christ. That is impossible. When the gospel is preached we are either for or against Christ. We may hide it but that is already a decision against Christ.

When the church openly preaches Jesus Christ, she can expect the resistance and hatred of the world. If General Synod makes its decisions in accordance with the Word of God, it cannot expect acclaim from the world. Not at all!

Lastly we see the victory of Christ! Christ completed all the work of salvation to gather God's people before God's throne. Christ did not die in vain. God's Word is not preached in vain. The gathering of God's people cannot be stopped. The gospel preaching will continue, whether the preachers are in prison or not. How great a blessing Christians in prison can be. Think of Paul, and the Christians in concentration camps who give a faithful testimony to Jesus Christ.

It is a reason for thankfulness that the apostles are set free, ready to preach from house to house. God makes sure that His Word will continue to be preached. That is the whole message of the Scriptures.

In our chapter it is mentioned that the apostles are beaten and that they rejoice that they are counted worthy to suffer for the name of Christ. They consider the name and honour of Christ higher than their personal freedom and honour and reputation in the world. We should not seek this persecution of the world. But if it comes because we are faithful to the Word of God, we can rejoice with the persecuted of all ages.

May we and General Synod be guided

CORRECTION

Mr. Hans Boersma asked me to place the following note in *Clarion*:

In my article it is not clear that the reference to a "church-political blunder" on p. 160 (March 31, 1989 issue) refers to an article by Rev. W.W.J. VanOene in *Clarion* 36:18 (Sept. 11, 1987), p. 395, arguing that when the churches liberated themselves in 1944 it was wrong to do so on the basis of Art. 31 C.O.

I further referred to the Press Releases of the Regional Synod West (March 31-April 2, 1987) in *Clarion* 36:10 (May 22, 1987), p. 233; and of the Regional Synod West (Nov. 8, 1988) in *Clarion* 37:25 (Year End issue, 1988), p. 546.

J. Geertsema

not by wisdom of human reasoning and convenience but by the wisdom that comes from the Lord God. He has promised it to all who bow before the Word of the Lord and Saviour. Lest we be found opposing God.

Christ's is the victory! He will gather all His people through His Word and Spirit. And for us — every day, tomorrow, and in the coming weeks — is the time of decision.

After this, Rev. van Beveren leads in prayer. We thank the Lord for uniting us here tonight, a privilege many believers miss who are persecuted for their faith, languishing in prisons and concentration camps. We thank the Lord for bringing us together in the unity of the faith, united in the confession of God's Son Jesus Christ, the wonder of His grace which we do not deserve, since we are not better than others.

We give thanks for Christ who gave His blood for His people, who were God's enemies; for being chosen to be His children and the surety and reliability of God's promises now and in the future; for the fact that nothing will separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We pray . . .

that we may always be faithful to God's Word, in spite of the temptations and attractions of the world; for steadfastness; for the Lord's blessing on the brothers delegates to make decisions that are important for the way the churches will go; that they in all their actions and deliberations may seek the honour of God's great name and the edification of His church; that the churches also through this synod may continue to walk in the Lord's way and the churches and all the members be able to do their task, proclaiming the mercies of the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ; for the missionaries and mission workers, that the Lord may bring many to His churches through their work; for those who turn away from God, that, as the Lord has overcome the resistance of our hearts, He will also overcome the hardness of their hearts; for the government to be an instrument to further God's kingdom and church; for God's blessing upon the church, on the generations of the Lord's children, a blessing into eternity; for the sake of Jesus Christ.

After offering our gifts for the needy, we sing Hymn 40:1,4,5 to the praise of the Lord. Then we receive the blessing of the Lord in the benediction.

In a social gathering downstairs the joyful crowd of brothers and sisters meet each other, strengthened and encouraged by the preaching of the Word of our gracious God.

Synod begins

At 9:00 a.m., Tuesday, April 18, Rev. W. den Hollander, on behalf of the convening church of Winnipeg, opens the meeting of delegates by asking them to sing Hymn 2:1,3. He reads Matthew 28:16-20 and leads in prayer. He addresses the delegates and the audience with cordial words

of welcome. He speaks fitting words from the Scripture passage and reminds the delegates that their work is to be service to the Lord Jesus Christ, the only universal Bishop of the church. May we see in the youthfulness of the delegates the Lord's faithfulness as He recruits a new generation of servants. May all things be done decently and in good order, for the peace of Jerusalem, to the greater glory of our Lord and Saviour. The meeting and audience then sing Hymn 2:4.5.

The brothers de Leeuw and Poppe examine the credentials. All the first delegates are present. The officers of synod are elected by ballot. Chairman: Rev. G. Stam; vice-chairman: Rev. M. VanderWel; first clerk (Acts): Rev. P.K.A. de Boer; second clerk (correspondence): Rev. R. Aasman. Synod is now constituted and the officers take their seats.

Rev. Stam addresses synod and expresses gratitude for the confidence placed in the officers. He mentions that this synod has been labeled as the synod of "baby boomers" but is grateful for the presence and maturity of a "baby booster", the vice-chairman. He expresses gratitude for the good spirit that was evident already yester-

day and trusts that this will continue. Synod has also been labeled as the synod of the inexperienced. But in spite of all the labels, synod is to do its work in faithfulness to the Word of God, in accordance with our accepted Church Order. Our inexperience will show at times but let us continue in faithfulness.

He stresses that ecclesiastical assemblies never stand on their own, isolated from other major assemblies. Many items on the agenda have served at previous synods. Many items are even against previous decisions. We must reckon with the aspect of continuity and not break radically with the past but express *unity in continuity*.

People sometimes speak of good and bad synods. A bad synod would be one that makes rash decisions that are not properly researched and that are totally unexpected by the churches.

We have to come to responsible and balanced decisions, listen carefully to each other all the time, see the value of the argumentation of each other, and treat each submission and appeal with respect, without considering the person.

Rev. Stam thanks the convening church

for the preparatory work and the excellent reception till now. This shows great promise for the (hopefully not too many) weeks ahead.

He expresses gratitude to Rev. van Beveren who, though retired, is still very active and alive when on the pulpit, and who must have a lot of time on his hands: no active minister comes up with *five* points for a sermon. He thanks Rev. van Beveren for his words and the Word of God he preached yesterday. May the Lord bless you, Rev. and Mrs. van Beveren in the time of your retirement.

The chairman reads letters of greeting from our Free Reformed sister churches in Australia and South Africa. Synod may expect a representative from our sister churches in the Netherlands. Rev. Jack Petersen, representing the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, is expected to attend some time next week.

Synod then adjourns to give the officers the opportunity to propose a schedule of time and committee work.

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Ottawa reflects on pearl anniversary

On January 4, 1959, a small group of determined pioneers instituted a Canadian Reformed church in Canada's capital city. In so doing, they ended a formal dependency on the mother church of Toronto and struck out on an unknown course. Very quickly, this new congregation would see difficult times and learn to lean on the arm of Christ — her Bridegroom.

On Saturday evening, January 7, 1989, a small group of equally determined people paused to reflect on the events of the past thirty years. The ladies of the Ottawa congregation first provided a buffet dinner which we all enjoyed very much. After dinner, letters from former members of our congregation were read. We also enjoyed hearing about the "good old days" from Mr. and Mrs. G. VanWeerden — the only "originals" still residing in Ottawa, and from Mr. and Mrs. P. Koning who were able to join us for the celebration.

The evening was not entirely confined to a stroll down memory lane. We were entertained by some of Ottawa's present and future talents: an ice-breaker, musical performances, readings, songs, not to forget a truly spirited rendition of "Old Shep."

Youth participated as well



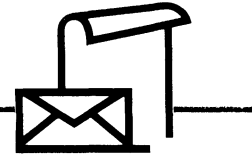
Abundant food for shepherd and flock

To close the evening, our MC — Mr. George Vanwoudenberg gave the floor to Ottawa's current minister, Rev. G. VanPopta. Our minister found it appropriate that the thirtieth anniversary is traditionally symbolized by the pearl: For thirty years, the church at Ottawa could treasure a pearl of great value — the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

As our tiny group straggled outside into the cold January evening, the im-

age of the pearl stayed in my mind. For a pearl has a wonderfully warm, lustrous quality as it reflects the light of the sun. Though at times the church at Ottawa has walked in the shadow of some tragic moments, we continue to bask in the light of the Son and await, along with her sister churches, the arrival of her Bridegroom at the coming marriage feast.

By Peter Buist



Dear Editor,

The recent spate of articles concerning the OPC presents an almost unrelied rosy picture of our contact with the OPC. It is not that I enjoy being a wet blanket, but a few caveats ought to be raised.

I begin with Dr. Van Dam's press review (01/02/89, p. 7). After he narrates the exodus of several congregations out of the OPC into the PCA, he concludes that this "trend will also strengthen the Reformed character of the OPC." But why? Is he saying that the people leaving the OPC are unreformed and that for 12 years we have had contact with a body dominated by unreformed people? If those who are joining the PCA are unreformed, ought we not encourage the OPC to faithfulness in disciplining unreformed ministers and churches, instead of bidding them a fond adieu? Indeed, since the OPC still has fraternal contact with the PCA, is not this whole "realignment" an example of a doctrine of the pluriformity of the church?

Indeed, one can question whether the OPC that is left will be more Reformed, or simply more conservative. After all, it was J. Gresham Machen, the founder of the OPC and not one of those "unreformed" PCA types, who defined the church as a voluntary association of like-minded people. It was John Murray, and not one of the PCA "realignees," who authored a report for the Thirty-third General Assembly of the OPC which stated that people who refused to have their children baptized could be members of the church and that the fellowship of the Lord's Supper was to be extended to every Christian. It was this same John Murray who wrote that assurance was not of the essence of faith. It was Rev. G.I. Williamson, a favorite of the *Journey* crowd and not of the realignment group, who told the consistory at Blue Bell that confessional membership does not work and that the theology of the Liberated churches represents dead orthodoxy. It was the Rev. John J. Mitchell, and not one of those going into the PCA, who wrote, "There is no such thing as a Reformed church that limits itself to those who can fully accept all major doctrine of the Reformed faith; such a body is a sect, not a church" and "The 'one true church in each locality,' as that idea developed in continental, particularly Dutch, circles, has no grounding in Scripture . . . To strive to develop a 'one true church' in Blue Bell is an unbiblical goal." We must

also consider what the *OPC Form of Government* says concerning the unity of the church:

The visible unity of the Body of Christ, though not altogether destroyed, is greatly obscured by the division of the Christian church into different groups or denominations. In such denominations Christians exercise a fellowship toward each other in doctrine, worship, and order that they do not exercise toward other Christians. The purest churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error, and some have gravely departed from apostolic purity; yet all of these which maintain through a sufficient discipline the Word and sacraments in their fundamental integrity are to be recognized as true manifestations of the church of Jesus Christ. All such churches should seek a closer fellowship . . . (*FOG*, IV.4, p. 14)

Is Dr. Van Dam right that the OPC is becoming more Reformed? The evidence above suggests not. Is realignment a biblical solution to the problem of unfaithfulness? Again, it would seem not. Realignment seems a politic maneuver which implies that there are two heads of the church: Christ, the Head of the faithful and Satan, the head of the unfaithful — and the two live together without the issue of discipline being raised. How then can we best aid the OPC? By remaining absolutely faithful to our Confessions and by urging that same faithfulness upon the OPC.

More troubling is the article, "Has the OPC Changed?," by Rev. R.F. Boersema. On one point, we agree: the OPC has not changed substantially since 1977. On what this means for our continuing contact, however, we disagree. First, let us clarify a little history. Rev. Geertsema has already pointed out Rev. Boersema's faulty reading of the decisions of the Synod of Dordt about confessional membership; I would further refer the reader to Rev. Stam's articles in the *Clarion* concerning the baptismal questions and Rev. VanOene's introduction to the 1989 *Yearbook*, "The Whole Doctrine." Revs. Geertsema, Stam, and VanOene, as well as Classis Ontario South of September, 1985, all agree that Blue Bell's position concerning confessional membership is the biblical and Reformed position. Yes, the OPC was asked to change, but was that not a matter of the Reformation of the

church? Should Blue Bell be faulted for asking for the OPC to become biblical? And should the OPC be excused for not becoming biblical in this regard simply because they had never held to confessional membership before this?

Second, we are confronted with the question of the "interim" session, Presbytery, and the complaints. The "interim" session was imposed upon Blue Bell by the Presbytery of Philadelphia. Elders were brought in from other churches and made, by the fiat of Presbytery, the elders of Blue Bell; the congregation was not given the right to vote for those elders. When Presbytery was challenged about this, they denied the complaint of Blue Bell and affirmed the legitimacy of the "interim" session. (Just in passing: the Presbytery is in no way comparable to the Classis. The Presbytery is considered to be the permanently standing ruling body of the "regional church" which "consists of all the members of the local congregation and ministers within a certain district" (*FOG*, XIV.1, p. 50). As such, presbytery "has the power to order whatever pertains to the spiritual welfare of the churches under its care" (*ibid.*, XIV.5, p. 50). The presbyterian system of government is collegialist and hierarchical from its inception; the local congregation is only a part of the regional church, not a complete church. Blue Bell was trapped by this hierarchy.) Blue Bell was denied elders from among her congregation and Presbytery refused to declare eligible for call any candidates who held to the positions of the church at Blue Bell.

Very well, but why did Blue Bell not go with its complaints to General Assembly? Here things get confusing, but it is important to see this sequence of events and to remember the hierarchical church government of the OPC. Presbytery denied the complaint against the imposition of the 'interim' session, but in the course of that meeting of Presbytery, the interim session resigned. Presbytery then appointed a committee with the authority to settle the issues brought forth in the complaints. This committee then stated that the complaints no longer had any standing since they were brought against the 'interim' session which no longer existed. Like the rule in pick-up basketball: no harm, no foul. Yet, one of the members of the former 'interim' session complained against the 'plenary' power given this committee. Presbytery acceded

committee. They then appointed the same men to a new committee with the mandate to solve the problems at Blue Bell. In the meantime, the one member of the 'interim' session who had not resigned stopped the election of elders from among the congregation at Blue Bell.

This, then, is the situation at the end of September, 1984: Presbytery was not, contrary to Rev. Boersema's contention, still studying the complaints, but Blue Bell was told that the complaints had no standing. There was no chance of elders being elected from among the congregation and the congregation was subjected to a steady stream of false and abusive preaching. For example, we were told that "there is no difference between the children of believers and the children of unbelievers"; we were told that we were the church of Ephesus which had left its first love and the Pharisees to whom Christ would say, "Depart from Me. I never knew you"; individual members of the congregation were criticized from the pulpit, and members of the congregation were put under discipline for studying the Heidelberg Catechism together in their homes — all of this under the hierarchical imposition of the "governing body of the regional church," the Presbytery. At this point, Blue Bell withdrew from the OPC in accordance with the procedure set forth in the *FOG* XVI.7.

Blue Bell did not go directly to General Assembly because there was no vehicle for Blue Bell to go to General Assembly and maintain its integrity as a church of Christ. Yet, this is not the same as saying that the issue did not go before General Assembly. The report, from which Rev. Boersema quotes, was written by the consistory of Blue Bell in January, 1985. Its purpose was to bring the matter before the whole OPC. Blue Bell had been stymied by the hierarchical imposition of Presbytery, so this was the only route for Blue Bell to take. This was done, again, because of the peculiar nature of OPC government. Just as the local congregation is only a part of the 'regional church,' the 'regional church' is only a part of the 'whole church' which is governed by the General Assembly (*FOG*, XV.1, p. 55). Part of the responsibility of the General Assembly is to review "the records of the presbyteries" (*ibid.*, XV.7, p. 57). Thus, the General Assembly in its work would be forced to approve or express disapproval of the actions of the Presbytery of Philadelphia with regard to Blue Bell. By making the other churches aware of the situation, by making our appeal in this way, we had hoped that the records of the Presbytery of Philadelphia would not be received by the General Assembly — but they were so received, with-

out any challenge to the Presbytery's actions concerning Blue Bell. The churches as a whole were clearly confronted with the issues. And Blue Bell did have its appeals before the General Assembly in the only way we could, given the situation.

(I should note that at least one presbytery, the Presbytery of the Dakotas, took cognizance of our appeal. But, instead of objecting to the actions of the Presbytery of Philadelphia, they proposed that both sides pretend that nothing ever happened. Both Blue Bell and the Presbytery of Philadelphia rejected this.)

One also ought to note that the issue of confessional membership (which, by the way, was not the only issue involved at Blue Bell) had come to previous General Assemblies. In 1966 and again in 1967, the General Assembly decided that it was proper to admit to the Lord's Supper those who would not baptize their children as well as all other non-Reformed 'Christians.' Further, these General Assemblies ruled that local congregations may receive into membership these same people, if the local session sees fit. This was the settled and established rule within the OPC. How many times does Rev. Boersema require an issue to be settled before there are grounds to separate?

With regard to Rev. Boersema's assertions regarding the situation at Laurel, I will be more brief. Rev. Boersema argues that the denial of the complaint by the General Assembly "does not mean that the OPC is not open to reconsidering their method of admitting visitors to the Lord's Supper." First, if the biblical position, such as the position of Rev. Hofford, *et al.*, is rejected, then is not an unbiblical position accepted? Second, if the OPC is open to change, why did the General Assembly refuse the request of the complainants to have a study committee established? Third, let us consider the judgment of Classis Ontario South of December 9, 1987, concerning the General Assembly's decision. Classis found that the General Assembly's "observations in answer" to the complaint took "refuge in an invisible church concept, undermining covenant responsibility," contained "an incorrect use of Scripture, thereby reducing the responsibility of the Session to guard the Table," and contained "a playing down of the seriousness of the judgment of God" (Press Release, *Clarion*, March 18, 1988, p. 135).

In the case of Blue Bell and Laurel, we have seen hierarchical imposition, a denial of the rights of the local congregation, a wrong use of discipline, and that the churches as a whole were clearly confronted with the issues. By Rev. Boersema's own criteria, we see that comparison with the *vrijmaking* is not only not farfetched, but wholly accu-

rate. The question is not whether Blue Bell and Laurel were too hasty, but what took them so long.

There is much more that needs to be said concerning these matters, but no one letter, even one as prolix as this one, can put out all of the fires started; one only hopes to contain the conflagration. One might, for example, ask why neither the Committee for Contact nor Dr. Van Dam commented on the CEIR's offer to have "arranged for an orderly transition (of the church at Blue Bell) to the confederation of the Canadian Reformed Churches." Is this not a strange view of the church that says to a member of the federation, "We will arrange an orderly transition to another flock"? Is this not the same lack of discipline and of pluriformity seen in the "realignment"? But, perhaps, more of this at another time.

Sincerely,
KENNETH A. KOK

Response

Having been asked to respond, I take this opportunity to do so, but I will be as brief as possible.

In the first place, I would like to reaffirm the Reformed character of the OPC in spite of Rev. Kok's suggestions to the contrary. It is a well-known fact that hardly needs elaboration here that the OPC has a special position in American Presbyterianism precisely because of the influential Reformed element that has been such a blessing to this church. One can think here especially of the role which Westminster Theological Seminary had within the OPC. Distinctively Reformed men like C. Van Til and R.B. Kuiper taught there and had a positive impact in the OPC. Of course, besides this very specific Reformed element there have also always been the distinctively Presbyterian features of the OPC. Thus there were and are in the OPC those who lean more in the specifically Reformed direction and others who are more inclined to go into a specifically Presbyterian direction if they had to make a choice.

As can be expected in such a situation, some in the OPC now (within the context of seeking union with the PCA) place a higher premium on retaining and safeguarding what has been gained in building a Reformed OPC; others would consider it more important to seek union with other Presbyterians even if the gain in Reformed distinctives might be jeopardized.

For this reason, if the latter are convinced that they should now leave the OPC for the PCA (cf. the interview with Rev. Galbraith), then their departure from the OPC cannot but strengthen the Reformed (as opposed to Presbyterian) character of the OPC. I therefore wrote that the trend of congregations leaving the OPC for the PCA will "strengthen

the Reformed character of the OPC. This gives all the more reason for us as Canadian Reformed Churches to intensify our contacts with the OPC."

Now to suggest as Rev. Kok appears to do throughout his letter that a church holding Presbyterian distinctives in certain areas of doctrine and practice is for that reason a false church is unwarranted. Our confession defines a false church differently! Regarding these matters one should also read and study the reports on the OPC that have served our churches so well through so many synods with careful analysis and evaluation of all the issues involved.

The balance of Rev. Kok's letter reacts to an article of Rev. Boersema, who may want to react to that in a future issue.

C. VAN DAM

Dear Mr. Editor;

Your editorial, "Our Contact With the OPC" (Vol 38, No. 6), draws attention to key points of discussion in our relationship with the OPC. It is a helpful summary of the issues involved.

It was also helpful in drawing to my attention an error I made in my article. I consulted H. Bouwman's book, *De Kerkelijke Tucht: Naar Het Gereformeerde Kerkrecht*. (Kok, 1912.) By not photocopying all the relevant pages, I jumped to the wrong conclusion. It was not the famous Synod of Dort that made the statement to which I referred, but the Regional Synod of Leiden of 1619. You also refer to this decision in your editorial. I sincerely apologize for the mistake.

In the OPC there is *greater variety of practice concerning what is expected of those who make public profession of faith* than in the Canadian Reformed Churches. However, I can safely say that it is a general practice that before making profession of faith, *some kind of classes in the doctrine of the church are followed* and in these classes, it is clearly the Reformed faith that is taught. My wife, who was born and raised in the OPC, studied the Westminster Shorter Catechism and was expected to agree with all the Reformed doctrine before making profession of faith. It would certainly be a caricature of the OPC to suggest that all that is expected is a confession of faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour without any further understanding of the biblical doctrine. Also in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church it is the *exception and not the rule that someone has difficulty with some point of doctrine and is received into the church*. Such a person must indeed submit to the session of the church and may not make propaganda for his divergent views.

Someone who makes profession of faith in the OPC is asked four questions. The first is, "Do you believe the Bible, consisting of the Old and New Testa-

ments, to be the Word of God, and its doctrine to be the perfect and only true doctrine of salvation?" The fourth is, "Do you agree to submit in the Lord to the government of this church and, in case you should be found delinquent in doctrine or life, to heed its discipline?" Parents who have their child baptized must answer the following question, "Do you promise to instruct your child in the principles of our holy religion as revealed in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and as summarized in the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this church . . . ?"

The difference between our views with regard to confessional membership is partly linguistic. Although I would not formulate it this way, Dr. Bouwman wrote:

Thus the Reformed people always wanted to maintain the doctrine of the church as based on the Holy Scripture, but they also did not want to shortchange personal freedom. They gave each the freedom to confess differently or to have a different understanding of the Scripture than the church has, but they did not allow unlimited freedom. If someone who did not agree with the Confession wanted to take his stand outside the bounds of the church, he had that freedom. However, if he wanted to stay inside the church, he could not misuse the freedom of speech in order to combat the truth confessed by the church. (Bouwman, *Kerkelijke Tucht*, 195.)

In the Canadian Reformed Church in which I grew up, for many years we had a member who did not believe in infant baptism and who did not have his children baptized as infants. Did that mean that our consistory had given up the binding of the church to the Reformed confessions? No, none other than the Three Forms of Unity were ever taught in our church. As a matter of fact, I did not know that this member rejected infant baptism until many years later and even now I imagine that many who were members of that church were never aware of this brother's position. The Church faithfully taught only the Reformed faith. That is how it should be.

GENERAL SYNOD NEWS

On Thursday, April 20, 1989, General Synod appointed:

DR. N.H. GOOTJES

of Busan, Korea, as professor of *dogmatology*

and

DRS. J. DE JONG

of Burlington-South, as professor of *diaconology*

The Church also welcomed this brother who did not make propaganda for his views. That is also how it should be. In order to be the Catholic Church it is necessary that both these positions be maintained. As you write in your editorial, we maintain confessional membership in the church, but we do so in a pastoral way.

An Orthodox Presbyterian brother reading about the Canadian Reformed position might say, "I have no difficulty at all with your position as such. I share that position. But, if you also, as an exception, admit as a member someone who does not hold to infant baptism, and you also recognize that those who make profession of faith do not always thoroughly know the Three Forms of Unity, I cannot understand why you call that confessional membership. Confessional membership to me means that you bind your members to the confessions in the same way as the office-bearers are bound.

For this reason I say the difference is partly linguistic. We say that all our members must declare that they acknowledge the Reformed doctrine to be "the true and complete doctrine of salvation" yet we allow exceptions and we recognize that many members do not have a full understanding of the Canons of Dort, for example. Yet for office-bearers we do not allow such exceptions. Although we formulate it differently, our position is not so different from that of the OPC.

There is also the difference that in the Canadian Reformed Churches baptized members seldom make profession of faith before they are 17 or 18 years old and it is expected that they have a basic knowledge of all the doctrines of the church before they make profession of faith, while in the OPC profession of faith is often made at a younger age and it is felt that learning the doctrine of the church is an ongoing process which continues after making profession of faith. There are differences in practice between our two church federations, but these are differences of degree and do not represent mutually exclusive positions.

I did not have the time to thoroughly investigate the history of the continental Reformed churches about this matter of "confessional membership," but my appetite was certainly whetted. For example, I found a book by G. Voetius, *Verhandeling Over De Zichtbare En Georganiseerde Kerk* (Kok, Kampen, 1902) quite interesting (especially pp. 85-89). Mr. Editor, I thank you for a chance to correct my mistake and I urge you to invite someone to write a full-fledged article or series of articles on the matter of confessional membership in the history of the Reformed churches.

With brotherly greetings,
R. BOERSEMA



Press Release Classis Ontario North, March 10, 1989

1. *Opening*: On behalf of the convening church at Brampton, Rev. G. Nederveen calls the meeting to order. He reads John 13:1-17 and leads in prayer. He requests the delegates to sing Psalm 145:2. The delegates and the deputies of Regional Synod are welcomed.

2. *Examination of Credentials*: All the churches are properly represented. The churches of Elora and Fergus have one instruction each.

3. *Constitution of classis*: Classis is constituted and the following executives take their respective places: chairman: Rev. G.P. VanPopta; clerk: Rev. R.N. Gleason; vice-chairman: Rev. P.G. Feenstra.

In the memorabilia the chairman congratulates the church at Orangeville with the fact that Rev. den Hollander accepted the call extended by them. He expresses the wish that the vacant churches may soon find their own pastor and teacher. He also mentions that Rev. A.B. Roukema was taken to be with the Lord. Gratitude is expressed for the work the Lord allowed br. Roukema to accomplish in the midst of the churches.

4. *Agenda*: After several items are added, the agenda is adopted.

5. a. Prior to dealing with the various points on the agenda a letter from the church at Burlington (Ebenezer) regarding the retirement of Rev. D. DeJong in accordance with Art 13. C.O. is discussed.

Taking note of the information submitted by the Ebenezer Canadian Reformed Church at Burlington, classis with the concurring advice of deputies of Regional Synod decides,

1. to release most honourably the Rev. D. DeJong from his ministerial duties in the classical district of Ontario North as of September 1, 1989, on which date his retirement from active service in the church at Burlington (Ebenezer) will take effect;

2. to commend the Rev. D. DeJong in his retirement to the Lord and the Word of His grace, with sincere gratitude for the work which Rev. D. DeJong has faithfully carried out during his service in this classis, and with the prayer that it may please the Lord to confirm the fruit of his labour;

b. the deputies of Regional Synod are thanked for their advice and leave the meeting.

6. *Reports*: a. A report from the classical treasurer is read and received. The

bank balance per December 31, 1988, was \$6411.53. The classical contribution is \$4.50 per communicant member, to be directed to the classical treasurer, br. J.J. Poort.

b. A report from the church at Burlington South regarding inspection of the archives is not present. The church at Burlington South is instructed to have this report at Classis Ontario North, June 9th, 1989.

c. Church-visitation reports to the churches at Grand Valley, Lower Sackville, and Ottawa are read and received.

d. A report from the Committee re: Funds for Needy Churches is read and received. Classis urges the churches in the classical district to pay the outstanding amounts for 1988 (\$19.50 per communicant member) and informs the churches that no levy will be issued in 1989.

7. Question Period according to Art. 44 C.O. is held.

8. *Instructions or Proposals of the churches*:

a. The consistory of the church at Guelph proposes a more uniform practice of reimbursement by requesting classis to advise those churches who receive pulpit supply as arranged by classis to:

1. Reimburse the church granting them pulpit supply rather than the minister of that church.

2. Pay the church the amount they pay their "guest" ministers.

3. Direct ministers who wish to be reimbursed for transportation costs (particularly when long distances apply) to classical funds.

After amending point 3 to read: "pay the transportation cost to the appointed ministers" classis adopts this proposal.

b. A proposal by the church at Burlington South pertaining to the same matter mentioned in "a" above need not be dealt with since it was nullified by the proposal which was adopted.

c. Classis adopts a proposal by the church at Brampton regarding travel expenses. Travel expenses made on behalf of classis will be reimbursed at a rate of 25 cents per km.

d. The churches at Elora and Fergus request pulpit supply for one Lord's Day per month. The following arrangements are made:

Elora:

April 16 — P. Feenstra; May 21 — G. Nederveen; June 18 — G.P. van Popta; July 16 — J. De Jong; August 20 — D. DeJong; September 17 — J. Mulder; October 15 — R. Gleason.

Fergus:

April 30 — D. DeJong; May 28 — R. Gleason; June 25 — J. Mulder; July 23 — G. Nederveen; August 27 — P. Feenstra; September 24 — J. De Jong; October 22 — G.P. van Popta.

9. *Correspondence received*:

a. A letter of appeal from a br. and sr. is dealt with in closed session.

b. A request for financial assistance from the church at Lower Sackville. The following proposal is presented for consideration and adopted:

To provide the church at Lower Sackville with a grant of \$8,000.00 to complete the study and laundry room and build an attached garage, as addition to the present church building.

10. *Appointments*:

a. Convening church for the next classis is the church at Burlington (Ebenezer); date — June 9, 1989 at 9:00 a.m. in the church at Burlington West.

b. Suggested officers: chairman, J. DeJong; clerk, G.P. van Popta; assessor, D. DeJong.

11. *Personal Question Period*: is made use of.

12. *Censure according to Art. 44 C.O.*: is not exercised.

13. The *Acts* are adopted and the Press Release approved.

14. *Closing*: The chairman thanks the ladies for their wonderful hospitality. He requests the delegates to sing Psalm 84:5 and leads in a prayer of thanksgiving. Classis is closed.

On behalf of classis,
P.G. Feenstra,
Vice-chairman, e.t.

Press Release Classis Ontario South (Contracta) at Hamilton, March 31, 1989

1. *Opening*: On behalf of the convening church of Hamilton, Rev. Cl. Stam calls the meeting to order. He requests the singing of Hymn 42: 1,8; reads Prov. 16: 1-9 and leads in prayer.

2. *Credentials*: The credentials of the delegates of the three churches present are examined and are found to be in good order. Delegates are: Attercliffe — Rev. D.G.J. Agema and elder K. Elzinga; Hamilton — Rev. Cl. Stam and elder A. Witten; Smithville — Rev. C. Bosch and elder P. Linde.

3. *Appointment of Officers*: Classis is constituted. Appointed as officers are: chairman — Rev. Agema, clerk — Rev. Stam; vice chairman — Rev. Bosch. The chairman notes the reasons for this

classis contracta, viz., the request of the consistory of Hamilton to approve the release of Rev. P. Aasman as missionary of the church of Hamilton and the request of Rev. C. Bosch for a certificate of release ad. art 9 C.O.

4. *Adoption of Agenda:* The agenda is adopted.

5. *Release of Rev. C. Bosch of Smithville:* The necessary documents are presented. These include: a letter of call extended by the Free Reformed Church of Kelmscott, W.A.; letter of acceptance of call; certificate of release of the church of Smithville. Rev. Bosch is granted his release from his ministerial duties in the classical region ON South. A Classical Certificate of release is read, approved and signed. In thankfulness to the Lord, Rev. Agema addresses some words of appreciation to Rev. Bosch for his work in the classical region. In place of Rev. Bosch, classis appoints Rev. C. Stam as deputy ad examina on a temporary basis until next classis.

6. *Request Hamilton:* Hamilton re-

quests classis to approve the release of Rev. P. Aasman as missionary of the church of Hamilton. Classis, after having heard the reasons given for this request concurs with Hamilton's decision to release Rev. Aasman from his call as missionary and notes that he is available for a call within the churches. The chairman speaks some words of encouragement of the delegates of Hamilton with respect to its mission work and the disappointments experienced.

7. *Acts and Press Release:* The acts are read and the press release is approved.

8. *Closing:* The delegates sing Psalm 125: 1,2 and Rev. Agema closes in prayer.

C. BOSCH, clerk e.t.

K. Schilder commemoration 1990

In 1990 it will be one hundred years ago that K. Schilder was born.

The Theologische Universiteit of The Reformed Churches (Liberated) in the

Netherlands wishes to commemorate this fact with the publication of a book and the organization of a symposium.

The memorial book will include contributions concerning the theological work of K. Schilder by the faculty and alumni of the Theologische Universiteit.

Among the contributors are: J. Douma, B. Kamphuis, J. Kamphuis, H.J.D. Smit, C. Trimp, K. Veling, J.P. de Vries and W.G. de Vries.

This tribute to the remembrance of the Reformed confessor and theologian K. Schilder is not meant to be purely retrospective, but also to inquire as to the present and future significance of his work.

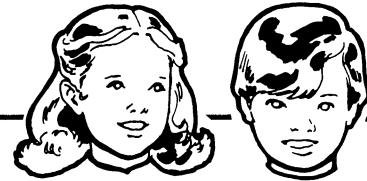
The symposium will be held, Deo Volente, Wednesday, December 12, 1990.

The memorial book will serve as a starting point for discussion and lecturers will discuss the various contributions in workshops.

Information concerning the time and place of the symposium and how to participate will be sent later.



OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE



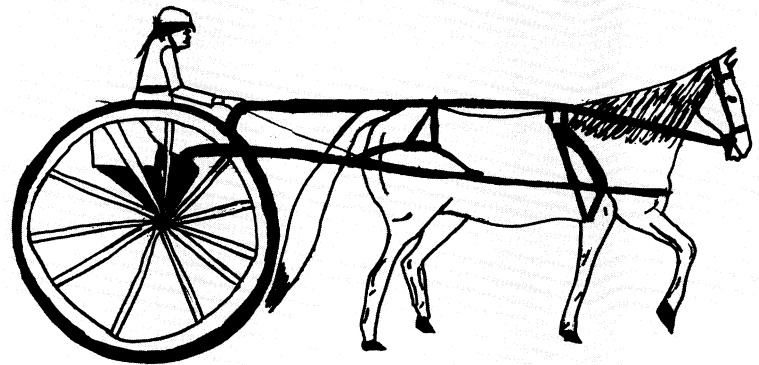
By Aunt Betty

Let's start with a Spring poem by Busy Beaver Brenda Oosterveld.

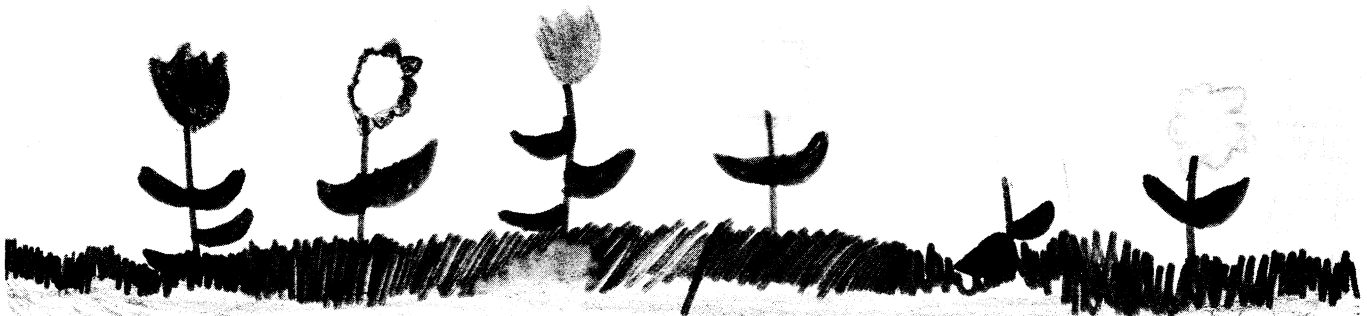
Picture by Busy Beaver Earl Van Assen

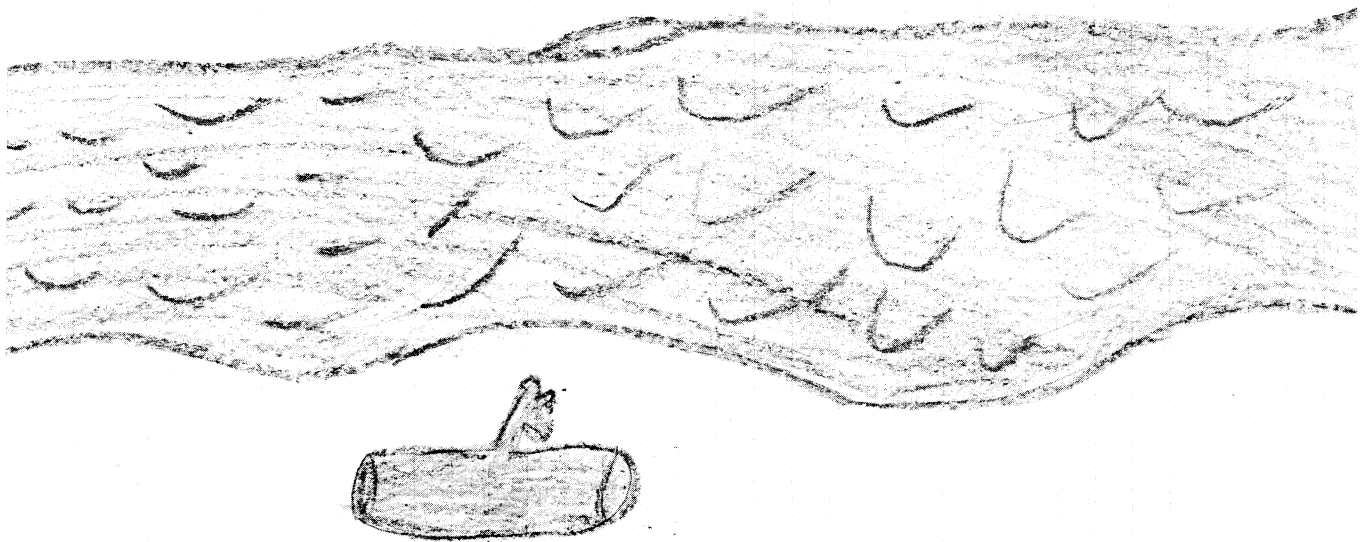
Spring

Winter's gone,
Spring is just begun.
All the kids are playing,
Having so much fun.
The flowers start to grow
The streams start to flow.
The trees start to bud
The sun melts all the mud.
The birds are singing sweetly
The wind is blowing neatly.
Spring is just begun!



Spring Border by Busy Beaver Joni Dekker.





Time for May birthday wishes!
 Here's to all Busy Beavers celebrating a birthday in the "merry month of May" — a very happy birthday and may the Lord grant you many more years in health and happiness. We wish you all a very thankful day celebrating with your family and friends.

May

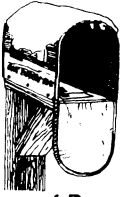
Melanie Veenendaal	1	Nicole Aasman	15
Darlene Vanderpol	3	Nellie Bosveld	16
Karen Vander Veen	3	Kimberley Driegen	16
Karen Bartels	4	Jennifer Siebenga	18
Felicia Viersen	5	Beth Kingma	19
Jacoba Harlaar	6	Kimberley Kamphuis	20
Heather Krabbendam	6	Lee-Ann Beintema	22
Timothy Van Popta	9	Brian Jager	24
Rebecca Boersma	10	Steven Vandevelde	26
Julie Buitenhuis	11	Barbara Kobes	30
Rebecca Hekert	11	Lydia Viersen	30
Tim Verhey	12	Christina Bredenhof	31
Sara Vanderpol	14		

"My Favourite Book"

by Busy Beaver *Jane Schulenberg*

My favourite book is "Pollyanna." It's about a girl who is an orphan. Both her parents died. She goes to live with her aunt who doesn't love her because her father took away her mother (her aunt's sister) from her aunt's home. Through the whole book she meets lots of people with troubles. Pollyanna makes them happy with a game called "the glad game" that made people think of good things. Later her aunt does grow to love her after she is run over and is paralyzed. The book ends with a doctor friend curing Pollyanna and planning to marry her aunt.





FROM THE MAILBOX

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Selby Bareman*. We are happy to have you join us. How did your team do this winter, Selby? Please write and tell me when you are successful in getting a pen pal, all right? You can find the names of Busy Beavers who of Busy Beavers who would like a pen pal in these issues of *Clarion*, January 28, 1989, September 16, 1988, March 4, 1988.

How did you do on your 4H speech, *Christina Bredenhof*? And can you play some songs to sing? Thank you for your letter. Keep up the good work, Christina!

Hello *Yvonne Vanegmond*. It was good to hear from you again. Thank you for the picture and the letter. What are you doing at recess time now that it's spring, Yvonne?

Sounds to me as if you had a very interesting Christmas holiday, *Sara Plantinga*. And now we've had Spring break already! How time flies. What good news you had, Sara. Be sure to write and keep me posted!

How is Max doing, *Denise Elliott*? And have you done any more experiments lately? Maybe you will write and tell us about them? The Busy Beavers would enjoy that, I think. Bye for now. Write again soon.

Who will exchange letters with:

Selby Bareman (age 11)
Box 754
Grassy Lake, Alberta T0K 0Z0

Jocelyn 't Hart (age 10)
76 Leonora St.
Albany 6330
Western Australia

Quiz Time!

MATCH ME UP

by Busy Beaver *Melanie Peters*

Match up the names of the sons with their father's name. (If you need some help you may look in Matthew 1.)

Sons	Fathers
Isaac	Abraham
Jacob	Judah
Perez	Boaz
Jesse	Shealtiel
Obed	Amon
Solomon	Isaac
Boaz	Obed
Zerub-babel	Asa
Joseph	Jesse
Mathan	David
Josiah	Salmon
Jehoshaphat	Jacob
David	Eleazar

SPRING WORDSEARCH

by Busy Beaver *Barbara Kobes*

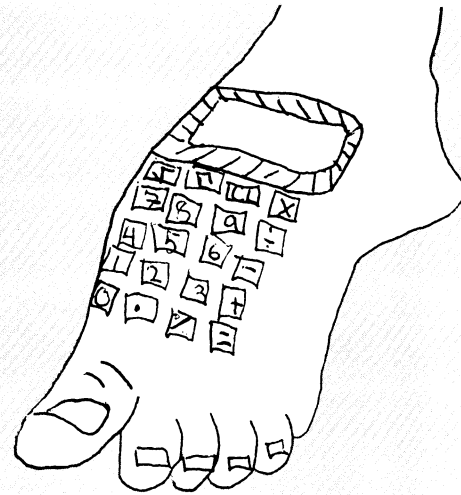


Look for:

flowers, bloom, buds, sun, planting, birds, warmth, friends, love, care, happiness

NUMBER PUZZLE

by Busy Beaver *Mary-Anne Moes*



- ▲ Pick any number.
- ▲ Add the next largest number.
- ▲ Add nine.
- ▲ Divide by two.
- ▲ Subtract the first number you chose.
- ▲ Now count the toes on your left foot.
- ▲ What number did you get?

How did you enjoy the puzzles, Busy Beavers?
Bye for now.

Love to you all,
Aunt Betty