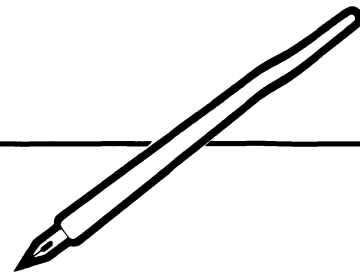




# Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

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## The ICRC — and a critical voice

In this issue we begin with the publication of material on the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC), held June 19-29 of this year in Langley, B.C. The reader will find the sermon of the Rev. M. van Beveren, preached in the prayer service, the opening word of the Rev. J. Visscher, and a report on the meetings, written by the Rev. G.H. Visscher. After this we hope to publish the papers that were delivered.

At the same time we publish what Rev. D.G.J. Agema wrote. He gives a picture of the history of the conception and birth of the ICRC, a picture taken from one specific angle, where the dark shadows fall. In this editorial I shall comment here on the main point of this critical voice, while adding a few remarks concerning details immediately following the article. The main thrust of the Rev. Agema's criticism is, in my opinion, the point that Reformed Churches with the Three Forms of Unity cannot truly have a sister-church relationship with Presbyterian churches which have and adhere to the Westminster Standards. His reason is that the divergencies are in fact "contradictions" which do not and should not allow us to place the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards beside each other as basis for a shared international organization of Reformed Churches. The other arguments simply are adduced to support this main point.

My comments here concentrate on the summarizing conclusions. Rev. Agema wants our churches to re-examine (which practically means withdraw from) the ICRC in the first place "because of the irregular history" for "the matter never came from the churches and various Committees went outside their mandate." First a remark is to be made regarding the formal aspect. If it is the rule that always all things which have been started in an irregular, unordered way should be (have been) rejected, quite a number of good things would have had to be abandoned. [Editorial remark: We changed Rev. Agema's "unordered" into "irregular"; "unordered" is an obsolete word.]

Further, even if it began with a suggestion of (an) Australian committee member(s) to the Dutch committee and so to the Dutch synod and the churches and, thus, did not officially come from the Australian Synod or churches, the matter would have come up anyway, because it lived in the minds of members of the committees for contact with churches abroad. The matter would have been brought to the attention of the churches anyway, because the time, the situation, was leading towards such a development.

Moreover, is not involvement in an international conference a matter which the churches of a federation have in common? Article 30, C.O. states: "A major assembly shall deal with those matters only which could not be finished in the minor assembly or which belong to its Churches in common." Since

the churches have their committees for contact with churches abroad, and since a conference is a form of such contact, I do not see anything irregular ("un-church-orderly") in a proposal from a committee for contact to the churches, meeting in their general synod, to organize a conference as another form of contact.

Rev. Agema stresses the fact that the Australians placed "and Korea" between brackets. This was a matter of uncertainty which one can interpret negatively but also simply as a question mark. However, could the Dutch churches exclude their Indonesian (Sumba Savu) and Korean sister churches? And even if one is convinced that there should first have been a meeting of Reformed Churches only, can we really turn the clock back? In my view, the Rev. Agema uses this formal(istic), I could even say, legalistic, argument, because for him Reformed and Presbyterian Standards do not fit together.

Rev. Agema's second ground for "re-examination" is that "the Church Order does not allow a General Synod to decide whether to join a conference." Earlier we read: "I do not believe that this Conference can ever be an ecclesiastical assembly simply because I do not see in Scripture an indication that we should strive for such an international synod and because our C.O. does not provide for this." From all what my colleague writes about this point in the article, especially regarding the ambiguity in the constitution here, one thing is very clear. It is this: that neither the churches nor the ICRC itself want the conference to be an international synod which "rules" the member churches. Therefore, this second point is a matter of "carrying water to the sea" and as such cannot be used against the ICRC.

However, there is more. When br. Agema says that Scripture does not indicate that we should strive toward an international synod, my question is: does Scripture give indications that we must have a national synod or even a classis? If it does, could not the same indication be used for an international synod? If it does not, is it wrong to have any major assembly? In the New Testament we do not read about a national synod or even a classis either. The meeting in Jerusalem (Acts 15) was a meeting of and with the apostles, and therefore of a different character, but it was kind of international! Is something wrong because there is no indication for it in Scripture? I am not at all saying that I favour an international synod; all I want to say is that we must be careful and correct in our argumentation.

Rev. Agema also rejects such an international synod (which nobody wants) because "the Church Order does not provide for this." I also agree. If, in fact, we were to have an international synod, just like our provincial and general or na-



The Moderamen: Rev. M. van Beveren, corresponding secretary; Rev. J. Visscher, chairman; Prof. A.C. Boyd, recording clerk; Rev. J. de Gelder, vice-chairman

tional synods, an article in the Church Order dealing with such an international major assembly would indeed be indispensable.

However, also with regard to a conference this argument (the C.O. does not speak about it) seems to count. Rev. Agema's point is that the Church Order *does not allow* [italics added] a general synod to decide whether to join a conference. In his reasoning the question is: how can an ecclesiastical meeting (synod) make a decision about joining or sending delegates to non-ecclesiastical, private conference. Is Rev. Agema aware that herewith also sending delegates to and joining an organization of only Reformed Churches which have the Three Forms of Unity, which Agema proposes to go back

A bird's-eye view of the conference



to, must be rejected? For such a conference of just Reformed Churches could not be a synod (see the above arguments: it is not in Scripture nor in the C.O.); but since such a conference can only be a non-ecclesiastical, private organization, a synod is not allowed to join it or send delegates to it.

Rev. Agema reasons: it is not in the Church Order, therefore it is not allowed; and since it is not in the Church Order and there are no indications for it in Scripture, it cannot be an ecclesiastical, but must be a non-ecclesiastical, private matter. I find this reasoning of Rev. Agema legalistic. It means that, as churches, we can do nothing on an international level except for maintaining correspondence via the Committees for Contact with Churches Abroad.

Here I want to say something regarding the ambiguity in the Constitution. As far as the technical formulation is concerned, I can agree that there is much of what Agema calls ambiguity. There is room for improvement in the formulation. However, one could also see a struggle of the synods and of the Conference itself to avoid the establishing of an international synod (again: which nobody wants), but also to avoid having just a private undertaking. Here is the view that the catholicity of the church implies the calling for the churches, not just for private church members, to practice international unity and to help each other as faithful churches in this modern world. Again I ask: is this forbidden because the Church Order does not speak about it? If the ICRC can be an organ through which we can the better share our rich heritage with others who need it and ask for it, should we refuse with a formalistic and legalistic reasoning? Is that showing Christian compassion?

Point three (the ambiguity) and five (the danger of hierarchy) I have dealt with. As long as the member churches keep seeing their own responsibility, and the ICR Conference does not become a "ruling" synod, this danger of hierarchy is not there. Besides, do our major assemblies really "rule" the churches? Is it not rather so that the local churches which together form or have joined the federation have made certain agreements in the Church Order for living and working

together? Is speaking of a ruling synod as such not using hierarchical language?

Point four is, in my opinion, the key issue: "the basis contains diversities in combining two sets of confessions." This point has been debated again at the Conference. There are two questions. Can the two confessions, in spite of their divergencies, form together the basis of the organization? And if we say that this can be so, are we, then, not binding ourselves to the Westminster Standards?

The question is: what are we doing when accepting both sets of confessions in the basis? We are saying that for working together in the ICRC as Reformed and Presbyterian Churches we, as Reformed Churches, acknowledge the Westminster Standards to be Reformed confessions and that in churches which have and faithfully adhere to these standards we have to do with churches which stand on a Reformed basis. We acknowledge herewith that such Presbyterian Churches can be true churches of our Lord Jesus Christ. We do not say that for ourselves and our church life we now also accept the Westminster Confessions, and neither do we declare that we place ourselves in everything behind what they say. No, we accept these standards only as basis for meeting each other in the ICRC and working together there.

We have adopted the Three Forms of Unity and have bound ourselves to them. We have to maintain them for our church life. The Presbyterians have adopted the Westminster Standards and have bound themselves to them. Therefore, they are bound to maintaining them. This is also for them simply a matter of ecclesiastical faithfulness. We do not have to make a Presbyterian church into a Reformed church in order to make it a true church of Christ.

However, we both have bound ourselves to our respective standards as *subordinate* confessional standards with *derived* authority. The first authority is for both of us the Word of God. From it the confessions derive their authority. This means that, if we should find in our creeds certain pronouncements which are in conflict with the Scriptures, we promise to bring a gravamen (objection) to the major assemblies in the ecclesiastical, church-orderly, way in order to have such a point corrected.

Since for both Scripture is the norm, we are called to discuss the differences or divergencies. If the Presbyterians find some fault with the Three Forms of Unity on the basis of Scripture, they are to address us on such a point; and vice versa. Discussing divergencies when they are of a serious nature is a matter of faithfulness to both Scripture and Confession.

Now there is an important aspect here. This is that our churches, following the Dutch sister churches, have declared, and in the evaluation of the divergencies have explained, that those divergencies do *not form an impediment* to recognizing the Presbyterian Churches as true churches of Christ.

It is with this declaration that Rev. Agema, in fact, disagrees. It is because of this disagreement that he writes that "it would not hurt to admit that we made a mistake" in 1977. And it is this point which makes him say in point six that the ICRC "does not promote unity in the proper way." Do I put it too strongly when I formulate it in this way: According to Rev. Agema, the Westminster Standards contain false, unbiblical doctrinal statements, contradictions with our Reformed confessions, and, in fact, with Scripture; and, per consequence, no Presbyterian church which faithfully adheres to the Westminster Standards can be declared to be a true church of Christ?

If this is so, Rev. Agema should have written an appeal against the decision of the 1977 Synod of Coaldale, in which appeal he should have proven the false doctrine in the Westminster Standards, for instance, on the point of its speak-

ing about the church. For the declaration that the Westminster Confession is "a fully Reformed confession" ("een voluit Gereformeerd belijdenisgeschrift"; Acts Coaldale, Art. 91, II, Considerations, d (p. 40) and Acta Generale Synode Amersfoort 1967, Art. 241, D) must then be declared a false statement.


I have great difficulty with characterizing the Westminster Confession's manner of speaking about the church as false doctrine. False doctrine we have to reject flatly. Wrong teachings or interpretations of Scripture or Confession we have to discuss with each other and try to correct and overcome in brotherly polemics. If we declared that the Westminster Confession with its speaking about the invisible and the visible church and the way in which it does this teaches false doctrine, this would mean that we declared that many of our fathers, if not most, were teachers of false doctrine on this point.

Let me take as example the Rev. J. Kok, who wrote the booklet *The Training for the Ministry of the Word "for the Church by the Church"* ("De Opleiding tot de Dienst des Woords 'voor de Kerk door de Kerk'"; Kampen: Kok, 1906). In it he states: "The church of the Lord is invisible," because "'I believe a holy, catholic Christian church' and faith is a proof of matters 'which one does not see,' Hebr. 11:1" (p. 11). Now I do not agree with this statement. With respect to the church faith and visibility do not exclude each other. Dr. K. Schilder has clearly shown this. One simply has to read through his many articles on the point of visible and invisible church. But must we now declare that Rev. Kok taught a false doctrine? Schilder would not have done so. He would have discussed differences and shown wrong interpretations and undesirable consequences.

In this connection we can point to his fight against the Kuyperian teachings regarding covenant and baptism. The Liberation did not come about because there were different views, but because the synodical synods bound everyone to the wrong teachings of Kuyper and those who followed him. Schilder engaged in polemics with his opponents, but acknowledged them as his brothers in the same church.

It is in this way that I approach the matter of the divergencies between the Reformed and the Presbyterian confessions. With its strong emphasis on the doctrine of election the Westminster Confession is a "fully Reformed" confession. And those who adhere to it can be called Reformed. And when I with my heritage of the Liberation, as a student of K. Schilder, come to the conclusion that some expressions and statements in the Westminster Standards are weak or could be said in a different and better way, I want to discuss that with my Presbyterian brother and try to share with him what I have received. He does not have to become Reformed and reject his Westminster Confession before I can acknowledge him as my brother; and a faithful Presbyterian church does not have to adopt the Three Forms of Unity and reject the Westminster Standards before we as Canadian Reformed Churches can recognize them as a true church of Christ.

This is basically what Rev. Agema wants: first the divergencies, the "contradictions," must be worked away, and only then can we have a solid basis for recognition and cooperation. If this is the route which we have to go, we are forced to deny the work of Christ in Presbyterian churches which are the result of reformations (1843, Scotland; 1936, the OPC) just like our Reformed Churches (1834, Secession; 1886, Doleantie; 1944, Liberation). And if we cannot recognize any church as true, unless it has our Reformed Standards, are we then not using our Three Forms of Unity as a law, in a legalistic way?

Herewith I have also replied to Rev. Agema's sixth point, that the present ICRC with the two different sets of confessions "does not promote unity in the proper way." 

# The second meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Churches Vancouver 1989

## Prayer Service


On the evening of June 19, a prayer service for the Conference was organized by the Canadian Reformed Church at Cloverdale. The Reverend M. Van Beveren led the service and delivered the following sermon on Galatians 2:18-21.

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

We are assembled here this evening to give thanks to the Lord for the privilege that we may have the meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Churches which is scheduled to begin tomorrow. It is a reason for joy and thankfulness when churches from several parts of the world send their representatives and thereby express the unity of the faith in Christ Jesus as He is revealed in the Scriptures and confessed in the Reformed creeds. In a time in which the authority of God's Word is undermined and the validity of the creeds of the Reformation is more and more called into question, if not ridiculed, those churches come together through their delegates to encourage one another to remain on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the Cornerstone. They come together to assist each other to do the task to which the Lord calls them, the task namely to proclaim the gospel as revealed in the Scriptures. And that, congregation, in short, is the purpose of the Conference. That is why we should rejoice! The Conference is not a spectacle to exhibit that strength lies in unity. For what strength do we have? As it is, the churches have no strength in themselves and the Conference of churches does not change that at all. The only power for the churches is the Word of God, no matter how big, no matter how small those churches are. It has been said that the International Conference of Reformed Churches is a conference of disappearing minorities. We agree with the last part of this description. Minorities they are — those churches. But whether

or not they are disappearing is something else. That depends on whether or not they continue to build on that one foundation, whether or not they hold on to that one gospel of Jesus Christ. For that is the power, the Gospel. The power of the churches is the proclamation of the happy tidings of free grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The power is the preaching of reconciliation in this world — reconciliation to God through the one Mediator between God and man. When the churches start tampering with that message, then they will begin "disappearing". And there will be no future. It is as Paul says in his letter to the Romans, "The gospel is the

power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith." By that power the church was built in the early centuries in the midst of the heat of persecution. By that power the church was built in the days of the Reformation, and by that power the church is built today and will be built. And that, congregation, is why we will this evening also pray for the Conference and the delegates. We will ask the Lord that not human wisdom will prevail, but that all involved will be guided by God's Word and Spirit; that all discussion and decisions may serve the proclamation of the gospel in the churches and in the world close by and far away, so that God's



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**IN THIS ISSUE**

Editorial — The ICRC  
— and a critical voice  
— *J. Geertsema* . . . . . 334

The second meeting of the  
International Conference  
of Reformed Churches  
Vancouver 1989  
— Prayer service  
— *M. van Beveren* . . . . . 337  
— Opening address  
— *J. Visscher* . . . . . 340  
— Report of the cor-  
responding secretary . . . . . 343

Presbyterian and Reformed  
— two of the branches?  
— *J. Geertsema* . . . . . 344

Ray of Sunshine  
— *Mrs. J. Mulder* . . . . . 346

College Corner  
— Blessings from above  
— *C. Van Dam* . . . . . 347

The ICRC — *D.G.J. Agema* . . . 348  
— Some editorial comments  
— *J. Geertsema* . . . . . 356

Women's Savings Action . . . . . 356

Letters to the Editor . . . . . 357

Our Little Magazine — *Aunt Betty* 358

name may be glorified and His church built. But before we pray we will listen to the Word of God as we find it in our text.

In the letter to the Galatians the apostle Paul is preaching the Gospel of justification through faith in Jesus Christ. It is true that the apostle has done that in all his letters, but there is a special emphasis here. This letter to the Galatians is almost entirely against the heresy which came up in the early Christian Church — the heresy of Judaism and legalism. By that we understand the teaching and belief that for the justification and salvation of man, besides Jesus Christ, something else is required, namely, the keeping of laws and regulations — in those days, the laws and regulations taken from the Old Testament and the Jewish tradition. “Besides Jesus Christ,” people said, “We need our own good works as a condition that God might fulfill His purpose in His people.” Paul fights that teaching with all his power. And he uses strong language for it. He preaches that mankind is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ only. Paul does not mean that we have nothing to do with the law of God. No, Paul also fights against that so-called libertinism that says we do not have to bother about God’s will anymore. At the end of the letter he shows that the law of God still has a function as a guideline for the believers to walk in thankfulness — to walk in thankful covenant obedience. Or, as he says it in his letter, “to walk in the Spirit” and he calls that fulfilling the law of Christ. But that can only be on the basis of what Jesus Christ has done and nothing else. Well, I don’t have to say it, because you know what justification is. It is that God says, “You are no longer guilty.” He declares, “You are righteous. Your sins are taken away.” Martin Luther could never be sure of his salvation because no matter how he tried, his so-called good works were imperfect and defiled with sin. He was sure of his salvation only when he understood that a man is justified through faith in Jesus Christ because Christ died for our sins and only through faith in Him God declares that we are no longer guilty. Congregation, that message is important for us always, also tonight. If we confess that the Church’s one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord then also a conference of churches can have its foundation in Him alone — in Him as He is revealed in the Scriptures. I may preach unto you **GOD’S GRACIOUS GOSPEL OF JUSTIFICATION THROUGH FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST.**

We will see Paul

- first, defending the Gospel,
- secondly, professing his faith,
- and thirdly, preaching God’s grace.

### Paul Defending the Gospel

In our text the apostle says, “If I build up again those things which I tore down, then I prove myself a transgressor.” The question is: What did Paul tear down? He tore down that whole Jewish structure and teaching that a man is saved by doing the law, by keeping rules and regulations. That is what he tore down right from the beginning when he became an apostle of Jesus Christ. And he says, “If I would then build up that Jewish system again, namely, that we have to be saved by doing the law and not by faith in Jesus Christ alone, well then I (and others also) would still be a transgressor, for then I would still be under the law, I would still be condemned by the law.” By the works of the law no man shall be justified. Paul defends the Gospel which he preached before. The situation was serious.



Rev. M. van Beveren

Not just one church was influenced by Judaism and legalism. This letter is addressed to the churches of Galatia — four or more churches were involved. They accepted the view that all Christians should be circumcised and that they had to keep many of the Old Testament rules. That was not only embarrassing for the Gentiles who had become Christians and had joined the church on the basis of Christ’s work alone, but it was clear that the gospel of Christ was being perverted. Here was a different message. Here was a gospel that was contrary to what they had received. That is why Paul right at the beginning of his letter, in chapter one, says, and he says it two times, “If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which he received, let him be accursed.” It cannot be said any stronger. Then Paul explains how he from the beginning had preached the gospel of free grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

That gospel is not based on personal opinion, but is received from Christ Himself. And Paul explains that this preaching was also accepted by the other apostles. Indeed, after quite some discussion and discussion, but those discussions were caused by false brethren who secretly slipped in to spy out the freedom in Christ. Paul does not have too many good words for those people. It all began in Antioch. There Paul had spoken of the blessings of the Lord, that also the Gentiles had accepted the gospel. But some men, those false brethren, came down from Jerusalem and said, “It is fine that those heathen believe in Christ, but they have to be circumcised according to custom of Moses, otherwise they cannot be saved.” You can read that in Acts 15. The matter was then discussed at the meeting of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem and it was decided, and the whole church agreed, that the Gentiles should not be compelled to be circumcised. With that message Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch and the whole matter seemed settled.

Not so! Something else happened. First, the apostle Peter came to Antioch. He is called Cephas. Peter had also accepted that the gospel is justification through faith in Jesus Christ for Jews and Gentiles alike. Peter had fellowship with those Gentiles who had become Christians. He ate with them, and he sat with them at the same table. But then, again, people arrived from that circumcision party in Jerusalem, and they said, “Sure, sure, we agree, we agree that Gentiles do not have to be circumcised in order to be Christians, but there should be a clear distinction between those uncircumcised people who do not keep the law of Moses and the believing Jews.” And Peter listened to the circumcision party and gradually he withdrew and finally separated himself from his Gentile friends altogether. He did not eat with them anymore, and no longer sat with them at the same table. And not only Peter did so, but also the rest of the Jews and even Barnabas were influenced. They again introduced a difference, a separation, between Jews and Gentiles. The Jews were considered clean and the others unclean. And that happened in the Christian church! In the church, they saw on the one hand a group of better Christians, more advanced Christians, Christians of a better standing. And on the other hand, there was the group of Christians on a lower level. Oh, those people of the circumcision party meant well, and they could say, “The whole tradition of the Old Testament supports us.”

Well, congregation, you know that when such a distinction is accepted in the church of Jesus Christ, the church is in

great danger. For then that one basis, that one foundation, is no longer recognized. The apostle Paul warns the Galatians; he admonishes them not to live by that Jewish structure again, not to build up again that Jewish building, that teaching that salvation is based on doing the works of the law. For it is an impossibility. That is how the apostle Paul defends the gospel of justification through faith in Jesus Christ. And there is no other gospel!

### Paul Professing his Faith

Next we see in our text that Paul professes his faith. That is very personal. We read that part again, the verses 19 and 20. And you see that the emphasis is on "I" and "me". "I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." This is a very personal confession, congregation. For the apostle Paul is not speaking about a system. He spoke about the system of Judaism and legalism. And you may even call that a philosophy. But the message of justification through faith is not a system. It is a message, a proclamation which can be accepted only through faith, that very personal faith in Jesus Christ. In the past, Paul had been an ardent observer of the law. He had kept the law, the law of the covenant, exactly as the Jewish leaders required it. At that time Paul considered himself, as he explains, blameless. But when he believed in Jesus Christ, he saw that keeping rules and regulations for one's salvation was a dead-end street. It does not help for salvation. That is the meaning of "I died to the law". Paul no longer looked to the law as a source of salvation. That does not mean no laws for Paul anymore. His purpose and desire was not to live for the law, but to live to God, the Law-giver, the living God. He looked to Him who in Christ is gracious and slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He looked to Him as the source of his salvation with a personal and living faith. When the apostle Paul speaks about himself this way, congregation, he actually spells out what our confession is and should be, for each and every one of us. It is one thing to speak about the doctrine of justification through faith, but it is another thing to confess it. We can discuss for hours at our study societies, and at the Conference as well, the subject of justification through faith. Sure, and we are thankful that the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards give ample help to understand the Scriptures, but the question is do we live by that confession in everything we do,

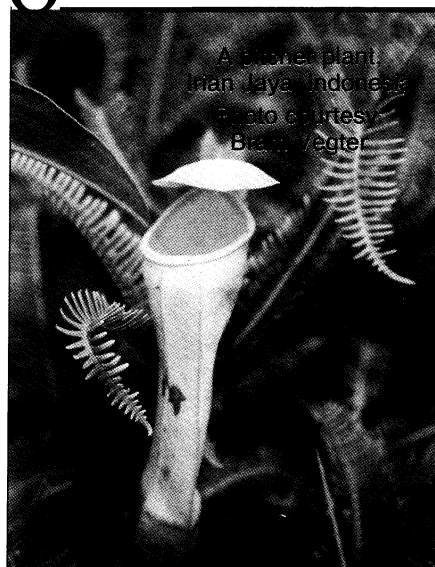
also when we talk about how the church of Jesus Christ should be built up? And that's why we need that personal confession. Can we say, congregation, what Paul says, "I have been crucified with Christ?" That is: I who by myself am a self-righteous man or woman; I who think that I can save myself by good works, by my offerings, by everything that I do in church as a good member of the congregation; I who used to have confidence in myself, I am crucified and crushed with Christ. My proud heart is broken. I, with all my desires and wishes, with pride and self-esteem, I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I, that self-righteous man, who lives, but it is Christ who lives in me. And Christ is the one who now directs my life, who gives direction to my desires; in Him is all my hope and trust. Is that your confession, congregation? Is that the confession of everyone present here? Not just on paper! But is that your confession just as when the apostle Paul confesses his faith? And if he had not confessed his faith, if that were not his faith, then all the letters of the apostle Paul would be worthless. His is not only a confession for the future. No, he speaks about the life today. "The life I now live in the flesh." This earthly life, with its weaknesses and sin and dangers, I live through faith in Christ. He is my salvation. He is my guide every day again. Every day I live by the forgiveness of my sins through the blood of Christ. Every day I live by the justification through faith alone. "Faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." On that confession Christ builds His church. So, it is not, as some might say, subjectivism or individualism when we speak about a per-

sonal faith or a personal confession. When the church confesses, the members confess. And if we cannot confess such a personal faith, we may be registered in the records of our congregation and may be active in church, and we may be involved in everything, and we may have our strong opinions, but we are not living members of Christ. Then no matter how impressive the credentials for attending the Conference, we have no power to build the church of Christ. "I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." Nobody can be indifferent to that confession. We confess or we deny. We say "Yes" or we say "No". We are living stones or we are dead branches.

### Preaching God's Grace

That is the gospel that is preached by the apostle Paul. In spite of opposition, Paul continues to preach it: *the gospel of God's undeserved grace to sinners*. Paul says, "I do not nullify the grace of God" and he means, "I will not nullify, I refuse to nullify, the grace of God," as those people do who still expect their salvation by keeping the law, keeping regulations. For there is no justification through the law, but only through Christ crucified. Through Him there is remission of sins, through Him there is new life. Did you notice, congregation, that the apostle Paul does not say, "Forget about the law." No, he says, "Christ lives in me." He gives direction to my life, to my mind, to my thoughts, to my intentions, to my aims. Christ is alive in me. Accepting justification through faith in Christ is also accepting the guidance of Christ as He speaks to us in God's Word. That was Paul's preaching and Paul continues to preach that gospel and nothing else. This is how the Galatians are brought back to the freedom in Jesus Christ. Not to gratify the desires of the flesh, but to walk in the Spirit, to fulfill the law of Christ — all that as a result of faith in Jesus Christ. That is the power of the gospel, the power of the preaching of the gospel. It is the power for the church of all ages and for the churches in all places: on the mission fields and at home. For that message sets free. That message renews life because it renews the heart of men through God's Spirit. Through that message God's people begin to walk with love and delight according to God's will. That message sets men to work, and to live, in thankful covenantal obedience. It is that message that builds the church. Otherwise all those efforts to build the church are in vain. Through that message the church is built and church life can grow and flourish. No other power can do it. Paul in another letter says, "The grace of God is training us." He doesn't say anything else is train-

## OUR COVER



A pitcher plant  
from Java, Indonesia  
Photo courtesy  
Brian Vetter

ing us. No, the grace of God trains us to live a thankful life, godly in every respect. That is the power of God behind everything. That is the motor for church life. The motor for Christian life. And that message gives freedom and joy, lasting joy. Well, congregation, we should be thankful for what is good in our church life, thankful for what our Christian activity has performed and is performing. I think here of all the offerings and sacrifices, your support for church life. I think of the schools for our children and support for the colleges, about the missionary activities and about charities. We have to see, and when our eyes are opened we

do see, the blessings of the Lord — the blessings of the Lord also in the Conference of Reformed Churches. But we should not forget that those blessings are blessings only on the basis of God's undeserved, sovereign, free grace in Jesus Christ. We always, and in everything, have to go back to Him as the source of our salvation, the fountain of life, and we have to rely on Him alone. A Christian culture, a Reformed lifestyle, also a Canadian Reformed lifestyle, and a Presbyterian tradition, are all very valuable as expressions of our gratitude to God, as fruits of our thankfulness to Him, but if they become more than that,

if they become, for instance, a touchstone to determine levels and standings among us or even to determine whether a person is a true Christian, we fall into the error of the Judaists, substituting for the Jewish law and culture a culture of our own. As a result the churches will lose their power by taking away from that glorious and powerful gospel of justification through faith only in Jesus Christ. May that gospel also be in the centre in the coming days of the Conference. May we at the Conference remember the power of God. For it is: through faith alone, by God's grace, apart from works, apart from any work. And there is no exception. Amen. **C**

## Opening Address

*The following was delivered by Rev. J. Visscher on the morning of Tuesday, June 20, in the Langley Canadian Reformed Church.*

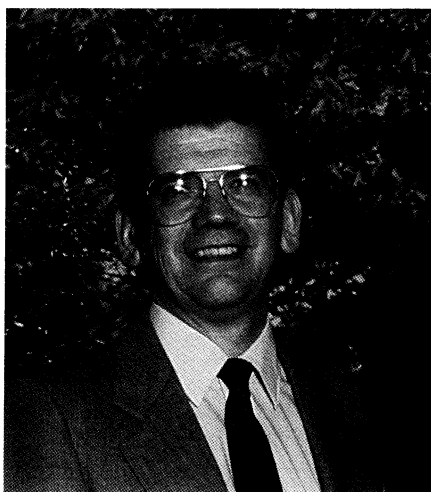
On behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches as a whole, and the Canadian Reformed Churches of Cloverdale and Langley in particular, I would like to welcome you to Langley, B.C., Canada, for the second official meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Churches. Many of you have travelled great distances in order to be here. We are thankful that you have arrived safely, and we pray that the same may be the case for those who are still on the way.

As mentioned, this is the second meeting of the ICRC. This Reformed ecumenical organization was born in Groningen, the Netherlands. There during the months of October and November in the year 1982 a Constituent Assembly was held and the foundation of the Conference was laid. Thereafter the first official meeting of the Conference was held three years later in Edinburgh, Scotland.

What all of this readily reveals is that the ICRC is a very young organization. And youth, as you all know, typifies certain things. Youth often points to inexperience and to a measure of immaturity. No doubt as you experience the Conference in the coming days you will discern that, compared to some other ecumenical organizations that you may have experienced in the past, this Conference still needs to grow and to develop further. Maturity has not yet arrived. Youth is also characterized by a certain uncertainty in terms of direction and goals. And that, too, you may find in our midst as we grapple with matters relating to future aims and developments. Finally, youth exemplifies freshness, vitality and potential. These tend to be among the

positive characteristics of youth. Without sounding conceited it is hoped that they will be found among us in such abundance that they will make up for the other shortcomings.

Yet in spite of its youth, the ICRC is already an international entity. At present ten churches having their roots in Africa, Asia, Europe and North America are members. It is expected that this meeting will increase the number to eleven, and



*Dr. J. Visscher*

that at future meetings the numbers will continue to grow. The fact that there are ten observer churches present is hopefully representative of the future potential for growth. Indeed, let it be stated here that every church in the world which places its doctrine and life wholeheartedly under the divine authority of the Scriptures and the derived authority of the Reformed confessions is invited to participate in this Conference.

It has been rightly said that the Word of God is characterized by unity in diversity. So many different men, in so many different times, under so many different circumstances, from so many different backgrounds, were led by the Holy Spirit to write the one Word of God. Out of all of that variety there emerged a scintillating singularity of witness, all climaxing in Jesus Christ the Word Incarnate.

To some extent the same maxim about unity in diversity also applies to the church of our Lord. Our reading from the book of Revelation testifies to this, the whole Word testifies to it, indeed, what we see at this Conference testifies to it as well. We may humbly and thankfully say that we belong to the one family of God, to that one people of the Lord. Yet there is an awesome diversity among this people. To speak with the words of the apostle Paul, within that family there are different branches. Present here are two of those branches in the form of the Presbyterian churches which have their roots in Scotland, England, and the USA and the Reformed churches which have their roots in the Netherlands and continental Europe.

It must be admitted that there are differences between these two branches of the one family in terms of the confessions which have been adopted, the church government which has evolved, the historical developments that have taken place, and the practices which have developed. These differences, however, do not constitute insurmountable obstacles, but matters that need to be discussed and dealt with properly. The challenge before us is to listen to each other, to learn from each other, and so to grow towards each other in terms of understanding, love, and fellowship.

In this connection it can be said that





**Delegates:**

Top row: J.M. Vingno, J.C.L. Starreveld, W.P. Gadsby, G.I. Williamson, K. Deddens, P. DenButter, M. van Beveren, A.C. Boyd, A. Roos, J. Visscher, W. Boessenkool, D.C. Jones, T.E. Tyson, R.S. Rayburn, R. Sander, Ho Jin Jun, C. Graham, V.E. D'Assonville. Middle row: J.P. Galbraith, J.J. Peterson, J.L. Helberg, P. Rossouw, L.W. Bilkes, P. VanderMeyden, J.L. VanBurgel, W. Underhay, B. Stewart, J.A. Gillies, J. Eikelboom, A.A. MacDonald. Bottom row: J. de Gelder, N.E. Reid, O.J. Douma, J. Douma, J. Faber, D. Macleod, J. van Bruggen, C. Van Dam, Cl. Stam, W.D.J. McKay. Missing: J. Heyns

**MEMBER CHURCHES**

*Canadian Reformed Churches*  
 Rev. Cl. Stam, delegate  
 Dr. J. Visscher, delegate  
 Prof. Dr. J. Faber, adviser  
 Prof. Dr. C. Van Dam, adviser

*Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Ireland*  
 Rev. Norman E. Reid, delegate

*Free Church of Scotland*  
 Rev. J.A. Gillies, delegate  
 Prof. D. Macleod, delegate  
 Prof. A.C. Boyd, adviser  
 Rev. Wm. Underhay, adviser

*Free Church in Southern Africa*  
 Rev. A.A. MacDonald, delegate

*Free Reformed Churches of Australia*  
 Mr. J. Eikelboom, delegate  
 Mr. J.L. VanBurgel, delegate

*Free Reformed Churches in South Africa*  
 Rev. W. Boessenkool  
 Mr. A. Roos

*Gereja Gereja Reformasi (Indonesia)*  
 -absent

*Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia*  
 Rev. W. Peter Gadsby, delegate

*Presbyterian Church in Korea*  
 Dr. Ho Jin Jun, delegate

*Reformed Churches in the Netherlands*  
 Rev. J. de Gelder, delegate  
 Rev. O.J. Douma, delegate  
 Prof. Dr. J. Douma, adviser  
 Prof. Dr. J. van Bruggen, adviser

*Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland*  
 Rev. W.D.J. McKay, delegate

**OBSERVER CHURCHES**

*Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands*  
 Rev. P. DenButter  
 Rev. J.C.L. Starreveld

*Christian Brethren Free Church (Philippines)*  
 Rev. J.M. Vingno

*Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa*  
 Prof. Dr. J. Heyns  
 Dr. P. Rossouw

*Free Reformed Churches of North America*  
 Rev. P. VanderMeyden  
 Rev. L.W. Bilkes

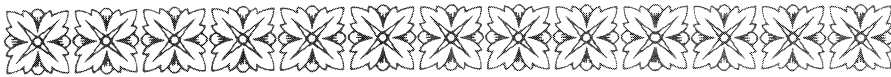
*Orthodox Presbyterian Church*  
 Rev. J.P. Galbraith  
 Rev. T.E. Tyson  
 Rev. J.J. Peterson  
 Rev. G.I. Williamson

*Presbyterian Church in America*  
 Prof. Dr. D.C. Jones  
 Dr. R.S. Rayburn

*Reformed Churches in South Africa*  
 Prof. Dr. J.L. Helberg  
 Prof. Dr. V.E. D'Assonville

*Reformed Church in the United States*  
 Rev. R. Sander

*Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America*  
 Dr. Bruce Stewart



## 55th Wedding Anniversary



*John and Grace Zietsma (nee Vandermeulen) were united in marriage in 1934. They were blessed with 6 children, three boys and three girls. In 1954 they immigrated to Canada and settled in Burlington, Ontario. They now enjoy retirement with family and friends, thankful to God that He has given them so many years together.*



the ICRC has a great potential, not as some super, international church, not as some meddling socio-economic-political body, but as a forum which will promote among its members fuller understanding, closer relations internationally and greater unity locally, increased cooperation in the various areas of missions and theological training, and, finally, an improved Reformed witness in this world in theological and ethical matters. Truly, the possibilities are numerous and the potential is vast. Whether we are up to the challenge and the opportunity remains to be seen.

To a large measure that depends upon our vision. And what should our vision be? First of all, our vision must be biblical. It must be grounded and rooted in the infallibility of God's inspired Word. This Word has been given, says the Belgic Confession in Article 5, for the "regulation, foundation, and confirmation of our faith." We believe what it reveals. We believe that it is sufficient. We believe in its supremacy over all the words and pronouncements of men.

This Word is truly authoritative, and that authority must not be sacrificed on the altar of feminism, nor on the altar of revolution, nor on the altar of scientism and evolutionary speculation, nor on the altar of homosexual rights. Our vision

must be defined and determined by the Word of God. The ICRC will only prosper as long as its commitment to the Word of God remains unshakable and immovable. All around us churches and ecumenical organizations are busy accommodating the Word to fit their views and insights and agenda. Whereas, it must be the exact opposite; our views and ideas must be determined by the Word and fall in step with the Word.

Secondly, our vision must be historical. There are many today who would like to turn the clock back to the days of the early N.T. church. That is supposedly the ideal and the ultimate model. But what is forgotten is that God's clock keeps on ticking, His plan for all things keeps on unfolding, and His redemption keeps on moving towards fulfillment. It is not possible and it is not right to go back to the Jerusalem of old. On the contrary, we must look forward with longing to the new Jerusalem that will come down from above.

Today we live between advents, between Jerusalems, and between Paradises. In other words, we must be conscious of the passage of time and of how God leads His people through the times. We look back with thankfulness to the heritage of the past: to the early church fathers — Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian,

Athanasius, and Augustine; to the great Reformers — Luther, Calvin, Knox; to the great creeds both ecumenical and Reformed — the Apostles', the Nicene, the Scottish, the Belgic, the second Helvetic, and the Westminster. Our roots run deep and our treasures are great.

But our future is even greater. God's people are a people on the move to a new home and a new future. With longing and with confidence we may live and must live. Christ is coming again. And so our vision must not only appreciate the past but also anticipate the future. This Conference does itself no service when it cuts itself off from the past; rather, it must embrace what God has given us in the past in terms of the faithful witness of church confessions, church fathers, and church reformers and continue to defend it. We are one with the church of all ages. And at the same time the smallness of our numbers should not deter us either. The future belongs to the people of God. We may do our work with confidence, for Christ is with us.

Thirdly, our vision must be contemporary. Faith in the Triune God is not a relic of the past, not passé, but an ongoing reality. We live in a world filled with problems and tensions, and we dare to say that the Word of God has the answers to the predicaments of man, be they social, economic, racial, political, or religious. The Word speaks today because the Spirit of Christ continues to speak through it. It is never silent and never out of step.

Too often our stand with respect to the world is ambivalent. Should we love it or curse it? Neither. We are to witness to it without compromise and with hope. Our vision must be acutely relevant. The ICRC must not only deal with internal problems and predicaments, with theological questions and organizational issues. It must also recognize that God's people live in a world of temptation and confrontation and that it must speak with biblical boldness and clarity to the moral and ethical problems of the day.

Finally, our vision must also be catholic and universal. We all confess that catholicity is a mark of the church and of the people of God. We believe it and are even proud of it to a degree. The Christian faith is not a narrow-minded business. Yet when it comes to exercising and promoting this catholicity we sometimes take a more parochial and restrictive posture, as if our particular local churches and the churches we officially recognize exhaust the matter.

What we forget is that Christ's church-gathering is broader and greater than our perceptions. His people are spread and dispersed over the whole world. He is an eternal King who is never

without subjects and who gathers these subjects from everywhere, from every corner of the world. Our Scripture reading from Rev. 7 describes this so well when it speaks about "a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb" (v.9).

This catholicity, which stretches over all time, all places, all races, and languages, demands that our vision be as wide as the world. The ICRC is already well on the way to reflecting this universal dimension, and that is as it should be. Indeed, may the diversity increase even more, but it must be diversity in unity, unity of faith, and hence, unity in Christ.

May Jesus Christ, the only Head and universal Bishop of His Church, fill us with His Spirit and guide us with His Word, and so make it possible for these days to be filled with fruitful discussion, increased understanding, and true fellowship.

Herewith, I declare this second meeting of the ICRC officially open. ❏

## Report of the Corresponding Secretary

The Interim Committee has requested that I also report on their behalf. During the years after the Edinburgh Conference regular contact has been maintained with the Interim Committee by means of correspondence. The contact was fruitful and pleasant. It was regrettable, however, that about a year ago, due to health problems, the Rev. D. Lamont had to resign. As we all know, he was the chairman of the Edinburgh Conference. The Rev. J. Visscher was co-opted to take his place.

Another member of the Interim Committee, the Rev. G. van Rongen, chairman of the Constitutive Assembly in 1982, vice-chairman of Edinburgh 1985, and organizer of the Committee on Ecumenical Creeds, informed us that he is unable to attend the Conference because of illness in his family circle. He conveys his best regards to the brethren and writes, "I have had much pleasure in the work and hope that the ICRC may become more and more beneficial to the member churches. In a world which is becoming more and more hostile to the true gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, we will increasingly need each other's support as churches which desire to be faithful to their Head and King. May He, therefore, also richly bless the 1989 conference."

With sorrow we learned that the Rev. M.K. Drost, member of the Committee on Missions, died December 9, 1986. The Rev. Drost was lecturer in Missiology at the Theological Seminary of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands. The loss suffered through his death is duly mentioned in the report of the Missions Committee.

As the Edinburgh Conference did not appoint alternate committee members the vacancy in the Committee on Missions was not filled. Also the fact that Prof. J.L. McKay could not accept the appointment as a member of the Committee on Ecumenical Creeds underlines the desirability that for every committee, the Conference appoint alternate members. It is also advisable that before an appoint-

ment is made, the person involved be consulted. I mention here the suggestion of the Rev. G. van Rongen that, to facilitate communication, committees comprise of members living in the same region.

The following churches have expressed their regret that they can not send a delegate:

The Reformed Church in Japan

The Iglesia Evangelica Presbiteriana del Peru

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Christchurch, New Zealand (formerly: the Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Christchurch)

The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia

They all express the wish that the Conference receive the Lord's guidance.

I may read to you part of the letter from the Reformed Church in Japan, "In view of the recent outcome of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod at Harare, our interest has been more increased in the ICRC. But our committee could not decide to send an observer from our church to the next conference in Canada. In spite of this we have great interest in the conference because of our deep concern with ecumenicity based on the

sound Reformed faith and action. We would, therefore, appreciate if you could keep us informed of all the results of the next meeting. We would also ask you to give our warmest greetings to the delegates and observers at the conference" (Nov. 2, 1988, signed by H. Suzuki).

There has been correspondence with several other churches not represented here, some of which had sent visiting delegates to Edinburgh 1985. Other churches had asked for information on the ICRC or were recommended by member churches. We know that high travel expenses discouraged small churches from sending delegates. An example of such a church is the small congregation at Christchurch. I quote from part of their letter to show that absence does not mean indifference: "Our great concern is to raise a clear biblical and Reformed witness in the midst of confusion, compromise and apostasy. We have little to offer at this point to a wider fellowship of Reformed churches, though, we admit, much to gain from the input of such a group. We would appreciate continuing contact and information. Our sincere desire and prayer is that your coming Conference will be a means of cementing unity between Reformed Churches



*Representing Canada, the Netherlands, and Scotland*

worldwide, and also a means of stimulating these churches in the great missionary task our Lord has laid upon His disciples.” (Apr. 13, 1989, Dr. A.W. Young)

We are thankful that we have an impressive list of well-known scholars ready to introduce their topics. The initiative of the churches which recommended those brethren has been most helpful and has fulfilled the wish of Edinburgh ‘85, namely, that the member churches participate in establishing the agenda of the Conference. As you may have noticed, however, there is also a list of recommended topics which are not on the agenda. They could have been there if speakers had been mentioned as well. We are still looking for men eager to tackle those subjects, and if the churches suggest nominees well in advance, this will hopefully happen at the next Conference.

I am sorry that I can not address the Rev. G. van Rongen today. He has been one of the promoters of the ICRC from the very beginning. We are grateful for the ac-

tivities he employed to the Conference up till now, and we wish him the Lord’s blessings.

Prof. C. Graham, however, still is in our midst. For the past four years he has served as the heart of the Interim Committee. He never left letters unanswered and guided the Committee in a quiet but persistent manner. The churches may not have realized that the greater part the Interim Committee consisted of persons who had retired from their official position. I am certain nobody noticed it, because Prof. Graham is one of the men who may retire but never give up. I think it is not Scottish to accept praise, but I would label Prof. Graham as the father of the 1989 Conference. I suspect, however, that he looked at the secretary as at one of his pupils, considering him 20 to 30 years younger than he is. And that may have helped to keep the Interim Committee young and vigorous. On behalf of all the churches, thank you, Prof. Graham.

The churches of the ICRC have a great aim: to assist each other to fulfill

faithfully the mandate received from the Lord, at home and abroad. It should be clear that that aim can only be effective when the churches realize that the riches they have, are received by God’s grace alone. All conceit and arrogance will prevent the ICRC from attaining the goal, will defeat the endeavours to reach out, and will undermine the proclamation of the gracious gospel of Jesus Christ.

The ICRC can not be founded on our faithfulness or be based on human insight, nor should it be the aim to make the ICRC an organization that finds its strength in numbers.

But imploring the Lord for His grace for Christ’s sake and expecting His strength as He has promised, the ICRC should strive so that, as Scripture says, the Word of God may grow and multiply. Then, guided by that Word and God’s Holy Spirit, the Churches and the Conference can expect the Lord’s blessings, and His redeeming power will work in unexpected ways.

M. van Beveren

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## Presbyterian and Reformed — two of the branches?

By J. Geertsema

There are a few lines in the ICRC’s “Opening Address” of the Rev. J. Visscher which I should like to comment on. I was not happy when I read them. They are the following:

We may humbly and thankfully say that we belong to the one family of God, to that one people of the Lord. Yet there is an awesome diversity among this people. To speak with the words of the apostle Paul, within that family there are different branches. Present here are two of those branches in the form of the Presbyterian churches which have their roots in Scotland, England, and the USA and the Reformed churches which have their roots in the Netherlands and continental Europe.

To begin with, Rev. Visscher says: “To speak with the words of the apostle Paul, within that family there are different branches.” I do not read anywhere in the letters of Paul, nor in the book of Acts, that Paul ever called different churches

(“denominations,” to use that word for clarity’s sake) different branches of the one family. This was impossible anyway, for in the days of Paul there were no different church denominations. There were only the true churches of Christ, also together called church (in the singular) over against the false churches, the synagogue(s) of Satan (cf. Gal. 4:21ff. and Rev. 2:9). The legitimate address of the true church was clear, also then. But it is also a fact that nowhere in the New Testament the local or even provincial or national churches are called “branches of the one family of God,” neither by Paul nor by any other apostle or evangelist. The word “branch” is simply not used for a church or congregation in the New Testament.

In John 12:13 John uses a word which means specifically “palm branch.” He uses it in a literal way. The general Greek word for “branch,” again in the literal sense, is used in Matthew 13:32, Mark 4:32, Luke 13:19 (branches of the

shrub that grows from a mustard seed), Matthew 21:8 (branches from the trees), Matthew 24:32, Mark 13:28 (a branch of the fig tree). The same general word is used by Paul in Romans 11:16, 17, 18, 19, and 21 in a figurative way for the unbelieving Jews who were cut off from the stem of the olive tree, which is God’s covenant people, while also believers are called branches: branches which came from the wild olive and are ingrafted into the holy olive tree of God.

Now there is the remarkable fact that Paul speaks constantly about the Jewish branches, which were cut off, in the plural, while he addresses the Gentile believer in the singular. One could suggest that this singular must be taken as a collective and reason that Paul speaks of two branches of the olive tree, the branch of the Jewish people and the branch of the Gentile believers. But this interpretation cannot be correct just because of the fact that for the Jewish branches the plural is used, which clear-

ly indicates that these Jewish branches point to individual members of the people of Israel. This means that also the Gentile branch must be taken for the individual believer and not as a collective. Paul admonishes each believer from the Gentiles personally not to boast to the cut-off natural branches. Romans 11 does not give any ground for calling different "denominations" branches of the one family, or even of the one root.

These text references, mentioned above, are all the places where this particular general word for "branch" occurs. There is another, also quite common, word of the same root which is used only in John 15:2, 4, 5, and 6. Christ speaks there of Himself as the vine and of the disciples, the believers, as the branches. Also here, just as in Romans 11, the word is used in an individual manner. In other words, Scripture cannot be used as a basis for speaking about different "denominations" as the different branches of the one family of God.

Our Three Forms of Unity do not use this manner of speaking either. How is this with the Westminster Confession? I quote from *The Westminster Confession of Faith* by G.I. Williamson (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1964). Article 25, 4 reads:

This catholic church hath been sometimes more, sometimes less visible. And particular churches, which are *members* [italics added, J.G.] thereof, are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and publick worship performed more or less purely in them.

Article 25, 2 says about the church:

The visible church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel, (not confined to one nation, as before under the law), consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children; and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.

Thus, also the Westminster Confession does not use the word "branch" for the different "denominations" or churches. It uses here the word "members" in connection with the fact that the universal church is called the body of Christ and "the house and family of God."

Now it is so that the use of the word "branches" for the different church "denominations" is common in the circles of the World Council of Churches. In my opinion, to use this WCC-coloured terminology in connection with the ICRC is unfortunate and confusing.

Moreover, in the context of this use of the word "branches" as indication of

different church groups, Rev. Visscher speaks about "an awesome diversity among this people" of God. The word "awesome" means, according to my dictionary, "causing awe" and "showing awe," while it gives as meaning of "awe": "great fear and wonder; fear and reverence." If I understand the meaning well, "awesome" does not mean "terrible" or "dreadful" (which is the meaning of "awful") but indicates something which fills a person with wonder and amazement, with respect and reverence. In other words, the Rev. Visscher is struck, and wants us to be struck, by the respect-inspiring, amazing diversity which exists in the fact of the different branches of the one catholic church.

**"... Scripture cannot be used as a basis for speaking about different 'denominations' as the different branches of the one family of God."**


Further, "Two of those branches" were present at the Conference. One asks: which are the other branches? Are they the Lutherans, and the Pentecostals, and the Baptists, and so on? Is this in line with the "more or less pure" of the

Westminster Confession?

Does this in practice mean that with the words "diversity" and "branches" in this context we are led back to the acceptance of the concept of the so-called pluriformity of the church? I sure hope that the formulations with which the brothers were welcomed were not the result of thorough consideration, but of being hastily put together. I may quote once again from Dr. K. Schilder (*De Kerk*, vol. III, p. 256, where he refers to what Dr. S. Greijdanus "already years ago wrote as minister in Friesland"): "pluriformity of the church, fine, *but then within the true church*. Sir, there [in the true church] one has negroes and Kaffirs [negers en kaffers], and farmers and city people [en boeren en burgers], and Javanese and Californians, there one has all and everything [alles en nog wat], but it is within the church, and she is the true one, she is, in other words, church, and not an invisible thing in the air." Schilder in his teaching opposed the concept of the pluriformity of the church. He always stressed the normative manner of speaking of the Belgic Confession.

What I missed in the words of my colleague were words which clearly referred to the Three Forms of Unity with their more normative manner of speaking, rather than words which partly referred to the more descriptive manner of approach of the Westminster and a terminology which remind us of WCC language. It is my conviction that Schilder still has a lot to teach us and that we should share this heritage with the Presbyterians and not leave it behind us as dead capital and forget it. Our confession speaks of true and false, and of the calling to maintain and build the visible unity of the (local, etc.) church. The pluriformity concept is one of the dangers which we must be aware of when engaging in an organization of churches. With this concept of pluriformity, for instance Canadian Reformed and Free Reformed and Orthodox Christian Reformed and Orthodox Presbyterian will stop trying to become one in the same church institute. The pluriformity concept kills the call to obedience, and accepts the status quo. That is what Schilder fought against. See my previous editorial.

Again I state that, in order to be useful and fruitful in the ICRC, we should not forget but bring along our Reformed (Liberated) heritage which we have received as a rich gift of the Lord, and share it with the others. If joining the ICRC means that we adapt our thinking and speaking to the language of the Westminster confession or WCC, and in the meantime lose what we have received, then I would become negative which I do not want to be. ❏



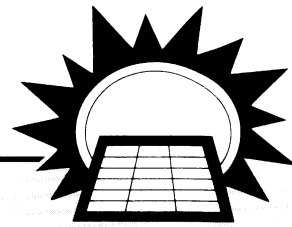
**CHURCH NEWS**

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**CALLED to Watford, ON**  
**DRS. D. MOES**  
of Langley, BC  
\* \* \*

**DECLINED to Fergus, ON**  
**REV. B.R. HOFFORD**  
of Laurel, MD, U.S.A.  
\* \* \*

Winnipeg, MB: morning worship services now start at **9:30 a.m.**



By Mrs. J. Mulder

*Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*

*Colossians 3:16*

## Dear brothers and sisters,

During the summer months many of us may enjoy God's beautiful creation while travelling or camping.

We had the privilege of attending the closing evening of "Camp-Boo," a two-week camping holiday and outing for the handicapped. This annual event is organized by the "Anchor" association. Being there we met many of our "Sunshine friends," their counsellors, parents, relatives and friends.

It was a most enjoyable evening and also a moving experience watching and listening to the campers and staff when they entertained their audience. Many of the parents and friends had come out for this occasion.

It was especially touching to hear and see how those children and young people loved to sing the psalms and hymns, "making melody to the LORD with all their hearts." They certainly like to sing and they do it well. And so we could witness God's work of grace when we heard them expressing their praise and thankfulness to their heavenly Father. To all who heard it, they proclaimed in their own way His glory and majesty. "I love the LORD, the fount of life and grace." "But the LORD will send salvation and by day His love provide." You also could sense that they know what and to Whom they are singing.

There might be many things these young people cannot do because of their handicap. But most of them certainly can praise the LORD!

And is that not in fact the ultimate purpose of you and me and the church — to give praises to the LORD? I had to think of the beginning of the Westminster Catechism "What is the chief purpose of man?" Answer: "To glorify God and enjoy Him for ever." That is according to the Scripture. Our lives should be filled with His praise and glory all the day (Psalm 71:8). Do we not often fall short in this respect, we who are healthy in mind and body? We are often better at arguing than singing, talking than making melody for the LORD.

David says in Psalm 22:3 that the LORD is enthroned on the praises of His people, young and old, handicapped or not.

Let's therefore continue to proclaim the Name of our God in our songs of praise and supplication. Be it sometimes out of tune and in imperfection, if we do our

best, it is pleasing to our LORD. And we are preparing ourselves for the great and glorious day of Christ.

For the end will find the church of God, great and small, around the throne of God, singing a new song in perfect harmony (Revelation 14:2-5).

## Our birthday calendar for September:

### MARY VANDENBURGT

17244-61B Avenue  
Surrey, BC V3S 5M7

*Mary will be 33 years old on September 11th.*

### JERRY BONTEKOE

"Anchor Home," 30 Road, RR 2  
Beamsville, ON L0R 1B0

*Jerry hopes to celebrate his 25th birthday on September 14th.*

### PAUL DIELEMAN

307 Connaught Avenue  
Willowdale, ON M2R 2M1

*Paul's birthday is September 29. On that day he will become 20 years old.*

Congratulations to all of you and a happy birthday!

'Tis good with jubilation to sing and glorify  
Thy Name, O LORD Most High, and thank Thee  
for salvation,

At dawn in Thee rejoicing and in Thy steadfast love,  
At night the praises of Thy boundless mercy voicing.

Greetings from

### Mrs. J. Mulder

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

*P.S. Too late I discovered that somebody [!?!] had added his own little note to last month's "Ray of Sunshine" (See under Birthday Calendar). I hope you realized that it was not my own doing!*

Mrs. J.M.

By C. Van Dam

## Blessings from above

Once again a school year has come to an end and the summer season has started. With great thankfulness to our gracious God and Father we can look back to the academic year behind us.

In several ways it was a special year. The fact that it was Dr. Faber's last full academic year at the school was fully realized by all and it gave the year a special "flavour" — great gratitude that he could still be with us, but also the sense of an impending loss. It was, therefore, with great joy that news about Synod's appointment of Dr. H.N. Gootjes as Professor of Dogmatics was received. We all look forward to his coming into our midst and his assuming his teaching responsibilities, D.V., in January 1990.

Also in another way it was a special year. We had the smallest student body in quite some time. With the total number being five, the churches can be sure that the four professors gave them the necessary attention! Although two students registered in September, only one remained with us, namely, J. Ludwig (of the Canadian Reformed Church at Hamilton). Three students were enrolled in the second year of studies, the so-called sophomore year, namely, R.D. Anderson (who came to us from the Reformed Church of Silverstream, New Zealand and who is now a member of the Canadian Reformed Church at Ancaster), C. Herfst (of the Dundas Free Reformed Church) and W. Wielenga (who came to us from Coaldale, Alberta). J. Boersma (who also came to us from Coaldale) was the sole occupant of the junior or third year and none was registered in the senior year. There will, therefore, be no one graduating this year. Although the number of students was small, it was a very good year in terms of the students' dedication to the task as well as the quality of the work they were able to do.

The prospects for the future look good. If all goes as expected, five new students will form the Freshmen class next year and at this moment there is a very real possibility that it will become six. Four of these students come from the Canadian Reformed Churches.

As we look ahead, we also note that

the next academic year will be the last one for Dr. Deddens, Professor of Diaconology and Ecclesiology. We are very thankful for the work which he continues to do in our midst and rejoice in the fact that Synod could appoint his successor in Drs. J. De Jong who will also start his work in 1990.

The changes affecting the College are not restricted to the teaching staff. Synod Winnipeg also made many first time appointments as governors because legally (according to the Theological College Act) outgoing governors were no longer able to be reappointed. This is another indication that we are in the process of shifting to a new time period for the College. It also shows how the Lord continues to provide also in this area.

In noting all the changes that are or will be affecting the Theological College,

we would be remiss if we did not also mention that the Women's Savings Action has new Board members. For this organization too a new time period has begun. We will undoubtedly be hearing more from them in the near future. Let me take this opportunity to again register the great thankfulness of the College community for their crucial work. Our library and thus our work at the College would be unimaginable without their vital contribution of providing financially for the purchasing of books. This too, we see as a great blessing from above.

May the gracious and faithful Giver of all these blessings, "the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change" (James 1:17), continue to use the Theological College as an instrument in His hand for the sake of His Church and the coming of His kingdom.



**HYMN 57**

St. George George Job Elvey, 1858

1. Thank the LORD and come with praise;  
Songs of ju-bi-la-tion raise  
When the crop is gath-ered in  
Ere the win-ter storms be-gin.  
God, our Mak-er, will pro-vide  
For our wants to be sup-plied.  
Let His peo-ple all con-fess  
His un-chang-ing faith-ful-ness.

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# THE ICRC<sup>1</sup>

## I. Introduction

It is nothing new, in this century, to organize a conference of churches. Indeed, this century has seen the rise of many such conferences and organizations. Some of the more prominent have been:

1. World Council of Churches. Constituted in Amsterdam 1948, as a fruit of many Missionary Conferences in the first part of the 20th century. This Council is well-known. It strives to realize unity among all churches who confess Christ as Lord, no matter how one interprets this confession. It also promotes unity in development of doctrine, in action (at times political), and in mission. This Council promotes unity at the expense of truth. We may speak in this regard of false ecumenicity.

2. International Council of Christian Churches. Constituted in 1948 in Amsterdam as well. This Council is the competition of the W.C.C. It wants to base itself on God's infallible Word. However, it does not want to be bound by confessions. Due to the lack of a confessional basis also this Council does not promote true unity.

3. Reformed Ecumenical Synod. Constituted in 1946 in Grand Rapids. In 1988 the name was changed to Reformed Ecumenical Council. Members are, among others, the Synodical Churches in the Netherlands and the Christian Reformed Church. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church recently withdrew from this Council. The REC has a confessional basis, namely the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards.

When the RES was constituted in 1946 all Reformed Churches were invited to participate, including the recently liberated churches in the Netherlands. However, in 1948 our sister churches in the Netherlands declined the invitation to join the RES. The General Synod Amersfoort 1948 gave the following reasons:

a. The invitation came from a church which only a few years ago (Liberation

By D.G.J. Agema

of 1944) had deposed faithful office-bearers.

- b. The Reformed Church Order does not know of an ecumenical synod.
- c. It is impossible to have an ecumenical relation between different churches in one nation who does not have unity.
- d. The basis or foundation of this synod cannot be accepted because of contradictions in the confessions mentioned in the constitution.

The three last reasons are of importance for our topic. We should notice that in point d. our sister churches at that time spoke of *contradictions* in the constitution. It will be clear that the synod is speaking here about the differences between the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards.

Some nineteen years later the same matter of differences between the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards was discussed again. General Synod Amersfoort 1967 had to deal with a request of Regional Synod Groningen 1967 to seek correspondence with the Presbyterian Church in Korea (*Acts* 1967, Art. 241, p. 288).

In one of its considerations the General Synod referred to a decision of a Regional Synod Groningen 1966 which, after having tested the Westminster Confession, had concluded that this confession was in full a Reformed confession. Regional Synod had admitted that there were some matters in these confessions which perhaps did not belong in a confession. But the fact that the Korean churches had the Westminster Standards was not seen as an impediment to ecclesiastical correspondence.<sup>2</sup>

Whereas the decision of 1948 had never been appealed, General Synod of 1967 adopted a different approach to the Westminster Standards. What in 1948 had been called contradictions, now were

seen as minor points of difference.

Dr. J. Faber in the *Clarion* (Vol. 28 No. 11) pointed to this change. Reaction to this from the Netherlands came via the pen of Dr. Douma in *De Reformatie*, Vol. 54, no. 48.<sup>3</sup> About this change Douma writes: "In the course of our liberated ecclesiastical life we have spoken many forceful words — too forceful — which, when they could not be maintained, very easily, too easily, are given up, with a result that there is no self-examination." (*Reformatie*, Vol. 54, no. 48, p. 762.) About these two sets of confessions he says: "We have become much milder in our thinking about the differences between this confession and our confessions than was the case in 1948, which is a good thing" (p. 763). And later he adds: "It does not hurt when we more often indicate that we in certain matters have been too radical" (no. 49, p. 778).

I would like to make two remarks with regard to this change from 1948 to 1967. In the first place, seeing the far-reaching consequences of the decision of a Regional Synod Groningen 1966, I would like to see the report which served that Regional Synod. The *Acts* of General Synod 1967 do not include this report. In addition to this, I question the ecclesiastical status of this report. Did the churches in the Netherlands, by referring to this Regional Synod, now officially approve of the Westminster Standards? Should not the General Synod of 1967 itself have tested these Standards rather than refer to a study done by deputies of a regional synod?

This is important, for this decision of a Regional Synod of Groningen also finds its way into the Canadian scene. It became one of the considerations for Synod 1977 in recognizing the OPC as a true church (*Acts* 1977, Art. 91, II). General Synod 1980 at Smithville indeed stated that this decision is not binding as such on the Canadian Reformed Churches (*Acts* 1980, Art. 97 B (i)3). Still the fact



# THE ICRC

is there that it did play a role. In light of this it would be even more important to see this report. Also, because as Canadian Reformed Churches we have never yet officially evaluated the differences between the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards.

My next remark stems from the words of Dr. Douma. He is thankful that today we think more generously with regard to the Westminster Standards. According to him we were too forceful in the past. I agree that this can happen, but yet I think we have to be very careful when we say this. It can be easy to label what was done in the past as being too forceful when not living in the situation of the past. Certainly we must evaluate the past in the light of God's Word and as a result we could be thankful for changes. At the same time, without in any way suggesting that Dr. Douma wants to go that way, we

(= the Dutch Committee) had received from the Australian Committee. This letter from the Australian deputies contained the following proposal:

To organize an ecumenical synod, or a session on a general synod, in which all churches can be represented, Africa, Australia, Canada, The Netherlands and (Korea). It seems to us very important to be able to speak together in this way and have verbal contact as churches which stand on the same foundation (*Acts Groningen 1978*, p. 484).

The decision of Synod Groningen 1978 concerning this matter was that Synod acknowledges a letter from Australia con-

4. to consider contacts and relations with other churches.<sup>4</sup>

Synod decided to instruct the committee to consult the sister churches or their deputies in order to prepare a R.I.S. and come with proposals to the next synod.

This letter from Australia is an interesting matter. The report submitted to General Synod Groningen 1978 by its Committee speaks of it as containing a proposal, but the decision of Synod uses the word request. The change is a substantial one. For in changing from proposal to a request the whole organization of such an international event comes now into the hands of the Dutch churches. They can now determine the course of action, for they were "requested" to do so.

In addition, Rev. Veldman writes in *Una Sancta* that the *Acts* of General Synod Albany 1975 do not mention at all such a proposal or request (*Una Sancta*, xxxiii, 11, 5). This Australian Synod did not instruct the Committee to bring a proposal concerning an international synod to the attention of the Dutch churches. That the whole matter about such a synod ended up on the table of the Dutch Committee and via this Committee on the table of the Synod in Groningen 1978 must be the result of a personal idea within the Australian Committee itself. Most likely without knowing it, Groningen 1978 dealt with a matter which had not come on its table in the church orderly way. We could also put it this way, the beginning of the ICRC was not in accordance with Article 30 of the Church Order.

Also the formulation of this letter from Australia needs our attention. The purpose of the "international synod" was to speak together as churches which have the same foundation. It mentions Africa, Australia, Canada, the Netherlands and (Korea). Korea is between brackets. The Committee was not certain on this point. I interpret these brackets as follows: In the first place we do not all acknowledge Korea as a sister church and should address the matter of sister church relationships; in the second place, since the churches in Korea do not have the Three Forms of Unity we should speak about the confessional foundation of such a synod. My conclusion from this letter is that the original idea as proposed by the Australian Committee — albeit without having a mandate to do so — envisaged a synod of churches which are full sister churches. However, this took another direction, because the Dutch churches took the matter completely in their hands.

## 2. Reception of this matter in Canada

In *Clarion* (Vol. 28, No. 13) Dr. J. Faber dedicated an editorial to the proposal of Groningen 1978 concerning an international synod. In his opinion such



L-r: Rev. W.P. Gadsby (Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia), Rev. O.J. Douma, Dr. J. Douma, Dr. J. van Bruggen (Reformed Churches in the Netherlands)

have to realize that it is typically the language of deformation to say "Yes that is what we maintained in the past, but thankfully we think differently now."

## II. History of the ICRC

### 1. The origin

The original idea for an ecumenical conference of Reformed Churches started within the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. We gather this information not from these churches but from our sister churches in the Netherlands. The report of the Dutch Committee for Contact with Churches Abroad to the General Synod Groningen 1978 makes mention of a letter (dated March 11, 1977) which it

taining a request to organize an ecumenical synod and considers that a Reformed International Synod can serve

1. to proclaim unity and exercise ecclesiastical fellowship among the churches according to the command of Christ;
2. to encourage one another to keep the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints;
3. to consider common tasks, e.g., in bearing witness to the unity in true faith, and in carrying out the missionary mandate, with a view to contemporary developments in divers areas of life in this world;

# THE ICRC

a synod would be something new, for even Dordt 1618-19 was still a national synod. He asks therefore "Does the unity of faith in the one Spirit have to find external expression in an International Synod? Is there not the danger that by way of imitation the World Council of Churches was structured after the United Nations, the RES after the WCC, and that the RIS will copy the RES?" (p. 287).

Dr. Faber foresees problems as well when it comes to the confessional basis of this synod. In this context he refers to the decisions of Amersfoort 1967 concerning the Westminster Standards.

Where Amersfoort 1948 saw contradictions in the *content* of the confessions, Groningen 1978 — in the line of Amersfoort 1967 — sees only differences in the *manner* of expressing the truth of God. As long as the Canadian Reformed Churches have not made a final decision on this doctrinal point, we should not place the Westminster Standards and the Three Forms of Unity beside each other in the basis of a Reformed International Synod, if such a Synod has to be convoked (p. 287).

Dr. Faber also suggests to change the word Synod to Conference. "Why not first of all strive for an international *conference* of churches and have this *convention* speak about the common affairs, to begin with the matters of confession, church order, and liturgy" (p. 288).

In the meantime the Dutch deputies appointed by General Synod Groningen 1978 went to work. Our churches received the following letter from the Dutch Committee (*Acts* Smithville 1980, page 123):

Synod (i.e. Groningen 1978, D.A.) decides to invite through her deputies for correspondence abroad the sister churches abroad and the churches with whom preliminary contact was established to send delegates to a constituent assembly for the convening of a Reformed International Conference.

The agenda of this Conference will at least contain the following:

1. the unity of faith as gift and mandate and its significance for
  - a. the diversity among the creeds of the churches
  - b. the diversity among the forms of government of the churches
  - c. the confession concerning the church
  - d. the reflection on contacts and relations with other churches.
2. Mutual help in the execution of the missionary mandate in the missionary situation of our time.
3. Basis and name of the Reformed International Conference.

4. Meaning and authority of the judgements and conclusions of the R.I.C.

5. By-laws concerning
  - method of delegation
  - frequency of meetings
  - drafting the agenda
  - method of dealing with the agenda.

The General Assemblies of the sister churches in Australia, Canada, Korea, Sumba, South-Africa are being asked to authorize its Committees for Fraternal relations, a. to appoint delegates; b. to help draft the agenda of the Constituent Assembly.

When we now compare the decision of Groningen 1978 and the official letter the Canadian Reformed Churches received in 1980 then we notice some marked differences. The official decision of Synod Groningen 1978 spoke of an "International Synod" whereas this letter speaks of an "International Conference." Could the Committee change this on its own?

In the second place, the decision of Groningen 1978 instructed the Committee to *consult* with the sister churches and come back with proposals. However, the letter of the Committee goes far beyond this in that it contains an *invitation* to send delegates. The whole project is now already past the stage of "consultation." This letter of the Dutch Committee is not at all in agreement with its mandate. No consultation is asked for, as Synod Groningen had instructed, instead, delegation is requested.

In this change of procedure the sister churches are being completely bypassed in the set-up of such a conference. The Dutch churches, or rather the deputies, now take the whole matter into their hands. Not only is this against the mandate of Synod, but it also brings about problems with regard to the question who to invite to such a conference. The Dutch deputies invited all the sister churches but also all churches with which the Dutch churches had contact in one form or another. Whether the sister churches had contact with them as well was not a point of discussion. In fact, the contacts of other churches were not considered.

It was again Dr. J. Faber in (*Clarion*, Vol. 31, No. 9, p. 155) who pointed to this last fact. He notes that not all the churches to whom the invitations were directed have ecclesiastical fellowship with each other.

Apart from the answer to the question who will be invited — the specific names of the churches to be invited

— it is my conviction that our Dutch sister churches would have done better to restrict the *constituent* assembly to those churches that have full ecclesiastical fellowship with each other. It would have meant an assembly of delegates of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, the Canadian Reformed Churches, the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and the Free Reformed Churches in South-Africa . . . . Those churches that live in full ecclesiastical fellowship on the basis of the Three Forms of Unity and the so-called Church Order of Dordrecht should first speak together about a common approach to, e.g., Presbyterian Churches with their Westminster Standards and Presbyterian polity . . . .

The Canadian Reformed Churches reacted cautiously. Synod Smithville 1980 decided the following concerning the Dutch invitation:

- a. That the Committee for Contact with Churches Abroad be authorized to send two delegates to this Conference;
- b. That a report on this Conference analyzing its basis, aim, powers, structure, members and agenda, along with a recommendation on how to proceed further in this matter, be sent to the next Synod of the Can. Ref. Churches by the Committee for Contact with Churches Abroad;
- c. That Synod Smithville 1980 refrain from any official endorsement of this Conference due to its preliminary character (p. 127).

Going back for a moment to the Netherlands now, we notice that the Committee appointed by the General Synod of Groningen 1978 submitted a report to the next Synod, Arnhem 1981. This report of 1981 was identical to the letter which our Committee already had received in or before 1980. Synod Arnhem 1981 indeed decided to change the word "Synod" to "Conference" and adopted the report and recommendations of the Committee. This means that, in 1981, it approved of a certain procedure which we, as Canadian churches, already had on our table in 1980, namely, the official invitation to send delegates. Again we see here a Committee which did not obey its mandate — and a Synod which did not indicate this to the Committee.

The Dutch deputies had an excuse for their actions. The *Acts* of Synod 1980 at Smithville, Art. 153C sub 3d (p. 125) give the following explanation: "They (i.e., the Dutch deputies, D.A.) explain that they come with this request prior to Synod Arnhem 1981 in order to save time. If they wait until after Synod Arnhem has agreed and then approach the sister

# THE ICRC

churches, this Conference could be delayed until 1983. They would like to convene it earlier." These words give no excuse, they only underline what I said before that here deputies took matters into their own hands in disregard of their mandate.

### 3. The Constituent Assembly in Groningen, 1982

In 1982 delegates and representatives of various Reformed churches came together in Groningen in answer to the invitation of the Dutch deputies. This assembly was to be the constituent assembly.

In the Acts of Synod Cloverdale 1983 we find an elaborate report on this assembly. I will quote at length.

The original agenda was set up in such a way that differences in Confessions, church polity, relations with other Churches, and missions would be discussed first. Thereafter the matter of the constitution and regulations would be dealt with.

We as Canadian delegates disagreed with the order of procedure. It was our concern that, if the agenda remained structured in this way, a lot of time would be spent discussing and debating but very little would be accomplished in terms of establishing a firm constitutional basis for the ICRC. The Canadian Churches had sent us to the Netherlands at a considerable expense and they would surely expect more for their money than a report of some speeches that were delivered and some debates that were held. They would want to know what concrete steps had been taken towards the establishment of the ICRC, how it would function and whether we should join it. In light of these considerations, we therefore requested that the matter of formulating the constitution and regulations of the ICRC be given primacy of place and that the papers to be delivered be scheduled to accommodate this change. The assembly decided to do so.

Now this change of emphasis was not met with agreement by all. Some were of the opinion that first all of the differences between the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards, between the Church Order and the Form of Government, between fraternal relations and correspondence must be ironed out and a common basis established before we could go over to constitutional matters and the establishment of the ICRC.

This view immediately came under attack because, as some delegates stated, we came here precisely because our Churches in

their Assemblies/Synods were convinced that we have the Reformed faith in common. If that basic assumption had not been there, we would never have been delegated in the first place. Besides, others remarked, it would be rather optimistic to assume that those differences that do exist between us could be resolved after a few papers and several days of discussion. This is not to say that the differences between Churches originating from

mandate given to this Committee by Synod Smithville 1980 with this report which was submitted by the Committee. The mandate was to go to Groningen to observe what would be done and report what was decided. Synod Smithville 1980 expressly stated that it refrained from any official endorsement. Now we go to the report. From it we do not receive at all the impression that our delegates acted as observers. On the contrary they participated as full members. Was this in accordance with the mandate? I do not believe so. The mandate was to listen and report back, but the delegates acted as if the Canadian Reformed Churches had already joined the ICRC.



L-r: Dr. K. Deddens, Rev. Cl. Stam, Dr. C. Van Dam, Dr. J. Faber

the continental Reformed tradition and those arising from the English-Scottish Presbyterian tradition are major, but surely it would take more than just one Assembly to understand each other fully and to smooth out all the wrinkles that remain in our relationships.

Still, the fact that the Assembly subsequently decided to deal with the constitution first should not be construed as an indication that now all of the remaining differences would be swept under the carpet. Rather, it showed that the Assembly was of the opinion that in spite of our differences we were one in the Lord and that we should proceed to lay the foundation for the organization that would in the future assist in bringing that unity to even greater and clearer expression (p. 326).

Also here I would like to compare the

In the second place we read in the report that the delegates disagreed with the order of procedure. "We as Canadian delegates, disagreed with the order of the procedure. It was our concern that if the agenda remained structured in this way, a lot of time would be spent discussing and debating but very little would be accomplished in terms of establishing a firm constitutional basis for the ICRC." Did Synod Smithville 1980 ever give this instruction to the delegates? No. Did Synod Smithville 1980 object to the original agenda? Again we have to say "No." These delegates were never instructed to object to this agenda. Their "concern" should have been to fulfil their mandate. And besides, does voicing such an objection agree with the mandate to be observers? These delegates should have refrained from all this. Instead they went completely outside their mandate. The

# THE ICRC

reference to money spent is totally out of order.

These delegates had come together in answer to an invitation which contained an agenda. The first point on this agenda was the matter of diversities. The delegates were sent with that agenda in mind. It is therefore completely incorrect to state that "we are here because our Churches in their Assemblies/Synods were convinced that we have the Reformed faith in common." The invitation never asked this from the churches. In fact Synod Smithville 1980 refrained from any endorsement. But at the meeting that which officially was presented for discussion first, was considered as already having been discussed. The very fact of coming together was interpreted to indicate that the sending churches were convinced of a common Reformed faith among each other. Our delegates should have let it be known that this did not apply to the Canadian Reformed Churches.

In addition, this change of procedure was not just a minor change, but a principal change with far-reaching consequences. Originally the order was first the differences, then the constitution. However, now the order became first the constitution and then the differences. This had a two-fold result. In the first place the confessional differences were swept under the carpet, as being perhaps interesting but not essential. In the second place these differences now found a way into the constitution. They were "legalized" in this way and placed beyond the point of open and honest discussion before God's Word. The whole change of procedure resulted in a Basis which reads as follows: "The Basis of the Conference shall be the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards." This gave rise to the later question, "Have we as Canadian Reformed Churches now officially adopted the Westminster Standards?"

We can conclude that our delegates at this Constituent Assembly went outside their mandate. Also, the change in procedure was a principal change, which swept under the carpet the most important matters, namely an open discussion on the diversities among the creeds and forms of church government.

One more remark yet about this Assembly in Groningen. Reading the report in *Clarion*, Vol. 31, No. 25 I was left with a question. On page 513 it says that Prof. L. Doekes presented a paper on "Harmony and Variety in Reformed Confessions." The report then reads: "The discussion that followed this paper was, to say the least, very interesting. Because most of it was held in closed session, I am not at liberty to reveal the way that the

discussion proceeded." Why would a discussion on such an important topic be held in closed session? And in addition, can a Conference, which has no judicatory power and whose purpose is discussion, meet in closed session? Does this not point to the fact that the assembly acted as a Synod?

This Constituent Assembly adopted Rules and Regulations for the Conference. They can be found in *Acts Cloverdale 1983*, pp. 329-333. I will not deal with them here, but will come back to them in my evaluation.

#### 4. Decision of Cloverdale 1983

How did General Synod Cloverdale 1983 react to this report and to the matter of the ICRC itself? Among all the considerations that we do find, I miss an indication that Synod judged the actions in Groningen by the deputies to be beyond their mandate (*Acts 1983*, Art. 121).

Some of the considerations were that there were churches present in Groningen 1982 with which we do not have ecclesiastical fellowship. Also that by joining the ICRC the Canadian Reformed Churches will be faced with "third party" relationships; further that

from the context of the discussion about the Basis of the ICRC, it might be understood that the charter members at the Constituent Assembly upon joining the ICRC subscribe to every expression or formulation of both the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards; however, membership in the ICRC must not be taken to mean that the Canadian Reformed Churches subscribe to the Westminster Standards.

And, finally, it was stated that the matter of divergencies should receive priority at the next Conferences.

Synod decided to join the ICRC in accordance with the proposal of the Committee. However, this was done with the clear instruction to move some amendments to the proposed Constitution. There should come about a stipulation in the Basis of the ICRC that the delegates subscribe only to the standards of the churches of which they are members. Also the Canadian Reformed Churches maintain that membership of the RES is an impediment to membership in the ICRC. Further, in the proposed Constitution it says that the member churches "are urged to receive the decisions" of the ICRC. In order to avoid hierarchy the word "receive" should be changed to "consider." Member churches are

"urged to consider" these decisions. The Committee had to present these amendments as well as some others to the next Conference in 1985 in Edinburgh, Scotland.

The *Acts* make mention of a Minority report as well. I should like to mention it, because I believe it contains some important points. This report urged Synod not to adopt the recommendation to join the ICRC on the following grounds:

1. The International Conference of Reformed Churches is proposed to be a Conference whose character is unknown in the Church Order of the Can/Am. Ref. Churches.
2. The Church Order does not regulate an official ecclesiastical representation of the Can/Am. Ref. Churches to a Conference.
3. The Church Order only knows of ecclesiastical assemblies — of Classes, Regional Synods and General Synods constituted by delegates from minor to major assemblies.

This report forces us to think about the church orderly place and possibility of such a conference. Can we as churches indeed decide to join a Conference? And related to this the question comes up, what exactly is the character of this Conference? I hope to address this in the evaluation.

#### 5. Edinburgh 1985 and General Synod Burlington 1986

I will not go into detail as to what all was discussed in Edinburgh. Reports of this conference have been published in *Clarion*. Also the *Acts* of Burlington 1986 give some information in this regard.

We saw how Synod Cloverdale instructed the Committee to bring certain amendments to the meeting at Edinburgh. However, the Committee had to report to Synod Burlington 1986 that the amendments to the Constitution and By-Laws of the ICRC could not be dealt with because the provisions for amending these documents could not be met. They have been placed on the agenda of the 1989 meeting.

In this respect the Committee fulfilled its task. It should then also have stopped there. However, the report shows that it went on to argue why these amendments should be dropped. I mention this, since this is again an example of a Committee going outside its mandate.

Synod Burlington 1986 maintained what Cloverdale 1983 had said, with the exception of a change proposed by Burlington West, namely to replace "the churches are urged to consider," "the member churches are to be informed of the decisions." "The consistory is afraid of an 'outside' body initiating matters at our major ecclesiastical assemblies."

# THE ICRC

As it stands now, these amendments were to be tabled at the Conference, held this June in the Fraser Valley.

### III. Evaluation

1. There is a sad element in the whole history of the ICRC. It seems to be a history in which committees or deputies time and again went outside their mandate. The whole idea started in a Committee without having the mandate to do this. Then the Dutch deputies turned things around. Next, our own delegates go beyond their mandate.

This is a serious matter. We live in a society which ridicules authority. Also within our churches there seems to be a decline in the respect for authority. It is for this reason of utmost importance that those who are called to give leadership give the proper example of respect for authority in remaining within the bounds of a mandate.

2. One of the most devastating reactions to the last Conference in Edinburgh 1985 came from Prof. D. Macleod of the Free Church of Scotland. He stated that the agenda of the Conference was a mess, with as result that no political issues (apartheid) could be discussed. According to him there was in Edinburgh no attempt to present a Reformed testimony to the world. Finally, in his view, there was no real unity either, for ministers of certain member churches would not be allowed on pulpits of other member churches. "The next Conference should be asked to declare that there must be free exchange of pulpits and open communion between all member churches".<sup>5</sup>

This reaction, although it deals only with one Conference, yet brings into focus what I see as the two major problems with regard to the ICRC. The first problem is the question, "What is the character of this Conference? Is it an ecclesiastical assembly, or just a conference?" The second problem is the question, "Does this Conference indeed promote unity?" I will address both problems in more detail.

3. What is the character of the ICRC? Is it an ecclesiastical assembly or a conference? The difference between these two is that if it is an ecclesiastical assembly we have to follow the church orderly way and have to accept its decisions as binding. Then we look at it in a similar way as we look, e.g., at a General Synod. In fact, it would then become an international "super-synod." However, if it is a conference it is just a meeting like so many others.

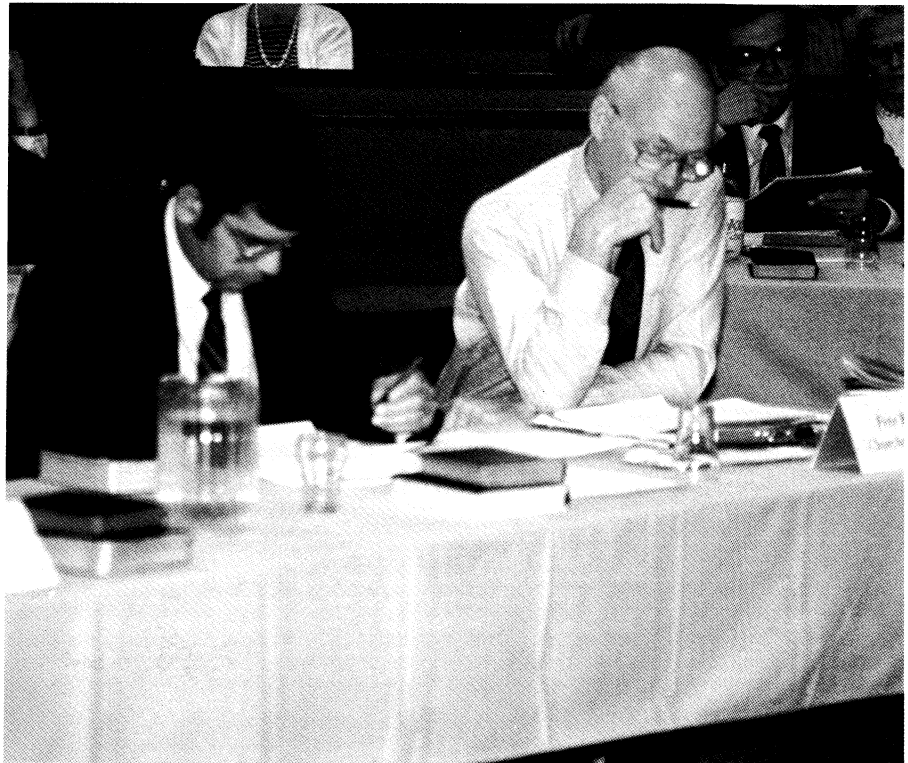
Reading the material pertaining to this topic I found confusion and ambiguity with regard to this point. This led me to the conclusion that there is no clarity

as to what character of this Conference really is. Some decisions, regulations and approaches point to an ecclesiastical meeting, whereas others point to a conference. It is this confusion and ambiguity which makes the ICRC into a ship without a rudder, which can easily drift into dangerous waters.

I will try to illustrate my conclusion. Take, for example, the matter of apartheid. Prof. Macleod argued that it should have been discussed. Whereas others vehemently denied this on the ground that none of the member churches had brought this in the proper way to the Conference. Indeed if you look at the ICRC as an ecclesiastical assembly, then you should follow the rule as we have in Article 30, Church Order. But if it is a Con-

ference, because all matters on the agenda have to come from the member churches. You see, then you treat this Conference as an ecclesiastical assembly. Indeed, a classis or synod may not place items on its own agenda, but why not a conference? However, at the same time this appointment of a Committee to come to an international version of the Apostles' Creed strongly points to the ICRC as a decision-making body, the decisions then being handed to the member churches. For, once this Committee comes up with an international version of the Creed and it is accepted by the ICRC, all the member churches will have to discuss it. But can a conference put matters on the agenda of a general synod?

To give one more example, Rev. Van Rongen in his opening speech in Groningen said that "we are lining up with the ancient church and its four great ecumenical synods, and also with the



*Mr. J.L. VanBurgel and Mr. J. Eikelboom of the Free Reformed Churches in Australia*

ference, why can the participants not discuss what they want? We see here how problems arise because of different approaches to the ICRC.

Let me give another example. After the Conference a controversy arose about a proposal made and adopted at Edinburgh as a result of Dr. Faber's speech, namely, to appoint a committee to come to an international version of the Apostles' Creed. Some said this could not

Reformers and their spiritual posterity."<sup>6</sup> Is this true? Does comparing this Conference with the great ecumenical synods not show that this Conference is more than a conference? I also think of that closed session to which I referred earlier. Indeed, there is confusion and ambiguity with regard to the character of the ICRC.

This confusion and ambiguity has deeper roots. The Constitution of the ICRC does not clearly define the char-

# THE ICRC

acter of the Conference either. In fact within the Regulations we have on the one hand the idea as if every Conference is an entity in itself, like our major assemblies, on the other hand one gets the idea that it is a permanent body, as in the Presbyterian system. The existing Regulations say:

"Art. I — Meetings of the Conference

1. The Conference shall convene every four years.
2. Each meeting of the Conference shall determine the time and place and convening Church of the next Conference.

Art. II — Executive Officers

The Conference shall elect the following officers: a chairman. . . ."

Article I.1 points clearly to a permanently existing body. It does not say, every four years a conference shall be convened, but *the* Conference shall convene every four years. It is the same conference which convenes. Article I.2 starts off with the same idea. "Each meeting of the Conference" is something different from "each Conference." However, then at the end this article says: "the next Conference." One would expect here "the next meeting of the Conference." Again ambiguity. The beginning of Article I.2 points to a permanent body, the end points to a body which ceases to exist as soon as the agenda is finished (like a classis or synod).

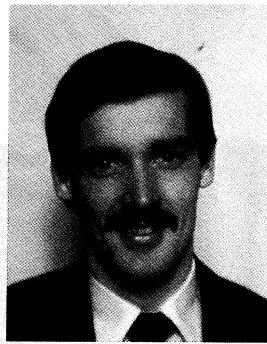
Synod Cloverdale 1983 asked that the beginning of Article II be changed from "The Conference shall elect," to "Each Conference shall elect." But is this in agreement with Article I.1? And if the Conference is a permanent body — as Article I.1 suggests — do the executive officers not remain in their respective offices? And why then should a church be asked to prepare and make decisions about a meeting? Also, the Constitution and Regulation do not clearly define the character of the ICRC either.

On the whole it can be said that there is no clearness with regard to the character, status, and authority of this Conference. I have the impression that on the one hand the majority of the member churches do not want to run this Conference like a synod. The Church Order does not provide for it, and the participants make it impossible. Then as national churches we would be ruled by an international synod. At the same time they want to stay away from the idea of just a conference which can be conducted as the participants deem fit. And therefore proposals have to come from the member churches only, in the "church orderly" way. The combination of these two points make the ICRC into a vague matter which can begin to live a life on its own.

For there are not only Reformed but also Presbyterian Churches in the ICRC.

And the Presbyterian tradition sees nothing wrong with a regional or national church, as their form of government shows. The vagueness and ambiguity would bring about an opening for hierarchy. Is it, then, not of absolute importance to determine carefully the character of this Conference? And are we not here faced with the consequences of the change of procedure at the Constituent Assembly in Groningen?

I do not believe that this Conference can ever be an ecclesiastical assembly simply because I do not see in Scripture an indication that we should strive for such an international synod and because our Church Order does not provide for



Rev. D.G.J.  
Agema

this. The minority report at Synod Cloverdale 1983 made a good point in this regard. We should never treat it as an ecclesiastical assembly, but as a conference, nothing more. It can serve an important purpose, namely, to function as a forum to meet each other. But it is then in character no different from, e.g., an office-bearers' conference. We meet each other to exchange information, to reflect upon ideas, but no binding decisions can be made and none of the agreements reached are admissible at a major assembly of a member church because of Article 30, Church Order.

This brings me to some critical questions. If the ICRC can only be a Conference, why should we at a synodical level decide to join it? From a church orderly point of view I ask: Can a synod decide this? Is it not outside the jurisdiction of a General Synod to make decisions concerning joining and delegation?

These questions are important for I see symptoms that point to another direction, the direction of a "super-synod." The lack of clarity concerning the character of this Conference will allow for a development in this direction. Yes, does

not the fact that this Conference has a Constitution and Regulations point to the fact that we are dealing here with more than just a conference? Which office-bearers' conference has a Constitution? Does not the fact of having a Constitution show that the ICRC is a permanent body with a definite purpose? Then we had better be careful.

4. Does the ICRC indeed promote true unity? We heard Prof. Macleod say that in 1985 there was no real unity, because ministers of certain member churches would not be allowed on pulpits of other member churches. This observation is correct, but indicates at the same time that in promoting unity the ICRC walks ahead of the member churches. Part of the problem is certainly that the Dutch deputies took matters into their own hands, and showed little sensitivity for the relations of the sister churches.

The way it is now, we are united in one Conference but do not all necessarily have full correspondence. This, according to me, means that unity is promoted in a forced and unecclesiastical way. Here we come to some of the symptoms which I referred to at the end of the previous point. We have to face so-called third party relationships. We sit together at one conference with churches which we have not accepted as true churches of Jesus Christ. Are we *forced* to accept them now as sister churches? Think also of the change in procedure at the meeting in Groningen. It was said then: the fact that we are together shows that we are convinced that we have the Reformed faith in common. This was said while several of the churches present had no official contact let alone a sister church relationship.

Does this Conference then not run ahead of the churches and instead of assisting them, force them in a hierarchical way to come to unity? Do we now suddenly have to initiate contact and offer correspondence to the other churches because we come together at this Conference?

Synod Burlington 1986, addressing this very same point, considered the following: "The ICRC might indeed help to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship by providing a forum where churches may meet each other. But formal recognition of churches as true churches of our Lord Jesus Christ should not be based on the testimony of sister churches only or on ICRC membership; such recognition remains the churches own responsibility" (Art. 175 C 3).

However, the same Synod gave *permission* to the Committee for Contact with Churches Abroad to initiate contact with the Free Church of Scotland whereas no church within Canada had asked for this.

# THE ICRC

Is this the church orderly way? The Synod never gave the Committee a *mandate* for this. But joining the ICRC was enough of a reason for putting this on the table of the Synod (Acts 1986, Art. 178).

Besides the so-called third-party relationships there is also the fact that from one country there are more than one member church. There are two member churches from Ireland which are not united or in the process leading to union. And if the Free Reformed Churches in South Africa would become members they will sit there with churches from that country with which they have no relation. Do we not so distort the whole matter of obedience to Jesus Christ? And does the Conference not so do damage to the true unity of faith? We can only promote the unity when we first establish full ecclesiastical correspondence. If we want to meet, let us then meet as sister churches.

5. This brings me to the next point, the Basis of the ICRC, which includes both the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards. Can we indeed truthfully promote unity on such a basis? I do not believe that "Reformed" and "Presbyterian" are synonymous. We should in this respect learn from the recent developments within the OPC. I think of what our sister churches at Blue Bell and Laurel went through. Indeed, I realize that part of the problem in this regard is also our decision in 1977 concerning the OPC. It would not hurt to admit that we made a mistake at that time.

This Basis also gives rise to the question in how far we as Canadian Reformed Churches now are bound to the Westminster Standards. Synod Burlington stated that even though there are more confessions in the foundation we are bound only to our own. And the idea behind it might be all right, namely, we are not bound to the Westminster Standards. But can you say "I join this organization but only subscribe to part of the constitution?" Burlington's proposal does not solve the problem. The danger of the ICRC is that the binding to the Three Forms of Unity becomes a minor detail. How can our delegates, who themselves have subscribed to the Three Forms of Unity, now subscribe to more? In my opinion that is impossible.

6. The question which remains to be addressed yet is: where do we go from here? Let me say first of all that I am not opposed to having contact with sister churches abroad. Neither would I be opposed to an international conference where we meet as Reformed churches. From time to time such a conference could be organized. But this contact in order to be fruitful and meaningful, needs a careful description of its character and

a solid basis. And this is exactly what is lacking with the ICRC and makes many uneasy about the whole idea. This lack of description of its character and of a solid basis, makes it also a potentially dangerous matter.

In addition to this I would like to come back to my first point in this evaluation, the unordered way in which this whole matter reached the table. All the ambiguity is, in my opinion, also a direct result of this unordered origin and history. If we want fruitful and meaningful contact, we

- unclear and even ambiguous about the character of the ICRC;
- 4. the basis contains diversities in combining two sets of confessions;
- 5. there is the real danger of hierarchy;
- 6. it does not promote unity in the proper way.

<sup>1</sup>Speech given at the opening of the study season 1987-88 in the Canadian Reformed Church at Attercliffe.

<sup>2</sup>Consterende D: dat de deputaten van de particuliere synode van Groningen 1966 na toetsing van de Westminster Confessie dien-aangaande 'meende te mogen vaststellen dat de Westminster Confessie een voluit gereformeed belijdenis geschrift is. Weliswaar moet worden geconstateerd dat deze confessie soms zaken aan de order stelt waarvan



Free Church of Scotland: Rev. J.A. Gillies, Rev. W. Underhay, Prof. C. Graham, Prof. D. MacLeod

should let go of the ICRC and go back to square one. Start all over, but then in the proper way. Then we should make clear what the character of such contact would be. Then we could come together as churches based on the same foundation, which is the Three Forms of Unity, to promote true unity.

In concluding I would like to summarize the evaluation in this way: the Canadian Reformed Churches need to re-examine the matter of the ICRC, for the following reasons:

1. because of the unordered history, the matter never came from the churches and various Committees went outside their mandate;
2. the Church Order does not allow a General Synod to decide whether to join a conference;
3. the constitution and regulations are

het twijfelachtig is of ze in een confessie thuisshoren, en dat soms op een breeduitgesponnen wijze. Maar dat neemt niet weg, dat toch onze conclusie kon zijn, dat het feit dat the Koreaanse kerken de Westminster Confessie als belijdenisgeschrift hebben, geen bezwaar is tegen kerkelijke correspondentie."

<sup>3</sup>"Wij hebben in de loop van ons vrijgemaakt-kerkelijk leven veel forse woorden gesproken — te forse woorden — die, als hun onhoudbaarheid evident wordt, ook gemakkelijk weer worden losgelaten, te gemakkelijk, zodat een goede zelfbeproeving uitblijft (*Reformatie*, 54, 48, 762). Maar we zijn over de verschillen tussen deze confessie en onze belijdenisgeschriften *gelukkig* wel een stuk milder gaan denken dan het in 1948 gebeurd was" (763). "Het kan geen kwaad wanneer wij eens wat vaker duidelijk maken dat wij hier en daar te radicaal geweest zijn" (54, 49, 778).

<sup>4</sup>Translation from J. Faber in *Clarion*, Vol. 28, No. 13, p. 287.

<sup>5</sup>*The Monthly Record of the Free Church of Scotland*, Oct. 1985, p. 221.

<sup>6</sup>*Clarion*, Vol. 31, No. 25, p. 512.

# THE ICRC

## Some editorial comments

Synod sent "delegates," that is, persons who are to take part in discussions and actions.

III. In his evaluation Rev. Agema uses comments and remarks of professor D. Macleod of Scotland about the lack of unity to show that in the ICRC there is no unity. Is this fair? Sure, on details there are differences of opinion and view, e.g., on the point whether a political topic can be discussed at a Conference. This difference again played a role in Langley. Another hot point for Prof. Macleod is the fact that our churches do not automatically have pulpit exchange and unity at the one Lord's Supper table with the other churches which take part in the ICRC. Does this difference dominate the ICRC? Rev. Agema says that it does, agreeing with Prof. Macleod. Others (compare the reports) disagree. Acknowledging differences, they rejoiced in the unity which was dominant at the meetings.

IV. Rev. Agema asks: "Are we forced to accept them [all the churches which belong to the ICRC] as sister churches?" He gives the answer himself: the Synod of Burlington has clearly stated that "such recognition remains the churches' own responsibility" (Art. 175 3).

V. Rev. Agema writes that "we have to realize that it is typically the language of deformation to say 'Yes, that is what we maintained in the past, but thankfully

we think differently now'." My question is: would it not be better, because it is more true, to say: this *can* be the language of deformation? Now the Rev. Agema does suggest, in spite of his additional remarks, not only that Dr. Douma (unintentionally) spoke the language of deformation, but also that the churches in the Netherlands and in Canada, as well as the sister churches in Australia and in South Africa, by recognizing Presbyterian churches as true churches and by declaring that the Westminster Confession is a Reformed confession, are on the way of deformation (see further the Editorial).

It is possible that an expression like the above can be used in a way that shows that one is on the wrong track. Another possibility is that people who just went through a difficult battle see everything in the light of that battle. Right after, and in fact still in the struggle of the Liberation, the churches read expressions in the Westminster Standards in the light of their struggle. For instance, when the Larger Catechism (Q.A. 31) answers the question "With whom was the covenant of grace made?" and answers: "with Christ as the second Adam, and in Him with all the elect as His seed," we who have gone through the struggle with the synodical synods (1942 ff.) are inclined to read such a statement in the light of the decisions of those synodical synods. We have been assured by the Presbyterians that we must not read the Westminster Confessions in that light. I have to accept that. Nevertheless, I maintain that God's covenant is with the believers *and [all] their seed*, which is also in the Westminster Larger Catechism [A. 166]. See the *Acts of Synod New Westminster*, 1971, p. 66).

See further the Editorial.

J. Geertsema

I. I will comment here on a few details. The main part of my comment is to be found in the editorial. At the end of his "Introduction" Rev. Agema writes that "as Canadian Reformed Churches we have never yet officially evaluated the difference between the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards." However, the Synod of Smithville 1980 (*Acts*, Art. 97, II, C, 3; cf. the Synod of Cloverdale 1983 [*Acts*, Art. 55, D, 2, b; p. 41]) stated the following: "For the benefit of our Churches a detailed evaluation of these divergencies, showing them not to be an impediment in recognizing the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as a true Church, should yet be provided," and decided "To incorporate this task in the mandate of the Committee for Contact with the O.P.C." The Synod of Burlington 1986 adopted the following "Recommendations":

1. Synod thanks the committee for publishing this detailed evaluation of the divergencies for the benefit of the churches.
2. Synod receives this report as the detailed evaluation of the divergencies which the General Synod of 1977 neglected to give for its decision to recognize the OPC as a true Church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

II. Rev. Agema writes that the Synod of Smithville gave the Committee for Contact with Churches Abroad the mandate "to observe what would be done [at the constituent assembly in Groningen in 1982] and report what was decided. Synod Smithville 1980 expressly stated that it refrained from any official endorsement." It is true, this Synod decided to "refrain from any official endorsement," but it is also true that this Synod did not send "observers," whose mandate it was only to observe and report back, but

## Announcement: Women's Savings Action

The Women's Savings Action wishes to announce that after many years of faithful service, Mrs. L. Lindhout has resigned as treasurer. We are very thankful for her valuable contribution to the Savings Action. We are also happy to announce that Mrs. C. Zietsma has been found willing to assume the responsibilities of the treasurer. Please take note that all cheques for our Savings Action should

now go to the new treasurer:

Mrs. C. Zietsma  
54 Como Place  
Hamilton, Ontario  
L9B 1Y4

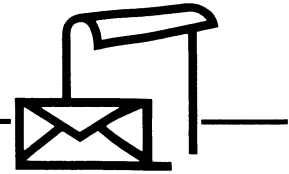
We are also happy to announce that Mrs. J. Van Dam has agreed to join us as secretary. Please direct any correspondence that does not belong to the treasurer to her.

Mrs. J. Van Dam  
642 Ramsgate Road  
Burlington, Ontario  
L7N 2Y1

We plan to give a full annual report of our activities at the College Evening in September. This report will be published in Clarion.

On Behalf of the Board  
Mrs. J. Mulder, president.





## Dear Editor,

I do not receive the Clarion directly, but I am always thankful when I have the opportunity to read it. I just recently saw the April 28th issue and was surprised to find myself seriously misrepresented to your readers. On page 203 I find the following: "It was G.I. Williamson, a favourite 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." I write this letter because I want the readers of Clarion to know that this is not a correct statement of my point of view.

It is interesting that, in the same issue of the Clarion, the Rev. R. Boersema says pretty much what I would want to say on the issue of confessional membership. After some 37 years of pastoral experience, much of which was in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, I remember a number of instances in which believers were permitted to make public profession of faith even though they were (a) of limited intellectual ability, or (b) afflicted with a scruple of one kind or another as to this or that doctrine. It was sometimes said to me that there was a major difference between the RCNZ 'Confessional membership' view, and that of the OPC from which I had come. But I must honestly say that I could find no substantial difference *in practice*. Also in my Fall River, Massachusetts congregation in the OPC we always gave careful instruction and made it clear that no one could legitimately make a public profession of faith in our midst who was not in essential agreement with the Reformed system of doctrine *and* in submission to the teaching authority of the church. Readers of the Clarion need to remember that a far greater proportion of the OPC has a non-reformed background, as compared with the Canadian Reformed Churches. Some-times people can experience a rapid revolution in their thinking. But for many it takes quite a few years to really iron out the wrinkles of their thoughts in captivity to the Lord Jesus. I would gladly grant that your people are more homogeneously reformed than ours are. Yet the bottom line is that I am unable to see how the ideal of confessional membership can be consistently applied. And, if that is true, then I think the difference between us is exaggerated.

With respect to the second point — "that the theology of the Liberated churches represents dead orthodoxy" — let me just say that this has never been my opinion. For nearly twenty years I, along with other pastors (some of whom were from the OPC), fought a hard battle to separate the Reformed Churches of New Zealand once and for all from the Synodical Gereformeerde Kerken. As long ago as 1980 — as some Article 31 men in the Netherlands, such as the Rev. Cnossen and Dr. Ohmann will testify — I took the initiative (while on my way to the RES in Nimes) to make the first face to face contact with the Article 31 churches. With me was one of our New Zealand elders from my own Session who had come from an Article 31 background. There were a number of people in my former congregation who came to New Zealand from Article 31 churches. They would gladly testify that I often spoke highly of these Churches. Mr. Dean Anderson — now a student at your Theological School in Hamilton — could also testify that I too recommended that he go there for his theological training. What I am saying, Mr. Editor, is that anyone who will trace my foot prints will see plenty to refute Mr. Kok's allegation. Recently my former New Zealand congregation called one of your ministers, the Rev. R.N. Gleason, with my knowledge and approbation. So I hope your readers will understand that I was distressed by this wrong allegation.

Just a week has passed since it was my privilege to attend the ICRC with three other OPC observer delegates. What we found was to us 'like a breath of fresh air' after the long years of our difficult RES struggle. We felt that we were among brethren. And our hearts were warmed again and again, by the way we were received as brethren. May the Lord continue to guide, bless and prosper your Canadian Reformed Churches. May it also be laid on your heart to give us whatever help and encouragement you can that we might become more faithful.

Sincerely,  
G.I. Williamson

*Bethel Orthodox Presbyterian Church*

Note: Gladly we place this correction, that takes away the blame put on the Rev. Williamson's name. Moreover, a warning against dead orthodoxy is in place when orthodoxy is stressed. Such stress on

maintaining the true doctrine can be accompanied by a lifestyle from which true holiness is absent, and in which Christian love and compassion is lacking.

J.G.

## Dear Mr. Editor,

The press release of the General Synod held in Winnipeg did not give many details concerning the appeals of Article 184 and 185 of Synod 1986. Since this matter of the doctrine of the church is of much interest to many in the churches, I would like to briefly give some details. Our appeals were rejected not because of the doctrinal position defended in the appeals, but because Synod felt that Synod 1986 should not be read in a one-sided way so as to exclude the positions defended in our appeals and therefore it was not necessary to modify these decisions.

In the consideration of our appeals, Synod 1989 made, among others, the following statements:

"To join the assembly of true believers is to join the one, holy, catholic and Christian church. . . ." This statement should not be turned around to posit that "Christ gathers the 'holy, catholic, universal church only in visible true churches!'"

(The decision) of Synod 1986 should not be used to conclude that there are three categories of people: "the world, the church and believers who are not of the world and also not of the church."

Synod 1986 stressed the obedience to the norms of Christ but did not deny that the church gathering work of Christ "is broader than the local, true churches. . . ."

With these statements, Synod 1989 has given some of the clarification that I asked for in my appeal. I am also convinced that Rev. D. DeJong (whose views were under discussion in the article I appealed) has never said anything contrary to these statements. While recognizing that Christ's church gathering work is broader than the local, true churches, he has always stressed the obedience to the norms of Christ. The same applies to candidate D. Moes whose views are the subject of discussion among some members in the churches.

I fervently hope that our Canadian Reformed Churches may now move forward in unity on the matter of the doctrine of the church and that all of us will joyfully appreciate all of the gifts God has given us in all of the members of his churches.

Yours in Christ,  
Ralph Boersema



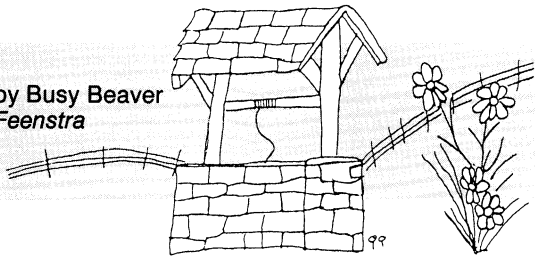
## Hello Busy Beavers,

Here are two holiday stories for you, from two of our Busy Beavers. I know you'll enjoy reading them.

"I went to Quebec for vacation this year. We went right to the ocean. I got lots of shells by the St. Lawrence River. Our camp spot was by the ocean. We could look over it while we were eating. I got a seal-fur wallet on a key chain. My sisters say it's not a souvenir because I didn't see any seals. But I think it is one. The day after we drove through Montreal there was a flood in it, and we didn't know till a week later."

"Yesterday was really funny. Some of my brothers and sisters had for the fun of it, made wild-rose perfume. When they found out no one wanted it, they stood by the road, and everytime a car came past, they yelled "perfume for sale." I just laughed, but my brother said "You'll be surprised when we come back with money." As you can imagine though, they never sold any of it. One time a car came past full of teenage boys. They even yelled "perfume," to them. What a laugh. They don't care though."

Picture by Busy Beaver  
Andrea Feenstra



## FROM THE MAILBOX

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club *Francine van Woudenberg*. We are happy to have you join us. It sounds to me as if you had a good time at your church picnic, Francine. Thank you for the poem and puzzle to share with the other Busy Beavers.

Of course you may join the Busy Beaver Club, *Nicole Roodzant*. I see you mean to keep the Busy Beavers busy, too! Have you been enjoying the summer, Nicole? Will you write and tell us about your family and your summer?

Welcome to the Club *Melanie DeBoer*. How did your swimming lessons go? And have you been busy looking after all your pets? How are they all doing? Bye for now. Write again soon.

How are you doing, *Anna DeVries*, after your fall off the horse? I'm sure glad you were able to keep riding, but you didn't feel anything the next day? And how is your correspondence going? Are you getting lots of letters? Thanks for the puzzle and quiz, too, Anna.

Hello, *Bianca VandenBeukel*. It was really nice to hear from you again! Are you enjoying the summer? You didn't say whether you are going on vacation or not. Did you join in our Quiz Contest from last time's *Clarion*, Bianca?

Thank you for the riddles, *Trina Jelsma*. I think the Busy Beavers will enjoy them. What are you doing to keep busy this summer, Trina? Have you tried the quizzes for our Contest yet? Bye for now.

I see you mean to keep those Busy Beavers really busy, *Christine Lodder*. Thank you for the puzzle. Have you done the quizzes for the Contest, Christine. And what about holidays for you? Will you write and tell us how you enjoyed your holiday?

## RIDDLE FUN

from Busy Beaver *Trina Jelsma*

1. What has 2 legs like an Indian  
2 arms like an Indian  
2 hands like an Indian  
and 2 feet like an Indian  
but isn't an Indian?
2. When can a net hold water?
3. What comes all the way up to a house  
but can't get in?



(Answers below)

## Quiz Time!

\* Word Search by Busy Beaver *Rebecca Stel* \*

\* \* \* \* \* FAITH \* \* \* \* \*

G	O	D	G	B	I	B	L	E	B
C	Y	L	O	H	L	J	D	F	F
H	A	J	U	L	E	L	L	A	H
B	A	H	O	S	N	K	I	M	Y
I	P	R	U	J	Q	T	S	I	R
R	W	S	O	N	H	T	V	U	O
T	S	I	R	H	C	X	E	Y	L
H	Z	Z	P	R	A	I	S	E	G

\* \* \* \* \*

Two of our Busy Beavers sent in a code quiz. And guess what? They belong together! Here they are.

Code Quiz #1 by Busy Beaver *Harold Winkelaar*

A-1	C-3	E-5	H-8	N-14	R-18	T-20
B-2	D-4	G-7	I-9	O-15	S-19	V-22
9 14	20 8 5	2 5 7 9	14 14 9 14 7			
7 15 4	3 18 5	1 20 5 4	20 8 5			
8 5 1 22	5 14 19	1 14 4	20 8 5			
5 1 18 20	8					

Code Quiz #2 by Busy Beaver *Melanie DeBoer*

7-G	16-0					
92-S	56-I	7 16 13	92 47 21	14 31 47 14		
14-T	31-H					
13-D	47-A					
21-W		56 14	21 47 92	7 16 16 13		

Answers to Riddles: 1. a picture of an Indian 2. when the water is ice 3. the steps.

How did you do on your last time's quizzes? Send them soon, Busy Beavers!

Love to you all from  
Aunt Betty