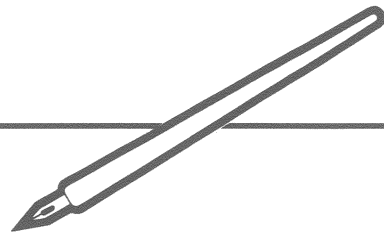


Clarion

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“I think”

In a conversation one can often hear these two words: “I think . . .” followed by what the speaker thinks. Perhaps every one of us has used these words, at home, at work, and at meetings, for instance at society meetings where God’s Word and the confession of the church are studied and where issues of our modern life and world are discussed. There are so many matters in life about which we think and talk, and which we discuss. To mention a few, there are the matters of abortion and euthanasia and the manner in which to fight them, there is the matter of family planning or having children and when and how many, the matter of women’s rights and what this means for the church, the matter of the Sunday as day of rest in connection with the modern secular trend to do away with any Christian distinction between the first day of the week as Day of the Lord, as day of rest and worship, “and so on and so forth” as one of our former neighbours used to say and perhaps still says. Talking about these and other issues we place opinion beside or over against opinion. “I think . . .”, yes, “And” or “But I think. . . .”

It is not my intention to deal here with such issues. What I ask your attention for is the use of this expression “I think” in our discussions and conversations. As with many things, also here we can distinguish two aspects. We can see a positive side and a negative one. When, in a discussion at our society meetings or at other occasions, a person comes forward and, adding his share to the conversation, begins with these words “I think”, this can point to humbleness. He can mean to say with this introduction: I give my opinion. I do not want to claim that this is the absolute truth. I do not want to say that I know it all. I present only what is my view on this matter. Who am I that I could say: “This is it!”? It is possible that I overlook certain aspects, or that I see or interpret things wrongly. Thus the words “I think” can show caution and carefulness.

I think that when we look at these words from this angle, we can appreciate this manner of expressing oneself. We do not like people who present themselves as persons who always know it all. Such an attitude irritates and leaves the impression of arrogance and misplaced pride and lack of humbleness. It easily turns us off and away, especially when it is clear that such a person overlooks aspects and is restricted and short-sighted in his views and therefore wrong in what he says. Thus, when “I think” displays a modest, humble attitude, it deserves our praise.

On the other hand, the expression can also display a negative side. Again, this depends on the manner and the situation in which the words are used. A few examples may illustrate this. At a Young People’s Meeting a Scripture passage is discussed which causes some difficulties. One comes with a certain possible solution based on the context or on other Scripture passages, comparing Scripture with Scripture, and cautiously com-

ing with his solution. Someone else who did not do much studying, if at all, adds his opinion to the discussion: “I think . . .”, while he does not come with grounds from Scripture for his explanation. At a Bible Study Society or Young Couples Study Club the matter of having children is discussed. One person, still thinking in the old ways, says that healthy Christian parents should not restrict the number of their children to one or two, as is so common in our modern world, because Christian parents, living by God’s Word, know that in God’s covenant children are a gift and blessing from Sion, a blessing in the Lord Jesus Christ, children received for Christ (cf. e.g. Psalm 127, 128, 1 Timothy 2:15). Then someone else responds with his or her, “But I think,” and bases this opinion on human needs and the situation of an overcrowded world or economic conditions, or even on the feeling that having children can be so bothersome. There is an elder who visits a young man and admonishes him because he and his girlfriend are living together. He shows from Scripture that the Lord does not want it this way. The response is: “That is your opinion. I am entitled to have my own. I think. . . .” Another elder admonishes certain members of the congregation because they regularly worship with other Christians outside their own congregation and federation of churches and see nothing wrong with this since, according to them, this belongs to our Christian freedom, and because the others are such sincere and loving Christian people. Again the response is: It is your opinion that this is wrong. We think differently. We think . . .”.

I am aware of the fact that my examples are chosen in a specific, negative way. However, these examples are chosen from the practice of the pastoral work and reflect reality. Is it not so that in meetings of Young People Societies opinion easily is placed over against opinion, not backed up by thorough study done before the meeting? Do we not often do the same in our conversations and visits? Don’t we, when a question comes up, quickly come with our ready opinions? The one thinks this, the other that. Is it not easily just a matter of opinions without a solid basis in Scripture? And do you, reader, not agree that this way of speaking and discussing can easily become a trend and an attitude? When we discuss things, do we go to the Word of God to try to find out what God has revealed in connection with the matters under discussion and with all our questions concerning our life. Don’t we easily form our opinion, influenced, perhaps even without our being aware of it, by the world around us, by, so to speak, what is in the air, by what everybody else thinks, without knowing what God’s Word says, or even without being aware that God’s Word could have something to say on this or that point? Let us also be aware of it that as (sincere) Christians we can form opinions and views which are based more on what we and our peers, our Christian environment, think than on Scripture. It remains possible as well that we think that we base

our opinions on Scripture, while, in fact, we do so on faulty interpretations. Among Christians, too, we find differences of opinion.

What must therefore be our principle? What should we always strive for? This, that we at all times ask, with all the questions of life, what does our God think about this? What does He say about what I think I need or want or should do? How does He want me to think about the issues of life? How does He see my needs and wants? What does He want me to do? In short, what does He say in His Word? Not what I think, not my opinion, but what He has revealed as His wisdom for our life, is the thing that counts and should count, always under all circumstances.


The apostle Paul wrote to the Roman Christians (12:2), "Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." The renewal of our mind is the renewal of our thinking, and so our speaking and acting.

Placing God's wisdom in Christ crucified over against the wisdom of the world, and proclaiming that this true wisdom of God in Christ for (daily) life is revealed by God through the Spirit of God in the gospel of Christ as Saviour, the apostle concludes 1 Corinthians 2 with the words (vs.16): "We have the mind of Christ." Again, the mind means the thinking. A renewed mind comes from the Holy Spirit. The unspiritual man does not grasp the things of the Spirit, but "the Spiritual man judges all things [correctly]" (1 Corinthians 2:14f.). The unspiritual man thinks and acts according to human opinion; the Spirit-guided person

lives by the Word of the Spirit, the Scriptures, and is given a correct judgment about the questions and issues in life. That is God's covenant promise in Christ. Indeed, believers who (and when they) live by God's Word and understand it correctly through the illumination of the Spirit, have the mind, the thinking, wisdom, of God in which Christ is central; Christ through whom God made the universe and worked redemption from sin.

So let it be (come more and more) our second (renewed) nature always to ask what God's opinion is, revealed in His Word, and as confessed in principle and summary in the standards of our faith. This will mean a continuing study of Scripture and confession. It will mean a constant steadfast prayerful reading of Scripture with our whole and undivided heart and mind. It will also mean a consistent denying of ourselves in our submissive commitment to our heavenly Lord. Such a humble "not my will but Thine, not my opinion but Thine" is only possible through a living faith in Christ, a living communion with Him through the Holy Spirit. Such a continuing renewal is gift and work of God's Spirit. Paul writes to the Christian believers in Corinth and in all ages that God "is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1 Corinthians 1:30). The fear of the Lord is still the beginning of wisdom.

So, having (the promise of) the mind of Christ, let us think the thinking of the Scriptures, the thinking of God and His Christ.

Not: "I think", but what does God think? This is the true humbleness. 

Worthy of full acceptance⁵

By C. Trimp

Preamble

Pointing to the suffering and injustice in this world, critics dispute the credibility of the Gospel in our own society. In articles 1 to 4 we have submitted a brief reply to this critique. In this article (5) we wish to address the "why?"-question as seen in the light of a Christian reflection on issues of faith, and in submission to the guidance of the Holy Spirit counseling God's children. We shall see that these children, also in their suffering, may experience God's nearness. Whoever humbles himself under the hand of God, will be uplifted by that selfsame hand. God's children do not only encounter wrath and punishment, but the Spirit also grants them sanctification.

4. The Holy Spirit teaches us wisdom

Nothing is more understandable than man's desire for an airtight, foolproof argument concerning the great mysteries of

human existence. The ills of adversity (for instance, suffering because of disasters, sickness, injustice and violence) strike both the evildoers and the righteous. This was a distressing matter for psalmists, for those who pray, for Job and the author of Ecclesiastes alike.

For us, too, this is a distressing matter; it can torment and haunt us.

"God makes His sun rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). Much thought can be spent on this issue, and we may invite one another's opinion about it. Not that this question normally worries us a lot. Far from it; it is a comforting observation, and we witness the goodness and patience of God blossoming forth in the life of His creatures. But misfortune strikes its blows daily, and this hard fact of life tests our faith that wishes to confess the providence of God to the honour of His glory and to the comfort of man.

Thus we can understand the desire for a convenient answer to the "why?"-

question. During the process of our investigation we gave some attention to the notion of Kushner. He sends us home with the message that God does want the best for all good people but He, unfortunately, can't bring this about (as yet).

We refused to accept his conclusion, as it is nonsense before the God who revealed Himself in His Son.

Another idea might be presented as follows:

God rules over both good and evil; whatever is good is destined for His children, and the bad for His enemies.

This, too, would be a convenient recipe, but it is plainly incorrect. When the Scripture tells us that "all things work together for good to them that love God" (Romans 8:28 K.J.V.), it does not mean that "all things" have, thereby, suddenly become "good things". We can't look at society and our own lives by making a simplistic division like that — no matter how clear and systematic everything would then become if we did. The actual

existence of man is apparently less clear-cut than the formulas which the heart of man is longing for. The Holy Spirit who is leading the church in all truth, teaches us differently.

The Spirit teaches us to confess our collective debts

At this point we wish to call to mind a remark of Abraham Kuyper. With a view to the suffering in this world he sounded a warning against the Pelagian heresy of representing suffering as an incidental happening or to conceive of it piecemeal and thus give it an individualistic character.¹

In other words: in pondering the difficult questions on human suffering, we have to consider sincerely our own faith regarding original sin and affiliated matters as: remaining weakness and how it affects the life of God's children. We refer to Canons of Dort I, 1; III/IV. 2-5; V, 1-7 (cf. also Article 15 Belgic Confession).

The children of God belong to the world of mankind. They are and remain Adam's offspring. The call of the devil to fall away from God still touches a responsive chord in their hearts and lives. They are born as children of God's wrath. Adopted through baptism to be in Christ, they are delivered from the wrath of God, but are not yet completely delivered from the power of their sinful hearts. That is the reason they are continually calling God's wrath down upon themselves. Although this wrath is not the retributive punishment of the Judge, it is, nonetheless and rightly so, the corrective punishment of the Father. This is the reason even the children of God are cast down under God's mighty hand. God humbles also His own children in their bodies (illness), in their careers (adversity), in their course of life (aging and dying), in their living together with other people (injustices, sufferings and tragedies that hit them all). All these things demonstrate the untenable position man and his society did get themselves into in the presence of their Creator.

Thus we can understand that God's children have been groaning together with the entire creation, which "has been groaning in travail" ever since the fall of Adam (cf. Romans 8:26). Evidently, God does not set up a separate, paradise-like society for those who are His children, as an adjunct to the troublesome and broken society of man and nations. Behind the longing for this situation or the dreaming about it, looms a presumptuous and perfectionistic idealism (background of many a charismatic movement!), which notion we will be completely cured of when we start taking seriously the confession of the church in L.D. 44 (Q. & A. 114 & 115) of the Heidelberg Catechism. There you will

find reiterated and summarized the profound words of the apostle in Romans 7 and 8.

This is also the substance of Canons of Dort V, Article 1:

"Those whom God according to His purpose calls into the fellowship of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and regenerates by His Holy Spirit, He certainly sets free from the dominion and slavery of sin, but not entirely in this life from the flesh and from the body of sin."

Therefore, we should (in the first place) not be too surprised when God's

"Faith is a matter of seeking, time and again, our peace outside ourselves and our human certainties . . . with Christ and Him crucified."

punishments are also visited upon our lives. We have to keep up growing spiritually, and we have to keep up examining our consciences in the painful awareness that still so many sins and shortcomings are left around in our hearts and lives. Then we mortify our flesh "by holy exercises of godliness" (Canons of Dort V.2) and by living God-fearing lives. These "holy exercises" should not take place removed from the avenue of our real, daily existence, in order that we might piously dream away the harsh reality of this world. These "holy exercises" ought to take place within the very sphere of our daily existence; that is: in the midst of the troubles and problems caused by the iniquities and the suffering and distress of this earthly existence. It is no coincidence that Paul's praising the Word as a "faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance" (K.J.V.) was written down at the moment he started to speak about "godliness that is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the *present* life and also for the life to come" (1 Timothy 4:8,9).

All this has its own specific meaning for our lives on this earth and for our participation in the society of man. We should be aware of a sense of kinship with all other sinners on this earth. When we see blatant injustice and bitter misery in this world, we shouldn't shake our pious head

and point at those other people. We should say this: "It is not at all self-evident that we will escape the fate of our fellow man who has to undergo intense suffering and extreme degradation (cf. Luke 13:1-5). Moreover: whatever that tyrant over there is able to accomplish, we can do, too, as soon as God lets us go our own way and gives us up to one another's willfulness." This is how we as human beings together mess up life that God has created on this earth. This is the plight of man — so miserable and so degenerated. So much for our accomplishments that are displayed before God the Father, Creator of heaven and earth. It is the Spirit who teaches us this humbling confession, right in the midst of our human society.²

The Spirit leads us to the Lord's Supper

By acknowledging the power of sin in and around us, we are brought to humble ourselves deeply before God. Whatever came over us people on this earth? What is it we have been doing since the fall of man? Thus humbled, we may and should take refuge in the crucified Christ. Only there, with Him, we can find peace for our hearts; because there, out of the thunderstorm of Golgotha, God's peace is proclaimed to us. Only this way can we also quieten down our hearts amidst all the questions and perplexing problems we can carry around with us.

In other words: we should frequently celebrate the Lord's supper so as not to run the risk, at any time, of losing sight of the crucified Christ, whenever we are preoccupied with our sorrows, questions and problems.

The Lord's Supper portrays to us the Christ of Golgotha: a completely debased and totally deprived Man of sorrows, who for our sake took upon Himself the anguish and pains of hell because of God's judgment. That is, ultimately, what man himself deserves when he has to approach the judgment seat of God. See the Man! See yourself!

Nowhere will man become more insignificant than at the cross of Golgotha; and insignificant people dare not be insolent before God. Far from it, in particular when they are standing in the place where the love of God together with the wrath for His Son reached its culmination. It is advisable to celebrate the Lord's Supper not in a secluded quiet corner of our clamorous society, as if it were some kind of intimate little feast of the pious soul with its God. The table of the Lord's Supper stands right in the midst of this world, as truly as the crucifixion was an international event.

No doubt, we have too often celebrated the Lord's Supper in an individ-

ualistic manner. We wanted to confine the event of Golgotha to the narrow prospect of our own lives. Sometimes we did not see the world — the world with its suffering, its misery, its lack of perspective and its unsolvable problems. Yet, this sacrificed and wholly-consumed man of Golgotha is God's answer to all the cries of despair in this world. There, as you know, He shed His blood of the Covenant for many. In particular at the Lord's table, God declares: Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of this world! For God so loved the world that he rather gave His only Son over to death than letting the sin of the world hold sway and abandoning the world to sin. Behold the Lamb of God! Behold Him now, before this Lamb is going to present Himself for the second time, this time as Judge of the living and the dead. "The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15).

The Spirit teaches us the struggle of conversion

Some moments ago we reiterated the words of the Canons of Dort (Ch.V, Article 1). Making an analogy at this point, we can impress upon ourselves and one another the following version: "Those whom God according to His purpose calls into the fellowship of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and regenerates by His Holy Spirit, He certainly sets free from the dominion and bondage of death and the fear of it (Hebrews 2:14,15), but He does, in this life, not altogether deliver them from its power, from its sting and effects."

Death is God's last enemy (1 Corinthians 1:26). For the time being, this enemy in all its manifestations is to serve as an instrument in God's hand to exercise God's children in leading God-fearing lives. Whenever one finds sin, there is death in all kinds of forms, because 'sin' is "death": the state of being-dead-before-God! Wherever there is sin, life will be in retreat and has to yield ground to the enemy, death. There, life is no longer functioning before God. Even though the *imperium* of sin and death has, indeed, been vanquished by Christ (Romans 5:14, 21; 6:9,12,14; 2 Timothy 1:10; Hebrews 2:14), this does not yet mean that the formidable opponent has become idle (1 Corinthians 15:24-26,56). This illustrates the basic duality of our human existence. The apostle has, particularly in Romans 7 and 8:6-13, defined this dramatic situation for us.

In our existence much can be found that must die because it is not really living, not living before God. At the same time, much has to be coaxed into life, until now having been barren ground un-

touched or just barely touched by the Gospel and the law of Christ. We call that the "mortification" of the old man and the "resurrection" of the new man: that is, the two parts of the true conversion. In this process God also wields the instrument of suffering in our lives.


This outlook compels us to say this: In the context of a God-fearing life we have to admit to the existence of our disturbing experiences with sin and God's wrath because of it (Canons of Dort, V. Article 2). And this is not only because we have a constant reason to humble ourselves before God and to pray for the grace of the Holy Spirit and to long for the goal of perfection, but our exercises of godliness also encompass the "mortification" of the flesh; that is to say: the destruction of everything still remaining in us as vital remnants of our rebellion against God, of our desire to quarrel with God.

We can also put it this way: In the struggle for the daily renewal of our lives, we must take into account (or take into consideration) the troubles that our sins cause, as well as the expressions of God's wrath. We have to die unto ourselves with Christ in order to be resurrected with Christ. Guided by the Holy Spirit we must learn how to deal with our specific, perplexing experiences in life. For the Spirit sighs with us when we do (Romans 8:26). These perplexing experiences will make us specifically understand what that "heartfelt sorrow" is, as mentioned in

Lord's Day 33 (Answer 89) of the Heidelberg Catechism. And gradually it will begin to dawn on us what that "heartfelt joy in God through Christ" is supposed to be, though our hearts be still filled with questions and unsolved mysteries. The troubles of this earthly existence do not obscure the outlook on God. The bitterness of the present cannot obscure the outlook on the future; this would be impossible within the terms of godliness (cf. 1 Timothy 4:8 "It holds promise for the present and also for the life to come.").

The children of God acknowledge their God as the Father of Jesus Christ. Because the Spirit is bearing them witness, they may call themselves children of God (cf. Romans 8:15). Through the Spirit they have been made members of Christ. Christ is dwelling in them and they in Him. Their life is, therefore, living with Christ; their suffering a suffering with Christ, their death a dying in Christ. Together with Him they are also moving onward through life and suffering and death, to that incorruptible life that is revealed in Christ on the third day since the total debasement of Golgotha. If we suffer with Him, says the apostle, it is that we may be also glorified with Him (Romans 8:17). Especially this word, too, shows us how trustworthy the Gospel is according to 2 Timothy 2:11.

The Holy Spirit makes the communion with Christ very real for us in the daily renewal of our lives and resurrection,



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HYMN 51

Jesus, meine Zuversicht Based on 1 Cor. 15: 35 - 58 Johann Crüger, 1653

1. Je-sus is our sure de-fence.
 Why should we then fear or wav-er?
 All our hope and con-fi-dence
 Rests on Him, the ris-en Sav-iour.
 E-ven in our dark-est hour
 He will shield us with His power.

which we call conversion. That is why we as children of God, in our communion with Christ, can make room for the inroads that illness, suffering, handicaps and grief make into our lives — all those forms of declining life and impending death. Because of Him all this has become a *dying in order to gain life*.

What appears to be demolition and also that which, actually, is demolition must serve the construction of the new building. What is now blocking our way must become a thoroughfare. This “must” is the glorious commitment of God’s plan of salvation for us. Thus the lowest point becomes the highest point; a blind wall becomes an impressive passageway: “Our death is not a payment for our sins, but it puts an end to sin and is an entrance into eternal life” (Lord’s Day 16, Answer 42). Citing the apostle Peter, we could also put it this way: “for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin” (1 Peter 4:1). This is not because of the intrinsic value of suffering, but because of the communion with the suffering Christ occasioned thereby. The apostle says, furthermore, “*arm yourselves with the same thought.*” He doesn’t say: “entertain that thought,” but: “take that thought with you as your weapon in the warfare of your life.”

This kind of spiritual discernment we don’t find with the aid of conveniently manageable formulas. Only the daily guidance of the Spirit will be able to point out the way our thoughts must take and will take. It is the way of the *desires* of the Spirit over against the flesh (cf. Galatians 5:16,17; Romans 8:5,11).

The Spirit delivers us from human schematization

We observed a moment ago that the road we have outlined is not the comfortable one which would be offered to us by some human scheme. On the contrary, it is the road of faith that is challenged and of faith triumphant. One can take possession of a scheme; one can master it, learn it by heart or keep it to fall back on in case of bad times lying ahead. It is at one’s disposal and will do the job whenever it suits him. It gives a feeling of security that difficult questions or experiences should not alarm him, because the scheme is ready at hand. No matter whether those schemes are liberal or orthodox, they are and remain — nonetheless — dead things which only in appearance can put heart and conscience at ease.

Faith is characterized by the fact that the Spirit is always giving it to us as a new present. The continuity of faith does not

lie in our ability of locking it up in a safe-deposit box. It does lie, however, in the great faithfulness of God the Holy Spirit, who continuously works, strengthens, defends and preserves faith in our lives. Faith is a matter of seeking, time and again, our peace outside ourselves and our human certainties and of finding it only with Christ and Him crucified. How great was the insight of the church when she spoke of a “a constant reason” to “flee to the crucified Christ” and spoke of “holy exercises of godliness.” (Canons of Dort, V, Article 2). In this context, the Confession has recited for us those words about trials and doubts and temptations that daily assail us (cf. Canons of Dort, V, Articles 3,4,11,12).

We acknowledge the Christ of Golgotha as our exalted Lord (cf. Romans 8:34). Working through His Spirit, He uses in the lives of God’s children also their troubles and sufferings as His instruments. Thus He directs them to the goal where He wants them to be (Romans 8:29). Not only did the apostle Paul tell us this, he also demonstrated it in his own life when he related to us his own great difficulties (2 Corinthians 12:7-9).

When we know our Lord and understand the work of His Spirit, after holding onto Romans 8:17, we will be able to appropriate the inexhaustible words of Romans 8:18-39. These words, one by one, make us perceive God’s ways with our lives, right in the midst of our scourged and ravaged world. And then we will learn the true answer for all the challenges that emerge from our own hearts or come our way from our community. The apostle was acquainted with all provocations as described in the verses 35 to 39. He let us know that none of them is able to thwart our communion with Christ or to obstruct our view of the glorious future. For the fundamental love of God is going to prevail over all the manifestations of His wrath which, daily, we are still calling down upon ourselves. This is as certain and truthful as His ultimate love He has shown to us in Christ. And it is exactly at this very point that Answer 28 of the Heidelberg Catechism, held up to scorn by its critics, lays hold of us and wants to capture us. The rendition of the finale is in a major key.

¹A. Kuyper, *De gemeene gratie*, (Kampen), II, 494 ff. Compare also S.G. de Graaf, *Het ware geloof*, (Kampen, 1954), pp. 300-308.

²It is our purpose here to provide a link-up with an old element of the Reformed liturgy, i.e., the weekly day of prayer for the needs of mankind, according to Calvin’s liturgy in Geneva (1542). In addition we would like to refer to the manner in which he broaches this subject in his *Forme des Prières*. Compare also, e.g., T. Brienen, *De liturgie van Johannes Calvijn*, Kampen, 1987, p. 105 ff.



The Book is out!

If you are wondering what is meant by "The Book," you have not been following the series of news medleys attentively enough. What we are referring to is, of course, the History Book of Carman. After a gestation period of approximately three years the birth was less than spectacular, but the result is something which was well worth waiting for. For one who loves the church of Christ and the history of the church it is a delight to read the various contributions which have been brought together in this one book.

Not everything is of equal interest to all, of course, but when we want to know what the early settlers went through, how they struggled, how they were sacrificing and how they were blessed, we can do nothing better than read their own stories.

If our young people today think that they have a rough time and that they pull the shorter end of the string, they had better read up on the history and this will make them thankful to the Lord for all the luxuries and the blessings which they may enjoy also as a result of the sacrifices and labours of the pioneers. Certainly, the time is past in which one could start a farm with two thousand dollars of borrowed money, but the opportunities are still there for those who are willing to work hard, to forego luxuries such as fancy cars, expensive stereo sets, faraway holidays, going out eating and more such unnecessary, although permissible extravagant expenditures.

When we are to preserve the remembrance of the early days — and this is necessary if we wish to remain thankful to the Lord for all He gives us today — the memories of the early days should be fixed in writing before that first generation is no longer there. It would be great if every congregation followed the same course, the course of having each family write down their experiences and bundle these records in order to make them available to all. It is realized that it will be hard to get everyone's cooperation. There are always people who "don't feel like it," and there are always procrastinators who sometimes bring the organizers to near-despair, but persistence pays.

Anyway, the price was not as high as expected. Instead of the well-over-thirty dollars that was expected as the price for "The Book," a mere twenty-seven will do. We are certain that especially ex-"Carmanians" and those who have relatives there will be eager to have the result of years of labour.

And now we had better move to something else, otherwise some might think that there is nothing else to be mentioned from the ecclesiastical scene.

In Carman some of the "original families" still remain. They even still form a good portion of the congregation. Not so in Calgary. This church recently celebrated the 25th anniversary of its institution, but of the original families only two are left. Some others left for other congregations, some broke with the church. Influx of others, although not as large as was hoped for, made up to some extent for the loss. We have always been wondering why not more people moved to certain cities, whereas in a quite inexplicable way other places, much smaller and, as one would think, with fewer possibilities, saw the congregation grow and grow.

Ottawa is one of the places where, we think, many opportunities can be found. Our members may then not belong to the portion of the population which brings the average wage in that city up to the high level which the newspapers reported

a few weeks ago, there still should be sufficient positions and occupations which can be filled.

In Ottawa, "the Consistory decided that, on a trial basis, Hymn 1A will be sung every other Sunday (thereby leaving open the possibility to use one of the other Creeds as well from time to time.)."

"The *Clarion* ad has, to date, resulted in two donations: One cheque for \$200.00, and an anonymous gift of \$1,000.00 from someone in the Fraser Valley. May this very generous person be blessed by the promise of Matthew 6:4."

I must admit that I was very sad when reading this last sentence. "Why," I thought, "is the blessing implored only for the second donor and why not upon the first one?" I do not know who the two are that donated but, *abstractly speaking* (!), it could be that the \$200.00 was a greater sacrifice for the one who gave it than the other gift was for its donor. I hope and expect that it was a slip of the typewriter or computer-keyboard.

In general, we are to watch out that we are not lavishing praise upon some who come more to the foreground than others while forgetting the hundreds and even thousands who stay in the background but without whose support and activities the ones whose names are known could not have achieved what was achieved.

Back to Ottawa. The internal drive for the purchase of a parsonage yielded some \$13,900.00 to date. It would be a nice thing if, with the help of the brotherhood at large, a parsonage could be bought. Then the congregation would no longer be exposed to fluctuating levels of rent.

The fire which destroyed the Burlington East church building still causes ripples in other congregations. Burlington West decided to review the insurance coverage on a bi-annual basis. In Chatham "after ample discussion it was decided to increase the coverage of the church from \$653,000 to \$1,000,000, the liability insurance from \$1,000,000 to \$2,000,000." The total cost of increase in premium is about \$600.00 yearly. I feel faint when reading these to me astronomical figures.

In Burlington East preliminary drawings for another church building with all facilities were presented to the consistory and were to be discussed at a congregational meeting on January 5th.

After many years, the Burlington East bulletin sported a new cover which, however, may not be the definitive one, as other designs are considered as well.

It appears that retired ministers are oftentimes very active. We read of the work which the Rev. VanDooren still does in that congregation, while Rev. VanderBoom also utilized his stay in Ontario by serving on several Sundays. It even appears that when ministers ask to be allowed to retire for health reasons, this does not mean that they become inactive. A letter from Rev. D. DeJong revealed that "we are doing fine, and will certainly be enabled to work in God's church and kingdom, when we settle down in Sliedrecht. There will be preaching and catechism instruction in nearby vacant Giessendam." And the *Nederlands Dagblad* contained a notice that Rev. D. DeJong could be reached via telephone for requests for preaching engagements.

In Burlington South the search for property and/or suitable buildings goes on. The "Kingdom Hall" would be too costly when purchase price and the cost of necessary renovations were added.

The Home Mission Committee reported that seventy-three requests were received for the Bible course "A Gift from Heaven." Other places, too, are considering to offer this course via advertisements in the newspapers or other means.

Brampton considered installing air-conditioning in the church building, but it was decided not to proceed to this "in view of the current fiscal requirements." This is a fancy way of saying: "We can't afford it at the moment." It is honest to admit that.

Up to Grand Valley. In the meantime we have received the bulletins with the pertinent information regarding property, building, etc. The Luther Township appears to have insisted on having a church building erected first.

"It was decided that since a special financing arrangement has been made available to the church, therefore, council will stop the purchase of the property on Leeson St. and will present to the congregation a plan wherein the church may proceed towards construction of a church building and a manse on the three-acre lot on Hwy 25."

"There was some fear raised that the counsel (council?VO) of the village of Grand Valley might be bringing an objection to the final settlement of the severance of the three acres on which we have made an offer. Thankfully, that objection has been withdrawn and the severance should have been finalized by now." (This was the end of October, VO) The congregation endorsed the plans for the full one hundred percent.

Jump, jump, jump, all the way to Smithers. "A letter from the organ committee stating that the total cost of a trimulant (tremulant? VO) for the organ would cost a maximum of \$350.00, and would be a positive addition. This is approved." I hope they won't "trimble" too much. It is an asset indeed. What a "negative addition" would be I don't really know.

Jump, down to the Fraser Valley.

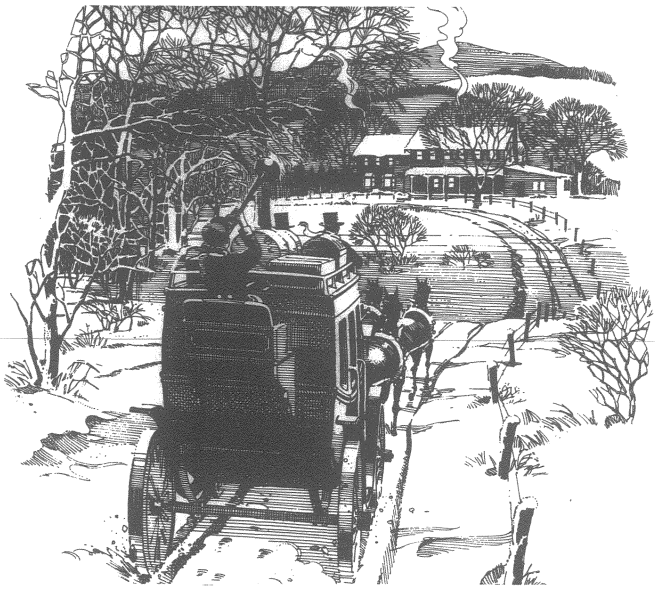
Remember that after the Burlington fire, the Rev. J. Visscher promised a fire drill? "Information regarding the fire drill will be distributed and the actual drill will be rescheduled for a dry day in January." Note: "a dry day."

"We have recently had a number of break-ins and thefts in the church building. As a result, all those who are using the building and have keys are responsible for ensuring that the building is securely locked. If you are having a meeting in one of the rooms and cannot keep an eye on the doors that have been opened, please put them on lock."

I was wondering whether the consistory itself abided by this rule when I read that "On Dec. 6, 1989, St. Nick, or one of his henchmen, visited the Langley church building while the Council was in session and left a large brown sack at the door and vanished. Upon opening the sack during the intermission (of course) we discovered that a gift had been designated for every office-bearer." There was a chocolate letter and a gift for each of them. "Needless to say, it was a most unusual church visitation and it did some amazing things to our meeting." Or did the mysterious benefactor have a key to the building? Or was there a "fifth column"? In any case, worse things do happen at times.

Under "Chilliwack" the *Church News* contained the complaint that the deacons often find it difficult to arrange a visit with the families in the congregation, something which renders their task difficult. Perhaps there is a misunderstanding among our people about the work of the deacons, as if the brothers come only when there is need and to see whether any assistance is necessary in some form or another.

Another aspect is what we read under "Byford" in the Australian district bulletin. "The deacons bring forward their concern that people are over-committing themselves with house and land mortgages and consequently find themselves in difficulty regarding repaying when work is not as busy as in the boom time. This problem is common not only with first



home buyers but especially with second home buyers." Both elders and deacons will pay special attention to this aspect of life.

Bedforddale officially dedicated their church building, and *Una Sancta* brought us an extensive report with pictures. From this report we pass on the following passage.

"It was then that the lights went out. And suddenly, peering down upon us, was the impressive figure of Rev. VanDelden. He had joined us 'From Afar' — as the programme announced it — to share the festivities with us. By virtue of a tape recorder and slides we were congratulated, introduced to the entire VanDelden family, shown some breathtaking scenery, and given a brief guided tour around Lynden. A tremendous and well-received surprise!"

We don't have to add a word to this!

As for general news regarding the Perth Metropolitan area, a meeting was held with a view to *Assistance for Our Handicapped Members*. A meeting was scheduled for December 14, "There we hope to discuss the desirability of forming an organization to provide employment for church members who are physically or mentally handicapped. It has been suggested that an 'opportunity shop' or similar facility could be set up. The primary objective would be to employ, under appropriate supervision, handicapped church members in a Christian environment."

A proposal is being considered to send a second worker to Papua New Guinea to assist the Rev. Koelewijn who is working there. The Australian churches now pay \$48.00 per communicant member for the mission work. In comparison, the Western churches here pay just over \$40.00 per communicant member for the mission work in Brazil, they also contribute to the mission work conducted by Smithers among the native population, and they support mission aid workers in Brazil. At the moment I do not have definite figures for the latter two enterprises and therefore confine myself to just mentioning them. It is realized in Australia that the amount per communicant member will have to be raised, and the whole matter has been given into the hands of a committee to advise "what kind of second worker should be appointed."

What I thought was a very nice gesture, is that both Rev. and Mrs. Bruning and brother and sister W. Buist received a large, framed photograph of the Port Moresby congregation. These two couples did a tremendous amount of preparatory work and for this reason it is to be applauded that the appreciation of the brotherhood in PNG was shown in this manner. Pictures say more than words in many a case.

It is good, therefore, that I cannot add a picture of myself to this medley. You will have to be content with my words, and you might just as well. C

Installation of Rev. N.H. Gootjes

By R. Aasman

On October 1, 1989, the Rev. N.H. Gootjes was installed as minister of the Word of the church at Ancaster. Although Rev. Gootjes has accepted a position as professor at our Theological College, this installation as a minister of the Word permits him to remain an active minister within our federation. The minister of Ancaster, the Rev. R. Aasman, conducted the installation service using as text the words of Paul to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:1,2. Paul's concern near the end of his life was that the preaching of good news would continue. To this end he not only charged Timothy to be a faithful minister of his Lord Jesus Christ, but also, *what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also*. Since many more faithful and capable men were needed to preach the gospel for Jesus Christ, Paul charged Timothy to begin what could be called an early trace of a theological college. This training of faithful and capable men for the ministry of the Word was basic to the continued gathering, defending and preserving of the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is for this reason that we still have a theological college today and that Rev. N.H. Gootjes, installed as a minister of the Word at Ancaster, is set aside to teach at our Theological College. In the line of Paul's charge to Timothy, Rev. Gootjes may serve the coming of Christ's kingdom by training faithful men for preaching the gospel of salvation at home and abroad.

In the afternoon service, Rev. Gootjes delivered his inaugural sermon on the text of Matthew 9:36-38. In this passage the Lord Jesus Christ taught His church that the sheep need a shepherd. Contrary to what some think, this passage does not refer in the first place to foreign mission fields, but to those who have become estranged from the gospel and need a shepherd to lead them back to the truth of the gospel. This applies to people in our own society. Rev. Gootjes pointed out that it is the goal of our Theological Col-

lege to prepare faithful preachers to care for the sheep. In this connection it is the duty of the church — for all of us — to pray for the work of the Theological College and for God to fill the need for shepherds of the sheep and labourers for the harvest.

Several delegates were present at the inaugural service of Rev. Gootjes. Two letters were read from sister congregations and two delegates spoke words of welcome after the service. The chairman

of the consistory also gave some words of welcome and encouragement, and promised that the church at Ancaster would do what it could in order to make Rev. Gootjes and his family feel at home in our midst. May the Lord indeed enable our brother to carry out his teaching function at our Theological College in order that more faithful and capable men may be prepared for the ministry of the Word in the vacant churches and in the mission fields of this world. C



L-r: Rev. R. Aasman, Mrs. Aasman, Mrs. Gootjes, Rev. N.H. Gootjes



Back row (l-r): Henk, Mrs. Gootjes, Rev. Gootjes. Front row (l-r): Jentine, Kees, Albert

“ACT-ual” gleanings

By W.W.J. VanOene

Now that we have had an opportunity to read and re-read the Acts of Synod Winnipeg 1989, we feel free to comment on a few points. The brothers worked hard, and we can express our wholehearted agreement with various statements and decisions made. For this we are thankful.

The brothers who formed this synod will be the first ones to recognize and acknowledge that their work was not perfect, and with hindsight they may even have to come to the conclusion that in some instances they should have formulated things differently or even have taken a different decision. This is at least our own experience, and the experience of others will be no different.

In a few articles we shall draw the attention of our members to some points which may be considered minor as well as to points which we consider to be major. This is done to pave the way for improvement at following general synods as well as to cut off dangerous trends and developments which the brothers may not have realized but which nevertheless are inherent to some decisions or considerations.

Simplicity, please.

Every time anew we are amazed at the skill and knowledge of consistories. When a *consistory* is able to state that “the Latin has neither definite, nor indefinite articles, but with its Greek background in earlier Creeds...” I cannot but bow in deep respect for a consistory that as a *body* is able to make (and, of course, back up) such a statement. And when this consistory, on top of that, displays its knowledge of Hebrew and Greek by using “El Shaddai” and “Pantokrator,” I am speechless.

Should we not become a little more down-to-earth, brothers, and should our consistories not say when the minister comes with such a proposal, “Sorry, sir, but we cannot take this over, for we do not know Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. If you want to write to the Committee, or even to synod, that is your privilege, but we do not feel able to do so.”? Ministers should not try to have consistories make decisions of which the brothers do not understand the reach.

It is no shame for a consistory to acknowledge that it is not knowledgeable when it comes to a German or Latin text, and no one looks down upon a consistory because of that. No consistory, on the other hand, should let itself be tempted into acting as if it were.

This also applies to various linguistic remarks. In some instances commas were suggested which basically would ruin what the church confesses in a certain sentence. This writer received an anxious telephone call from a brother with an M.A. in English who was very disturbed by such proposals and asked what could be done to prevent disaster. Our Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise*, he said, was composed of knowledgeable members and we should not but with great necessity propose linguistic changes in what they had been pondering for a long time.

We cannot expect a general synod as a body to be able to judge these things either, and the safest course is to go by the committee’s judgment, if anyone has any remarks or criticism, he should send this beforehand to the Committee, so that it can consider the remarks and, if deemed necessary, send an amended report to the forthcoming synod. This would be the best course of action.

The very same amazement was there when we read that Synod (!) offered an explanation in which it was stated that “increate is closer to the Latin word ‘increateus,’ infinite is closer to the Latin word ‘immensus,’ ‘steadfastly’ is a translation from (of? VO) the word ‘firmiter.’” p. 89. When a *committee* comes with such statements, we have no objection, nor do we have any objection when synod accepts its committee’s judgment and makes it the basis for its decision, but a *Synod* should not act as if all the brothers can judge which English word comes closest to or is a literal translation of a Latin original.

The Church at...

It should be realized that the brothers at a general synod work under tension. So much has to be done in a rather short period of time, and there is the responsibility which they feel and the awareness

that a wrong decision may be of great harm to the churches. We cannot expect the formulation to be “perfect” all the time when proposals are made and decisions are taken.

However, when the Acts are prepared for printing, all sorts of minor mistakes and inaccuracies can and should be corrected and the language should be “standardized.” The Acts are not only for internal use, they are a public document and should receive attention in accordance with that status. Preferably someone whose specialty is English should go over the whole text and ensure that no anomalies are found.

In Art. 30, for instance, we found under A. : “the Church of Chatham,” but under B. it reads “the Church at Chatham.” We find the same in Art. 34, an inconsistency which is found in various places in the Acts, as everyone can find out for himself. Even apart from the fact that the expression “the Church of” is wrong (the Church is the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ at such and such a place), care should be taken that we do not get a mixture of “of” and “at” and this at random.

Brother or Mister?

More serious is the terminology used in the case of two appeals. We are referring to Articles 112, 113, 122, 152. No, we are not going into the material of the cases. We have not been called upon to do so and, besides, would not be able to do it either for lack of sufficient information. What we do wish to point out is the wrong use of the term “brother.”

The appeals meant here were sent by persons who have been excommunicated by one of the churches. They appealed various decisions, and in the case of one who was excommunicated it is proper to declare an appeal admissible, since the ecclesiastical assemblies may have been wrong in their judgment and decisions.

Such an appeal, however, does not undo the fact that it comes from an excommunicated person. One may then have to be considered innocent until proven guilty, once the excommunication has taken place we have a verdict of an ecclesiastical assembly, i. e. a consistory,

and as sister churches we have to honour this verdict. It is not rendered doubtful or uncertain when it is being appealed. Once an appeal reaches a general synod, the matter has served at a classis and at a regional synod. These assemblies have scrutinized the consistory's decision and found it valid. The guilt has been proved.

Since we are to honour the judgment of a church, our terminology must be governed and modified by it. It is for this reason that we are to point out that synod used the term "brother" wrongly, improperly. When an ecclesiastical assembly refers to an excommunicated person, it should refer to him as "Mr. So-and-So" and not call him "brother."

We certainly are to "try to warn him as a brother," but he is "to you as a Gentile and an outcast," as the churches state in the Form for the Excommunication. Using the term "brother" when someone has been excommunicated constitutes in fact a casting of doubt on the correctness of a consistory's action. This is not permitted.

Matters are different when someone has broken with the church. In that case we still can call him "brother," although we should use the term very sparingly also in that case. There is never a valid excuse for breaking with the church.

Individual requests

Another point is that synod dealt with requests by individual members.

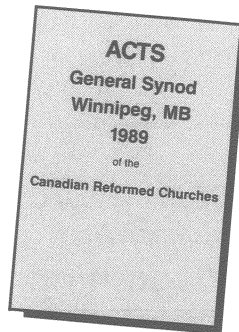
We do not deny the right of members to address synod regarding points which are on the agenda in order to make their views known or to draw synod's attention to specific aspects of that particular point. We do not say that this right should be used in a large measure, but a synod should not say "None of your business" when a member makes his views known about one or more of the points on the agenda. However, all synod is allowed to do is "take note of them."

This is vastly different from acting upon a member's request or "proposal," as if this were a legitimate way of putting something on the agenda. Synods and other major assemblies should remember that their agenda is composed by the *churches* and not by church *members*. We cannot understand this in any other way than that "proposals" by members or requests for action in particular respects cannot be declared admissible by the major assemblies. All members who send a "proposal" or come with a request (except in the case of genuine and true appeals) are to be directed towards their consistories. That is the body where they have to be, but a broader assembly is not allowed to entertain such a submission.

Art. 95 mentions the request received from a brother to change the wording in one of our liturgical forms. We are not

discussing the merit or non-merit of the case, although we are thankful that the request was denied. Our point is that the request as such should not have been dealt with at all.

The request concerned one of our liturgical forms. Liturgical forms are a matter of the churches in common, indeed. Since they are a matter of the churches in common, a general synod is



entitled to deal with them and to make changes, if these are considered necessary. However, *when* is a general synod allowed to deal with them and to consider a proposal for change? Is that when a church *member* comes with a request or a proposal? Not at all! In case it does deal with it, the possibility exists that a form is changed *without any of the churches having asked for it*. It is irrelevant in this connection whether a request is honoured or denied. It should be declared inadmissible in any case.

At the next general synod there may be a request from a member to change part of, let's say, the Catechism. According to the reasoning of Synod 1989, this request is to be declared admissible, "since confessional forms are a matter of the churches in common, and brother A. requests the alteration of one of these forms." And thus the churches may be faced with a change in one of these confessional forms while none of them asked for it or even may have been aware of it.

Synod 1989 did not differentiate between a. matters with which a general synod is allowed to deal, and b. upon whose request it is permitted to deal with these matters. Synod was right in point a., but deadly wrong in point b. Churches, beware! Proposals and requests by members should be directed to their consistories and be declared inadmissible at major assemblies.

A no-confidence motion

There is another point of which we hope that the next general synod will change it. Note the term "the next general synod." Some time ago we were sort of astonished when reading in a Letter to the Editor the wish "that Synod will return from this error." These words came from

what I assume was a Reformed person, but the words quoted are as un-Reformed as any words can be. The Canadian Reformed Churches do not have a synod which a year or two years or three years later can change its mind. Nor do we have broader assemblies which "meet" once in a while, as some still put it. A future synod can change things, but a synod that has passed away and ceased to exist cannot return from a path or error.

The point concerning which we fervently hope that the next synod will change it is found in Art. 132. To facilitate matters we quote the passage in full.

"Synod decide(s):

to instruct the Board of Governors that in the event of future appointments to the Faculty at the Theological College, the Board of Governors will make available to the delegates to General Synod the confidential report including curriculum vitae of proposed new professors for an available faculty vacancy one month before the convening of General Synod."

This decision amounts to nothing less than a motion of "no confidence" in the Faculty as well as the Board of Governors of our Seminary! I hope from the heart that no vacancy will have to be filled by the next general synod anyway, but even more so in order that this synod will have an opportunity to throw this provision out before it can be implemented.

Did Synod Winnipeg trust our Faculty so little that such a provision had to be made? Did this general synod trust the governors whom it appointed so little that a following general synod will not be justified when it goes by their report and recommendation? It is very sad. It is an irresponsible decision for more than one reason, and it is offensive to both the Faculty and the Board of Governors.

When a vacancy is expected to occur, the Faculty begins searching for a person who is both thoroughly Reformed and knowledgeable in the field for which he is considered. This search involves more than asking what the academic credentials are which the man has. It includes seeking information about the candidate's character, his ministry, if he had any, his faithfulness to the Scriptures, his upholding the doctrine of the Scriptures as the Church has formulated and summarized it in the confessions, etc. Briefly, whatever information may be useful will be gathered before the Faculty comes with a recommendation to the Board of Governors.

The Board of Governors then considers the recommendation, and may ask the Faculty to do some more research before it is satisfied that this brother is indeed the one that should be appointed. It is only after the Board of Governors has

satisfied itself that it can wholeheartedly recommend the brother to the general synod which has to make the appointment, that it proceeds to do so. In a confidential report to *synod* all the necessary particulars are given, so that synod knows all it has to know. What else is needed?

Now Synod Winnipeg decided that this confidential report is to be sent one month before the convening of general synod. It is not to be sent to the convening church, but to the brothers who have been delegated to this forthcoming synod and who, for one reason or another, may not be able to go there at all. For what reason should it be sent to these brothers? In its "consideration" synod gave as reason: "It is necessary that the delegates to synod are provided with the proper information so that they can prepare themselves adequately for their work at General Synod."

Is it really necessary for a good preparation, and has the confidential report to be studied for four weeks, that it has to be sent to appointed delegates? Are the brothers really not able to make a responsible decision one or two days after having received the confidential report at *Synod*? How are the brothers to "prepare themselves adequately"? By memorizing the particulars of the curriculum vitae? Or by launching an investigation of their own so as to verify the particulars in the confidential report? Pray, *what* could the brothers do that has not been done already? Is it not clear that this synodical decision was not well-considered?

Besides, who can expect that the matter will remain confidential if a report is sent to the brothers one month before they become members of synod? Now already this writer knew shortly after the Board of Governors had made up the nomination to Synod whom they proposed for appointment. In order to protect the innocent he wants to state emphatically that he did *not* receive this information from *any* of his colleagues who were in the know-how. It was the rumour mill and the grapevine that worked at maximum capacity. And then it should be expected that the whole matter will remain confidential when also sixteen other brothers receive the information four weeks beforehand? That is wishful thinking. Besides, why not send it to the alternates too, as they may have to go to synod unexpectedly and should have received the opportunity "to prepare themselves adequately."

If general synod is not satisfied with the information provided by the Board of Governors, there is nothing against it to invite the candidate to visit synod so that he can be interviewed. That would be the proper procedure, but to send a confidential report to synod to brothers who are not yet members of synod but only ap-

pointed to become this in due time is totally wrong. As far as we know, it is something completely new and until now unheard of as well.

It is our fervent wish that one or more churches will approach the next general synod with a well-documented proposal to throw this decision out. Only in this manner can the trust in the Faculty as well as in the Board of Governors be restored and is a return to the proper procedure possible. The "motion of no confidence" should be removed from the records.

"Resist a wrong development at its very beginning and root it out."

Article 11 C. O.

The matter of "Edmonton" came to General Synod Winnipeg as it has been on the agenda of previous general synods. The Church at Coaldale came with objections to decisions of Regional Synod Chilliwack 1987 in the case. As far as we can judge and as far as we are acquainted with the points in question, we are in agreement with Coaldale's objections. We were not at Regional Synod Chilliwack except for a few brief moments when not much was going on, but scanning its Acts we, too, were disturbed by various decisions regarding the whole procedure in all its aspects. As far as we understand Coaldale's objections, they appear to coincide with our own.

Again we want to state that we do not wish to go into the matter itself or to scrutinize the whole synodical decision. We just want to pay attention to one element in the "Considerations," an element which is so detrimental to the truly Reformed church polity that we would fail in our obligations towards the churches if we

did not raise the alarm. We do not know where this kind of polity was learned, but certainly not at our Seminary. It reminds us of sounds heard in the days before the Liberation, to be honest. The circumstances determine whether the provisions of the Church Order can be kept!

Let us no longer leave our readers in suspense. We are referring to some elements in Art. 138, page 101. We quote literally.

"8. The Church at Coaldale by separating the decision regarding provisional release from the dismissal according to Art. 11 C.O. attempts to show that the provisional release was against the C.O. ("a lawless act", Appeal III B 7) However, the provisional release cannot be understood except as an application of Art. 11 C.O. in the given circumstances. Regional Synod West 1987 did not maintain this connection consistently. (Acts, Art. 14, consid. 4 and 5)

9. Only a Consistory can dismiss a minister, and may not do this without the approbation of Classis and the concurring advice of deputies Regional Synod. However, Art. 11 does not state that the dismissal goes into effect only after the approbation of Classis, although this may be assumed as being normally the case. A dismissal can due to circumstances go into effect immediately, but is then provisional, pending the approbation by the next Classis."

When we had read this, we grabbed our head to support it, then took a pen to start writing, but put the pen down for a while again in order to support our head again. What we read here was not just nonsense, it was far worse, it is un-Reformed reasoning in-and-out to justify a wrong action.

Here a licence has been given to any consistory under any circumstances to deviate from what was agreed upon and to violate its promises as long as the action is approved later on by classis. Here the position of any office-bearer has been made subject to arbitrariness.

In our Reformed church polity we do not know of a "provisional release." We know only of a release according to Art. 11 C.O. In this article it is provided that "the consistory with the deacons shall not dismiss him from his service within the congregation without the approbation of classis and the concurring advice of the deputies of regional synod." Not a word about "provisional release" which is to be scrutinized and approved of by classis *afterwards*, no, no dismissal except when the approbation of classis and the concurring advice of deputies of regional synod *has been obtained*. The *circumstances* do

C HURCH NEWS



ACCEPTED
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of Harkstede and
Overschild, the
Netherlands

not determine whether a promise shall be kept or not, but the faithfulness to the promises is the determining factor, even when it results in one's own hurt, Ps. 15: 4; Eccl. 5: 4.

We know and realize that a consistory can be faced with difficult situations and that at times they do not know where to turn or what to do in a certain case. However, especially in tight and tense situations it is the more important and mandatory to abide very strictly by what has been agreed upon. If mistakes are made (and when are they not made?) these should be pointed out and it should not be tried via all sorts of crooked reasonings to make them look legitimate.


It is possible that on a certain Lord's Day a consistory is convinced that the situation is such that letting a minister go on the pulpit would cause great difficulties and that for that reason the consistory tells the minister not to conduct the services on that particular Sunday for the sake of the rest and peace of the congregation. This is not a suspension, it is not a "provisional release," but a one-time decision, made with a view to the situation at the moment. Such a decision can also be made with respect to an elder

or a deacon, if the consistory fears that bringing a certain family visit would work the wrong way. Telling an elder not to go to a particular family or perhaps even not to bring any visits for a few weeks to let things calm down does not constitute a "provisional release" either.

If, however, a consistory has come to the conclusion that their minister should be dismissed, since a fruitful cooperation and labour in the congregation is no longer possible, this is never a matter of one day or one week or one month even, but it is the conclusion of a lengthy development. Is it really possible that then all of a sudden an "emergency situation" arises which is supposed to give a consistory the right to violate its promises laid down in the Church Order?

If the situation is one of "intolerable tensions and disunity," a classis should be convened at the earliest possible moment and deputies of regional synod should be invited to be there as well in order to help the consistory and to agree to the dismissal. Then everything else has to be dropped in order to extend this so badly needed help. It is only *after* the sister churches have concluded that dismissal is the only course open that it can

be decided upon *and effectuated*. To state, as Synod 1989 did, that "a dismissal can due to circumstances go into effect immediately, but is then provisional, pending the approbation by the next Classis" is un-Reformed and is introducing an element which renders the position of any officebearer uncertain. The same reasoning can then be followed in the case of suspension or deposition of an officebearer. The brother is hanged, but it is only provisional, pending the later approbation by the neighbouring Church and/or Classis. If they disapprove, you can still cut the cord.

O Churches! It is for your sakes that the above was written. Resist a wrong development at its very beginning and root it out. We would not be surprised if in future years this decision will be quoted as a precedent in order to declare a similar procedure legitimate. Please do your best to eliminate the danger and never let the circumstances determine whether the promises laid down in the Church Order should be kept or not, much less suffer these promises and the faithfulness to them to be undermined by wrong and distorted reasonings such as pointed out above. 

INTERNATIONAL

By W.W.J. VanOene



WASHINGTON

President George Bush vetoed legislation Oct. 21 that would have provided federal money for abortions in cases of rape and incest. A later attempt to override the veto in Congress failed. (TI)

HARRISBURG, PA

The Pennsylvania Senate approved a set of restrictions on abortions November 15 by a vote of 143-58. The new regulations impose a 24-hour waiting period; require married women to notify their husbands; ban abortions after 24 weeks gestation; prohibit abortions on the basis of the baby's sex; and regulate the use of fetal tissue. (TI)

THE NETHERLANDS

To become a millionaire in the Netherlands appears less and less to be some exclusive achievement. In the years 1984 and 1985 the band of millionaires increased by eight thousand to a total of

more than thirty-five thousand, an increase of more than thirty percent. The Central Bureau of Statistics ascribes this growth to the increase in the value of stocks. Stocks constitute approximately sixty percent of their investments. In 1985 about nine hundred civil servants were among this group, while seven hundred millionaires had been declared unfit for work. According to some, the total is three times as large as the figure given by the Bureau, since this Bureau includes only those who pay taxes over a million or more. (DNC)

THE HAGUE

(ANP) The population of the Netherlands increased five-fold to 14.8 million during the past 150 years. On the other hand, Belgium stopped at approximately 10 million, whereas this country had a population of 4 million over against the Netherlands of 2.8 million when the former seceded. During the past 150 years some 5.2 million people came in, while 4.9 million persons left. (ND)

WALSRODE

Only 29% of all church members in Germany believe the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting, and a mere 32% believe that the Holy Spirit exists. This is the outcome of a recently conducted poll. (ND)

GOES

If all goes as expected, the first part of a biography of Dr. K. Schilder will appear towards the end of 1990. Drs. J.J.C. Dee, Netherlands Reformed minister at Ellecom, will receive the doctor's degree with Prof. J. Kamphuis as his promotor. December 19 will be the one hundredth anniversary of Schilder's birth. The thesis will be printed by Oosterbaan & LeCointre, which company intends to publish a special edition immediately after the promotion. The thesis covers the life of Schilder until 1933, the year in which he became professor of Dogmatics, and describes especially his life as a minister. (ND)

THE NETHERLANDS

In October, the synod of the synodical Reformed Churches voted to change the Church Order, so that the second Sunday worship service is optional. Art. 70 of their Church Order now reads: "On the Lord's Day, the consistory shall call the congregation together for worship, if possible twice, but at least once, and further, at least once on Christmas Day, Good Friday, and Ascension Day." (TB)

Here we see the same phenomenon as with the store closings: they are open on Sundays, but have to be closed on all sorts of special days determined by man. Whether the people come together twice on the Sunday is immaterial, but they *have* to come together on man-made days, and this again "at least once."

ROME

Archbishop of Canterbury Robert Runcie and Pope John Paul II prayed together and signed a declaration committing the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches to efforts towards "visible uni-

ty." The meeting was Runcie's first official call on the Vatican as head of the 70 million-member Anglican Communion, which includes the Episcopal Church in America. It was only the fourth visit of its kind made by an archbishop of Canterbury since the Reformation.

Reports of the meeting indicated the two leaders agreed the pope should have primacy in any reunited church, but differed on what would be the exact nature of his role. The ordination of women, permitted by some segments of the Anglican communion but rejected by the Roman Catholic church, stands as a major obstacle between the two bodies. This was not discussed, however, during the meeting. (CT)

CANADIAN SCENE

A Canadian invention is changing the face of paper money. Up until now, to verify a bill's authenticity required close inspection and some knowledge of printing and paper technology.


The latest security device featured on the Bank of Canada's new \$50 bills (in-

troduced December last) changes all that. The optical security device (OSD) is a small square of film on the bill's face. When the OSD is tilted, the colour shifts between gold and green.

This simple, reliable check allows anyone to quickly verify that the bill is authentic. The OSD is so advanced it would be prohibitively expensive to reproduce. It cannot be copied by photographic or printing technology.

The portrait on the face of the bill is that of William Lyon Mackenzie King, Canada's tenth Prime Minister. The new \$50 bill illustrates the Snowy Owl, continuing the recent practice of featuring birds on our currency. The bill is deep red in colour.

LITHUANIA

For the first time since 1940, Lithuania had an official holiday on Christmas. An estimated 3 million of Lithuania's 3.6 million people are Roman Catholic, but Christmas has not been a holiday since Lithuania was annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940. (NIRR - REC NE) 

BOOK REVIEW

By C. Van Dam

A Matter of Choice

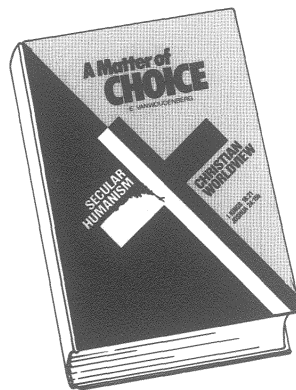
E. Vanwoudenberg, *A Matter of Choice*, 1989. (318 pages). Available for \$14.95 from CHP CANADA, P.O. Box 22009, Station B, Vancouver, B.C. V6A 3Y2

The leader of Canada's Christian Heritage Party (CHP) has written a book to elaborate further on the policies and principles of this party in order "to inform and explain, to teach and to direct" (11-12). Although the book was not commissioned by the CHP and the contents of this book are thus the sole responsibility of the author, this work is an important one. For the first time the policies and ideas of the CHP are available to a wider public. The significance of this is readily seen when one realizes that

the CHP is a principled Party, distinctly different from the populist parties which dot our political landscape. Our strength as a Party lies in our obedience to God's Word as the rule of life and the kingship of Jesus Christ as central for all our actions (p. 21).

On this basis, the CHP can claim to offer a distinct alternative to other political par-

ties which hold to the world view of secular humanism. Hence the title, *A Matter of Choice*.



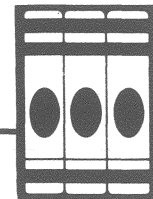
Contents

Within the confines of his stated purpose, Vanwoudenberg succeeds in bringing the ideals and goals of the CHP close to the reader. The writer is obviously very much involved with the issues he brings to the fore. It is his life and he believes in what he writes. He also comes with concrete solutions to problems facing our na-

tion. These are significant strengths. Because of his frequent appearances on talk shows and phone-in programs, he is also able to anticipate many objections and to answer them.

After an introductory chapter, "Why the CHP," the author takes us through an interesting historical journey in a second chapter ("Constitutional Development") and then starts to address other specific concerns as multiculturalism, native issues, bilingualism, and immigration and refugees (in chapter 3, "The Canadian Nation"). Subsequent chapters deal with family issues (chapter 4), justice (chapter 5), health and welfare (chapter 6), the environment (chapter 7), defence (chapter 8), and external relations (chapter 9). The above includes many valuable sections and analyses which I cannot go into now. A helpful feature of this work is the official documents that fill the last 83 pages of the book. These include the British North America Act, Canadian Bill of Rights, Charter of Rights, and the Meech Lake Accord.

This work contains a wealth of information that amply rewards a reading of it. You will frequently find yourself nodding



in agreement. With clarity and vigour Vanwoudenberg makes his case on all the issues confronting us as nation and specifically as Christians. As such this is an excellent resource book. I will resist the temptation to elaborate on that here. You should read it for yourself. Often the information is very revealing of the current strong bias in government against Christian principles. For instance, when the pro-life and pro-family REAL Women asked for federal funds they were frustrated repeatedly. (The pro-abortion NAC women's group is lavishly funded to the tune of over 12 million in 1986 alone.) When REAL Women tried to get funds under the pseudonym, The Association of Lesbian Mothers, full federal co-operation was instantly achieved (pp. 111-112)! This book is full of examples of such bias in many areas of life and shows very clearly what we as Christians are up against. For that reason alone, this book should be required reading for all who are concerned with what is happening in our nation.

A pioneering work

Within the confines of a brief review, I would like to make two further points. In the first place, the zeal and effort of our brother as evident in this book are deserving of our respect. Anyone who has wrestled with the very basic issues that need to be dealt with when discussing political issues in the light of Scripture will realize that this is no small thing — not to mention the further need to defend your stand on radio and TV and now in print. In the Netherlands, Groen van Prinsterer and Abraham Kuyper have laid much of the ground work on which present work can continue to be built. Their work should also continue to be of help for us. However, as far as the Canadian scene is concerned, this is to my knowledge the very first work to examine our specific political issues in the light of Scripture. Its strength is its clear commitment to the full authority of the Word of God. (e.g. "The gospel is relevant and applicable to all areas of life . . . We must speak out, beholden to none and obedient to *One*". p. 27) This commitment is evident everywhere. And it is not a naive one. The author realizes full well the sway of man-centred thinking and ethics in present society and even notes that "it would be presumptuous to say that Canada is or ever was a Christian nation *per se*" (p. 55). The question of success automatically arises.

How successful will the CHP be in its principled approach to politics? The question is not relevant. The measure of success from a pragmatic point of view is power; the measure of success from a divine point of view is obedience. If we want to place politics in its proper perspective, we must see it as

an act of service to God and our nation. (p. 25)

In the second place, as can be expected from a pioneering work, this book sometimes betrays lack of consistency and clarity about certain basic underlying issues. For example, the task of government over against that of the church is not always as carefully delineated as it should be in order to prevent confusion. On page 18 it is correctly stated that the CHP has "no right nor duty to interfere with the unique task of the Church, which is to preach the gospel and defend the faith. Our task as a political Party has well defined parameters, which must never be confused with the work of the church." However, on page 13 one could easily interpret the intent of the rhetorical questions raised to mean that church and state should not be separated! This confusion is unfortunate, occurring as it does near the beginning of the book and working against the intent of the author. What Vanwoudenberg meant to say was that religion and politics cannot be separated. It would have been better to spell out very clearly at the outset precisely what the respective tasks of the church and the state are. This would have enhanced the clarity of this most important, but admittedly very difficult, area. (Cf. most recently, K. Veling, *De Dienst van de overheid* [1987] and J.P. de Vries, et al., *Een Vrije kerkleer vrije staat* [1988]). Unfortunately, this confusion also occurs elsewhere. Although the author often affirms the task of the church to preach the gospel, he muddies the waters with quoting approvingly at length Dr. R. Ganz. Speaking of the CHP, Ganz says among other things (and then elaborates on it) that "our great commission is of course to evangelize and to disciple the nations" (p. 128)!

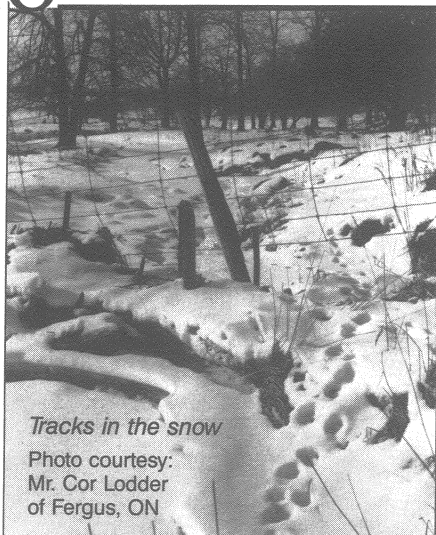
Another (but related) example is the matter of applying the Old Testament laws to today's situation. In light of the controversy about "theonomy" (cf. Cl. Stam in *Reformed Perspective*, May 1989), it is unfortunate that Vanwoudenberg uncritically quotes one of the staunchest defenders of the new "theonomy," G.L. Bahnsen, to say that there is no conflict "between Old and New Testament punishment to fit the crime" (p. 125). As Bahnsen makes clear in his book referred to (*By This Standard*), he means by such a statement that wherever the death penalty was required in the Old Testament it will still be required by God in the New Testament. Thus, the Old Testament ordinance that the civil government in Israel was to punish the blasphemer with death (Leviticus 24:13-16) would mean that this is still the responsibility of the civil magistrate. Would the CHP propose similar legislation for Canada? Certainly not! But, Bahnsen would (*By This Standard*, 332-335, also see 271-274). In the light of the current theonomic controversy (which has not been an issue in our circles), Vanwoudenberg's brief response to the charge that the CHP would institute a "theocracy" is inadequate, in spite of the good things that are said (pp. 130-135). Old Testament law is most relevant for us today. However, precisely how this law is to be used needs to be further addressed.

I will leave it at these two examples. The point is that greater circumspection and care needs to be used in dealing with fundamental issues. Unfortunately, this book was not designed to include such a discussion and so can hardly be faulted for what it does not include. However, the above examples show that such a discussion would not have been a luxury and it would have greatly enhanced the purpose of this book. Hopefully such an addition will be possible in a future edition of this work.

Summing up

What is my overall impression of this book? I am grateful that it is available. In spite of my criticism, which is meant to be edifying, this book will do much to bring the political issues of our day close to us so that they can be studied and analyzed from a Christian perspective. I sincerely hope that all Associations for Reformed Political Action as well as local CHP riding associations will study this material carefully. Needless to say this hope also applies to all of us. This book will be an effective tool to help us discern the issues of our day so that we too can see that it is indeed *A Matter of Choice* between secular humanism and the Christian world view. May this book help us to become better citizens of God's kingdom so that we can better execute our responsibilities as citizens of Canada. C

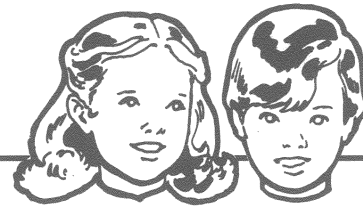
OUR COVER



Tracks in the snow

Photo courtesy:
Mr. Cor Lodder
of Fergus, ON

By Aunt Betty



Dear Busy Beavers,

Happy New Year to you all!
How did you spend New Year's Eve?
Did you stay up to "ring in" the new year and wish everyone "Happy New Year"?
The Bible talks about "happy" people, too.

FOR YOU TO DO

What, to you, was the most *special thing* that happened in 1989?
Will you think about it?
And write and tell us?
Maybe it was something personal.
Maybe it was special for your family.
Older Busy Beavers may think of something that happened somewhere else in the world that was special.

Whatever it was, please write and tell us!

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

Psalm 144 tells us "Happy the people whose God is the Lord."

And Psalm 146 says "Happy is he whose help is the God of Jacob."

The Bible also tells us that the Lord is faithful.

"The promise of the Lord proves true." Psalm 18:30.

That's why we can say to each other "Happy New Year"!

FROM THE MAILBOX



Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Florence Nyenhuis*. Thank you for your colourful letter! We hope you'll really enjoy participating in all our Busy Beaver activities. How were your holidays,

Florence?

Welcome to you, too, *Jessica Dehaas*. Will you write and tell us more about your pets? You did well in that race, Jessica! Are you planning to enter again?

Welcome to the Club, *Nellie Beukema*. We are happy to have you join us. How far are you in the "Little House" series, Nellie? Bye for now.

Hello, *Francine Vanwoudenberg*. Have you been busy reading stories about ponies? Have you learned about all the different kinds of ponies there are, and how they have to be looked after? How were your holidays, Francine?

Thank you very much for your letter, *Anna Devries*. It was good to hear from you again! I see you've been busy, and mean to keep others busy, too. Thank you for the puzzles. I'm looking forward to hearing from you what you thought most special in 1989.

Congratulations on that terrific test, *Lee-Ann Beintema*. Keep up the good work! Thank you for the pretty bird you sent, Lee-Ann. He looks like a spring bird to me, though. So we'll share him with the Busy Beavers, then. Good plan, don't you think?

How did you like Quebec, *David Deboer*? Did you get to practise your French? Thank you for the puzzle, David. Keep up the good work. Did you have one very *special day* in 1989?

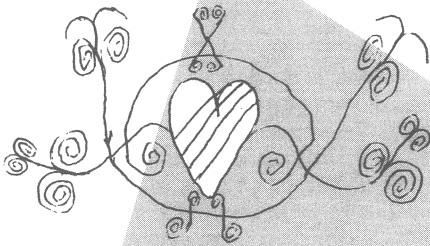
Hello, *Eric Brown*. It was good to hear from you again. I see you are a good puzzler, Eric. Keep up the good work! Bye for now. Write again soon!

Thank you for the riddles, *Steven Vandeveld*. And I see you are a good puzzler, too! How did you keep busy during the holidays, Steven? Do you like winter?

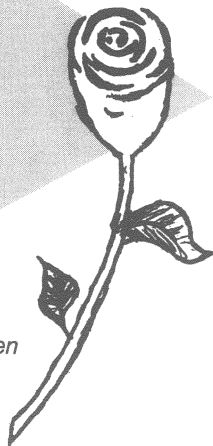
How did you do at the volleyball tournament, *Michelle Peters*? And how did your "Mixed Mystery" turn out? I hope everything got straightened around at your house and you had a good holiday, Michelle. Bye for now.

You've been a very busy girl, *Bianca Vandenberg*. Thank you for the puzzles. I see you mean to keep the other Busy Beavers busy, too. How was your holiday, Bianca? Be sure to write and tell us about your special day.

Designs



by Busy Beaver
Anna Devries



by Busy Beaver
Lydia Viersen

