



Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

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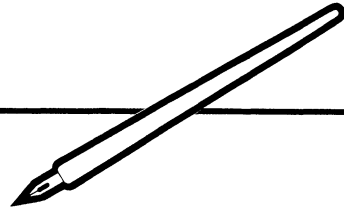
September 14, 1990



American
Reformed Church
LYNDEN

Worship Services
10AM and 2PM

Rev. A. van Delden
Minister



Welcome

Some worthwhile remarks were made in the Reformed Church Magazine for Zuid-Holland (*Gereformeerd Kerkblad voor Zuid-Holland etc.*) by the Rev. A. de Snoo. It was taken over in *Nederlands Dagblad* of June 2, 1990 in the column "Tribune." It is about welcoming people in the church. I take over part of it. He begins with a question.

... what do we do when in a normal or special worship service people from outside the congregation also enter the church auditorium? I would like to pass on to you how they do this in Haarlem (with gratitude to those who gave me the information).

In Haarlem a few members of the congregation are ready before every service to act as a kind of 'guest watch.' They are equipped with Bible and the Reformed church book (Book of Praise), but with a pamphlet as well in which the congregation presents itself.

As far as I know, in our churches often the ushers function as kind of a "guest watch" to give to those from outside the church (federation) a Bible and a Book of Praise. Not so long ago the Rev. VanOene asked the membership in News Medley not to obstruct this act of welcoming guests by taking these tools for the worship service away from those for whom they are meant: the guests. Good loving care belongs to those who call themselves by the name of Christ.

Now ushers have to watch and help without distinction all those who come to the worship service. If for them it is no problem to welcome strangers and help them out, that is fine. However, if we can improve on this welcoming, I would say, so much the better. I like the idea of special "welcome committees" or "welcome couples." Often it is not enough to speak a word of welcome and to bring the guests to a seat. Hopefully, it never occurs anymore that people who like to sit on "their own" place in church every service and find it occupied by guests tell them that they have to move from those seats. This is completely in conflict with Christian hospitality and gives not only a bad impression of those church members themselves since such acting would be very selfish and impolite even in the world. But through them it would also give a bad impression of Christ Himself because people see the master in the servant. If the servant acts in a bad manner, the master gets the blame, like a parent will be blamed for the misbehaviour of the child.

But let us get back to the ushers and their task to watch all who come in. They can only just speak a word of welcome, lead guests to a seat, and give them the books they need. If now a congregation organizes this welcoming a bit more, it can become more efficient. Those who are appointed for "their" Sunday can, then, approach a guest or guests and help them with whatever is needed. They can, for instance, offer to sit beside them and help them during the worship service, at the proper mo-

ments, with information about what is going to happen. Also after the service the contact can be continued, if this is desired. I give this just as a suggestion.

Now the little article of the Rev. De Snoo speaks about a pamphlet that is offered to guests besides the Bible and the Church book. He gives a description of this pamphlet made up and used in the Church of Haarlem. I take this over in its entirety as it was in *Nederlands Dagblad*.

It is a small, folded piece of paper with exactly that information which is needed to know what is going to happen, what the rules are, as well as a friendly invitation for those who want further contact.

On the front page the word WELCOME appears. Underneath it are given the name and the address of the church and the times of the worship services. When we turn the page, we read "Welcome . . . we welcome you heartily in the worship services of the Reformed Church (liberated) at Haarlem. Every Sunday the members of the congregation gather together in this building, the 'Fountain Church,' to meet with God. In these gatherings the congregation, among other things, listens to the interpretation of the Bible, speaks to God in her prayer and in her singing of psalms and hymns.

The Reformed Church at Haarlem desires to live in accordance with the Word of God. She accepts the Bible completely, because she believes that God has made known His will in it. . . ."

When one hereafter opens the pamphlet further, he finds first a page on which the "Order of the Morning Service" is explained. A few points are given:

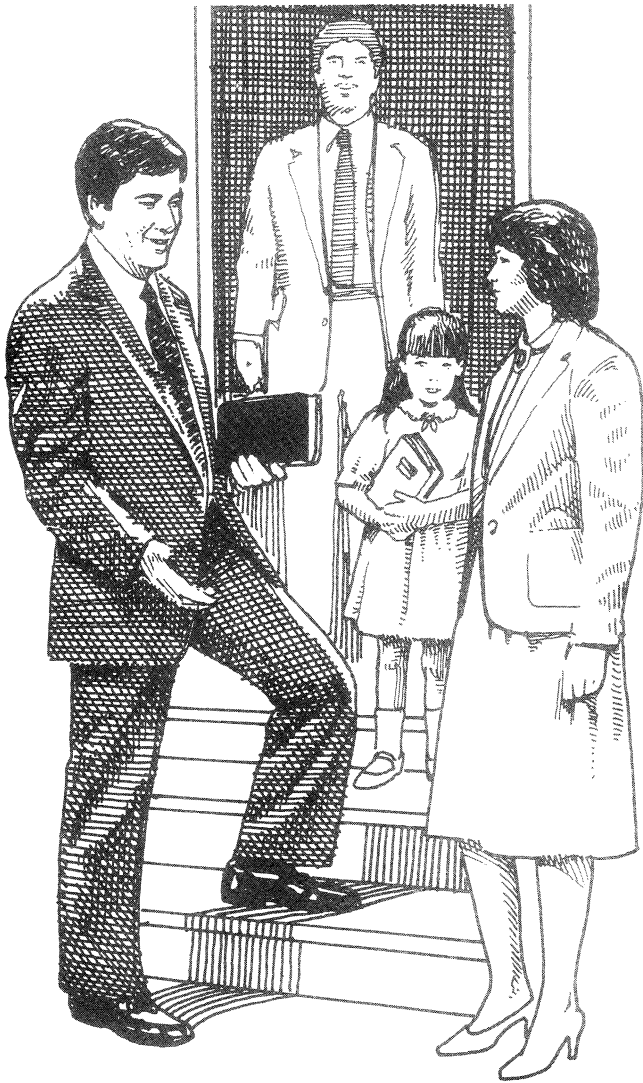
— The Reading of the Bible (the table of contents of the Bible books can be found on one of the first pages of the Bible).

— The reading of the text: the portion of the Bible which is especially dealt with in the sermon.

The next page presents "The Order of the Afternoon Service (again with all the relevant information about sitting down and standing up, and so on)

Above the fourth page it says: Specifics: Here brief information is given about baptism and the Lord's Supper. Concerning the latter the folder says:

"It can be that you happen to attend a church service in which the congregation celebrates the Lord's Supper. Only members of the congregation who have made public profession of their faith are admitted to the Lord's table. The celebration of this sacrament takes place in the morning, instead of the reading of the text and the sermon. The Form which is hereby read you find in the Book of Praise, on the page 521ff. In the afternoon the celebration takes place after the



first singing of the congregation. Then a shorter Form is read (Book of Praise, pages 528ff.).

The Rev. De Snoo adds the remark:

"An exemplary welcome, don't you think?"

Yes, I think so, an example to follow. This can be done instead of sitting beside guests in church and giving them the information they need by word of mouth. The pamphlet way and the more personal way can also be combined. It probably is so that with such a pamphlet the other way will not be seen as necessary anymore. The way of the folder can also be less disturbing, although the other way can be experienced as more personal. It depends also on the desires of the guests.

Whatever way we choose, we should make an effort to make strangers feel welcome in the church of Jesus Christ who says to His people in His Word that they have to show hospitality: "Do not neglect to show hospitality, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Heb. 13:2). And "let all men know your forbearance" or "your gentleness," your friendliness" (Phil. 4:5).

We have so much in our Reformed heritage. It is a struggle to keep it. However, the best way to keep it is to share it. Keeping without sharing is like what Christ showed in the parable about the talents: putting your talent in some cloths into the ground: it lies there buried as dead capital. Moreover, it makes

us guilty over against the Giver. Sharing the received treasures means learning and realizing the better what you have because you have to work with it. In matters of faith one can only truly share the things one really possesses and knows. It is in the context of this call of sharing that this proposal from the Netherlands on how to do it is brought to your attention.



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A Life-long Process

Some Remarks on Conversion or Regeneration

By W.W.J. VanOene

The Rev. G. Wieske expressed his disagreement with a passage in "Patrimony Profile" No. 70, published in Clarion of Nov. 24, 1989. To facilitate matters and save our readers the trouble of turning several boxes upside down, I quote the relevant passages here.

It was Kuyper's wrong interpretation of the term 'regeneration' that should have been recognized by his opponents. Now they sort of lost their prime and sharpest weapon in the battle against his new theories. Falling for Kuyper's interpretation, they basically were an easy prey.

It is good and necessary to stress that limiting or confining 'regeneration' to a momentary, one-time occurrence is not in accordance with the teachings of Holy Scripture and the language of the church in her confessions.

The terms 'regeneration' and 'conversion' mean the same and, as we confess in Lord's Day 33 of the Heidelberg Catechism, are a life-long process.

This process does indeed begin at a certain moment, but in by far the most cases this moment cannot be pinpointed as, by the grace of God, indeed in by far the most cases the children of the covenant love and serve the Lord from their early days on, from the days when they begin to understand things, as was the case with Timothy.

Even there where the beginning of the regeneration or conversion can be pointed out it would be wrong to let the term refer exclusively or even mainly to that beginning.

Now I shall try to summarize Rev. Wieske's objections. Part of his submission does not refer to what I wrote and I could bypass that, although there are a few things in it to which I must pay attention. If I understand him well, he makes the following statements.

1. When VO writes that one is mistaken when understanding the term "regeneration" or "being born again" to

be a one-time event, he speaks differently than Scripture and confession do.

2. There is a difference between Art. 24, B.C. and the Canons III/IV, Art. 12 and 13. The Belgic Confession speaks of faith *before* regeneration, the Canons "confess that we actually believe *after* regeneration."
3. Holy Scripture never mentions that we are "being regenerated" as in a life-long process.
4. The Forms for Baptism do not say "unless we are *being* born again." A birth whether physically or spiritually is by its very nature always a momentary happening or a one-time event.

REGENERATION IS INCOMPREHENSIBLE

As long as they are in this life, believers cannot fully understand the way in which God does this work. Meanwhile, however, it is enough for them to know and experience that by this grace of God they believe with the heart and love their Saviour.

Canons of Dort, III/IV, Art. 13

5. Dr. A. Kuyper did not misinterpret the word regeneration when he stated that it was a one-time event. But he went wrong when he taught that the Holy Spirit works this regeneration immediately, that means: without the Word.
6. Let us leave room in our preaching and teaching for ... "Examine yourselves whether you be in the faith." 2 Cor. 13:5.

My first remark in connection with Rev. Wieske's criticism must be that he started from the wrong end. He consulted his Dutch and English dictionaries, and with the definitions that these dictionaries gave he approached the Holy

Scriptures and the confessions. But is that the proper way of trying to understand what the Scriptures or the confessions mean by certain terms? It would have been different if he had consulted and quoted a dictionary that explains the use of various terms and verbs in Scripture. Such dictionaries do exist. But to take a common dictionary and then conclude: this is what Holy Scripture and the confessions mean by this word, is somewhat hasty and superficial in my view.

Usually I do not work with extensive quotations, for I have been taught that one has to do his homework before starting to speak or to write. What the hearers or readers deserve and may expect is not a plate full of separate ingredients but an "integrated meal." Besides, with quotations one can "prove" almost anything, for a person is always inclined to look for passages that (seem to) support his stand, often doing this without taking the context into consideration. This time I would like to make an exception to that practice and quote extensively. I could quote from the notes I made when at a post-confession class we "crawled" through the Canons of Dort in the course of two-and-a-half years, but these are not accessible to our readers. I shall quote from works that every one can obtain or may have in his own possession.

Rev. T. Bos

Readers of "Patrimony Profile" will recall the name of the Rev. T. Bos, one of the men who opposed Dr. A. Kuyper's new ideas. He wrote an explanation of the Canons of Dort that was published in 1915. Here follows part of what he wrote in explanation of Canons III/IV, 16.

"What a neat description is given here of the conversion of man to God; and this not in the first place of the continuing conversion in the way of sanctification, but of the conversion in the sense of regeneration, in connection with the preaching of the Gospel. It is sufficiently convincing for all that our forefathers, according to the Word of God, have laid a connection between the preaching of the Word and the regeneration. This is a de-

cision, a will of God. What exists in God's decision has not yet been actually established. The decision is executed in time, and with this execution God uses the Word, the Word of the Gospel that He has preached outwardly to the elect. He sees to it, therefore, that the Gospel comes where there are elect, and that it comes there when the moment of their being brought in has come. Before, therefore, they are elect, but not yet converted or regenerated people. To achieve the regeneration with them, the powerful insuperable power of the Holy Spirit joins itself to the proclamation of the Gospel to make them understand what God says to them in the Gospel.

What I would like to repeat in connection with our topic is that Rev. Bos a. speaks of "conversion in the sense of regeneration," b. speaks of "converted or regenerated people."

Rev. E. Koop

The Rev. E. Koop wrote a brief commentary on the Canons. It appeared in 1983 and its title reads *The Canons of Dort Brought Closer*. If I remember well, Prof. J. Kamphuis gave it a favourable review in *De Reformatie*.

We read the following sentences in the explanation of the above-mentioned Article 11.

"The Holy Spirit penetrates by means of the Gospel into the innermost depth of man, the centre, the *heart*. In this manner He brings a person to conversion, to regeneration.

"In Art. 11, 12, the terms conversion and regeneration are used alternately for the same thing. In that century the people spoke of 'regeneration or conversion.' The 'Sentences of the Theologians' at the synod of Dort declared, among other things, 'As in the beginning man was unable to prepare himself for his own creation, so likewise the sinner cannot do this himself for his own *conversion* (which is a new creation, a *regeneration*, a raising from the dead, a making alive). Here, too, both terms are found having the same meaning. And as the conversion is not a matter of just once (we daily must be converted to God) so the Acts of the Synod of Dort also speak of an ongoing regeneration!

"The Synod of Dort was compelled by the errors of the Remonstrants to confess this extremely important matter clearly, Scripturally. The Remonstrants asserted: No new powers or gifts in man's will are needed for this conversion. For this reason the faith by which a person is converted is not a power of God's grace but only an act of man. It could be called a gift but then only with respect to the power or the grace to at-

tain to this faith (Rej. of Errors, art. 6). This power or grace to come to faith and repentance is nothing but a 'gentle advising' by the preaching of the Gospel, a 'good advice' that leaves a person free. By virtue of his free will man can follow this advice or refuse to do so, and in this manner come to repentance or not come to it.

Over against this it was forcefully maintained and confessed that the conversion or regeneration is a miraculous work of God, a re-creative work of the Holy Spirit."

Under the heading "Conversion and Regeneration" Rev. Koop wrote:

"In the Canons of Dort we do not read any distinction with respect to the regeneration. Conversion and regeneration are two different terms for the same thing. The term 'conversion' points to a turning around, a breaking with the previous sinful way of life and a beginning to live for the Lord and His service.

"Of the regeneration we read in both the Old and the New Testament. John speaks of 'being born of God,' (1 John 3:9), and James speaks of 'brought forth by the word of truth' (James 1:18). Jesus spoke to Nicodemus 'Unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God' (John 3:3). Nicodemus should have been able to understand this, for the Old Testament speaks of this matter in clear language. We read, for example, that the LORD will give a new heart and a new spirit; the LORD will remove the heart of stone and He will give a heart of flesh (Ez. 36:26). Likewise: 'Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, remove the foreskin of your hearts.' (Jer. 4:4.)

CHURCH NEWS



The Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad has delegated the Rev. Cl. Stam and the Rev. Dr. J. Visscher to visit the Free Church of Scotland and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. This visit will take place from Sept. 12-26, 1990. The purpose of this visit is to further the mandate which the Committee received from Synod Winnipeg, as well as to discuss a number of recent developments in inter-church relations.

NEW MAILING ADDRESS:

"Cornerstone"
Canadian Reformed Church
P.O. Box 4263, Station "D"
Hamilton, ON L8V 4L6

"We confess with Art. 24, B.C.: 'We believe that this true faith, worked in man by the hearing of God's Word and by the operation of the Holy Spirit, regenerates him and makes him a new man.' Faith, conversion, regeneration: the one work of salvation by the Holy Spirit by means of the Word. 'We have been born anew, not of perishable seed but imperishable, through the living and abiding Word of God.'

"Later on, after Dort, theologians began to make sharp distinctions between regeneration and conversion, a separation indeed."

Is there a difference between the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort, as Rev. Wieske asserts? Is there any truth in his statement that the Belgic Confession "speaks of faith *before* while the latter confesses that we actually believe *after* regeneration"?

One has to come with proof instead of just putting it. In light of what we quoted we fail to see how any proof could be found; we are convinced that Rev. Wieske's assertion has been sufficiently refuted.

Forms for Baptism

In the installment No. 70 of "Patrimony Profile" I quoted the old Form for Baptism, adopted in 1566. I repeat it here.

"This new birth(!VO) consists of these two parts: First, that with sincere contrition and sorrow for our sins we deny our own nature and all sorts of desires, and submit to the will of God and hate and flee all sin from the heart. Then also that we begin to have desire and love to live according to the Word of God in all sanctity and righteousness."

Does this differ in any way from what we confess in Lord's Day 33 regarding the true conversion of man?

Did Dr. A. Kuyper not err?

Did Dr. A. Kuyper, Sr. "not misinterpret the word regeneration when he stressed that it was a one-time event?"

May I give a lengthy quotation from a booklet that is within everyone's reach? I am referring now to *The Bride's Treasure* by Dr. J. Faber and others. It was published by the Publication Organization of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia and is, I presume, in every society's library as well as on the bookshelves of practically every family. Rev. Wieske, too, undoubtedly has it. We turn to page 90 and following.

"Dr. A. Kuyper claimed that our Reformed forefathers in Dort had not yet attained a clear enough Scriptural insight to express themselves unambiguously in this. That is the reason why they still did not quite know the difference between 'regeneration' and 'conversion.'

"What can be said about this? Is this really so? Did our forefathers not have sufficient Scriptural insight? This is, of course, possible. But then it is necessary to point out whether or not the Holy Scriptures recognize this distinction and thereby to show that the Confession really falls short of a pure reflection upon this teaching of the Scriptures.

"Every experienced Bible reader knows that the term 'regeneration' is not always used with the same meaning and content. When Peter says that his readers (1 Peter 1:23) are regenerated 'not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God which liveth and abideth for ever,' then everyone understands that 'regeneration' in this instance means something else than when Christ says in Matthew 19:28 that His disciples who have followed Him shall, in the 'regeneration' (of heaven and earth) sit on twelve thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel.

"But whatever the variety of contents the word regeneration may have in the Scriptures (such as '... born of God' in 1 John 4:7; or that He begat us 'with the Word of truth' James 1:18), there is absolutely no ground on which to make a sharp, even temporal distinction between 'regeneration' and 'conversion.'

"The clear Scriptural insight of our forefathers was not so bad after all. We can only be thankful that they, who were actually not at all afraid of theological distinctions, did not introduce into the confession any logical and theological 'clarities' unknown to Scripture.

"But although it is certain that the Scriptures do not support those theories of regeneration which separate Word and Spirit — it is a different matter whether or not it is justifiable to differentiate between the contents of the two words. We see no reason to oppose this, since the Scriptures tell us of the *fundamental start* as well as the *continuance* of the work of God's Spirit. We will understand this better when we look at the actual meaning of the Greek word, which, in the New Testament is commonly used for being spiritually born. Professor Greijdanus has pointed to the fact that this image of being born is not derived from the natural, physical birth of a child which comes into the world, but from conception, which occurs before the actual birth. The biblical word 'regeneration' and its various forms, accentuate the very start of life. Here the accent is clearly put on the recreating and regenerating work of the Holy Spirit which occurs totally independently of man's actions.

"However, it is true that the content of the term 'to be born again' in the Holy Scriptures is not limited to this very first

start of the regeneration of a new life. It also embraces the development of this life, and the continuing sanctification and walking 'in the newness of life' (Romans 5:4).

"In this general way the confession also speaks of the regeneration without comprehensively distinguishing between the conversion and sanctification of life. This, for example, clearly comes to the fore in Art. 24 of the Belgic Confession in which it is stated that true faith is "wrought in man by the hearing of the Word of God and the operation of the Holy Spirit, regenerates him and makes him a new man, causing him to live a new life and freeing him from the bondage of sin." The Canons of Dort, however, accentuate other points which result in a far clearer and better description of God's sovereign power and work of regeneration, as being totally independent of man's work."

Was Dr. A. Kuyper correct, as Rev. Wieske asserted? In view of the above it will be impossible to maintain that.

Life-long

I cannot help saying that I find dangerous elements in Rev. Wieske's submission as well as hasty statements.

In proof of his assertion that "the Bible never mentions that we are 'being regenerated' as in a life-long process" he mentioned John 3. He does not give a specific text but refers to the whole chapter. In this connection I remind our readers in the first place of what has been quoted under the previous heading regarding this "life-long," ongoing process.

Choosing the first text Rev. Wieske mentioned to elaborate on, I presume

that he has verse 3 in mind: "Jesus answered him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.'" Does the Lord speak here of a one-time event, of something that takes place and thus is behind?

Most times it is said that Nicodemus misunderstood the Lord and thought of a being born again in the same manner in which a person came into the world in the first place. I do believe that Nicodemus understood the Lord's words perfectly, even though he could not see how it would be possible. He was aware of the need to "start all over again," a need that the Lord Jesus made clear in verse 3. But how could one, being at an advanced age, throw overboard all that he had learned, all the habits he acquired, his whole development, his character as it was formed and molded in the course of many years? If that was required, one might as well demand that a person be again born of his mother as he was many years ago. Then he would be able to make a new start and keep himself free from the "ballast" that he acquired in his (then) previous life. But that was an impossibility!

The Lord Jesus replied to this objection of Nicodemus' that what is impossible with man is possible with God. Flesh indeed cannot bring this about. It is only the Holy Spirit who can work this and does achieve that a person's whole way of thinking and conduct takes a different course and that in the course of life he does get rid of all the wrong things he acquired during his past years.

What do we read here of an alleged one-time event? We do not even read here of the *beginning* of this regeneration. What the Lord Jesus stressed here is the absolute need for a re-formation of a person's whole state of mind, of his character, his concepts, his pattern of life. I have to think here of what the apostle Paul wrote in his letter to the Philippians: "But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ," and "forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus," Philippians 3:7, 13, 14. This is not a matter of one moment; it is a life-long process, as the apostle describes it in several of his letters. Paul himself needed several years of preparation for his task during which years he learned to divest himself of his wrong pharisee ideas and to grow in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. He did not acquire his correct insight into the Scriptures at the moment when the flash blinded him on his way to Damascus! See Galatians 1.

One would act a little too quickly when quoting John 3:3ff. in support of

OUR COVER

American Reformed Church
of Lynden, Washington, U.S.A.

Photo courtesy:
Case Biesbroek
of Langley, BC



the thesis that regeneration is a one-time event, distinguished or even separate from conversion.

"In the Faith"

The last part of Rev. Wieske's submission to which I want to react is what he writes in the end. Honestly, I sense a dangerous trend in his writing and wished he had considered more carefully what he was going to put down on paper.

Rev. Wieske quoted 2 Cor. 13:5 from the King James Version: "Examine yourselves whether you be in the faith."

I preached on this text on August 6, 1944 in preparation for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, five days before I undertook the trip to the well-known meeting in The Hague on August 11, 1944. I chose this text on purpose. There were dangerous mysticist tendencies in the congregation I was serving at that time, and the point of self-examination was very much in the centre of attention in connection with the controversies that were disturbing the churches. Preparatory study convinced me that this text does not say at all what some read into it, and that it does not support the (synodical and mysticist) concept of self-examination. If I could still quote from that sermon I certainly would do so, but I burned it long ago together with hundreds of other sermons.

What does the apostle speak of here? Again I quote, this time from *The*


New International Commentary on the New Testament, from the volume on II Corinthians, by Ph. E. Hughes, p. 480, 481.

"The trouble-makers have been inciting the Corinthians to demand proof that Christ speaks in Paul. In other words, they have been impugning his apostolic authority. But Paul tells his readers that it is they themselves that must examine and put to the proof. If such self-examination reveals that they have experience of the grace of God, then that alone is proof irrefutable that it is none other than Christ who speaks in Paul, for it was precisely through his ministry in Corinth that they received the gospel and passed from death to life. He thus appeals to their self-knowledge, which of all knowledge is the most intimate and indisputable: if they know Jesus Christ to be in themselves, then they know, by simple logic, that he is the one who proclaimed Jesus Christ to them. The form of the question, 'or do you not have thorough knowledge of yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?' is mildly ironical, and its tone indicates Paul's confidence that they do know quite certainly the indwelling presence of Christ in their lives. The sole awful alternative to such certain knowledge is that they are reprobate — put to the proof and rejected as spurious.

"So far, then, is Paul from expecting that the proof afforded by their self-exam-

ination and self-knowledge will disclose that they are Christless reprobates, that it is his definite hope that this same proof will confirm them in the knowledge that is not without proof—in other words, that the proof they ask of Christ speaking in him (v. 3) they will find in their own saving relationship to Christ. 'You know only too well that Jesus Christ is in you,' he says in effect to them, 'and by that very fact you know that you already have the proof of Christ speaking in me, through whom the message of Christ was brought to you.'

Final remarks

I expect that our readers were not annoyed by the lengthy quotations I gave. In view of all that was quoted above, not much is left of Rev. Wieske's assertions. I hope that by this discussion the matter itself may have become much clearer to our readers. That there is a beginning to the regeneration or conversion, who can deny this? I certainly did not in the passage that evoked Rev. Wieske's reaction, but stated so expressly. The regeneration or conversion itself, however, is a life-long struggle. It is our happy confession that by the power of the Holy Spirit it is nevertheless a fact. And He that began this work in us will also complete it to the glory of the triune God. 

PRESS REVIEW

By C. Van Dam

Aftermath of CRC Decision About Women In Office

As reported in an earlier *Clarion*, the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) this summer decided to "permit churches to use their discretion in utilizing the gifts of women members in all the offices of the church." The opening of all ecclesiastical offices to women has resulted in much soul searching and debate in the CRC as also seen in *Christian Renewal* (August 20, 1990). This issue is the source of information for this Press Review.

Initial responses

In an informative article, John Van Dyk notes:

Already letters have been or are in the process of being sent by councils throughout the denomination to the CRC's Stated Clerk in Grand Rapids informing him of their disagreement with and opposition to synod's decision. Similar letters are going to the clerks of classes. Some

churches have closed their pulpits to ministers who support synod's decision . . . Overtures are also being formulated asking synod to rescind Synod 1990's decision, or asking the synod of 1992 not to change the Church Order to allow for women ministers and elders. Some church councils are also informing their classis that they will not participate at classis meetings where women delegates are seated.

There are about fifty Korean churches within the CRC. They are the first to have made far-reaching decisions.

Many Korean congregations and members originally joined the CRC because of "its orthodoxy and its commitment to the creeds and confessions." The leadership among the Koreans see the move to open the offices to women as an erosion of this commitment. Said senior pastor, John E. Kim, of Korean CRC in Clasis Greater Los Angeles, "We feel betrayed" by the CRC. His church of 1,200 members has made the decision to leave the CRC in conjunction with the other Korean churches affiliated with the denomination. The churches met on July 25 to discuss the decision and agreed unanimously to work in the direction of separation.

The Alliance, Concerned Members, and Separation?

The Christian Reformed Alliance (CRA) numbers about 20 church councils who work together to maintain and promote the CRC's "Reformed Christian heritage and its confessional nature." Because of the synod decision, rather than wait for the next regular meeting scheduled for March 1991, an early meeting of the CRA will be held on November 13-15 in Illinois near Chicago.

The Committee of Concerned Members draws members from individuals in the CRC (about 2,000). A special board meeting was held in which a number of resolutions were adopted. Two are especially worthy of note.

"congregations and members to remain in contact with the Board of Concerned Members and the congregations of the Christian Reformed Alliance in order that whatever action eventuates from the present circumstances a consensus may bring about a united movement."

Another resolution reads as follows: unless there is a fundamental return to a proper understanding of the Word of God and the doctrinal standards we have held since the beginning of our history, there will and must be a separation of ways so that we may serve God according to His revelation.

Van Dyk adds that "For many in the CRC, individual members and churches, the Synod of 1990 crossed the line when it opened the door to women ministers and elders. Many refuse to toe the line. Some will be unwilling to wait until 1992 for the possibility that the decision will be overturned.

Separation is also a possibility for

PSALM 112

Geneva, 1562



Rev. J. Tuininga who concludes an article on the official reports of the synod's decision by writing:

The whole thing is very dismaying. The CRC is further down the road of liberalism than many care to realize. The slide is accelerating. I for one will not remain in such a church for much longer. There are other church communions where a Reformed person would feel much more at home. Sad, but true.


What to do?

In the same issue of *Christian Renewal* there are two other relevant articles. One by Rev. R. Gleason of the Canadian Reformed Church at Toronto entitled "A Plea for True Unity" and the other by Cheryl Frampton, "Seeking the Right Church." Since the former article is of somewhat wide scope (union of all faithful Reformed and Presbyterians is sought) and the author is not speaking from within the CRC, let us briefly note some salient points of the latter. Frampton looks at the matter of church membership in the context of a report on a presentation she attended. She correctly notes that church membership carries responsibilities. "Being a member in a congregation, marks one as responsible for the doctrines taught and that which goes on in the fellowship where one is a member."

She recognizes that one cannot stay in a church "that has departed from the truth of God's holy word." In deciding where to go three questions should be asked. "Is this where I hear the pure preaching of the Word?" "Do I find here the proper administration of the sacraments, again with the truth of God's Word the determining factor?" "Is there spiritual exercise of the love of Christian discipline, without which neither the sacraments nor the preaching can be maintained?" The attentive reader will recognize here the marks of the true church as detailed in the Belgic Confession, Article 29.

She concludes with: "Christians must be thankful if they find themselves in a true, God-loving church, but they must not linger if their church falls short."

The future?

We do not know that the future will bring. One thing is very clear. We must pray that the Lord continue to strengthen and endue with wisdom the concerned in the CRC. But that is not all. We must also pray and work to the end that all true confessors of our Lord Jesus Christ find each other and experience the true unity of faith. Where possible, we must also let the concerned know that we remember them in prayer and show that we desire unity with all those who love the Reformed faith. 

REMEMBER YOUR CREATOR

By R. Schouten

Twenty Minutes a Day

Once in a while I run into booklets with titles like "Twenty Minutes a Day," or "Ten Minutes to Physical Fitness." Such publications want to make us aware that even a small investment of time and energy pays big dividends in cardio-vascular health and overall strength. Being fit doesn't require twelve hours of training a day! Still, most of us know that disciplined exercise runs contrary to our natures. Who wants to go jogging after school? Only when we consider the rewards are we motivated to act.

As bodily health is produced and maintained only through disciplined living and exercise, so we can only thrive as Christians through what we might call "spiritual exercises." Our heart, as the centre of our life with God, doesn't stay healthy without spiritual discipline and exercise. In this context we could speak of the worship service, of Bible reading, catechism classes, Bible Study groups, and so on. All these activities form part of the overall discipline of Christian life through which our life with God is maintained and strengthened.

But another very important part of the spiritual exercise regime is prayer. Prayer is both a duty and a privilege of Christian life. Unfortunately, it is frequently neglected. I once asked a group of people whether they thought a non-praying person could be a Christian. Surprisingly, not a few thought that this was indeed possible. This is surprising, because the Bible shows us that a non-praying person is either a non-Christian or a disobedient and weak Christian well on his/her way to becoming a total unbeliever.

And yet, there is probably no other area of Christian life as neglected as prayer, and as a result, no other point about which so many feel so much guilt. Few have developed the discipline of regular private prayer. Yes, I know that we pray at mealtimes, at public meetings of Christians, at our Reformed schools, and so on. But if we speak of private, personal prayer, we discover a real lack.

This problem is a reason for great concern. A church composed of members who pray only at formal church

functions like the worship service or at family functions (like meals) is bound to be a weak church, unable to fight for the truth, virtually powerless against secularizing decay. People who don't pray in private are unlikely to diligently fight against temptation. More and more they will succumb to the Evil One. A church without a praying membership is on its way to religious formalism and apostasy. We might say that a church whose mem-

"No person who neglects prayer can expect to survive as a Christian."

bers don't pray in private is a church full of hypocrites.

The way we pray or don't pray reveals the quality of our relationship with God. If you have a good relationship with someone, you will want to communicate with that person. If you never pray personally, you should ask yourself whether you really have faith, whether you have really accepted the promises of God made to you, personally.

Prayer life always has to be seen in the light of the covenant which God has made with His people and their children. This covenant means that Almighty God has become our Father in Jesus Christ. It means that the Creator and Lord of the universe has decided to love us and make us His people. Our prayers have a firm basis in this covenant. We don't have to go looking for God. He comes very near to us. His Word is at hand. He has promised that His Spirit will dwell in our hearts.

Yes, the basis for communication

with God has already been established. There is a relationship between yourself and God. The point is, however, that we are now called to live on the basis of that relationship. And, as anyone knows, if relationships are to flourish and endure, there must be communication. Young men and women often get into trouble in their relationships because they never really talk. If there is no meaningful exchange of thoughts, feelings, and desires, a friendship or courtship will be shallow and unsatisfying.

Well, many people have a very shallow and unsatisfying relationship with God because they never talk to Him. They never open their hearts to Him. What is your prayer life like? I'm asking you to be very honest with yourself because this is a matter of life and death. To have a shallow prayer life means that you will be a very weak Christian. It means that you will easily become unfaithful to your God — just as people in shallow marriages more easily fall prey to the temptation of adultery.

Prayer is the exercising of a relationship with God. Prayer keeps that relationship going. The covenant initiative of God requires our response. To respond to the loving initiative of God, who constantly woos His people, is both a duty and privilege. No person who neglects prayer can expect to survive as a Christian.

So prayer is the necessary response of the believer to the covenant initiative of God. You agree with that, of course. But now, what do you talk about with God? Once you get past the Lord's Prayer or the formulas of your childhood, what do you say? Well, prayer is in the first place a matter of bringing our petitions before God (think of the Lord's Prayer). As believers we realize that we have many needs. We need forgiveness of sins, renewal through the Holy Spirit, strength against temptation, wisdom in relationships, the ability to seek God's Kingdom above all. God has promised to fulfil all our needs — but only through our prayer. Ask, and it will be given. If you are a poor Christian, you have only yourself to blame. The only kind of

poverty in the Church is that which is self-imposed.

And then there is the need for intercession — prayer for others. We can only mention a few necessary points: prayer for government, for parents, friends, boyfriend/girlfriend, teachers, minister, elders, deacons, the rest of your congregation, missionaries, your unbelieving neighbour, the Jehovah's Witness who keeps coming to your home, the sick, those who are depressed, etc. etc.

And, of course, your prayer will always have the framework of praise and thanksgiving.

Prayer is essential. No Christian can survive without it. So why not make a commitment to it, today? Why not resolve to spend twenty minutes a day in the privacy of your room, or wherever you might want to go, to speak with your covenant God? Take your Bible with you. Follow a system of reading. Meditate on the sermons you've heard the previous

Sunday. And then speak to God. Speaking aloud or whispering helps to keep your mind from wandering. And trying to pray while lazing in bed is definitely asking for trouble. The best posture for praying is still kneeling.

We are God's children by covenant privilege. But He demands a response of love exercised in prayer. Without prayer, your heart will wither and eventually shrivel up altogether. You will have no joy in your life with the Lord. And you will have no resistance to the assaults of your enemies — Satan, the devil, and your old human nature. Instead of growing in faith, obedience, and service, you will regress.

And so, please do take the time for prayer.

Of course, everybody is busy. But a lot of other things can be left aside without any serious effects in your life. Leaving prayer, however, will have the result that nothing works. Without prayer you

will die. So turn off the T.V., shut down the stereo, or get out of bed twenty minutes earlier. Everybody and everything else can wait. But God can't! Who wouldn't give up just about anything for an evening with a very special person? Well then, how can we keep God waiting on His date with us? He wants to hear from us every day. Keep the appointed hour.

And then watch as God fulfils His promises in your life. You will become increasingly sensitive to God's revealed will. The Lord will bring great joy to you because of your growing relationship with Himself. Through prayer you will become a fine-tuned instrument in the hand of God, a ready servant, equipped for the tasks of your young life and able to persevere to the end.

The rewards of prayer are very great.

C

HYMN 47

Vater Unser

Based on the Lord's Prayer

Leipzig, 1539

1. Our Fa-ther, clothed with maj-es-ty,
Who, dwell-ing in e-ter-ni-ty,
Hast set Thy glo-rious throne on high,
In Christ, Thy Son, do we draw nigh,
In hum-ble prayer to seek Thy face
For Thy pa-ter-nal love and grace.

6. Do not our trespasses record,
But freely pardon them, O Lord;
As we, who by Thy grace must live,
Our debtors' trespasses forgive.
Yea, cleanse our hearts from every stain,
In Him who on the cross was slain.

10. Dear Father, do not hide Thy face,
For we rely upon Thy grace.
Our hearts, O Lord, who seest all,
Condemn us not whene'er we call,
But say, since Thou dost hear our plea,
"Amen, Amen, so shall it be!"

Rethinking Redemptive-Historical Interpretation⁴

By N.H. Gootjes

In this final article we will continue to compare moralistic and psychological applications with a redemptive-historical application. After two more examples a short conclusion will round off the discussion.

Daniel (Dan. 1:8-16)

This first chapter of Daniel tells us the story of Daniel and his friends, who did not eat the food the king of Babylon had assigned to them. Daniel first asked the chief of the eunuchs to be allowed not to eat it (vs. 8). When this request was turned down (vss. 9, 10), Daniel asked someone else for permission to experiment for ten days with plain food and water (vss. 11-13). The result was that Daniel and his friends looked healthier than all the others (vs. 15).

This text too allows for a number of attractive lessons. E.g., Daniel was so strong that he dared to go against the majority. We too should in situations where we have to choose between obeying God and following the ways of the world, act as bravely as Daniel did. This is expressed in the song:

Dare to be a Daniel,
Dare to stand alone.

Another lesson can be derived from the fact that Daniel saw the danger of seemingly unimportant things like food. Most people would say there is no relation between faith and food. But Daniel knew that the law of God applies to common daily things like food too. We should do likewise. We have to apply God's commandments not only to the food we eat, but also to the books, magazines, and newspapers we read. We should treat even our business competitors fairly.

Noteworthy is also the way Daniel acts. He has decided not to eat this food of uncertain origin, but he does not in a surly manner say: "I'm not going to eat that stuff." He presents a petition. And when it is turned down by the chief of the eunuchs, who was afraid for his life, Daniel does not laugh at him, but still respects him. He acts wisely in turning next to a lower official who did not have so much responsibility. This shows us that

we too should act wisely when we in obeying God have to differ from the world.

It cannot be denied that these are all good lessons; there is no application we have to call unscriptural. The question we are faced with is not whether the applications are right in themselves, but whether they do justice to the text. Again we have to say that several important elements in the text are left out of consideration.

1. The time and the place of this event. The event took place not in Canaan but in Babylon. And the reason why Daniel and his friends were in Babylon was that they were a kind of hostages, to make sure that their country would not rise up in rebellion. So in Israel, God's chosen people, the king had been deposed and together with the people had gone in exile. It seemed as if God had left the house of David and had abandoned His people Israel.

2. Again, in these lessons God is irrelevant. But in the text He is very much present. Vs. 9 says that God gave Daniel favour and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs. And the fact that Daniel and his friends after their ten days' test looked healthier than the other boys cannot be ascribed just to natural reasons; it is a special work of God.

At the same time here we have found the reason why the lessons from this text are drawn from man, not from God. The reason is that man's actions can be generalized, but God's actions cannot. It is easy to say: "We all have to act like Daniel." But it is impossible to say: "If you act like Daniel, God will help you as He helped Daniel." Christians just as obedient as Daniel have been thrown before the lions or have died at the stake. Daniel and his friends were healthier after their ten-day trial period, but other faithful believers have died of hunger. Because God does not necessarily act towards us in the same way He did with Daniel, we have the idea that it is by generalizing our human actions or feelings that we have to derive the lessons taken from Scripture. But if with this method no justice can be done to the goal of Scripture, as can be evident from the fact that important parts

of the stories have to be neglected, the price we pay for the lessons is too high. Even though we cannot generalize God's actions, we have to maintain that He is central, also in the application of a biblical story.

So the question becomes urgent: When we take into account the specific situation of Daniel and his friends, and the centrality of God, can we still apply this text to our situation? To begin with the situation, the people of Israel had been conquered, the leaders had been brought to Babylon as prisoners. This was God's punishment for Israel's sin. But the nations could think that Israel's God was a powerless God. And Israel could think that God had given up his salvation work.

In that specific situation God showed that He was very much present and powerful, even in the capital of the new worldpower. Dan. 1 relates that He can influence people's minds so that they are favourably inclined to Daniel and his friends. And He proved that He could keep His servants healthy even on a not very nutritious diet.

In the following chapters God proves time and again that He is stronger than all the kings of the Babylonians, the Medes, and the Persians. This could be called the theme of the first, historical part of Daniel. The book of Daniel shows that the downfall of Israel does not mean the downfall of Israel's God. Even in Babylon He is in control of world history.

To return to the first chapter, if it is true that God here begins to show that He is present in the most powerful palace of that time, how can that be applied to our time? The answer is that Christians, even when they are alone, should dare to put their trust in God alone and do His will. This is much similar to one of the lessons given above. But the reason for it is different. The reason is not that we, through this event, have seen how Daniel trusted God, and how God protected him, but the reason is that God has proven in this history that He is God even in the most hostile centres of the world.

When Christians today just trust God and obey His commandments, they do not know what will happen. There is no need for God to do exactly the same in our situation as He did in Daniel's situation. What God does will depend on His plans with us. But because we through Daniel's life have again learned about God and His omnipotence we know we can trust God wherever we live. As a matter of fact, we do not just know God as Daniel did; we have seen more of God's power, e.g., through Christ's resurrection. Therefore we can trust God even more than Daniel did, and we should show our faith in everything, including our daily food.

Esther (4:15-17)

The Jewish girl Esther had become the queen of the nation of Persia and Media. The prime minister of the country Haman, had a grudge against the Jew Mordecai and conceived the plan to kill all the Jews. At first Esther, as a queen safe from Haman, did not want to interfere. Later, disregarding the dangers for her own person, she went to the king to plead for her people. Then she spoke the famous words: "If I perish, I perish." However, the king had mercy on her, listened to her pleas, had Haman executed and saved the life of the Jews.

This story about Esther has often been used as an example. Esther is taken as a model of self-sacrificing courage. During group Bible study the question may be put to each: "How would you act in a situation like that of Esther? Would you give your life for your fellow countrymen?" Some, full of self-confidence, may say that they will act like Esther; others will doubt their courage and hope and pray that in times of war and oppression they will be as brave as Esther was. Esther is then used as an example of self-sacrificing love for her people.

It is important to stress this love in a time when individualism often leads to egotism. But we have to ask whether this use of the story agrees with God's intention in having this story recorded. The answer must be that this may well be the worst application in all the examples given above. In the other cases God was at least present, be it not in the centre. But here God is completely absent, and He is not needed either. An application of God's Word that can do without God, cannot be correct.

Also the fact that the story is about a special nation is neglected. Israel is not a nation like the other nations of the world. Israel had received special promises from God, and the Messiah was to be born from this nation. There-

fore this text cannot be used for patriotism in general.

The story also takes place at a specific time. At that time the kingdom of Persia and Media controlled all the nations in the Near East. Among them was the nation of the Jews. A part of the Jews had returned to their homeland, Canaan; others were still living in the land of their captivity, where some had become quite respectable. However, all the Jews were living under the control of the kingdom of Persia and Media. And Haman's threat against the Jews extended to all of them.

To find the true significance of the story we again have to begin from God. God is present in Susan, the capital, and from there protects His people Israel. Then we have to realize that according to God's promises the Messiah will be born from this nation. If Haman's attack on the Jews succeeds, the Messiah will not be born and God's plan of salvation cannot be realized. That will mean the failure of redemptive history. And that, in turn, will mean that we cannot be saved. Here is the point where we come in. Our real interest is the salvation we need and which God was in the process of realizing also in the days of Esther.

To protect His people and finally to bring about our salvation, God used Mordecai and Esther. Even before Haman's attack was conceived, God was prepared and had the Jewess Esther placed in a strategic position as queen at the side of king Ahasuerus (3:1). At first Esther does not want to use her influence to save her people (and to keep the door open for the coming of the Messiah). Esther almost has to be forced to intercede. But finally she does what she should do. And God uses her beyond her wildest dreams (7:8) to destroy the enemy of His people and to continue protecting His people (10:3).

Through this book we first of all learn much about God. With irresistible power and with incomprehensible wisdom God is working towards the coming of Jesus Christ. God had revealed centuries before that the Saviour would come from the Jews. In Esther He continues to realize this coming. He uses even people who do not want to be involved.

It is this fact that should give us courage today. Jesus Christ has come; no power was able to prevent His coming to perform His saving work. And as long as Christ's church is on the earth, God will not leave it alone or give up the work He does for it, but His plans for it He will fulfill.

Therefore a Christian who uses Esther as a model of courage will only be halfheartedly courageous. For Esther

was not very courageous at first. But a Christian who sees God's work in Esther can really be courageous. For he knows from this story that he can trust God to fulfill His plan of salvation in Christ. Looking at this God he will be encouraged to serve Him in his own place in life.

Conclusion

Since the historical parts of the Bible are told to show us how God's redemptive plan has unfolded, the explanation of these parts and the lessons drawn from them should be redemptive-historical. Of course, then the designation "redemptive-historical" in itself is not the most important thing. Decisive are not the words on the label but the contents of the bottle.

The main concerns of the redemptive-historical method can be summarized in the following four rules:

1. God's central place should be honoured in each history. If the application goes directly from a person in the Old or New Testament to us today, and God can be omitted from it, then there is something wrong with the application.

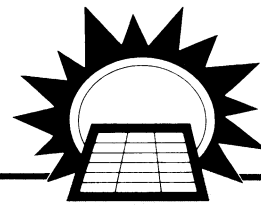
2. The relation of that specific event to God's work of salvation should be made clear. If this relation is absent, then the connection between then and now will be on a moralistic or psychological level, and not be specifically Christian.

3. The development of redemptive history should be taken into account. An application that places us back in the time of Israel or of the apostles must go wrong somewhere.

4. The specific function of a person in the Bible (prophet, priest, king, apostle) should be taken into account for a correct application. That means we have to concentrate on what God did (or wanted to do) through this office-bearer, and that we cannot just place ourselves in the position of that person.

This concentration on God's work does not mean that man disappears in the application. Man is present, he is important in redemptive history. The real question is not whether man is involved in the application, but how he is involved. The answer is that man today should not do something because a person in the Bible did something. In such applications God and His work of salvation are neglected. Man today should do something because the story shows that God wants it, that God governs the universe, that God can be trusted.

Only when the historical parts of the Bible are explained according to their own character, God will be honoured as our Saviour and we will receive the stimulus we really need for a life in faith. ©



By Mrs. J. Mulder

*"Then the dragon was angry with the woman, and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and bear testimony to Jesus."
Revelation 12:17*

Dear brothers and sisters,

The previous time we saw that all the efforts of the dragon, that is Satan, to destroy the Church of Christ came to nothing. The gates of hell could not prevail against her for God prepared a safe dwelling place for her in the wilderness, where she was nourished and protected by Him.

However, Satan does not give up that easily. He knows that his time is short. Therefore he intensifies his attack. He now goes to make war with the remnant of the woman, the Church of the Lord. He directs his diabolic attention now to the individual members of God's Church, who remain faithful to their Lord and Master. They are the most difficult obstacles for Satan to overcome. He uses all his power and tricks — sometimes very subtle — to try to pull them away from the Lord and His service.

If we want to remain faithful to the Lord and obey His commandments, then we better be prepared. For then the struggle, the enmity and conflicts will come sooner or later.

Bearing testimony to Jesus, means believing in Him and therefore keeping up the testimony Jesus gave about Himself, namely that He is the Son of God, who has fulfilled all the obedience of God's law. The Lord Jesus testified of Himself that He is the only Saviour. When you keep up that confession in word and deed and live accordingly, you are a threat to Satan and you are obstructing his evil plans.

Therefore he concentrates his power on each of the Church members, very personally. He knows our weak spots and makes use of them. Sometimes he tries to make us stumble and fall by using brute power; sometimes he disguises himself as an angel of light. But the result is that each of us has his or her own secret sorrow, his own personal conflict, his own personal sin to overcome. Sometimes it is as if Satan concentrates all his power on you alone. And we can help each other in the communion of saints. We should encourage each other so that we may go on in good trust on the Lord.

But in final analysis you must make the personal decision, when temptations of the evil one come your way. Others may support you, but you have to say "Yes" or "No"! And that can be hard!

It is so hard because you are offspring of the Lord! You belong to Him body and soul. Yes, that makes you the constant object of Satan's devilish temptations, but your Lord did overcome. And following Him,

you will overcome. The Lord Jesus said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." Through Him we are more than conquerors.

When we may share in Christ's suffering, we should rejoice and be glad, for then we also will share in His glory. Look up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near. [Luke 21:28]

Our birthday calendar:

ALAN BREUKELMAN

Box 666, Coaldale, AB T0K 0L0

Allan will be 24 years old on October 17.

HELENA HOF SINK

6705 Satchel Rd., Box 40,

"BETHESDA," Mount Lehman, BC VOX 1V0

Helena hopes to celebrate her 30th birthday on October 22.

JOHN FEENSTRA

RR 1, Wainfleet, ON LOS 1V0

John has his birthday on October 25. He will turn 32.

MARY ANN DEWIT

6705 Satchel Rd., Box 40,

"BETHESDA," Mount Lehman, BC VOX 1V0

Mary Ann's 34th birthday is on October 28.

Congratulations! I hope you all will have a very enjoyable day!

From the Mailbox:

A request: Mrs. H. Van Amerongen from Hamilton asks our attention for the family Vroegop in the Netherlands.

In this family three of the seven children suffer from a rare disease, which causes them to lose the use of their bodily functions. Leo [38], Atty [30] and Bert [26] are living in "De Wijngaard," a well-known Reformed nursing home in Holland.

Although it becomes more and more difficult for them to communicate, they are still mentally alert. They would really enjoy receiving some mail from Canada, since some time ago when they were still able to do so, they visited their relatives here in Ontario. Their mailing address is:

Leo, Atty and Bert Vroegop,
"De Wijngaard", Denneweg 2, De Kuip,
Bosch en Duin, ZEIST, 3735 MG
The Netherlands

Madonna: an Assessment

by J. Van Popta

A 10-year-old girl comes home from a "Canadian Reformed" school and tells her dad, "Madonna is all right. My friend told me that her song 'Like a Prayer' is about Jesus Christ. The song mentions him by name." A 14-year-old boy asks Mom, "May I buy Madonna's new record? It's OK Mom, Madonna is kind of tame." A 16-year-old girl wants her hair "... to be just like Madonna's."

At the end of May the Rock/Pop singer Madonna staged three sellout concerts in the Toronto Skydome. *Clarion* does not carry reviews of concerts or films (and rightly so), yet we need to be educated in this matter. Many of us know little or nothing regarding the modern music scene. Rev. Stam has written on this subject in *Reformed Perspective*, but Madonna deserves special mention. Her shows are the cutting edge of demonic attack on every thing that is holy. She is controversial even among the people of the world.

What follows is based on reviews found in Toronto area newspapers following Madonna's concerts in May. Mitch Potter's review in the *Toronto Star* states that it was "a constantly moving spectacle of dance, design and high tech eroticism that left no doubt that Madonna is having a good laugh with all her controversy." Potter continues with saying that during the show she was "busy setting us up for a weird, dramatic aside of sexual and religious imagery." This is the heart of the matter. Madonna mixes and blends Christian religious imagery with pornography and violence. Granted, the Christian imagery is mostly Roman Catholic in origin, but the message is clear.

Just noting her name, "Madonna," alerts us that she borrows from the vocabulary of the Roman Catholic Church. "Madonna" is a name given to Mary, the mother of Jesus. In her concerts Madonna played a set of five "quasi-religious" songs. Just the titles are an affront to Christians and to God Himself: "Like a Virgin," "Like a Prayer," "Live to Tell," "Oh Father," and "Papa Don't Preach."

It is the staging of "Like a Virgin" that

is the most offensive. Through backstage technology Madonna rose through the floor on a red satin bed. Dressed in lingerie and garters she writhed about on the bed in sexual self-gratification. Mitch Potter describes what followed; "The stage was suddenly transformed into a scene of the Catholic Mass, replete with hundreds of burning candles, a neon cross, six 10 meter fake marble columns

"Her message is one with an anti-Christian bias that knows no bounds and so should find no place in the lives of God's people."

and a stained glass altar. Here was the Madonna that truly causes the commotion — falling to her knees in the house of God, quite literally straddling the altar."

While two performers staged a fight, Madonna called out to the audience, "In America people really dig a little senseless violence, What about you, Toronto?" ... and the crowd went wild. Later in the show this leader in pop music mixed whips with sexual excitement in a sado-masochistic scene. (In her video "Express Yourself" she appears nude, in chains and irons.)

Madonna is so controversial that when the Pepsi-Cola Company saw the full video "Like a Prayer," for which they had bought the advertising rights, they cancelled the contract at a cost of 10 million dollars.

However, Madonna does not just blend pornography and violence with Christian imagery but also is in the fore-

front of "gender blurring." She appears on stage wearing a pin-striped suit, wearing her sexually enticing lingerie over the suit. This may seem silly, even ridiculous, until you realize that on stage with her are seven male dancers who are wearing the same type of lingerie, complete with bras, corsets, and garters, but without the pin-striped suit. This affront to human sexuality is promoting a life-style of homosexuality and bi-sexuality in a way that should make us shudder. (This attack on the created order has also been perpetrated by a group called "Poison," a group made up of four men dressed as women, and by "Queen," whose name is taken from the term used for the man who plays the female role in a male homosexual relationship. The group "AC/DC" takes its name from the slang term for a bisexual person.)

The *Hamilton Spectator* judges that "Madonna is not only in vogue — she is the top trend setter of pop ingenuity." This was born out when perusing the "Concert Calendar" in the *Toronto Sun*. In June there were two rock groups that came to Toronto: "The Church" and "The Jesus and Mary Chain." This trend of open exploitation of Christian themes is being combined with the standard fare of drugs, sex, and violence. In July 1989, the *Vancouver Province* reported a meeting of record producers. They were discussing the possibility of setting up a quasi-censorship committee which would police and classify the records they produced. When no agreement on criteria could be reached, someone suggested that they should agree to remove all reference to drugs, sex, and violence. One of the producers answered, "That would be like taking Jesus Christ out of Christianity."

Madonna is one of the most popular performers of the day but in her stage productions we see that her values are incompatible with those which God's people must live by. Her message is one with an anti-Christian bias that knows no bounds and so should find no place in the lives of God's people. **C**

By *W.W.J. VanOene*

The Report of Deputies

Before we continue with the documents the reader's sympathy has to be invoked for the translation of the relevant information. In the first place, the language is oftentimes very complicated, and in the second place the sentences sometimes do not run properly. Perhaps the brothers were pressed for time, perhaps there were other reasons for a less correct grammar and formation of sentences. Dr. Geelkerken more than once added a note pointing out grammatical errors. In case, therefore, strange constructions or obvious mistakes are found in our translation, do not blame the translator in each and every case. Every effort is made to render the original as faithfully as possible.

Now we shall listen to what the Deputies ad Art. 49 C.O. stated in their report to Classis Amsterdam. Here it follows.

Report

The Deputies of the Particular Synod of North Holland, considering that after they had given their advice at the meeting of the Classis Amsterdam held April 1st last, there was no more opportunity further to explain their advice, consider it their duty to offer in writing to the meeting of the Classis Amsterdam the following further reasons for their advice.

Since Dr. J.G. Geelkerken himself gave a written statement in which he informs you of what was said by him, it is up to Your assembly, completely apart from the protest submitted to Your assembly, to investigate whether the contents of this declaration itself gives just ground for suspicion.

According to the unanimous judgment of Deputies, there is indeed sufficient ground in the wording in which Dr. J.G. Geelkerken has expressed his sentiment to ask of him a further explanation of this sentiment.

They base their judgment on the following consideration:

Dr. J.G. Geelkerken says: "And as we of the state of glory hereafter, of heaven, so we can also visualize that state of rectitude only with the help of what we know in *this* dispensation. When, therefore, God gives us His Revelation about this, He speaks about it both about that state of heavenly glory and about that state of rectitude, in terms derived from our present, "earthly dispensation."

Dr. J.G. Geelkerken seems to say hereby that the form of the Revelation in which the Lord has told us the history of the state of rectitude is equal to the form of the Revelation concerning the state of glory.

If this is his sentiment indeed, this would lead to the concept that the Revelation recorded in Gen. 1, 2, and 3, was given in a symbolic form, just as the Revelation concerning the state of glory.

This would indeed be a most serious deviation from our confessional forms, especially of Art. 5 of the Belgic Confession.

Not only would by this presentation the profound difference be misjudged which exists between the Revelation which God has given us of what happened in time, and the Revelation which He gave us concerning the state of glory, which lies in eternity, but then also what Gen. 1, 2, and 3 tell us would cease being pure description of history.

In this connection it also makes us wonder that, after reminding us of the difficulty which the explanation of various particulars which Gen. 3 tells us, such as "the tree of knowledge of good and evil," "the serpent and its speaking," "the tree of life," and so on, Dr. J.G. Geelkerken after this does say that it is a fact that in Gen. 3 we have the divine revelation of an historical fact, the fact of our fall into sin, but does not say therewith that *everything* happened in the manner as we are told in this chapter, something which might have been expected after the reminder of those difficulties.

Without in the least accusing Dr. J.G. Geelkerken that he deviates from the confession of our Churches, or starting from the assumption that he is not orthodox, Deputies yet are of the opinion that the declaration given by him gives "just grounds for suspicion," which obligates the ecclesiastical assemblies to demand a further explanation of his sentiment in accordance with the subscription form for the Ministers of the Word.

Now, if Dr. J.G. Geelkerken had complied with the repeated serious request made to him and had made the declaration which was put before him by Classis, Dr. J.G. Geelkerken would thereby have given a statement which, in the opinion of Deputies, could be considered sufficient to take away the objections raised by the declaration of what he preached.

However, Dr. J.G. Geelkerken firmly refused this. In light of this refusal Deputies consider the more that there is sufficient reason in the declaration given by him now to ask a further explanation of his sentiment, in order that it may become evident whether this sentiment is in agreement with the Confession of our Churches.

For this reason, in the judgment of Deputies, the proposal which Dr. J.G. Geelkerken submitted at the meeting of April 1st, is totally insufficient to conclude the matter, since this proposal does not in any way give a further explanation of his sentiment.

In order to prevent any misunderstanding Deputies now wish to formulate their advice as follows.

The Deputies advise the Classical meeting to decide:

"The meeting of the Reformed Churches of the Classis Amsterdam,

"deploring the fact that Dr. J.G. Geelkerken has refused to comply with the repeated serious request which was directed to him to give the declaration which Classis put before him;

"of the opinion that the declaration about what he preached given by Dr. J.G. Geelkerken gives 'just cause for suspicion,' because the wording of this declaration gives rise to the thought that Dr. J.G. Geelkerken is of the opinion that the revelation written down in Gen. 1, 2, and 3, has been given by God in a symbolic form, just as the Revelation concerning the state of glory, what would lead to the idea that Gen. 1, 2, and 3 are not supposed to be pure description of history, what, in turn, would be in conflict with our Confessional forms;

"considering that, when this declaration is seen in light of the above-mentioned refusal, there is the more reason at present to hear Dr. J.G. Geelkerken with respect to his sentiment;

“decides:

“1. In connection with the declaration about what he preached given by him, to ask of Dr.J.G.Geelkerken a further explanation of his sentiment concerning what is told us in Gen.1, 2, and 3, in order that it may become clear whether his sentiment is in agreement with the Confessional Forms of our Churches;

“2. To appoint a Committee to formulate the questions which will be put to Dr. J.G. Geelkerken after Classis has adopted them;

“3. To suspend the discussion of brother H.Marinus’ protest until Classis will have dealt with Dr.J.G.Geelkerken, and to inform this brother of this;

“4. To inform Dr.J.G.Geelkerken and the Consistory of the Reformed Church of Amsterdam South of this decision.”

The Questions

On April 22, 1925, Classis Amsterdam decided to put the following questions before Dr.Geelkerken.

Question 1. Do you fully agree with what our Churches confess in Art.4 and 5 of our Belgic Confession concerning the Holy Scripture so that, notwithstanding the “particular difficulties” before which, according to the judgment given by you in your “**Declaration**” the third chapter of Genesis places us, you believe that all events of which we are told in this chapter did indeed take place in that manner?

Question 2. You say in your “**Declaration**”: “And as it is with the state of glory hereafter, of heaven, so we can also visualize that state of rectitude only with the help of what we know in *this* dispensation. When, therefore, God gives us His Revelation about this, He speaks about it, both about that state of heavenly glory and about that state of rectitude, in terms derived from our present, earthly dispensation.” Do you mean to say thereby that the form of the revelation in which the Lord has told us about the state of rectitude is equal to the form of the revelation concerning the state of glory?

Question 3. Do you believe that the revelation of God concerning the state of rectitude, as it has been recorded in Gen. 1, 2, and 3, according to its form and contents in everything is the historically faithful narration of what actually happened in that manner?

Question 4. When you state in your “**Declaration**”: “So it speaks of the state of rectitude, and therefore of an era in the history of the human race which preceded its history as we know it only, namely, in sin,” do you then mean thereby that what God revealed concerning the state of rectitude is not to be understood as history in the common sense of the word, and that, when it comes to the point, the history of the state of rectitude is unknown to us?

Question 5. Do you reject any version in which what is told us in Gen.3 regarding the fall into sin is considered to be some sort of “wording,” be it one with a kernel of history?

Question 6. You say in your “**Declaration**”: “It is also oftentimes difficult to determine how all sorts of particulars of which Gen.3 tells us are to be explained ... Think of the ‘tree of knowledge of good and evil,’ ‘the serpent and its speaking,’ ‘the tree of life,’ etc.... This much is certain that in Gen.3 we have the divine proclamation of an historical fact, the fact of the fall into sin.”

Do you mean thereby that only the fact of our fall into sin is certain, or is it also certain for you

1. That God gave the command to Adam to test him, as Gen. 2: 16, 17 tells us?

2. That the tree of knowledge of good and evil was a real tree, pointed out by God Himself?

3. That the serpent of which Gen.3 speaks was a real serpent, that it really spoke to the woman, and that first the woman and then Adam really did eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil?

4. That likewise the tree of life was a real tree, pointed out by God Himself?

The Reply

On June 16, 1925, Dr.Geelkerken sent the following reply to the above questions.

To the Classis Amsterdam of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, assembled at Amsterdam on Wednesday, June 17, 1925.

Reverend and Esteemed Gentlemen and Brothers.

Your letter of June 10 last with the enclosed copy of the “Report of the Deputies of the Particular Synod of North Holland ad Art.49 C.O.” has been received by me.

I emphatically protest before your assembly the manner in which, as appears from the contents of the above-mentioned documents, you assumed that you were entitled to use the Subscription Form for the Ministers of the Word to which at one time I subscribed in good faith; and I therefore inform Your assembly that with respect to the decision made concerning me, d.d. April 23, “5-22-25” (?) and May 27th last, I shall appeal to the forthcoming Particular Synod of North Holland.

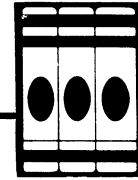
Irrespective of this appeal, I am going to answer, insofar as I am obligated to do so according to the above-mentioned Subscription Form, the questions put to me in connection with what Your assembly calls my “**Declaration**,” but what in reality is a part of my sermon on Lord’s Day 3 Heidelberg Catechism, delivered on March 23, 1924. I do this both from regard for the ecclesiastical character of Your assembly, and because I want to avoid even the semblance that I would seek even to the least extent to get away from the fulfilment of my promise given by my subscription, and also because I value it most highly not for one moment to give the impression that I was having even the slightest objection to making known as such my sentiment about any whichever of “all the parts of the doctrine, contained in the Confession and the Catechism of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, as well as the declaration concerning some Points of the aforesaid Doctrine adopted in the National Synod Anno 1619 in Dordrecht.”

My answer, therefore, reads as follows: I fully agree with what our Churches confess in Art.4 and 5 of our Belgic Confession concerning the Holy Scripture, consequently also count Gen.1, 2, and 3, according to *form* and *contents* to belong *in everything* to “all the Scripture....inspired by God (2 Tim.3:16).”

With brotherly greetings and Godspeed
Yours truly

Amsterdam, June 16, 1925 w.s. J.G.Geelkerken

— *To be continued*



THE CHRISTIAN LIFE, A DOCTRINAL INTRODUCTION

Reviewed by J. De Jong

Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Christian Life, A Doctrinal Introduction*, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989, 218 pp. US \$7.95.

The author of this book, professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster Seminary, represents the Scottish Calvinist tradition, which he also couples with a good knowledge of such Puritans as Thomas Watson and John Owen. This book offers a doctrinal summary of the gospel in simple terms, and so forms a good handbook for the average reader.

The author's basic aim is to be practical. All theology must be practical, said Luther, and he was only too correct. The result is that although the treatment is thoroughly doctrinal, the whole is set in a devotional setting with many applications concerning the practical value of each doctrine for the believer. This comes in a characteristically Scottish way, for example in the paraphrase of Paul in 2 Timothy 3, 17: we must be "kitted out" for every good work.

Certain features of the book highlight its background: an accent on the individual, a section on the "conviction of sin" which is placed between calling and regeneration, and a good deal of quotes from the hymns of Watts, Toplady and others. Apparently Ferguson sees the "conviction of sin" as part of the "preliminary features" of the Christian life, and as distinct from "dying to sin" which he deals with in a later section. He also calls the doctrine of regeneration "perhaps the most crucial doctrine of all," p. 47. I could not find any other reason for this beyond the specific background and special interests of the author.

In dealing with the conflicts in the Christian's life, Ferguson uses a common analogy: just as D-Day preceded V-Day, so Christ's victory over sin precedes the final defeat of sin. Yet the essential battle has been won, and we are faced with only "minor skirmishes and mop-up operations," p. 144. But Paul had a somewhat less optimistic view of the Christian struggle when he said, "O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?"

Paul admits that he is carnal, sold under sin, and that according to the flesh he serves the law of sin. Hardly a skirmish!

It is not my intention to provide an in-depth criticism of the book. My sole purpose is to give a flavour of its contents. If the reader keeps its background in mind, he can benefit from reading this book. It can help preachers in Catechism preaching and also those who are studying the confessions. The book can be an aid to preparing an introduction on such topics as: justification, election, rebirth and so on.

One thing this book shows is how hard it is to be truly practical without two essential doctrines so characteristic of our background: the *covenant*, and the *church*. These are mentioned, but only sparsely. The result is a book which aims to be practical but could be more practical if these doctrines had been more fully treated.

Used with due care and critique, however, this can be a helpful book. It also has many good illustrations and examples. And one can only praise the people of The Banner of Truth Trust for the excellent appearance of the book.

THE PURITANS

Reviewed by J. Van Dam

D.M. Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors*. Addresses Delivered at the Puritan and Westminster Conferences 1959-1978. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust 1987 (hardcover, 421 pages; price \$25.95 US)

The name of D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (minister of Westminster Chapel in London, England from 1938 until 1968) is undoubtedly familiar to many as the author of published expository sermons on Romans and Ephesians. *The Puritans* is a collection of addresses (some of which have been published separately in the past) given at the Puritan and Westminster Conferences from 1959 to 1978. These Conferences were the result of a renewed interest in the writings of the English Puritans during the late 1940s. From 1959 it became customary for Dr. Lloyd-Jones to give the final address. The subject matter of these speeches is the Puritans taken in the broadest sense

of the term. Dr. Lloyd-Jones did not limit himself to the seventeenth century and a number of his addresses are on themes outside the Puritan era.

Dr. Lloyd-Jones gives us an insight into a tremendous variety of church history. Not only do we become more familiar with the work and thought of John Owen, George Whitefield, John Knox, Jonathan Edwards and John Bunyan but also lesser known figures such as William Williams and Howell Harris. There has always been a great deal of confusion about the exact meaning of the term Puritan. Throughout his addresses, but especially in his 1971 speech on "Puritanism and its Origins" Dr. Lloyd-Jones tries to clear up this confusion. Dr. Lloyd-Jones' knowledge of church history was not limited to the English-speaking world as we see in his essay "The Christian and the State in Revolutionary Times: The French Revolution and After" where he mentions the contribution of Groen van Prinsterer and Abraham Kuyper. Often in his address he deals with an important anniversary of an event or a person, because he considers it very important to remember the past.

Dr. Lloyd-Jones considered it important to know what happened in the past not just for its own sake, but also to draw lessons from church history. As he put it in his address on John Bunyan in 1978, "one of the chief reasons for our interest in these 17th-century men . . . [is that] we may learn from them, and watch them, as they battled with the same problems and difficulties which confront us" (p. 391). Throughout his lectures Dr. Lloyd-Jones stresses the need to let the Holy Spirit work in our lives individually and collectively as church. He really warns against a dead orthodoxy, a mechanical type of Christianity. To quote Dr. Lloyd-Jones, "Our danger, is, perhaps, to be so concerned about correctness of doctrine as not to be sufficiently concerned about correctness of life" (p. 325). Dr. Lloyd-Jones often warns against Arminianism and shows the richness of Calvinism, especially in his address on "William Williams and Welsh Calvinistic Methodism." For example, on p. 211 we read, "The more powerful Calvinism is the more likely you are to have a spiritual revival and reawakening.

It follows of necessity from the doctrine." Dr. Lloyd-Jones constantly emphasizes the importance of the preaching of the Word of God; it is unfortunate that he did not practise redemptive-historical preaching.

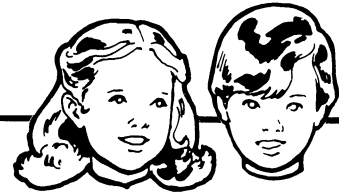
It is inspiring to read in these address-

es the enthusiasm and zeal Dr. Lloyd-Jones had for the gospel. He clearly shows how God is in control of the history of His church. This book enlightens us as to the work of the Lord in the English-speaking world and helps us to understand the churches in this tradition. Al-

though these addresses do not offer a scholarly systematic treatment of the subject and although one sometimes wishes that his sources had been noted, the reader will benefit from the wealth of information and insight which is presented.



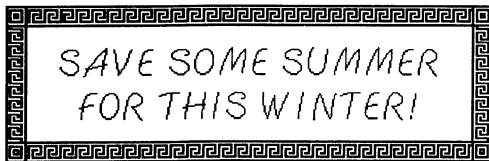
OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE



By Aunt Betty

Dear Busy Beavers,

What do you think of this idea?



"FALL" THINGS TO DO

MAKE A LEAF COLLECTION

Take a walk around your yard or on your street. Collect leaves of different shapes and colours — as many as you can find.

Carefully spread your leaves between paper towels.

Put them in a big book, or put a heavy book on top of them.

Look at them 2 or 3 weeks later — summer leaves for all winter!

Do you know the names of the trees or plants your leaves come from?

Look it up!

MAKE A SEED PICTURE

Collect different seeds that will spread nicely on paper. Let them dry a few days if they need it.

On heavy paper draw a simple picture or design.

Put glue on a small part.

Sprinkle one kind of seed on the wet glue.

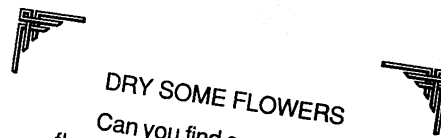
Now spread glue on a different part of the picture.

This time use another kind of seed to spread on the glue.

Repeat till your design is covered with seeds.

The different shapes and colours of the seeds will make it a very interesting picture.

What a way to save summer for all winter!



DRY SOME FLOWERS

Can you find some small, flat flowers to dry between paper towels?

Look for different shapes and colours.

This winter they'll be great for making special cards AND pictures!

Maybe you can use them with your dried leaves to make your very own writing paper.



MAKE A PICTURE

All you Busy Beaver artists, look carefully at those gorgeous fall colours and skies.

Then make your pictures of all kinds! What a way to save the sights!

Quiz Time!

Number Puzzle

by Busy Beaver Margaret Nijenhuis

How many numbers can you find in this picture?
What are they?



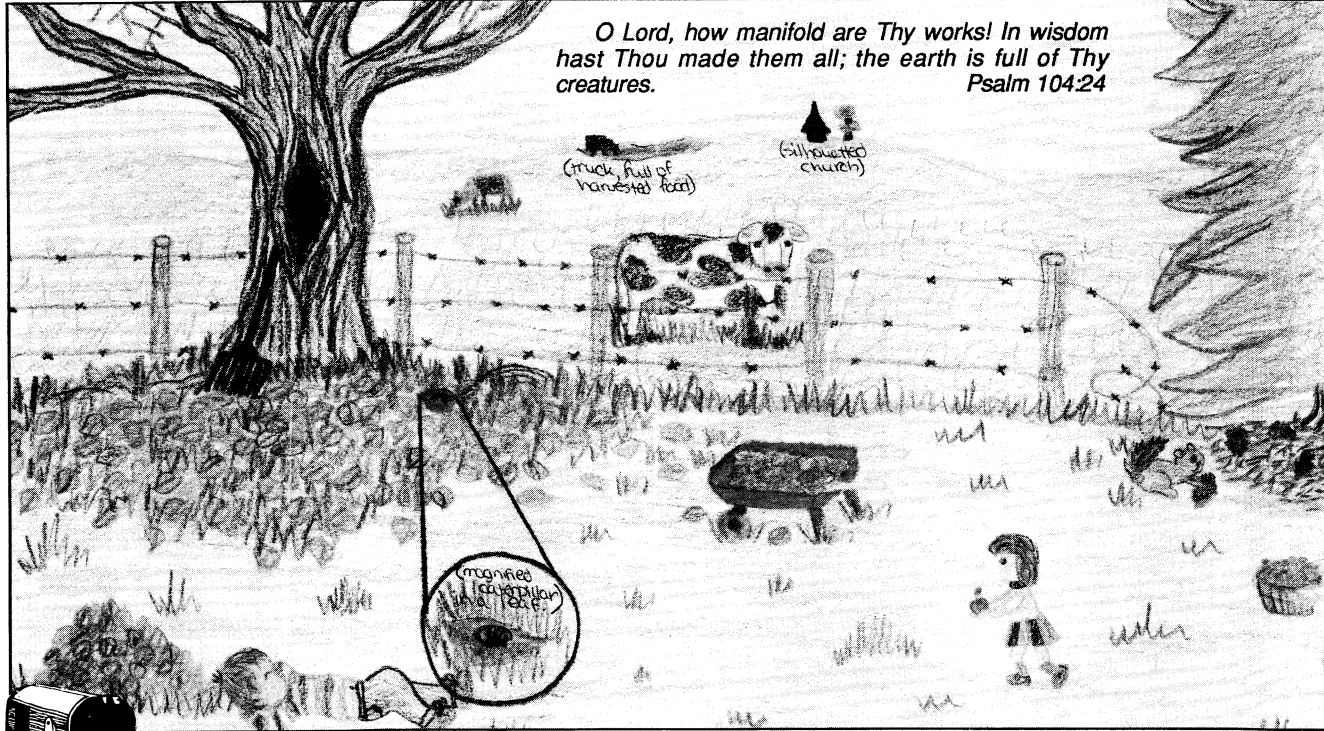
Looking for Work!

What was the trade, occupation or position of each of the following people from the Bible?

1. Abel _____
2. Paul _____
3. Simon Peter _____
4. Eli _____
5. Zaccheus _____
6. Nehemiah _____
7. Cornelius _____

8. Demetrius _____
9. Ezra _____
10. Joseph of Nazareth _____
11. Boaz _____
12. Luke _____
13. Alexander _____
14. Jairus _____
15. Hosea _____

(Answers below)



From the Mailbox

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club *Ann-Marie VandenOever*. We are happy to have you join us. How did your swimming lessons go? Look back at some of the earlier Clarions, Ann-Marie, and you will find a penpal to write to, and maybe you will still want to send in the answers to the Summer Quiz Contest!

Welcome to the Club, *Elissa Faber*. How did you enjoy your plane trip, Elissa? Will you write and tell us about it? Thank you for the puzzle. I see you're a real Busy Beaver already!

And a big welcome to you, too, *Teri Oosterhof*. How was your first day of school with your new teacher? Bye for now. Write again soon!

How did you enjoy your graduation, *Bianca Van den Beuke*? And how did you and your cousin solve the language problem? I'm sure curious to hear!

I think your grandma must have enjoyed your company, *Esther Hordyk*. And did you get to go up north? Have you sent in the answers to the quizzes, Esther?

Thank you for a very neat letter, *Laura Bol*. And congratulations on reading so many books at the library club! Will you write and tell us about the very best book you read this summer? How did you enjoy your trip to B.C., Laura?

Congratulations on your baby sister, *Sarah VanderZwaag*. You sure were lucky to get to hold her for baptism! Did you win

a prize at the fair, Sarah? Be sure to write and tell us.

Hello, *Margaret Nijenhuis*. I see you've been very busy. How did you enjoy going to the beach? Which was the very best one, Margaret? Thank you for the puzzles and I'm looking forward to getting your answers for the Quiz Contest!

I like your picture, *May Hofsink*. And the story, too. Thank you for writing. How did you enjoy the summer, May and are you happy to be back in school?

Thank you for the puzzle, *Netty Sikkema*. I think the Busy Beavers will enjoy it. You were lucky to get to go to Ottawa, Netty. What part did you enjoy most? Will you write and tell us? Busy Beavers, we need a pen-pal for

Ann-Marie VandenOever (almost 10 years of age)
RR 2, Beamsville, Ontario L0R 1B2

Answers

Looking for Work!

1. keeper of sheep 2. tent-maker 3. fisherman 4. priest 5. tax collector 6. king's cup-bearer 7. centurion in charge of a hundred soldiers 8. silversmith 9. a scribe, writer of the law 10. carpenter 11. farmer 12. a doctor, 'the beloved physician' 13. copper-smith 14. ruler of the synagogue 15. herdsman

Bye for now, Busy Beavers.
Keep busy!

Love to you all,
Aunt Betty