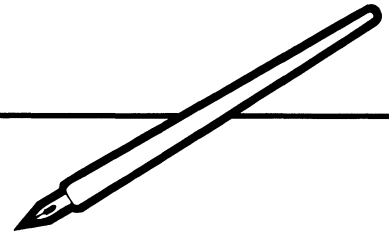




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On Small and New Churches

A new yearbook

Recently a new yearbook was published for the churches, and once again we receive all the statistics with respect to the various local churches. A heart-warming fact is that the churches continue to grow. Last year saw an over-all increase of nearly 400 members, a good number for a federation of our size. Yet we have a number of small churches, and it is also important to consider this situation. Particularly those churches which have a total membership of less than fifty members ought to be considered. This is a relatively new phenomenon in the Canadian Reformed Churches, and one which shows a measure of adaptation to the world we are living in today. However, we ought to give this situation some review, before it becomes a trend that is taken for granted.

The Church Order

While there is no specific provision in the Church Order concerning the minimum number of members required to form a church, there are some general guidelines. The tenor of the Church Order is that the undertaking must appear viable before a new church is instituted. Article 40 states: "In places where a consistory is to be constituted for the first time or anew, this shall be done only with the advice of classis." Article 41 states: "Places where as yet no consistory can be constituted shall be assigned by classis to the care of a neighbouring church." Clearly, the Church Order envisions situations where people may have the desire to institute a church, but where the necessary prerequisites for doing so are not yet present.

The prerequisites

What is required for the institution of a church? The guidelines here are found in Art. 39 of the Church Order. The minimum number of officebearers in any church is three. Two form a pair, and three form a college for decision-making. The Reformed Church Order thus accents the importance of the *offices*. The existence of the *offices* is an absolute requirement for the institution of the church.

How does one ensure the continuation of the *offices*? Here there is no absolute rule. Yet considering that the churches maintain the rule of periodic retirement, the normal figure required for the proper continuation of the *offices* is a minimum of eight to ten brothers who are suitable for office. And, under normal circumstances, a congregation possessing this number of suitable candidates will have a size of sixty to eighty members. These are simply rough figures pointing to the minimum required to start a new church within the confines of a Reformed Church Order.

The present situation

We presently have a number of churches that are well below the figure suggested above. Some have recently joined our federation. These churches have been accepted as full churches, perhaps in certain measure because of the difficult circumstances surrounding their requests to join the federation. It seems to me to be difficult and inappropriate to turn away a group of people from the federation if they desire to live according to the Reformed creeds and also wish to adopt the Church Order of Dort under which we live. One can perhaps point such a group to a faithful church that has the Presbyterian system of church government. But if the group strongly desires the Reformed order above the Presbyterian one, what grounds would there be for denying this request?

However, matters can become problematic when we as Reformed churches are too quick to make concessions with respect to certain provisions of the Church Order. The Reformed Church Order does not envision a situation in which some churches maintain the rule that officers serve for life. It also does not appear to be in the tenor of the Church Order to accept smaller groups with ministers as legitimate churches, and then give them the status of "needy churches" if they are unable to carry their own burdens. Neither does it appear to accord with the tenor of the Church Order to subsidize the ministry of the word in these churches by the classis churches.

The tenor of the Church Order is that if the group requesting recognition as a church has little provision for the proper continuation of the offices, it be given the status of a *house congregation*, Art. 41. If such a small congregation comes into the federation with a minister, it is in line with our Church Order to give the incoming church the status of a house congregation, and have the minister announced as eligible for call in the midst of the churches. The young house congregation is then obliged to sacrifice its present minister, fall under the care of the neighbouring church, and wait until there is sufficient growth before calling a new minister.¹ If there is no sufficient growth, but a decline in membership, members should eventually be encouraged to live where there is a larger church. This, too, is part and parcel of the consequences of joining the federation of Reformed churches.

Representation

The importance of this matter reaches far beyond simple finances – although that too is a realistic issue which should not be depreciated. It concerns the principle of representation on which our while Church Order is built. A classis is a meeting of churches, in which the churches are

duly represented. However, if one of the churches barely has sufficient members to sustain the office, is it realistic to give this group a full voice at the major assemblies? A major assembly is a gathering of *churches*. And while it is important that smaller churches not be unfairly penalized with respect to their representation at major assemblies, it is also important that the principle of representation is permitted to function in a reasonable way. In other words, delegates representing a church at a major assembly ought to be seen as figures that have a *congregation* behind them, and not a small group of only a few families.

A realistic approach

Essentially what I am pleading for is a realistic approach to small congregations and requests coming from smaller and distant groups seeking affiliation with our federation. We ought to be hesitant to make concessions compromising the Reformed Church Order just to accommodate another group in the federation. For concessions represent precedents: what is permissible for one can soon become normative for all. And while we are called to bear one another's burdens in the church of Christ, we should be striving to avoid imposing all unnecessary burdens on the churches.

In his recent book *With Common Consent*, the Rev. VanOene also defends what I see as a realistic approach regarding house congregations when he says:

"In case it becomes obvious that there is practically no growth but rather a decline in membership, the brothers and sisters should be advised and urged to move to a place where they can participate in a regular church life. A situation when (sic) there is no proclamation of the Gospel, only mutual edification, no administration of the sacraments except on the occasional Sunday when they have a minister and elder in their midst, should not be continued indefinitely," p. 196.

To be sure, one ought not to discourage new endeavours, and the desire to establish the church in new locations. But we should discourage situations in which long term burdens are placed on other churches without this being strictly necessary. We should foster a realistic approach in promoting church growth and establishing new congregations, or supporting (and receiving) smaller congregations. On the same matter Rev. VanOene says:

"But when years go by without any significant increase in the number of the believers and when it becomes evident that, humanly speaking, there will never be the possibility of instituting a church, it is not only prudent but mandatory to move away and seek for a place closer to the church," p. 196.

In my view, these words apply not only to what we have always considered to be the "house congregation," but also to those more recent situations where the means to maintain the offices is inadequate, and the size of the church does not at all appear viable. All this may be difficult in terms of major relocations that are required. But such difficulties strike me as part and parcel of what the gospel requires – and that, too, is what the Reformed Church Order is all about.

¹The minister could conceivably be charged with a home mission project in the area of the small congregation. But if the continuity of the offices is not ensured, such a project would properly fall under the authority of a neighbouring church. The minister would then function as a member of the consistory of the sending church, just as the members of the small "house congregation" would be made members of the same neighbouring church.



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Thanksgiving 1992

By J. Geertsema

Canada still officially maintains "Thanksgiving Day" as a special day, a holiday, a day of rest from work on which God can be thanked for the harvest. This does not mean that Thanksgiving Day is used by all Canadians in order to give thanks to the only true God for His maintained goodness over us as a nation and as individuals. This goodness of God is also found outside of our borders. He gave to our world rain and sunshine, growth and maturity to plants, to grain and fruits, to grass and herbs. Even though in many places the crops were not good, in other areas they were. There is again food for man and animal.

The Creator and Upholder of the universe did once more provide for His creatures. Thus, He gives us reason to thank Him also in this respect. We have to maintain this in spite of the rain, even the snow and freezing temperatures in the middle of the summer, in Alberta; also in spite of the poor quality harvest in Manitoba, where "a large percentage of [the wheat] is going to fall into feed-grade quality." These are two examples of a lack of harvest or a very poor one. We also know about areas in the world where drought or civil war, or a combination of them result in a famine situation.

Nevertheless, in general, the LORD has kept His promise of after the flood also in 1992. "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease" (Gen. 8:22). We thank the LORD for this faithfulness, so that there is still work and food on the table as well as in the stable.

This faithfulness is totally undeserved. It is the pure, forbearing and enduring goodness of God by which He, indiscriminately, "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). We realize this endur-

ing undeserved goodness so much more when we consider what God sees when, from His holy heaven, He looks at us, modern men and women, on earth. I mention a few things.

Time and again we hear and read about a wasting of the products of the earth, granted to us by the Creator. Vegetables and fruits, for instance, are put to waste when "there is no money in it." Large amounts of food go to waste in the many restaurants. Much good food ends up in the garbage bin in our homes, since we do not want to eat what is a day or two old. When Christ Jesus had fed more than five thousand people, He commanded the disciples to gather what was left over, in order that nothing would be lost and go to waste (John 6:12).

Looking down, God sees also another form of a terrible wasting of what He created. It is the pollution of land, air, and water. Man, in his greed for fast monetary gain, and for his own pride, is busy destroying the environment in which he lives, not only for himself but also for other creatures, plants and animals. In a special way the debacle of one of our human systems is evident in the desolate environment of large areas of (formerly) communist countries. This is a strong warning for our western world which still allows much pollution to go on. Man is destroying what God created. And he is accountable to God for it.

Man not only makes his environment desolate and puts good food to waste. He is even directly destroying his own flesh, human life, in frightening proportions. Although man was created in the image of the living God, he allows and performs the slaughter of millions of babies in what should be the safest places for life on earth, the womb and the hospital.

Besides all this, modern civilized (wo)man who claims to be greatly ad-

vanced in knowledge and insight, not only consciously rejects the only true God and His revelation, but also literally turns back to the old (gods and) goddesses of the past, the personified powers of "nature." I shall again illustrate this with an example. In ancient Greece there was the myth of Demeter, the mother-goddess. She was connected with the fertility of the soil and was, therefore, the grain goddess. She had a daughter, Persephone, who was captured by Hades, the god of the underworld. From then on this daughter, went to the underworld each year for four months, after which she came back to live upon the earth. Thus she pictured and caused the "dying" of many trees and plants and the lack of growth "in nature" in fall and winter, and the return to "life" and growth in spring and summer, thus producing a good harvest. I found poem which refers to this myth. Above it was written: "honor to the goddess..., to Demeter, the immeasurable one, & to the maiden." From this much longer poem I take only the following lines:

Goddess of the Harvest,
the fruit of Whose joy in the return
of Your Daughter,
sustains us even as You make bleak
the earth
at Her leaving¹

It is clear. The harvest comes from Demeter, the mother-goddess, mother-earth. The harvest is also the result of the return to life of her daughter-goddess in the spring. We, on earth, are sustained by the fruits of the harvest which comes as her gift to us, in the bleak fall, when there is the "dying" in "nature."

This is the world, we Christians could say. But also among those who call themselves by the name of Christ there is found this wasting of food, and often a carelessly adding to the pollution. There are also among those who confess to believe in God and His

Christ who do not oppose abortion, and even mix the new mystic "spirituality" with what they still retain of the Christian faith.

The book of Revelation tells us about God's wrath and the judgments of His Christ against an unrepentant world. Revelation tells us that these judgments will be seen, among others, in "nature." Do we look at the things that are happening in and with God's creation, with "nature," with eyes that are enlightened by the Scriptures? Do we see the hand of God in the cold and wet summer in some areas and in the very dry summer in other regions of the world? Also among us it was dis-

cussed whether the unusually low summer temperatures were the consequence of the volcano eruption in the Philippines about a year ago. Was it also brought forward in the discussions that, in these strange phenomena in nature with their harsh effect on many, we have to do with warnings of God which call back to faith in Him as the only true God and to repentance from unbelief and sin? Do we see the present economic recession in the same light? Or is this recession also for us just a matter of world economy in combination with actions of our federal and provincial governments? Or do we talk about it that in all these things God

shows that life depends on Him, and on Him alone?

Thanksgiving 1992 was here. Do we give thanks to God for His remaining still patient and enduring goodness in the midst of the warning signs of His coming judgment? Do we show our gratitude by repenting from what is sinful in our lives, remembering that God does not have pleasure in the death of the sinner but in his conversion unto life?



¹Skarhawk, *The Spiral Dance A rebirth of the ancient religion of the great goddess* (San Francisco: Harper, 1989), p. 101. I cannot recommend this pagan, clearly anti-christian book.

Galatians 3:28 and women in office

By N.H. Gootjes

What has Gal. 3:28 to do with the issue of women in office? Our first reaction would probably be: nothing. The text itself reads: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." The text contains no indication that Paul is discussing the offices here.

Actually, the text is nonsense, if taken by itself. Paul says: "There is neither Jew nor Greek." But that is not true: there are many Jews and even more Greeks and gentiles. Paul would not want to deny their existence. The meaning of this brief expression can only be understood if the text is read within the context.

Is then Paul in the preceding verses dealing with the issue of what women may do in the church? The verses that lead up to verse 28 give a different impression. This verse is part of a debate about the question whether the New Testament congregation is still under the ceremonial law, the custodian, as it is called here. During the period God's people was under the custodian there was a great difference between the Jew and the Greek. But now, in Christ, this distinction has disappeared.

And not only this distinction, but any distinction you can think of. Paul mentions two other very important distinctions: the social distinction between slaves and free men, and the gender distinction of male and female.¹ They are all irrelevant with respect to receiving the promise of Abraham. Neither the text itself nor the context gives the impression that Paul discusses the women in office issue.

The decision of Synod 1992

Nevertheless, Gal. 3:28 is mentioned in the decision taken by Synod 1992 of the Christian Reformed Church concerning women in office.² This decision has two main parts:

a. Synod did not ratify a change in the Church Order which would make it possible to ordain women.

b. Synod encouraged the churches to make use of the gifts of women, by allowing them to teach, expound the Word of God and provide pastoral care under the supervision of the elders.

There are no scriptural reasons given for the first decision. But the second is supported by a number of texts. And among these texts we find Gal. 3:28.³

The decision itself is a typical example of a compromise formula: women may do the work that go with the office but may not have the status of the office. One need not be a prophet to predict that this decision will break apart in a few years and that b. will remain and a. will have to go. But that is not our point. We are still faced with the fact that Gal. 3:28 is used in connection with the work of women in the church, while at first glance the text has nothing to do with this issue.

Commentaries

We need a look in commentaries to see whether our impression that the text does not address the issue, is correct. H. Ridderbos remarks about this word of Paul: "This is not to maintain that the natural and social distinction is in no respect relevant any more." He then mentions a number of texts from which it follows that there are natural and social distinctions. Among these texts are also the texts that forbid the women to speak in the congregation: 1 Cor. 14:34ff. and 1 Tim. 2:11ff. Then Ridderbos explains the positive meaning of Paul's words: "From the point of view of redemption in Christ, however, and of

the gifts of the Spirit granted by Him, there is no preference of Jew to Greek, master to slave, man to woman."⁴ According to Ridderbos the text cannot be used to support the office for women.

H. Schlier is even more emphatic than Ridderbos. He emphasizes the fact that according to Paul those different people are one as people baptized in Christ Jesus (v. 27). We should, therefore, not draw conclusions from this text about the offices in the church, for the office does not depend on baptism.⁵

The quotations could be multiplied. And the question becomes even more urgent why Gal. 3:28 has been adduced. How can the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church think that Gal. 3:28 supports the view that women should be allowed "to teach, expound the Word of God and provide pastoral care."

Report for Synod 1990

The solution of this problem may well be found in the Report of the Committee to study headship, presented to Synod 1990. Here Gal. 3:28 has a crucial place.⁶

This Report has a very peculiar structure. It does not give a solution, but presents, first, the arguments that would support headship of the male, second, the arguments that would support full equality. It is in this second part of the report, as part of the arguments that support full equality, that we find Gal. 3:28. As a matter of fact, this text is the crown witness to prove that the thrust of the Bible is to place the woman alongside man, and not under him.

Let us follow the reasoning here.⁷ Paul understood, says the Report, the implication of the arrival of the new era. The effect is a levelling of the age-old barriers between people, as can be seen in Gal. 3:28. The Report, then, sees Gal. 3:28 as a general rule teaching equality between people. But this rule should be worked out in practical life. How did Paul do this?

According to the Report Paul saw the implication of this equality most clearly for the first barrier, that between Jews and Greeks. According to Acts and his epistles, he insisted on complete social integration of Jews and Gentiles in the church.

Paul was more cautious with drawing the conclusions for the second difference, that of slaves and free men. However, even though he did not draw the final conclusions, he did point out the direction in which to go. For example, what he wrote to Philemon

about his runaway slave Onesimus shows that he was in favour of freeing him. "Paul did not, however, openly oppose the institution of slavery. All he did was set a direction which, eighteen centuries later, and in spite of much opposition by Christian slave owners, was to lead to the abolition of slavery in the United States."

This is a quotation that requires a lot of attention. We cannot here go into the matter of slavery itself.⁸ We should also consider, what this statement means for revelation? It means this. Paul gave a general statement: "There is neither slave nor free man." He himself did not develop the meaning of it, only gave a hint. But the development of history has shown the full implication of Paul's word in Gal. 3:28. We know better what Paul's rule implies than even Paul did. We now have to go beyond Paul's understanding (or application) of his own rules.

Then the Report discusses Paul's third category, that of male and female. It asks the question how Paul implements this unity. The answer is that Paul was here even more cautious than in the matter of slavery. He took only a few initial steps. Those steps were: Paul mentioned women by name and on a par with men, and he worked side by side with women, whom he did not see as subordinates but as partners. These examples, obviously, do not prove the point the committee wants to make: that there exists an across the board equality between men and women. This full equality is connected with Gal. 3:28 in the following way: "Paul took only a few initial steps in implementing the unity of men and women in Christ, but in so doing he pointed the church in the direction of the coming age. It was up to the church in later centuries to take bigger and bolder steps."

This means nothing less than that we have to go beyond Paul. Paul pointed out the direction in which to go, but he himself did not go as far as we today go. We have to extend the meaning of Gal. 3:28 beyond what Paul himself realized as its meaning. We do not have to stay close to Scripture, we have to develop in the direction Scripture points us. Then the church will recognize that women have the same rights to teach and preach as the men.⁹

Evaluation

This reasoning for admitting women to the offices is, on the one hand, a strong support for those churches that

have resisted opening the offices for women. For the Report clearly admits that Scripture itself does not open the offices for women. The Bible does not admit women to the teaching office. Women in office is, even according to the Report, a development beyond Scripture.

On the other hand, this is a very disturbing reasoning. It means that the differences are not limited to the issue of the offices in the church. We are faced with a different view concerning God's revelation. God's revelation is no longer seen as complete. In order to make women pastors etc., one has to deny what the Belgic Confession says: "We believe that this Holy Scripture *fully* contains the will of God." The development of society, too, can reveal the will of God. Women could not teach and preach in Paul's day, that was socially not acceptable. But in our different society today they should be allowed on the basis of progressive revelation.

We have to reject this exegesis. Gal. 3:28 simply does not speak of the office at all. Reading the text in its context we see how Paul applies the text. Verse 29: "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise." The starting point is the promises to Abraham and his offspring (v. 16). These promises are for all who are in Christ. Then it does not matter whether you are a Jew or a Greek, a slave or a free man, a man or a woman. Whoever is in Christ, will receive the things which God has promised to Abraham.

But it is not enough to reject the exegesis behind the decision of Synod 1992, we also have to reject the dogmatics behind the decision. It is the dogma of continuous revelation. As a result not Scripture but the feeling of our day will decide the matter. For that is what happened in the decision of the CRC Synod. The decision follows the development of society, the upsurge of feminism in our day. In fact, the message of the Bible is modelled after the insights of today.

None of us is so strong and independent that he will not be influenced by his time. We need Scripture as our anchor, otherwise we will be swept away on the tide of our time.¹⁰ Then we realize that the burning issue of our times is not egalitarianism, but salvation. About salvation Gal. 3:28 says a decisive word: There is salvation for all who are in Christ, for men as well as women.

¹The reason why Paul mentions these three may be that a pious male Jew daily thanked God that he was not made a gentile, a slave or a woman, see R.Y.K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (NICNT: Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) p. 175.

²The recommendations of the majority committee on women in office, as adopted by Synod, can be found in *Christian Renewal*, July 20, 1992, p. 2.

³The first ground for this decision is: "Scripture teaches and our confessions affirm that men and women alike have been gifted by the Holy Spirit for the edification of the church." The references are to Acts 2:17-28; Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 11:5; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 4:1-13; Heid. Cat. Lord's Day 21, Q/A. 55.

⁴See H.N. Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans [1953] 5th. pr. 1968) p. 149. S. Greijdanus had already said the same thing, but clearer: "Met dit vers wordt verscheidenheid van dienst in 's Heeren gemeente niet uitgesloten, vgl. 1 Cor. 12:13vv., en evenmin gezegd, dat voor het gemeentelijke leven en optreden en werken, en ten aanzien der ambten, geslachtelijke verschillen voorbijgezien moeten worden, en van geene beteekenis meer zijn, vgl. 1 Cor. 14:34-35; 1 Tim.

2:11vv.," *De brief van den apostel Paulus aan de gemeenten in Galatië* (Amsterdam: Van Bottenburg, 1936) p. 252. See also R.F.K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, p. 176, esp. footnote 44. A quotation: "It seems precarious to appeal to this verse in support of any view of the role of women in the Church, for two reasons: (a) Paul's statement is not concerned with the role relationships of men and women within the Body of Christ but rather with their common initiation into it through (faith and) baptism; (b) the male/female distinction, unlike the other two, has its roots in creation, so that the parallelism between the male/female pair and the other pairs may not be unduly pressed."

⁵H. Schlier, *Der Brief and die Galater* (KEK; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht; 5. pr., 1971) p. 175 with footnote 4: "Erkennt man diese Einschränkung der Aussage in V.28, so hütet man sich, aus ihm direkte Folgerungen für die Ordnung des kirchlichen Amtes...zu ziehen. Das kirchliche Amt beruht ja nicht direkt auf der Taufe."


⁶The Report was called Report 26; it was published in: *Agenda for Synod 1990* (Grand Rapids, 1990) pp. 309ff. The Report itself did not come with a conclusion whether the previous decisions on headship were correct or not; it just presented

arguments in favour and against these decisions. The report was not adopted at Synod. Instead Synod permitted the churches "to use their discretion in utilizing the gifts of women members in all offices of the church," see *Acts of Synod 1990* (Grand Rapids, 1990) p. 654. This outcome was, to my opinion, in line with the general tendency of the Report.

⁷The following is taken from Report 26, pp. 328ff.

⁸See for a different evaluation of it. J. Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 8th pr. 1981) pp. 93ff.

⁹In another church, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), the same thing has been said, only clearer. Its Permanent Judicial Commission of the General Assembly stated concerning the women in office issue that "it is evident from our Church's confessional standards that the Church believes the Spirit of God has led us into new understandings of this equality before God," see J. Rogers, *Presbyterian Creeds* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press; 1985) p. 23.

¹⁰From this perspective we need to continually listen to the teaching of Scripture about the position of women. See on this three fine articles of J. van Bruggen, in *De Reformatie*, 67, nrs. 20-22. 

REMEMBER YOUR CREATOR

By G.Ph. van Popta

The Way

Since the very early days, Christians have been known by a variety of names. From the book of Acts we know that Christians were called: *Those who belong to the Way, Disciples, Brethren, Saints, Believers, Friends, Nazarenes, and Christians*. (There may be more. If I missed any, drop me a line.) I thought it would be instructive for us to reflect upon each of these names, one at a time, in a series of articles. The aim is to reach a better understanding of the rich significance of these names and to be led better to live up to the meaning of these beautiful titles.

The first name I want to think about with you is "One who belongs to the Way" (see Acts 9:2; 19:9,23; 22:4; 24:14,22).

The Christian faith was called "the Way." Christians belonged to the Way.

The name described the Christian community and the message it proclaimed. "The Way" was a name for the Christian church and its declaration that Jesus Christ died on the cross and rose again for the salvation of sinners. This proclamation included the call to repent, believe, and obey the commandments of God.

This special name for Christians and for the Christian faith and walk of life has a rich background, one aspect of which is the Old Testament.

The Old Testament often speaks about the way of the LORD. The word "way" simply means road. The way of the LORD is the road the LORD God takes. It is the way He takes as He approaches people. The author of Psalm 67 said that he wanted the people of the earth to get to know the way of the

LORD. What is this way? It is the saving power of God (Ps. 67:2). As God approaches people, He comes with and in His saving power.

Man sinned. Man disobeyed God. Man rebelled against God in the Garden of Eden. When man sinned, he put up a big road block between himself and God. Until then, man and God had interacted. They had had fellowship. That ended when man sinned. But God immediately opened the way again. He came to man with the promise of a Saviour. He approached man in His saving power. Psalm 67 calls that God's way.

So, the first thing we've got to understand is that in the Old Testament, the way of the LORD refers to the saving power of God. It refers to the road God

takes as He comes to sinful man with the promise of salvation.

But it means more as well. When God reopens the way towards us and comes to us with His salvation, then He demands that we embrace the free gift of salvation and turn away from sin. We must begin walking in the way of the LORD. We must begin travelling the road of salvation and of obedience. Psalm 1 speaks about that.

Psalm 1 teaches that there are only two ways to walk – the way of the wicked and the way of the righteous. The wicked, the unbeliever, rejects God’s salvation. He wants nothing to do with it. He continues walking away from God in the way of sin. The believer, however, embraces God’s salvation. He embraces God’s way out of the mess of sin and begins walking in a different way. The believer walks in the way of obedience to God’s commandments. He does that out of thankfulness for God coming to him all the way and powerfully saving him. The way God opened between man and Himself becomes a two-way street: God comes to man with His grace and love; man goes to God by walking in obedience to God’s commandments.

There you have a bit of a sketch of the Old Testament background to the expression “the Way” as you find it in the book of Acts. However, the background has several more dimensions. The New Testament, and then specifically the teaching of Jesus Christ, provides part of the background as well.

The Lord Jesus Christ, basing His teaching on the Old Testament, taught very emphatically that there are only two ways to travel: one way leads to life, the other to destruction. In the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 7:13,14, the Lord urged us to enter by the narrow gate. He warned that the wide and easy way leads to destruction. The narrow way which goes through the narrow gate, however, leads to life eternal.

This teaching of Christ is very similar to the Old Testament teaching of two ways; however, the Lord added a new and profound element. In John 14:6, He said: “I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me.”

Ultimately, Jesus Christ is the way. In Christ, God approached us once and for all time. God’s promise of salvation, as He spoke it repeatedly in the old Testament, finds its fulfilment in Christ. Jesus Christ is God’s powerful

way of salvation. Man sinned and blocked off the way to God. Jesus Christ paved the way back to God by His death on the cross.

Considering this background, it is no wonder that the early Christians called their faith “the Way.” They understood that Jesus Christ, the one who had died for their sins and arisen from the dead victorious over death, who had gone all the way for them, was the Way, the only Way to the Father. They understood that they had to go to Him – to the one who had come to them.

“...according to the Way...I worship the God of our Fathers, believing everything laid down by the law or written in the prophets, having a hope in God...that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.”

Acts 24:14,15

They understood that they had to believe in Him. They understood that they had to love Him, serve Him, and obey Him. There just was no other way.

In the beginning of the book of Acts we read that Paul (also known as Saul) persecuted those who belonged to the Way. He organized a Christian holocaust (Acts 9:2). He rounded up those who belonged to the Way and led them to their deaths. Later in Acts we see and hear a different Paul. The Lord Jesus Christ threw Paul to the ground as he was on his way to Damascus. Christ took Paul the persecutor and powerfully changed him into Paul the preacher of the Way. Throughout the rest of Acts we follow Paul on missionary journeys and we hear him proclaiming the Way as the only way of salvation. In Acts 24:14-16 Paul explains to the Roman governor Felix exactly what the Way is.


He said, first, that those who belong to the Way worship God. We adore God, we praise and glorify Him, because of His great love toward us. God came to us with salvation. Through Jesus Christ, God opened a way back to Himself. Therefore God is worthy of all service and love and praise.

Second, Paul said that those who belong to the Way believe everything laid down by the law or written in the prophets. In other words, they believe the Scriptures, the Bible, the Word of God. Those who are of the Way believe the gospel of Jesus Christ. They stake their lives on it. They trust the Word of God. They depend upon the God of the Word. They believe that everything in the Bible is true. They doubt nothing.

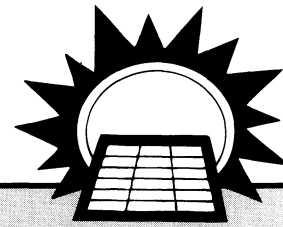
Next, those who belong to the Way have a great hope. Not only do they worship God and believe the Word. They also have a hope based on the Word of God, the hope of the resurrection. Paul said that we have a hope in God that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. The Lord Jesus Christ is coming again. He will come with great power. When he comes trumpets will sound. The dead will hear the noise and will rise from their graves. All people who ever lived since creation will appear before the judgment seat of Christ. He will judge them all. Those who hated Him, who rejected the gospel of salvation, who said No to God’s way of deliverance, Christ will send into everlasting perdition. But He will grant eternal life with Himself and His Father to all those who loved Him, who embraced Him as the only Way to the Father, and who believed the Word of God.

Then, fourth, the apostle told Felix that there was one other thing he did as one who belonged to the Way. He took pains to have a clear conscience toward God and toward men. The hope of the resurrection is a powerful incentive to keep one’s conscience clear. Who wants a conscience burdened by sin if he knows he’s going to appear before a mighty judge? The judge before whom we all will have to appear is none other than Jesus Christ, King of kings and Lord of lords.

There you have it. That’s what people of the Way are like. Does that sound familiar? Can you see yourself in this? Do you live as one who belongs to the Way? Do you follow Jesus Christ, the one who is *the Way*? Do you follow the only One who is the only Way to God the Father? Do you worship the only true God? Do you believe the Scriptures? Do you look forward to the resurrection? Do you always take pains to have a clear conscience toward God and men?

There just is no other way than *the Way*. 

RAY OF SUNSHINE



By Mrs. R. Ravensbergen

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It happens very often that some people get a baby. Maybe you can read it in the last pages of this *Clarion*. Then it says, "The Lord has richly blessed us with the birth of a child," or "Our gracious God has entrusted to our care one of His covenant children," or something in that line. Of course, that is, when the baby is born to people who believe in the Lord. People who believe in the Lord are children of God's covenant. When they receive a baby, they know that this baby is not just their child, it is God's child. The thing they want to do as soon as possible is, to have their baby baptized. They take it to church and there, in front of the whole congregation, the baby is baptized. The minister reads the form for the baptism of infants. Then he sprinkles some water on the baby's forehead and he says, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."

The little baby does not notice much of what is going on; only maybe the drops of water on his forehead. But the parents notice it, and they also know the meaning of these drops of water. As sure as they saw the water sprinkled on the baby's forehead, so sure they are that also this little baby is included in God's covenant.

God made His covenant many, many years ago with Abraham. That same covenant is still here today. Everyone who receives the sign and seal of God's covenant is adopted as God's child; God promises to give them everything they need, and to help them in difficult times. God the Son also promises to wash away all their sins, and God the Holy Spirit promises that He will live in their hearts, and make them living members of Christ. Those are beautiful promises. It makes a father and mother very happy to know that those promises are given to them and to their child. When the baby grows up they will tell their child about that, so that, when the baby has become a person who can understand the meaning of baptism, he or she will want to know more and more about the Lord and His covenant.

Not only the parents are happy when their child is baptized, the whole congregation is. When they see that a baby is baptized, they too are reminded of God's covenant with them. That makes them thankful. They know that older people pass away, young babies are taking their places, and that is how it is going on until the day of Christ's return.

When the children have grown older, and have studied the catechism, and the Holy Spirit has worked faith in their heart through the gospel, they will profess their faith. They will tell the Lord, in front of the congregation, that they want to serve Him all their life. Ev-

ery time when the Lord's Supper is celebrated they are allowed to confess their sins together with the other members of the congregation.

So every time a baby is baptized and every time the Lord's Supper is celebrated, the whole congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ is happy and thankful. When they see the water, or the bread and the wine, they are reminded of God's beautiful promises. That happiness and that thankfulness is there for everyone! Even when we are handicapped, unable to profess our faith, because we do not quite understand everything, we still may know that God has made His covenant also with us. He will help us to "fight against and overcome sin, the devil, and his whole dominion." And one day we will all be able to praise and magnify Him forever, without limitations, in perfect happiness.

*The words of promise which the LORD has spoken
Are purest silver seven times refined.*

*His covenant stands from age to age unbroken;
He is our God, in truth and faith enshrined.*

Psalm 12:4

Birthdays in November:

Wilma Van Drongelen

306-33375 Mayfair Avenue
Abbotsford, BC V2S 2M7

Wilma has her birthday on November 3rd, and she will be 35 this year.

Last year we sent some cards to Adrian DeJong, because he was ill, and receiving treatments in the hospital. Since it is Adrian's 8th birthday on November 27, I will again give you his address:

Adrian DeJong

RR 1, Site 6, Box 9
Barrhead, AB T0G 0E0

Another name that I should have mentioned last month is that of

Kevin Visscher

General Delivery
Graysville, MB R0G 0T0

His 15th birthday was on October 3rd. Please send him a belated birthday wish.

Happy Birthday to all of you,

Mrs. R. Ravensbergen
7462 Hwy. 20 RR 1
Smithville, ON L0R 2A0

Reaction and response regarding the American Reformed Church at Denver

Editor's Note:

When the reaction of Dr. L.J. Coppes was received, contact was made with Rev. M. Pollock, who had received a copy. It was agreed that a response would be given by the consistory and that the letter and the response would be published together. The response was sent in August but reached me in the beginning of October. I regret this delay and offer our excuses.

Out of concern for brotherly communion

I thank the editor of the *Clarion* for this opportunity to address some issues recently raised in this magazine by Rev. M. Pollock entitled, "History of the American Reformed Church, Denver." In behalf of the elders of the Presbytery of the Dakotas (POD), Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), and in behalf of the OPC, I wish to set the record straight on some significant points and to respond to what are in my judgment some serious and possibly misleading statements made by my good friend Mr. Pollock.

First, the following are the official actions regarding Mr. Pollock and Christ Church as those actions are recorded in the approved minutes of the POD (emphasis mine):

1. "On motion, Presbytery sustained Mr. Pollock's examinations in apologetics, church history, English Bible, the secondary standards, Greek and Hebrew, his exegetical paper 'Particular Redemption,' and his theological paper 'Situation Ethics and the New Morality' "

(item 31, Minutes POD, March 5-7, 1991).

2. On motion the Presbytery sustained the examinations in Christian faith and life, and theology (items 32, 33).
3. "On motion, Presbytery the examinations of Mr. Pollock as a whole for reception *into the OPC* were sustained" (item 39).
4. Mr. Pollock answered the receiving questions set forth in Form of Government (FG) XXIII.18 affirmatively (item 109) including the following questions:
 - (2) Do you sincerely approve the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this Church as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures?
 - (3) Do you approve the government, discipline, and worship of the OPC?
5. "At his request, Mr. Pollock was enrolled in the regional church" (item 110) according to FG. XXII.18 "...the Presbytery may, at his request, enroll him as a member of the regional church; he shall thus not be enrolled as a member of the Presbytery, and the Presbytery shall hold his ministerial credentials in suspense while he seeks a call to service."
6. "On motion, Presbytery accepted the petition of Christ Presbyterian Church, and that they be denoted as a mission work (FG.XXIX.A.1), and that they be permitted to use the name of Christ Presbyterian Church in advertising" (item 112).
7. "On amended motion appointed of Messrs. Wynja, Coppes and 1 ruling

elder from the Providence session to be the committee to examine the applicants and appoint a time for their reception and organization as a particular congregation of the OPC (FG.XXIX.A.5, b)" (item 113).

8. "The members of Christ Presbyterian Church who signed Communication I.1 were placed on the rolls of the regional church until such time as the church is particularized" (item 114).
9. "On motion, Presbytery directed that the committee shall see to it that officers be ordained and installed (FG.XXIX.A.5.d)" (item 115).
10. "On amended motion, Presbytery requested that the Presbytery Diaconal Committee make an appeal to the churches of the Presbytery to assist in the amount of \$300 a month in providing medical insurance for Rev. Michael Pollock who will be ministering at Christ Presbyterian Church." (item 116).

The above items indicate that at the March meeting of the POD both Mr. Pollock and the petitioning members of Christ Church were enrolled as members of the OPC.

It was not until the fall meeting in September (we meet twice a year) that it was made clear to the Presbytery that the petition they had signed had been improperly prepared and that they had not been interviewed by our Missions Committee with a view to being received as members. This clarification meant that they had not intended to be received into the OPC even though the petition was that they be received as an existing congregation (which in our form of govern-

ment means they were seeking to be received as members of the OPC). Our concern was that the minutes of the Presbytery had been in their hands since shortly after the March meeting and that their overtures to the Canadian Reformed Churches were made and pursued while they were still members of the OPC.

These minutes also indicate that Mr. Pollock had been carefully and extensively examined as to his concurrence with our standards, had agreed with those standards and upon his own request had become a member of the OPC. So considerably more had occurred than his undergoing "examination as a candidate for ministry in the OPC" and being "approved to receive a call" (*Clarion*, p. 232). He was, upon his own request, received as a member of the OPC with full awareness of and concurrence with what we believe and practice. After having submitted himself to the discipline of the OPC, therefore, Mr. Pollock did not confer with the Presbytery about his concerns before deciding to renounce his allegiance (he did confer with individual members of the Presbytery). Under our form of government his responsibility was to the Presbytery since that body is the court of original jurisdiction over ministers. His action is somewhat similar to a member of the church deciding to leave and then renouncing the church without first conferring with the consistory.

As to the members of Christ Church, to us it was a violation of their membership in the OPC, or, if one grants they were not members, a violation of their stated intention (i.e., a breach of contract) for them and Mr. Pollock to spend "many hours...discussing the administration of the Lord's Supper, church discipline, church membership, the doctrine of the church, etc." with the result that they became "convinced that the deep problems we were seeing in the OPC in Denver were the result of defective, misapplied, or unbiblical doctrine in these areas" (*Clarion*, p. 232). While these issues were raised with OPC ministers, elders, and perhaps with local sessions this was never in a formal manner, and it was only Mr. Pollock with whom these discussions were made (i.e., after they were all enrolled as members of the OPC). These discussions and actions were undertaken without an involvement of the Presbytery which was their consistory. Furthermore, these discussions involved serious accusations against the Presbytery and church without allowing the accused brothers any opportunity of defense. Finally, the contract was breached without any prior

knowledge of or involvement by the offended party.

Second, I am also very concerned to seek to clarify some of the serious accusations against us.

There appears to be a confusion in Mr. Pollock's presentation between form and practice (or ethics). It seems that he says that proper form leads to proper ethics. The history of the Reformed churches in Holland and America certainly prove this is not so. Moreover, I believe that if the OPC continues in the path pursued since its formation, increased faithfulness will be the result. In the 20 years I have served as a minister in the OPC. I have observed a continued and steadily increasing pursuit of such faithfulness. I urge inquirers to read the minutes of our General Assembly to see how the church has dealt faithfully with theological and disciplinary matters. I am unwilling to say I have always agreed that the church has made the right decision, but I am equally *unwilling* to say that the record evidences a church which is consistently sinful.

The OPC in some of its congregations does, it seems to me, suffer from ethical problems. Our practice of guarding the Lord's table sometimes does not conform to what we have agreed to do. I acknowledge that our position does differ from that in the Canadian Reformed Churches. Whereas we allow closed communion among our churches, we agree to no less than what might be called restricted communion. In our particular congregation we admit only those whom we are assured are professing believers who are pursuing faithfulness to the Lord. Ours clearly is not an open communion position. This conforms to what our Book of Worship says.

I agree that a mark of the church of Christ is discipline. I repudiate the statement that we do not seek to discipline those who err in doctrine and practice. Members of my congregation are bound by their membership vows (set forth in the denominational Directory of Worship) to accept the teaching and instruction of the elders and to submit to discipline if found in error (the 4th vow taken by all professing members of the OPC). How anyone can say this does not bind them to accept and receive the reformed position is beyond my understanding. They do not have to be reformed upon joining. We do not require baptized infants, who become members, to hold to the reformed position just as we do not require spiritual infants to be reformed as a condition of membership (such was the case in the

church to which Hebrews was written, cf., Heb. 5:12-6:8). However, we do require all members to submit to the teaching and discipline of the church and we require all ordained teachers to vow confessional adherence. If OPC ministers and elders are not making certain they or other teachers (e.g., Sunday School teachers) are being faithful to the gospel as set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith then those ministers and elders have an ethical problem. The error is in their ethics not in the form to which we adhere. Hence, in my judgment, it is a misleading accusation against us to say that "there is no requirement" upon church members to believe anything beyond the "doctrine of salvation."

I acknowledge that our form of subscription involves vowing that we "sincerely receive and adopt the Confession of Faith and Catechisms of this Church, as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures" (FG.XXI.7). This vow retains the distinction between the inspired Word of God and the uninspired but faithful statement of men, binds us to what the Scripture teaches, to affirm that what the Scripture teaches is contained in the standards and to receive and adopt that system of doctrine. The extensive examinations of elders and ministers are directed to assure the ordaining body that the candidate gives a sincere and intelligent allegiance and commitment to reformed doctrine and policy.

I agree that the present situation among the churches here in Denver is deplorable. But it is altogether misleading and wrong to say "that this situation is accepted as normal and nothing is done to identify it as wrong, much less to change it" (*Clarion*, p. 233). We may not be acting how or as quickly as the author of that statement wants but the situation certainly is not accepted as normal. There have been a long series of Presbytery committees and trials pursuant to rectifying the situation. Indeed, charges are currently pending before the Presbytery. The Presbytery has labored long and patiently seeking to counsel those involved to reconcile. Out of this counsel has come the current trial. The General Assembly received an appeal on the outcome of a formal trial and for the last two years has had a committee of two from outside the Presbytery to seek to rectify the situation within the Presbytery either by counsel or additional discipline.

Leonard J. Coppes

A Response to Rev. Leonard Coppes

Sharing Rev. Coppes' concern for brotherly communion, we the consistory of the American Reformed Church, Denver offer the following comments in response to him:

1. The article Rev. Coppes refers to was a submission by the consistory of the American Reformed Church, Denver not by Rev. Pollock alone. Rev. Pollock's name was attached by the editors of *Clarion*. This is important in that the experiences and judgments contained in the article were not those of one (perhaps mistaken) individual, but rather the cumulative and confirming experiences and judgments of us all.
2. We sincerely apologize for and retract the statement "This situation in Denver is accepted as normal and nothing is done to identify it as wrong, much less to change it." To give the impression that there are no elders or ministers in the OPC Presbytery or in Denver seeking to practice biblical discipline is inaccurate. Many, including Rev. Coppes, are working to see discipline applied in many situations.
3. Our reference to "The present situation in Denver among OPC churches, their ministers and members" that is "contrary to clear scriptural principles" and "accepted as normal, etc..." is a specific reference to the fact that OPC churches in Denver appear to live apart from each other. There is no exchange of pulpits by ministers. Disgruntled members (and even elders) leave one congregation and are welcomed at another. A church seeks help from elders 100 miles away when able men are only a few miles away, etc. Now our purpose is not to "hang out the dirty laundry." Certainly Prof. Geertsema is right when he says that weaknesses affect us all. However, it is these things that explain, in part, our reluctance to join the OPC. While to say that this situation is "accepted as normal" may be too strong, it does appear to us that little is done to identify and correct these sins of disunity. It is our conclusion that some of what we are seeing stems from a "defective, misapplied, or unbiblical doctrine" of the church (pluriformity, invisible church).

4. Rev. Pollock has acknowledged to the Presbytery, and publicly, that he considers the conflicting commitments of being both a member/candidate in the OPC regional church and a member/minister of the American Reformed Church, Denver as a sinful error on his part. His decision to remain with his congregation and to withdraw from the OPC regional church was, as far as he could see, the only course open to him. The necessity of this course is seen all the more because he became convinced that his congregation was right in adopting the Three Forms of Unity and Reformed Church Order.
5. Regarding Rev. Coppes' statement that the members of our congregation violated their membership in the OPC or are guilty of breach of contract, it must again be stated that clearly no members of this congregation were ever interviewed for membership, took vows of membership, or in any other way bound themselves to the OPC. The form of the congregation's overture to the OPC was dictated by the OPC Missions Committee and we were specifically told that the overture itself was not binding. Thus, Rev. Coppes is mistaken in his assertion, "overtures to the Canadian Reformed Churches were made and pursued while they were...members of the OPC." A little further he terms this "breach of contract." This however could also be charged against the OPC for violating

their stated intention of enrolling us as members *only after* interviews and a formal taking of vows. This misunderstanding about the congregation's status in relation to the OPC is unfortunate. The more so since both the OPC Presbytery and the congregation were acting in good faith.

6. The concerns regarding the OPC which were voiced in our article focused on the Lord's Table and confessional membership. We are grateful that Rev. Coppes (and others in the OPC) are desirous to guard the Lord's Table. The concern we have and voiced in our article is that the OPC "allows the open table" (*Clarion* p. 232). Those faithful in themselves nevertheless participate in the sins of other congregations which do not guard the table.

We are pleasantly surprised to find out that in Rev. Coppes' view membership in the OPC does "bind them to accept and receive the reformed position." We doubt, however, that the 4th membership vow he cites really functions this way. The 4th vow reads, "Do you agree to submit in the Lord to the government of this church and, in case you should be found delinquent in doctrine or life, to heed its discipline?" The problem with this is that "delinquent in doctrine" is so vague that it defies application. Is one "delinquent in doctrine" when one believes contrary to a point in the Westminster Confession? (This cannot be, for even OPC ministers and elders are allowed to note their exceptions to the confession). At what point is one delinquent? Is a Reformed Baptist delinquent? Is an Arminian or Dispensationalist? Because "delinquent in doctrine" is not defined by strict subscription to the confession of the church its application to members becomes almost impossible. Dr. Coppes says, "we do not require spiritual infants to be reformed as a condition of membership." We wonder *when* members are required to be reformed. Are "spiritual infants," who never grow to completely reformed convictions, really disciplined in the OPC as "delinquent in doctrine?" We see evidence to the contrary.

In conclusion, we sincerely hope that Rev. Coppes is right in his assessment of the OPC as "steadily increasing pursuit of...faithfulness." If he is right we should expect to see an increasing pursuit of that faithfulness in the unity of the OPC in Denver and the proper administration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, confessional membership, etc.

M. Pollock 

OUR COVER



A Response Regarding “Denver”

By J. Geertsema

Two issues ago, Rev. J.D. Wielenga gave his reaction to my response to him. Rev. Wielenga had written (*Clarion*, vol. 41, no. 11) that our recognition of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) as true church of Christ means that we should not receive the American Reformed Church at Denver into our federation but advise this congregation to become a part of the OPC. I expressed my disagreement with it in my response in the same issue. I stated that the Synod of Coaldale 1977 decided to establish a “temporary” relation of contact and emphasized the words “temporary” and “contact.” Colleague Wielenga reacted with stressing the recognition of the OPC as true churches of Christ. This, he wrote, is maintained by following synods. While I argued that we have not yet come to a sister church relationship, or, to use this term, “full correspondence,” Rev. Wielenga emphasized the fact that the Synod of Coaldale did speak about “fellowship” with the OPC which had to find expression in certain rules. He argues that this fellowship with a church group that is recognized as true churches of Christ implies a sister church relationship, not formally (yet), in a church-political sense, but, nevertheless, in the confessional sense. The implication is that maintaining Art. 28 of the Belgic Confession means that we cannot accept the request of the American Reformed Church at Denver to be received into our federation. We have to advise them to maintain the unity of the (true) church in their area, which is the OPC. This advice is in accordance with our normative, confessional, manner of speaking.

I shall try to respond briefly.

1. Rev. Wielenga makes a strong distinction between the sister church re-

lationship in a confessional sense and in a church political sense. His use of this distinction gives me again the impression that the confessional sister church relationship is the essential one, the real one, while the church political sister church relationship is secondary, additional, accidental.

I do not work with such a sharp distinction. In my opinion, such a use of this distinction becomes practically a separation. It down-plays the fact that Synod Coaldale established a “temporary relationship of contact.” In my thinking we have a sister church relationship (with the adopted rules which are still in place at this moment) when there is either “full correspondence” with a church in a foreign country, or a “federal unity” with a church in the same country.

2. In connection with this sharp distinction, Rev. Wielenga suggests that I am contradicting myself when I write, on the one hand, that the OPC is a true church, which means the recognition as sister church in a confessional sense, while, on the other hand, that not only church politically we do not have this sister church relationship yet, but also not fully confessionally. According to Rev. Wielenga, the latter denies the former, which is logically not allowed. Referring to the answer of the 1989 Synod of Burlington to the church at Smithville, Rev. Wielenga agrees that the divergencies can be impediments to full correspondence with the OPC, but not to the recognition as true churches.

For Rev. Wielenga, the recognition as true church is identical with the recognition as sister church in the confessional sense. And this excludes the possibility of a speaking about a difference in a confessional sense between us. I do not agree with this. In my opin-

ion, the recognition of a church as a true church does not imply that there cannot be any confessional difference anymore. I do not believe that the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards are fully identical in contents.

3. Rev. Wielenga agrees that there are two possibilities with regard to a sister church relationship in the full sense. There is: a) Full Correspondence (for churches in a foreign country); which has to result in b) Federative Unity when the two church groups live in the same country. Now one can say that the OPC lives in the United States while the Canadian Reformed Churches lives in Canada. But things are not so simple. Some of the churches in our federation are in the United States. They may locally not be surrounded by Orthodox Presbyterian Churches, but they are in the country where the OPC are. Must this be terminated? What counts for the one, should count for the others. Imagine that the OPC would begin mission work in the State of Washington and that this results in a number of OPC congregations in the northern part of this State. Will this mean that then the Canadian Reformed Church at Linden should join the OPC?

4. Rev. Wielenga acknowledges that there are differences between the OPC and our Canadian Reformed Churches. The former have a Presbyterian background, the other the continental Reformed origin. We can acknowledge this difference in the existing churches. Can we not do the same with respect to congregations that change from Presbyterian in confessional standards and form of church government to Reformed? Can we not acknowledge that a congregation, after study, has come to the conclusion that the Reformed way of church govern-

ment is more in line with the biblical principles than the Presbyterian way? Even though the adoption of the Presbyterian form cannot be said to conflict with the Scriptures and prevent Presbyterian churches from being true churches.

Acknowledging the differences means for me the freedom for a congregation to choose. Imagine, to continue in line with the above example, that the Canadian Reformed Church at Lynden would decide: Since we have a number of Orthodox Presbyterian Churches in our area, recognized as true churches of Christ, and since our study led us to the conclusion that the Westminster Standards and the Presbyterian Form of government are more in line with the Bible, we ask the OPC to receive us in their church. I could regret this and have a different opinion. But I could not deny them the right to make this choice. In such a case we cannot

really say, in the sense of Art. 28, B.C. that the church at Lynden does no longer maintain the unity of faith. It does maintain the unity, but in the OPC. And we are to continue to work on it that the two church groups do come to a federative union.

Therefore, while the American Reformed Church at Denver was in the process of joining the OPC but through information and study came to the conclusion: we want to be Reformed, we should not forbid them to do this. They do not seek to abandon the unity of the faith in the true church according to the articles of the Belgic Confession. Joining us is maintaining that unity. And there is the recognition with us and them that the full sister church relation between OPC and Canadian Reformed Church is not a fact yet.

5. Rev. Wielenga writes: the heart of the matter, the central issue, is the question: is the OPC a work, or a creation, of

the Lord. And "not addressing this central issue is an incomprehensible omission, unless indeed it was implicitly addressed: the OPC is not yet "fully" a work of the Lord, therefore the ordinances of the Lord confessed in Art. 28 do not fully apply yet." These words sound impressive. However, is Art. 28 written for a situation like this? Does this article address the situation that a true church and a false church and/or a sect live in the same country? Or does it also address the temporary situation that two federations of true churches exist beside each other in the same country, while we must say of both that they are the work of the Lord? It is clear that Art. 28 addresses clearly the situation of a true and a false church existing in the same land or area. The fact that we have to do with two church groups beside each other, both being the work of the Lord, makes things more complex and less simple. **C**

Favourite Dutch Hymns and Psalms

By C. Van Dam

It is always a joy to listen to good organ music and another excellent tape is available which makes such enjoyment possible. In this tape (*Psalmen en Gezangen*), Jan Overduin (who is Professor of Music in Waterloo and has appeared as a recitalist throughout Europe and North America) plays old Dutch favourites as set to music by J.S. Bach, F. Mendelssohn, Jan Zwart, J. Bijster, Cor Kee, and Feike Asma. On the first side are found "We Gather Together," "Come Now With Singing," "If Thou But Suffer God to Guide Thee," "I Will Go Find Comfort In Jesus," "In You O Lord is All My Hope," "O Strong Rock of My Defense" and others, while side two includes Psalms 23, 68, 84, "The Little Boat Under Jesus' Protection," "Jesus is My Sure Defense," "How Great Almighty is Thy Kindness" and others.

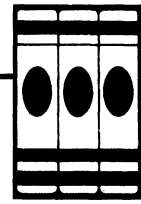
Jan Overduin made this recording available as a fund raising item for the mission work of the Free Reformed

Churches in Guatemala among the Achi Indians. This tribe numbers about 40,000 and they have never had the gospel presented to them in their own language. The town of Cubulco is in the heart of the hills and jungle that forms their home and it is there that a Christian hospital erected by a Dutch relief organization (Woord en Daad) is already operating. The very first missionary assigned to this lonely outpost is Rev. J. Herfst, a graduate of our Theological College.

This tape is heartily recommended. Besides the enjoyment of good music you also have the satisfaction of supporting the proclamation of the gospel to those for whom it is still unknown.

Orders can be placed with: Rev. C.A. Schouls, P.O. Box 550, Vineland, Ontario, L0R 2C0. Please prepay. The cost is \$12 including postage and handling. Cheques or money orders should be made payable to "Free Reformed Mission Fund" and marked "tape." **C**

By P. Aasman



Christian Growth and Faith

The Banner of Truth Trust has an excellent strategy to promote the literature it publishes. Its strategy appears to be: mix the old with the new.

I received a new booklet of some twenty-two pages by Sinclair B. Ferguson entitled, *Healthy Christian Growth*. (1.95 US) When a contemporary publication has in its title the word *GROWTH*, than one would expect to read about the virtues of the number counting and the church membership plotting as is done by the Church Growth school which has become so popular in North American evangelical circles.

But this booklet foils this expectation for Ferguson uses the word "growth" in the Pauline sense of Ephesians 4:15, "we are to grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ." This booklet is about personal spiritual growth. So, how does one grow? Ferguson says that we must "feed on Christ." But we do not grow by merely eating. We must also exercise. Ferguson promotes healthy Christian growth through three activities: by worshipping with God's people, by witnessing to our faith and by growing in our knowledge of our faith.

Of particular interest is what he says in relation to growth in knowledge:

It is far more important and will do far more good to read a smaller number of Christian books which have been well-tried and have proved their value than to develop the Athenian spirit which is attracted to anything so long as it is new. (p.9)

Perhaps Dr. Ferguson has in mind such a publication as the Banner of Truth Trust was issuing in the same year (1991) which is indeed well-tried and has proven its value: *What is Faith?*¹

What is Faith? occupies an established place in the Christian devotional literature of our century; indeed, it

stands side by side with such influential books as the twelve volumes of *The Fundamentals*.² From cover to cover, Dr. Machen struggles in this book against the numbing effect of liberalism on the Christian religion and calls for reformation in North American churches.

Machen sets the tone in his introduction by attacking the liberal idea that Christianity is an attitude, a feeling as opposed to a confession, a truth. He to show that faith involves knowledge and issues in knowledge.

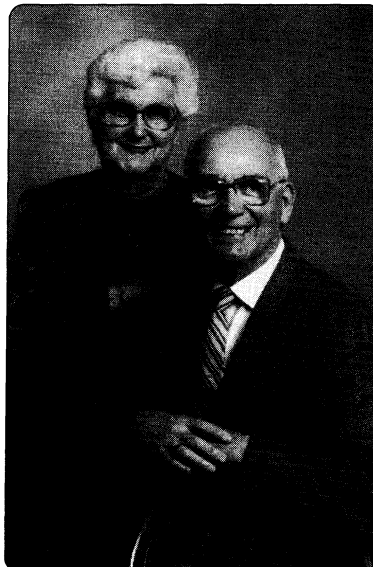
In the first chapter, "Faith in God," he laments the current disinterest in the study of the nature of God. Faith is not just a resting in God; it is founded on a knowledge of who God is. The supreme Christian confidence, "If God is for us, who can be against us" is

meaningful only if we know God from creation, the human conscience and above all from the Bible.

But the "If" of "If God is for us" is turning into "Yes, God IS for us" in Jesus Christ. This leads to chapter two: "Faith in Christ." If it is true that we must know someone before we can trust him, then we must know our Saviour! Ignorance will mar child-like faith not knowledge. Some have sought to know the Saviour by trying to discover the historical Jesus, but they have ended up with a saviour who was merely a man. The supreme Christian confession is "Jesus is God." Faith can go no higher. "The next thing less than the infinite is infinitely less." (p.117) Informed faith in Christ gives us the confidence to say, "who can separate us from the love of Christ?"

50TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

Psalm 91:4b



ALBERT and JENNY YTSMA
(nee Bouw)

hope to celebrate, the Lord willing, their 50th Wedding Anniversary on October 29, 1992. They emigrated from Assen, the Netherlands in June 1950 to Chatham, ON, where employment was found in the Head Office of Union Gas Limited in Nov. 1950 and from which Albert retired on May 1, 1982 as Manager of the Gas Supply Statistics Dept. They have four children and eight grandchildren. Albert also was co-editor and correspondent of the Canadian Reformed Magazine and still is correspondent for *Clarion*.

Home address:

42 Maple Street
Chatham, ON N7L 2E6



But what draws a person to Christ? It is a preaching of the law and a conviction of our sin. In this chapter, "Faith Born of Need," Machen pleads for a reformation through a preaching of the whole law that will drive us to the gospel as the only solution.

In the next two chapters, "Faith and the Gospel" and "Faith and Salvation," Machen defends two central doctrines that are commonly belittled and ignored: the theory of atonement and justification by faith. The church must be willing to become dogmatic and explain these doctrines in detail if she will hold to the faith.

In the chapter "Faith and Works," Machen addresses the oft perceived difference between Paul and James by pointing out that Paul used the word "faith" in Galatians 2:16 as the faith by which we believe (*fides qua creditur*) while James 2:24 uses the word faith with reference to the contents of faith (*fides quae creditur*). Paul and James are in harmony for Christian faith is neither mere trust, nor mere knowledge, but trust built on knowledge. James' point is that faith verifies itself by working out in acts of love.

Machen concludes by showing that if Christian faith is more than a feeling but also a set of doctrines, then it will

glow with the hope of enjoying the complete unfolding of God's love which God reveals to those who will accept facts from God by faith.

What is Faith? is a balanced presentation of both aspects of faith. He stresses the objective confessional content of faith, but without forgetting that we must subjectively trust in God.

But on both sides, one may find that he differs with Machen at times. On pages 156-160, Machen speaks about confessional membership in the church – a matter of great interest in the dialogue between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Machen objects to the notion that the church should require a candidate for the profession of faith to accept the confession of the Church since this is what is required of a candidate for ordination. This seems very strange, for what should a candidate for the profession of faith profess other than the faith of the church, or better, the faith as summarized by the church in her confessions? To profess faith in the church's confessions is simply a matter of publicly accepting the truths that have been taught in the catechetical instruction.

But also with regard to the subjective aspect of faith, Machen speaks

some strange words. While calling believers to holiness, he says that the Christian, helped by God's Spirit, must cooperate with God in the fight against sin. On the next page (p.208) he says that the Christian life is begun in us by God alone, but is continued by cooperation between God and man. But then what does Paul mean when he says, "it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20), and "God is at work within you both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13), and, "I know that nothing good dwells within me" (Romans 7:18)? Paul does not allow the idea of cooperation. When we do good, it is Christ doing it in us, not Christ *and* us.

Better are the expressions of the Canons of Dort where we read, "acted upon by God, the will itself also acts" (III/IV.12); and, "this divine grace of regeneration does not [...] take away the will and its properties, or violently coerce it, but makes the will spiritually alive, heals it, corrects it, pleasantly and at the same time powerfully bends it." (III/IV.16) Here we find no notion of cooperation; rather, the church confesses that God heals the will so that with our renewed will be can indeed do good things and thereby personally receive confirmation of our faith.

Much more could be said in this regard, and much more could be pointed out that makes this book very interesting and immensely important for Reformed readers. Although it was written 67 years ago, *What is Faith?* cannot be ignored in our continuing struggle for reformation in a world caught in the icy grip of liberalism. Machen's caution against tinkering with the historic creeds, his warnings against idolatrous attitudes toward church federations make this book urgent reading material for 1992.

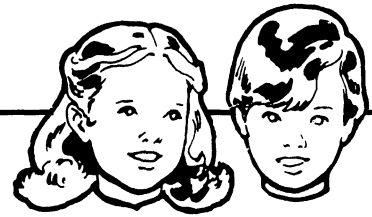
No book can be read or written without coming under criticism. This is indeed a book that is well tried and has proven its worth (a mere 9.95 US). **C**

¹Written by Dr. J. Gresham Machen. *What is Faith?* was first published in 1925 but now is being published for the first time by the Banner of Truth Trust.

²*The Fundamentals* were published in Chicago between 1909 and 1915. *What is Faith?* is listed along with *The Fundamentals* as belonging to the same class of literature by Jan Karel van Baalen in *The Heritage of the Fathers: A Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism* (Grand Rapids: 1948) p.107.

OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



Dear Busy Beavers,

Let's talk for a minute about

Thanksgiving 1992



"Show the Lord your smile."
That's what our minister said!
He was talking about praying and being thankful.
Be thankful? Show the Lord your smile?

I wondered about that!
Well, of course you smile saying "thank you."

Thank you, Lord, for our home.
Thank you, Lord, for daily food.
Thank you, Lord, for your loving gift of your own dear
Son who died for us.

Thank you, Lord, from the bottom of our heart.
We know we don't deserve Your goodness to us.

So many people are homeless.
So many people are hungry.

So many people don't know of
Your great love.
But we see and feel
Your love and care *all*
around us
every day.

Thank you
Lord for
undeserved
blessings.
Please help
us, Lord,
always to
remember your
blessings.
Please help
us, Lord, to find
ways to *share*
your blessings,
too!

Then other
people, too,
will know how
great You are!



Quiz Time!

CODE

by Busy Beaver *Hester Barendregt*

A - + F = @ I - \$ N -) S - / M - <
D - & G = * K - # O - + T - ? V - >
E - ^ H - (L - % R - = W - ~

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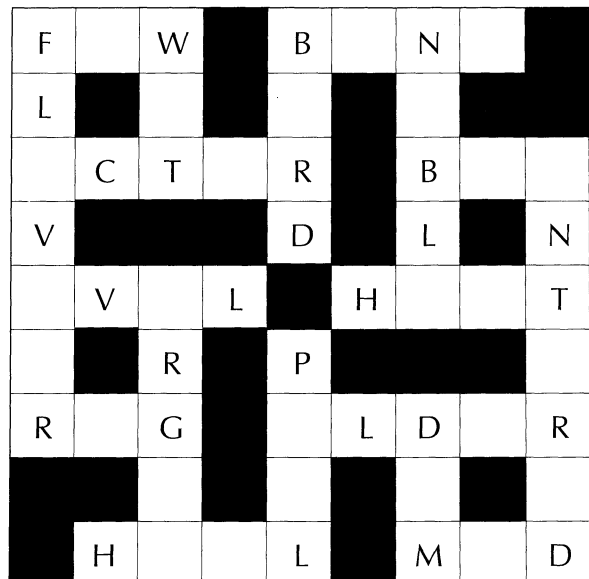
Romans 8:28

MISSING VOWELS

from Busy Beaver *Gerald Bartels*

Put A, E, I, O, or U, into the empty squares to make proper words and finish the puzzle.

Sometimes there will be more than one answer!



(See answers)

UNSCRAMBLE THESE WORDS!

by Busy Beaver *Jeremy Linde*

1. rneve _____
2. xett _____
3. irbd _____
4. okol _____
5. ichnt _____
6. lapy _____

(See answers)



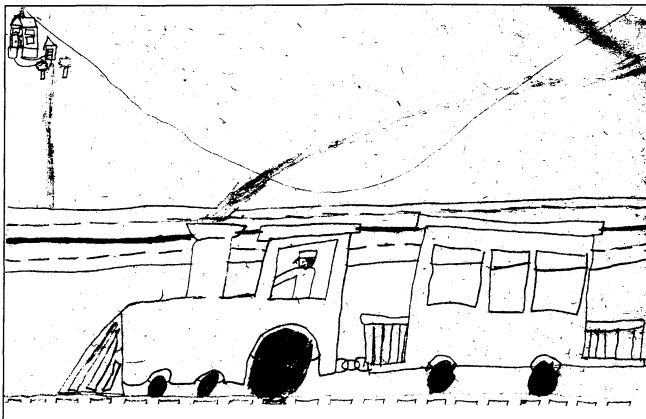
KNOCK, KNOCK JOKES

from Busy Beaver *Sarah Nobel*

Knock, knock!
Who's there?
Me.
Me who?
Don't you know yourself?



Knock, knock!
Who's there?
Anita.
Anita who?
Anita glass o' water!



Picture by Busy Beaver *David Aikema*

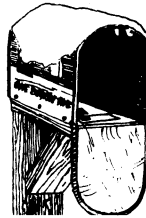
WINTER'S COMING!

What about a winter home?

Can you match each animal with the place where it will spend cold winter months?

- | | |
|--------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Moth | a. den or burrow |
| 2. Snakes | b. cave or rocky place |
| 3. Bears | c. burrow |
| 4. Turtles | d. cave or hole in ground |
| 5. Bats | e. cocoon |
| 6. Ladybugs | f. muddy bottom of pond or stream |
| 7. Chipmunks | g. a swarm in a protected place |

(See answers)



From the mailbox

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Sarah Nobel*. Sounds to me as if you had a good little business at the golf course this

summer! Thanks for your letter, Sarah.

And a big welcome to you, too, *Alisa Krabbendam*. We are happy to have you join us. Will you write and tell us about your hobbies sometime, Alisa?

Thank you for the puzzles and the picture, *Cecilia Barendregt*. Did you dive off the big rock at your campsite? I can see you look forward to camping again next year! Bye for now, Cecilia.

What an exciting trip you had, *Margaret Nyenhuis*! How did you feel about coming home again and starting school? Write again soon, Margaret.

Hello, *Gerald Bartels*. It was nice to hear from you again. I see you have been keeping busy! Thank you for an interesting puzzle, Gerald.

You're right, *Benjamin Bartels*. It's a sad, sad day your dog dies. Do you still miss Blacky? Thanks for the puzzle, Benjamin. How does it feel to be back in school?

Answers

Winter's Coming! 1. e 2. c 3. a 4. f 5. b 6. g 7. d 7. peal 8. dim
Down 1. flavour 2. wet 3. bird 4. noble 5. entered 6. argue
6. heat 7. rug 8. elder 9. heel 10. mud
Missing Vowels: Across 1. few 2. bone 3. actor 4. bee 5. oval
Unscramble: 1. never 2. text 3. bird 4. look 5. night 6. play

How did you do on the quizzes?

Did you like them?

Did you get them all right?

Great!

Bye for now, Busy Beavers.

Love to you all,
Aunt Betty

