



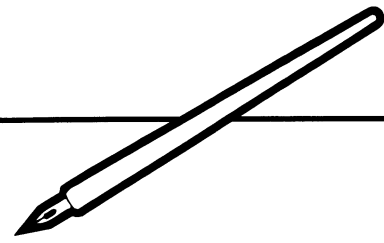
Clarion

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What Determines the Identity of a Reformed School

Introduction

The previous issue presented to the readers Br. A. Kingma's report of the principals meeting in November of last year. Drs. H. Messelink, the Assistant-Director of the Reformed Education Advisory Center for the Reformed Schools in the Netherlands, was one of the key speakers at that meeting. He also gave a speech at a meeting of parents and teachers in Burlington. Miss J. Kingma wrote a summary of this Burlington address which was taken up in the magazine of the Timothy Elementary school in Hamilton. In a number of ways, Br. Messelink referred to the situation of the school education in the Netherlands. What he said is important for us in Canada too, I believe. I would like to comment on one particular point.

However, first of all I want to express my thankfulness and appreciation for what Drs. Messelink said as to what has to happen (I quote from the report of Br. A. Kingma): "Our identity...must be clearly shown: in the philosophy and direction of the school, in the pedagogical views and structures of the schools, and in the curriculum of the school. The schools need a Reformed curriculum, but most importantly, Reformed, believing teachers." It is only these last words "but most importantly, Reformed, believing teachers" that I would like to comment on below, in connection with a statement made at the meeting in Burlington. Drs. Messelink made the point that it is the Reformed teacher who determines the identity of the Reformed school.

The reports

However, let me first give the reader a number of quotations from the report of Miss J. Kingma about what Br. Messelink said. The "introduction" reads as follows:

Educational focus has undergone some radical shifts over the past years. One such shift is the movement away from individualized instruction to efficient, effective education that focuses on outcomes. A more recent development is the generally accepted view that the acquisition of norms and values belongs to the task of the school. This development is not surprising in the face of a widespread decline in societal values and norms. Our own schools have not been left untouched by the trends in modern society. Many young people leave the church or behave unchristianly even though they have received many years of Reformed education. This development gives reason for a deep-seated concern about the life of faith of our students. Within the context of this development, the nurturing of faith becomes an important issue in our midst. We must carefully examine once again the unique identity of our Reformed schools.

Br. A. Kingma reported that Br. Messelink made a similar remark about the situation in the Netherlands when he said that "the Reformed schools are deficient in showing their real Reformed identity."

This is a sad picture and a difficult situation. Caring teachers will do everything they can to be instrumental in changing this picture by trying to bring biblical values and norms across to their students and guide them to acceptance. It is also very necessary in such a situation to have solidly Reformed, caring teachers in front of the class who know the Scripture and the Reformed confession and deeply in love with and enthusiastic about both. This means that the schools in Holland, and it is the same here in Canada, need teachers who can say with the church teacher K. Schilder and with the school teacher A. Janse that it is a delight to be Reformed. Both wanted very much, and worked very hard for, an education in church and school in which the teaching itself, in its contents, was fully in agreement with what Scripture teaches us and what we, accordingly, confess. It should be a warning for us here in Canada. We are certainly not immune for becoming deficient as churches and as schools who bear the name of Christ and the mark of being Reformed.

Miss Kingma's report continues with speaking about the "Unique Identity" of Reformed schools. First a definition of identity is given: "Identity refers to those recognizable elements by which Reformed schools distinguish themselves from all other schools." This is done "in two main ways":

1. Ideologically – our schools are founded upon the Word of God and the confessions which faithfully summarize the Scriptures. The foundation determines our view of life and of man.

2. Practically – concrete forms and actions based on our ideological foundation bring our identity into practice. We must, however, recognize two pitfalls that affect the practical working out of our Reformed identity:

- a. *Superficiality*: The identity of the Reformed school is not anchored in its work plan (curriculum), its textbooks, or its special programs. The believing teacher is at the center of Reformed identity. Without the believing teacher, the heart or essence of our identity is missing and superficiality takes over. Teachers propagate Reformed identity. For the believing teacher, to work on Reformed identity means to work on oneself – on the life of faith of the teacher.

Under b. *High Expectations*, Drs. Messelink warned that we should not set our expectations too high since not "every methodology and every teaching aid" can be "distinctly Reformed and be logically deduced from the Scriptures." He uses as example different spelling programs. Each child is

uniquely created. This means that the one spelling method can possibly work better with one child and the other with another child.

But then the following lines are written to which I shall come back at the end of this reaction:

The point to be made here is that we expect too much of the identity of Reformed schools if we expect to make a direct connection between our Reformed basis and every aspect of educational practice. It is not the forms and methods in themselves which distinguish the Reformed schools. Again, it is the believing teacher working with the available tools who must make our Reformed identity flesh and blood.

Under the heading "Reformed Education" Drs. Messelink stressed the need for the unity of faith in home, school, and church as vital to upbringing and education. "These three institutions share a common starting point – the Scriptures as the infallible Word of God. This starting point leads to unity in thinking about man, good and evil, and the goals of education . . . Having schools that are supported by a Reformed community and that are led by Reformed teachers instructing Reformed children puts us in a unique position. It allows us to speak freely about our identity."

After this, the point is stressed that "If we are to speak about our identity in the awareness of the foundations upon which our house rests, we have to know the foundation as well as the history of Reformed education." These things are very important, indeed. They are self-evident, too. It is a matter of course, I would say, that a Reformed teacher in a Reformed school, being a communicant member of a Reformed church, knows this foundation of Scripture and confession. For the purpose to help and instruct Reformed teachers to know how to teach on this foundation, we have our Reformed Teachers' College.

Miss Kingma reports what Drs. Messelink said further:

If all our foundations are religiously based and if all of education is religious, can we speak about religious education as a separate entity? Yes, we can if we consider that we demand that our children's attention be specifically directed to the tenets of our faith. Learning to pray and learning math are all part of education. Faith, however, comes by hearing the Word and, therefore, separate and direct attention must be given to the Word. We recognize that regeneration is God's work, comparable to His work in creation. God alone works the miracle of faith by conferring what by nature is not already there. And what is given? We receive Christ – we are grafted into Him and become heir to all His benefits and gifts (see Form for Baptism).

God works faith, but He uses means and instruments. He insists on them! God uses three main instruments: the family, the church, and the school. These three institutions must be one in faith. Teachers may be seen as specifically trained believers who labour in religious education.

A matter of regeneration?

Again I want to begin with the remark that I am quoting from a report. This must make us careful. I do not have the text of the speech. Nevertheless, in what is quoted here from Br. Messelink, I see a shift from emphasis on the contents of the Reformed teaching toward the stress on the subjective faith of the believer. For, beside the statement that all education in a Reformed school is to be religious, with which I



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wholeheartedly agree, we find the view that our schools must have special attention for "religious education as a separate entity." I understand from what follows that this separate religious education has to do with faith, not as faith *that* we believe (the contents), but the faith *with which* we believe (our believing as knowing and trusting, Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 7, Q.A. 21). This believing, this "faith," is said to come "by hearing the Word" and is linked to regeneration. Then it is said that God works regeneration or the miracle of faith. Again, who can disagree? However, I have a serious question when at this point it is asked "What is given?" and when on this point the answer is "We receive Christ – we are grafted into Him and become heir to all His benefits and gifts." In the way this is presented, we have here the thinking of the Baptists and not of the Reformed covenant believer.

Children in the covenant do not *become* heirs of the covenant when they are regenerated and become believers. Children in the covenant *are* heirs of the covenant and its promises in Christ from their conception and birth. And when they grow up, they, just as is the case with the adults, are called to appropriate (make their own property) what they *have in Christ*. Of course, this appropriating by faith that we and our children are called to do is only possible when the Holy Spirit works this appropriating in our heart. It is Baptist thinking, and not in agreement with Scripture, to say that we who are children in the covenant only then *become* heirs of the covenant when we are regenerated or become believers. Christ teaches covenant children and adults that they can loose what they have (have in promise; have in Christ).

This means that the school is seen as instrument of the Spirit to work regeneration and that the school, therefore, has to pay special attention to the regenerating function of the Word. Here I place a question mark. It is true that regeneration is the work of the Holy Spirit. It is also true that the Holy Spirit uses the Word of the LORD as the means through which He works it. But it is, in my opinion, not the task of the school to make regeneration a special item or a subject that needs constant attention. Just as parents at home and office bearers in the church, teachers in school have to concentrate on the contents of their teaching. As for the

school, this means teaching the great works of the triune God, and the consequent obligations for us, His people, in all the subjects that are taught, from the instruction in Bible knowledge to the teaching of physics and math. At the same time, as teachers (and parents and office bearers), we pray that the Lord will use us and our teaching to work faith in the heart of the students.

What is the dominating factor that identifies our schools?

I leave out now what is said under the heading "Goals and Methods," with the exception of the following paragraph:

A discussion of goals and methods brings us back to the teacher as a believer. If the teacher is to propagate the Reformed identity of the school, then the teacher must work on him/herself as a believer. There must be a constant search for depth in the life of faith. The only other alternative is superficiality. Teachers have opportunities to work on themselves built into their work. Regular study of the Bible, the confessions, and of church history should be part of the teacher's lesson preparations.

Teachers who live out of faith themselves can show the children how faith directs all aspects of life.

This working one oneself as a believer is not only necessary for the teacher in school, but also for the parents at home and for the office bearers in the church. We all need this very much. Otherwise, our families and our churches, too, will lose their character of Reformed, Christian, homes and congregations. Our life must be borne by a thorough knowing of and trusting in God's Word as we confess its truth in our Reformed standards.

However, I have some difficulty with the next statement in the report of what Br. Messelink said. It says: "The most important aspect of our children's education at a Reformed school is the development of the teacher as a believer." This is, of course, most important. Who can deny this? It speaks for itself. But why must we emphasize this as "*the* most important aspect of our children's education"? Why must all the emphasis be placed on the spiritual life, the "spirituality," of the teacher? In previous years this was simply assumed as necessary. The emphasis should remain on the Reformed character of the contents of the teaching. I do not see this shift in emphasis from the contents of the education to the spirituality of the teacher as progress or as a positive development.

Reformed ministers and other office bearers and members. Our identity is our confession, the truth of God's Word as we confess it. Of course, the office bearers and members have a great (practical) responsibility. If they do not adhere to God's Word as this is confessed, if they do not live what they confess, the confession as mark of identity becomes a hollow, empty sticker. But the foundational, dominating, bearing mark of our identity remains the truth as we confess it, and not the subjective, confessing persons. I see the same with respect to the schools. The basis, Scripture and confession as they are applied in all the different subjects that are taught, is to remain the dominating, identifying mark. The teachers, with the school board and the parents and the students are called to maintain this identifying mark. As far as I know, the development of a Reformed contents of the curriculum for the education in our schools has not been accomplished yet. Our teachers have still quite a task on this point. May the Lord grant much wisdom and strength and persistence here too. C

Improving Personal and Family Worship₃

By R.A. Schouten

In the first two articles under this title, we paid attention to the differences between serving God in all of life and to worshiping Him in special times of life. We also discovered a biblical imperative not only for public, corporate worship, but also for personal and family worship. In this article, we will proceed to discuss a number of practical specifics for personal or family worship.

Time for family worship.

We can begin by stating that there is no one perfect time for family or personal worship. Each family has its own agenda. Some families are not able to gather in the morning because father is long gone. Others find the evening difficult because children are gone to classes and various sports events, etc. It will be helpful for each individual or family to experiment in finding a suitable time frame. Some suggestions would be getting the whole family to rise 15 minutes earlier or having supper a half hour earlier than was the custom before. Other families would find a time slot other than meals more suitable, for example, 8:30 in the evening.

In any case, we should be aware that no time is easy! Satan does not like family worship and will use all sorts of devices in his efforts to disrupt it. Therefore, we have to discipline ourselves and our families to resist attacks on our appointed times.

If, despite a busy life, father and mother keep a regular time for family worship, this sends a clear message to the children about the supreme importance of this activity. On the other hand, if family worship is canceled for the slightest excuse, young people soon realize the real priorities of their parents.

If possible, we should strive for both morning and evening worship. In the Bible, we find Psalms for morning and evening. Also, both morning and evening sacrifices were brought in the temple. Furthermore, morning and evening worship harmonizes with the

natural cycle of life. When we get up to work and when we finish our work for the day, we are particularly aware of our dependence on God, of our need for His blessing on our labour and on our sleep.

The key for success in family worship is *planning*. Just as we plan our meals, so we need to plan our spiritual worship of God. There should be a habit in our worship. If we continuously need to make a fresh decision to worship God in our homes, we will become unfaithful in a short time.

As far as the length of family worship is concerned, it is important to be realistic, especially in cases where younger children are present. In my opinion, a workable plan would be something like this:

Morning: 5 minutes, including the reading of perhaps ten verses of N.T., or a few verses of the Proverbs or one of the Psalms, a time of prayer, thanking God for His providential care, asking for a blessing on the labours of the day, and a short Psalm.

Evening: 15 minutes. Reading of a longer portion, a chapter or more of the OT, more extensive prayer, and singing of one or more Psalms.

Leadership in family worship.

Normally, the father will lead family worship. As the head of the household, ultimate responsibility is with him. In Scripture, it is above all the father who is called to teach and instruct his children.

Perhaps no single truth is more crucial to the ongoing life of the church in these days than to have fathers awaken to their spiritual responsibility of giving leadership to their families. In many cases, this leadership is completely lacking and the effects will most certainly appear in the children.

In the absence of a father, however, the same responsibilities come to rest on a mother. In Scripture, also mothers are described as having great impact on their children in family wor-

ship. See Prov. 6:20-27; 2 Tim. 1, 3 (Timothy's mom).

Also, it is perfectly fitting that from time to time a father or mother would delegate certain responsibilities to the children, such as reading of Scripture or offering prayer to God. However, the norm will be paternal leadership.

Having spoken about the time for worship and necessary leadership in worship, we continue by examining the various parts of family/personal worship in more detail.

The Bible Reading

The first aspect we must deal with is the family Bible reading. It is hard to believe, but some families have no system at all. When they read the Bible, their choice is random. Such an approach to Scripture cannot be edifying and will only frustrate those who follow it. There must be a plan! From time to time, fathers should sit down in order to devise a yearly arrangement for the reading of Scripture.

On the other hand, the old method of reading through the whole Bible from Genesis to Revelation is probably not the best idea. Also in family worship, variety is the spice of life. Who would like their minister to spend two years in one book of the Old Testament? It is helpful to plan a refreshing alteration in the Bible reading.

In the mornings, the family could read through the Gospels. A small section would suffice. Or, they could choose to read through the Psalms and Proverbs, again limiting themselves to small sections. In the evenings, the family could read longer portions from the OT history and prophets. For more variety, something different could be read on Saturdays, while on Sundays, it is an excellent idea to read the portion of Scripture which formed the text for the sermon.

It would be best to involve children in the Bible reading. Each child should have a Bible to maximize his or her

understanding and to help discussion. The children can take turns with the parents in the reading of Scripture.

A suggestion would be to appoint one of the children to be a record keeper. The child's task would be to faithfully record the Bible readings for the day.

Another area of discussion is the use of Children's Story Bibles. It used to be that every self-respecting Christian home had a number of these teaching tools. Every day, mother would sit down with the preschoolers and even older children to acquaint their young minds with the mighty deeds of the Lord in history. For many children, that time was a holy hour in the rhythm of life. The

benefits were enormous. The facts of the history of redemption were firmly planted in their minds.

It is important to make a good choice for a children's story Bible. You will desire one which refrains from fantasizing, but instead, sticks closely to the Biblical text. Also, some of the examples I've seen are offensive because of the always hippy-like representations of our God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. One, by Kenneth Taylor, even dares to include a picture of God on the first page! Parents may have to excise certain portions at their discretion.

Examples that can be recommended include *Story Bible for Younger Chil-*

dren and the two volume *Story Bible for Older Children*, by Anne DeVries (published by Paideia Press, 1978). These volumes are still stocked by various Christian book and Bible stores. *The Children's Story Bible*, by Catherine F. Vos, is also a very workable volume, as is *My Bible Story Book* by Dena Korfker (Kregel). Older titles include *The Bible History Told To Our Children*, (three volumes by John Vreugdenhil and *Bible, Our Guide* (three parts) by Gesina Ingwersen. It would be good if a publisher could be found to make these books available again.

(to be continued)



Do Synods Exist?

By T. Plantinga

Sloppy talk leads to sloppy thought. This is surely the conviction of Rev. W.W.J. VanOene, for he uses his "News Medley" column in *Clarion* to set us straight on terminology and usage. In the November 6, 1992, issue (see p. 475), he points to "erroneous" expressions regarding broader assemblies. For example, he regrets the following sentence: "A letter will be sent to General Synod proposing that Synod meet during the month of June instead of November." Explaining his difficulty with this sentence, he writes: "Our synods do not 'meet' in November, for they do not exist, but they are usually held in November."

This is not a trivial concern on the part of Rev. VanOene, for he has made such points not only in *Clarion* on a number of occasions but also in his commentary on the church order of the Canadian Reformed Churches (entitled *With Common Consent*). He tells us that classes and synods ". . . are only rather short meetings, convened to deal with the matters brought before them in accordance with the adopted guidelines and they cease to exist as soon as they have completed their agenda. They have no permanence in the Reformed Churches" (p. 132). 1.

The point he is making does not seem to be widely understood by his readers, for the "error" continues to be made. In this short article I will first try to explicate his point regarding broader assemblies, then take issue with his claim that classes and synods do not exist, and finally relate this seemingly small issue to the current interest in Reformed ecumenicity and church union.

When Rev. VanOene tells us that synods and classes do not exist, he is in effect arguing that we should think in terms of *verbs* rather than *nouns*. Office-bearers of local churches meet and act and make decisions – that's what happens at "broader assemblies." Presumably he would say that a party, which is basically a social meeting, does not exist either. People sometimes turn the noun "party" into a verb and say, "Let's party!" From time to time, delegates of Reformed churches in a given area get together and say, "Let's classis."

Suppose I were to have a party at my house on the first Friday evening of every month, and that the guest list was roughly the same for each party. Would the regularity of those parties allow us to speak of "the Plantinga Friday night party" as something that exists? I don't think so; instead we would tend to use verbs in speaking of what happens. We

would say that people gather for fun and fellowship. And there would be *twelve* parties in a year – not a single party which exists all year long and gets lively only on the first Friday evening of the month. 2.

I believe that part of Rev. VanOene's point can be captured in this parallel. A classis does not have a continuing membership, even though the pastors will normally show up at every meeting. (The elders will be delegated by turns.) A consistory, on the other hand, does have a continuing membership. And so I believe that he would affirm that a consistory can be said to exist. His own terminology is that the consistory is a "permanent" body, whereas synods and classes are "temporary" (see *With Common Consent*, p. 133). A consistory has officers and a *continuing* mandate. 3.

In the party example, the guests who gather regularly on the first Friday evening of the month can easily turn themselves into an entity with a continuous existence. They might enjoy the parties so much that they constitute themselves as a club, appoint officers to plan the parties and manage the finances, and perhaps even register and advertise their name and existence somewhere.

Part of the VanOene objection to the language sometimes used by consistories and bulletin clerks is that a classis is not a club, and neither is a general synod. While this might seem obvious to *Canadian Reformed* readers, those who are familiar with actual practice in the *Christian Reformed* world know that a classis can all too easily become a club. A Christian Reformed classis has an "interim committee" and a stated clerk charged with the responsibility of handling the business of the classis between meetings and of making certain preparations for the next meeting. The result is that classis *does* exist, and so it can very well be asked what classis will do about such-and-such a situation, even if the next scheduled meeting is months away. A study of the actions taken by Classis Hamilton in relation to the secession of the Mount Hamilton Christian Reformed Church illustrates how clear it is that a Christian Reformed classis does exist between meetings and constitutes a force to be reckoned with on a continuing basis. 4.

Now, Rev. VanOene would presumably regard the actions recently taken by the stated clerk and "interim committee" of Classis Hamilton as illegitimate when judged from the standpoint of traditional Reformed church polity, and I would agree with him. Part of the point of insisting that classis does *not* exist is to work against the development of any climate of thought in which such actions might come to be seen as reasonable and legitimate. Canadian Reformed people oppose the introduction of "hierarchy" into church government, and rightly so. Thus Rev. VanOene warns: "Too soon the thought arises that a classis or a synod is a permanent institution that is higher in rank and has authority over the churches that are represented at it, or over the constituent minor assemblies. Any such thought would be contrary to the very character of Reformed church polity and would be detrimental in more than one respect" (p. 133).

In recent years we have been hearing suggestions to the effect that the (general) synod is the consistory of the entire Christian Reformed Church. In Canadian Reformed ears any such suggestion will sound dangerously misguided, and I agree that it is to be resisted. If synod does not even exist, as Rev. VanOene maintains, we can hardly regard it as the consistory which governs all the churches and which is therefore in a position to issue orders to local consistories and to classes

(which are then to be regarded as regional consistories). 5.

In all of this I am very much in sympathy with Rev. VanOene and feel inclined to applaud his reminders about correct usage. Yet I believe I must criticize his rule for the proper way to speak of the work of broader assemblies. My reason, very simply, is that I do not believe that his insistence that synods and classes do not exist enables us to do justice to the task and authority of these broader assemblies as defined in the Canadian Reformed church order.

Consider, for example, Article 37: "The classis has the same jurisdiction over the consistory as the regional synod has over the classis, and the general synod over the regional synod." The presupposition here is that such a body as the classis continues as somehow the same over a period of time. Moreover, it even has a name, e.g. Classis Pacific. To maintain that Classis Pacific does not exist but that it does have jurisdiction over the consistories within its domain is to strain common sense beyond the breaking point. 6.

Suppose that in a given year Classis Pacific meets on February 14, and then again on June 17. On Rev. VanOene's strict understanding of this matter, we have two separate meetings or events here, just as the Plantinga party in February is separate and distinct from the party held in January. And we should refer to them in terms of their dates: Classis Pacific of February 14, which is to be distinguished from Classis Pacific of June 17, and so forth (see *With Common Consent*, p. 138). But might not the meeting of February 14 take up a certain matter, fail to resolve it, and then leave it for a future meeting, assuming that some church is willing to place it formally on the agenda again? Could a delegate at the next meeting not say, "When we discussed this matter at our previous meeting . . . ?" This would be impossible if the two meetings do not enjoy some sort of identity and continuity with each other. Does Classis Pacific pop out of existence when the June 17 meeting begins? 7.

Article 46 deals with church visitors. We read: "Each year classis shall authorize two of the more experienced and able ministers to visit the Churches in that year. . . . They shall submit a written report of their visit to classis." The church visitors get their authorization to carry out their task from classis. But what if classis doesn't exist once the meeting is over? Does their authoriza-

tion then lose its validity? And are the church visitors to report to a body that did *not* appoint and authorize them? 8.

Consider Article 49: "The general synod shall be held once every three years. Each regional synod shall delegate to this synod four ministers and four elders." Now, if regional synods do not "exist," one is led to assume that each time a regional synod "is held" (VanOene's preferred terminology), it must appoint delegates for the next occasion when a general synod "is held": after all, *each* regional synod shall delegate Of course this does not happen, for then there would be three sets of delegates from each region at the general synod – one for each annual meeting of the regional synod. 9.

Here and elsewhere, the church order presupposes that we may think of the broader assemblies as having some sort of continued existence and identity. Indeed, if this were not the case, the churches could not even have official contact with the churches overseas, for such contact, according to Article 50, is to be "regulated by general synod." 10.

My conclusion, then, is that we should not follow a VanOene rule to the effect that we may not think or speak of classes and the general synods as existing. I believe that such a rule creates confusion. 11.

My main reason for writing this article is ecumenical, as I noted earlier. We are now – under God's leading, I trust – moving into a phase in Reformed church history in which it appears *possible* for the Canadian Reformed Churches to unite with a number of congregations made up of former members of Christian Reformed churches. In the discussions that are currently underway, the two sides are coming to know one another. Since I stand in the Christian Reformed tradition and have close contact with the people in my tradition, I know very well that there is considerable apprehension – and even confusion – about the question what Canadian Reformed people really believe regarding the church and the principles by which church business is to be conducted. I'm afraid that what I have called the VanOene rule will only add to that confusion: it will seem to churches in the Christian Reformed tradition that the Canadian Reformed Churches are asking that we adopt a cumbersome and roundabout way of speaking that requires considerably more forethought and linguistic dexterity than the use of "Thee" and "Thou" in prayer. Classis and synod exercise cer-


tain functions, hand out tasks, and so forth, and yet do not exist! 12.

What is to be done about the situation? My recommendation is not that some basic principle in the church order of the Canadian Reformed Churches should be surrendered or toned down. Instead my plea is that the principle in question be *explained clearly!* I am asking the Canadian Reformed brothers to be patient when some of us on the Christian Reformed side shake our heads and say, "I just don't get it!"

Classis does not exist, and yet it has such-and-such continuing responsibilities. How can this be?" 13.

I am in agreement with Rev. VanOene in his concern over the possibility of hierarchy creeping into our Reformed church life. The question is how we can best prevent this from happening. And I do not believe that the VanOene rule serves us well in this regard.

I leave it to Canadian Reformed church order experts to give advice about the proper wording to be used

when discussing the broader assemblies. But I do plead, in this time of ecumenical opportunity, for a clear explanation of Canadian Reformed principles of church order. I believe there is much in those principles which independent churches in the Christian Reformed tradition will find attractive and Biblically-based. But a positive exposition will be needed first. Who will provide that explanation? Who is willing to undertake the work of removing needless barriers to union? 14. 

Do Synods Exist? Once in a While

A Response:

By W.W.J. VanOene

Dr. Theodore Plantinga has raised a point that is not only of great interest but also of great importance, not in the last place with a view to discussions going on with those brothers and sisters who are convinced that they are not allowed to stay in the Christian Reformed Church because of the deviations found in it. Also, however, for our own members it is important to further explain this point as well as other matters related to it.

In order to facilitate an orderly reply, I have placed numbers with various parts of Dr. Plantinga's submission and this frees me from the obligation to repeat what he wrote. Our readers can easily consult his article.

1. A basic difference

There is a basic difference between consistories on the one hand, and broader assemblies, on the other hand. Consistories are existing *bodies*, existing entities, and consistories do meet once every two weeks or every week or whenever they consider this necessary. A consistory does exist also when the brothers do not meet. It is not completely correct, therefore, to state that I would rather think in terms of *verbs* than of *nouns*. Speaking in terms of verbs may apply to broader assemblies (although they do exist for a certain period of time as gatherings that have been *constituted*), it certainly does not hold true for consistories.

As for broader assemblies (I would use "broader" and "major" interchangeably to prevent any thought that "major" means "higher in rank." It simply means that more churches are represented there than at the local level), we should not forget that there is an agreement between the churches, laid down in the Church Order, that these assemblies shall be held. We could say that the *phenomenon* of classes and synods is known within the churches, whereas the classes and synods themselves are held (or: are actually present within the life of the churches) only occasionally and disappear as an existing entity as soon as the meeting is adjourned.

The term "classis" is used in a double sense. It denotes the churches together in a certain area. That's why we speak of "Classis Ontario North," referring thereby to a certain area in which specific churches are found, which churches come together in a classis by means of their delegates at agreed-upon times. Insofar as the term refers to a certain group of churches, we might say that it is a present reality.

Concerning the second use of the term "classis," the very terminology used in our Church Order prevents us from considering "a classis" to be an existing entity. We speak of "classical meetings," "such meetings," the "convening of a classis," and "cancellation of a classis." (Art. 44 C.O.) One cannot "cancel" an existing body or entity, can

one? In the same article we speak of "the last classis before regional synod." If both classes and regional synods did exist, the terminology should have been: "classis shall appoint delegates to the regional synod at the last opportunity before the latter is to meet" or something like that. However, the very words "before regional synod" show that regional synods (or general synods respectively) are no existing entities, although the phenomenon as such is known and agreed upon.

2. No loose party

The example of a "party" does not clarify anything. I realize that every example requires that we shall look for and at the *tertium comparationis* (the "third" of the comparison), but the element that is neglected in this example is: if there were a society that meets at regular or irregular times at the Plantinga residence, then that *society* would be an existing thing, although it would become "visible" only when they party together. Dr. Plantinga considers the possibility that a club is formed. That is now precisely what the *churches* have done (pardon the irreverent expression "club" in this connection!) when they formed their federation. It is not the *gathering of delegates* from the churches (forming a classis) that form the "club," but it is the *churches* that did so. These churches send delegates to meet together, to form a classis together at

such times as has been agreed upon. When they have fulfilled their mandate, these brothers return to their respective churches, and the classis which they formed together ceases to exist.

The permanence in Dr. Plantinga's example is *not* to be sought in the parties that are held once in a while (e.g. once a month) but in the club the party-goers have formed. The club is an existing entity, the parties are not.

3. Continuing membership?

To some extent we may say that a classis does have a continuing membership, a classis, namely, understood as the group of churches in a certain area. *They together* form a classis. And even the various classes that are held (now taken in the second meaning, that of "gathering of delegates") have a continuing representation: from each church there always come two delegates to form a classis with the delegates from the other churches. Only when a new church has been instituted in that area or a church had to be "dissolved" because of declining membership, will the number of members of a particular classis be changed: instead of fourteen members there may be sixteen or twelve.

The same persons may be delegated to the next classis, and in cases in which there is one minister in a church, he will always be one of the two delegates; in some churches even the same elder may be delegated twice or three times in succession (this is up to each church individually), but this does not mean that there is a continuing membership in that sense. The brothers come with credentials, and the credentials are examined before classis is *constituted*. If a classis were an existing entity, constitution of a classis would not be required, nor would credentials be required. But for each successive classis the churches have to write credentials, authorizing these two brothers to deal with all matters legitimately submitted for their scrutiny and decision. A classis does not exist until the credentials have been examined and found in order, and the suggested (suggested by the previous classis) officers or the *moderamen* have taken their positions. Before that moment there is only a meeting of delegates; once the *moderamen* have taken their positions a classis is in existence; and once classis has been constituted and come into existence, it would be wrong if the chairman gave the floor to "the delegate from the

church at A." He is no longer a delegate from a certain church but a member of that classis, bound by his credentials but authorized to discuss and decide about the matters that legitimately belong to this classis's jurisdiction.

4. No "interim-business"

A classis can not listen to and adopt "minutes" of the previous classis, as this is a different classis. Each classis, therefore, adopts the Acts of its proceedings at the end of classis, just as a regional or general synod cannot hear and judge the "minutes" of a previous regional or general synod. That the membership of a regional or general synod may vary greatly (as far as the persons are concerned) from that of a previous regional or general synod respectively does not carry any weight of argument: it is the *nature* of the assembly that is decisive: all the broader or major assemblies are on a level: they are gatherings of delegates from the churches in a certain area, sent to deal with a certain agenda. When they have done so, their mandate ceases and they return home, no longer a member of the assembly because the assembly has ceased to exist.

In truly Reformed church polity there can be no "business of classis between meetings," as is the case in the Christian Reformed Church. It might be that a decision by a classis requires appointment of a committee to execute *that particular decision*, but no new matters can come up that could be dealt with by an "interim committee" or some other official charged with what basically would be a supervisory task. When churches come, f.i. with the request for "pulpit supply," being vacant, a classis will appoint a few brothers to arrange this during the period till the next classis. Such a committee, however, is only charged with the execution of a *past* decision, but never has the right to take on a *new matter*.

Also the position of a "stated clerk charged with the responsibility of handling the business of the classis between meetings and of making certain preparations for the next meeting" is taboo in truly Reformed church polity.

In the first place: In Art. 30 C.O. it is clearly stated which matters may be brought to a classis: matters that could not be finished in the minor assembly, i.e. the consistory, or that belong to the churches represented at that assembly in common. And then there may be appeals, as Art. 31 states.

In the second place: at the end of each classis a "convening church" is appointed, and this *church*, not a "stated clerk" is charged with the preparations for the next classis. There can be no "business of classis" to be handled between two classes. And *IF* there are things that require the immediate attention of the sister churches, if, f.i., there are great difficulties in one of the churches for which this church requests the help of the sister churches or advice from the sister churches, the convening church, in consultation with the neighbouring church, can always convene a classis earlier than was decided at the last classis.

It does happen occasionally that a call has to be approved in the period between two classes. For such occasions a *classis contracta* can be held: all the churches in the area are invited to send delegates, but only the convening church for the next classis and the neighbouring church have been appointed to meet as classis *contracta*, and they are entitled to conduct the necessary business, i.c. approbation of call. The other churches may send delegates, but they are not obligated to do so. This arrangement applies only to approbation of calls or giving a document of release to ministers who accepted a call from a church outside the area. Acts are made of this *classis contracta*, and sent to the churches, just as is done with a full classis.

It was one of the objections of the Doleantie Churches that at the merger between the Christelijke Afscheiden Kerk and De Gereformeerde Kerk in Nederland (de Kruiskerken) in 1869, articles were adopted that introduced an hierarchical element by also having a synodical committee and by speaking of classes having supervision over the churches in that area and by using the same terminology with respect to provincial and general synods.

I have not seen much information about the matter of Mount Hamilton Christian Reformed Church, but I was flabbergasted when reading that they lost their possessions. If I recall correctly what I read, a judge declared that the possessions of the (local) church belong to the "denomination." Perhaps our readers are sufficiently aware of what happened in the Netherlands in 1944 and following years to see the similarity, if not identity of the situations. I have not followed the development of church polity in the Christian Reformed Church very closely since

1976, but the very same things against which we warned in 1976 have led to this development.

5. A synod no super-consistory

It is correct when it is stated that a suggestion that a general synod is a consistory over the whole federation sounds “dangerously misguided.” I would call it an abomination and a violation of the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, an attack on His Kingship over the church. He has given His office-bearers only to the local congregations. Their authority does not reach beyond the boundaries of the congregation (which is different from: the boundaries of a certain area). They can NEVER, by means of delegation to a broader assembly, assume or give authority over any other congregation or group of congregations.

If, as is the case in the Christian Reformed Church Order, it is stated that the major assemblies are composed of *office-bearers*, one is on a dangerous path, the path of hierarchy. The major assemblies are composed of *delegates* who, in most instances are, but not necessarily must be, office-bearers. A small church with two elders and one deacon may be compelled to delegate a non-office-bearer to a classis, and this brother will have to be received as a legitimate member of that classis because of his authorization by the consistory. It is even conceivable that this brother, being considered extremely capable, is delegated to a regional synod and then to a general synod. Would he now, by virtue of his having been delegated although not an office-bearer, receive supervision not merely over the church of which he is a member, but over all the churches? What a fallacy!

6. Jurisdiction does not constitute permanence

As for Article 37, the logical conclusion is not at all that “such a body as the classis continues as somewhat the same over a period of time.” And the word “authority” is contraband here. Once again: no one who has received authority from the Lord only over the flock over which he was elected and ordained can receive authority over other churches by means of being delegated to a major assembly by his own consistory.

Although I cannot agree in everything with P. Deddens in his inaugural address on *De Ratificering, etc.* he has, I am convinced, shown conclusively

that our forefathers avoided the word “zeggenschap” and used “zeggen” instead. The term “zeggenschap” implies authority; the term “zeggen” only means that one has a say in certain things. And that is exactly what our broader assemblies have. This “say” is qualified by the provision in Art. 30 concerning the matters a broader assembly is permitted to deal with. One has to note that this article does not include the congregation. The consistory has *authority* over the congregation; the major assemblies have a say in matters concerning the consistories as determined by our agreement laid down in the Church Order. The jurisdiction of regional and general synod respectively is accordingly. To conclude from this that therefore classes and synods must exist as a more or less permanent entity is unwarranted.

If we had put it differently, this article would have grown to an unwieldy size. When we speak of “the classis,” we are not referring to something existing but then we speak “qualitatively” or, if you wish, “generically”: when a classis is held, this classis has the same say over the consistories as a regional synod when it is held has over classes, and a general synod when it is held has over regional synods. Or, to put it still differently: a classis, when in existence for a day or two, is allowed to discuss and decide on matters concerning a consistory, matters that are defined in Art. 30 and 31. The same applies to a

regional and general synod regarding matters that concern the churches in a classical or in a regional-synodical area respectively.

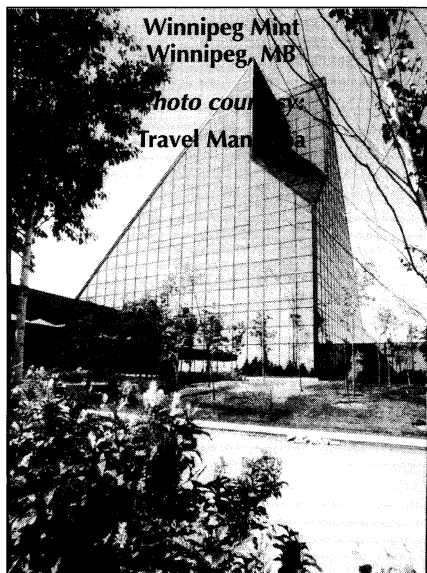
7. “Till we meet again”?

Classis Pacific cannot “meet” on February 14 and again on June 17, for when the one of February 14 has completed its agenda it ceases to exist, even though the churches of that area do not continue as if there were no classical bond. Thus we continue to speak of “the churches of Classis Pacific,” but this does not mean that each church is therefore part of an existing “body” or entity.

Classis of February 14 cannot “take up a certain matter and return to it at the June 17 meeting,” for the brothers are bound by their mandate to discuss and decide about all matters legitimately brought to their attention. Their authorization to do so expires as soon as classis is closed. If they are unable to finish a certain matter, not even when they have had sessions for two or three days or, for the sake of argument, three weeks, this will be recorded in the Acts of the meeting, and the churches are to judge whether the brothers failed in their duties or were unable indeed to come to a conclusion. But the next Classis *is not allowed under any circumstance to read the Acts of the previous Classis and to take up a certain matter because it was not finished at the previous Classis!* The June 17 Classis is allowed to discuss the matter only *if one of the churches of Classis Pacific has the matter put on the agenda of the June 17 Classis.* If none of the churches does so, the matter has “died,” so to speak, and will never come up again. The agenda of a Classis is determined by the *churches* and not by either the previous Classis or members of the former who recall that a certain matter was not finished “the other time.” It would be wrong to say: “But the other time WE decided . . .” “We” did not decide anything, but the previous assembly did. This holds true even if all those who were members of the February 14 Classis were again appointed by their consistories for the June 17 Classis.

It is therefore incorrect to state that according to my views “Classis Pacific pops out of existence when the meeting of February 14 is finished and pops back into existence when the June 17 meeting begins.” As a certain fixed region “covering” a certain number of churches Classis Pacific continues to

OUR COVER



exist. As the Classis Pacific of February 14 it ceases to exist and is not “revived” in any way on June 17. On June 17 a new meeting (Classis) is “born,” and when it dies at the completion of its agenda, we do not have a *Phoenix* that rises from its ashes after three months. The “institute” of Classes as such is a permanent thing, classes themselves are mosttimes *ephemera*, day-flies.

It is conceivable that the classis of February 14 cannot come to a conclusion right away, but has to appoint a committee to investigate a specific matter and to come with a report later, let us say, after four weeks. Then the classis of February 14 is continued on March 14 in order to complete its agenda. But this is basically different from being a permanent institution. No *new* matters may be dealt with on March 14; only the original agenda may be completed.

8. Authorized for a definite period

When Art. 46 states that “each year classis shall . . .” this simply means that such appointment of church visitors shall be done at the classical level, not regional-synodical or general-synodical respectively. Not every classis (if there are four per year) is to appoint church visitors, but this is to be done once a year. These visitors do not report to consistories (although mosttimes the consistory that was visited does receive a copy), nor do these visitors report to a regional synod or to a general synod, but to a classis. If, three months after their appointment they have made all their visits, they may report to the classis held at that time, but they do not have to report until the classis held one year after their appointment.

As for the question whether their authorization loses validity because there is no longer a classis: Of course not. They have been authorized to visit the churches of that area during the coming year. Their mandate is valid until a classis a year after their appointment. To conclude from the terminology used that therefore a classis must be a permanent entity is unwarranted.

Here we may refer to Art. 48: there it is said of the deputies appointed by regional synod (generic qualification!): “They shall not be discharged from their task before and until synod itself discharges them.” It all depends for what pre-determined period the brothers have been appointed to a specific task.



The first General Synod of Homewood-Carman – 1954

In general: all the provisions and terms of the Church Order must be read and understood within the framework of Reformed church polity. Be it far from me to suggest that the formulation is perfect. We won’t have perfection until the new earth. But whoever reads the articles of the Church Order and wishes to understand them and explain them, must read them within the above-mentioned framework.

9. “Each regional synod”

Take, for instance, Art. 49: “Each regional synod . . .” Is it not obvious to any unbiased reader that here we speak of Regional Synod East and Regional Synod West (same terminology as Classis Pacific etc.), so that a general synod will consist of delegates from all regions? If the number of churches should grow so much that we could have three regional-synodical districts, it is obvious that each of these three regions is supposed to send the delegates mentioned in Art. 49. *That’s* what we have stipulated in Art. 49.

Let me also quote here from Art. 47: “At the close of regional as well as of general synod the time and place of the next synod shall be determined . . .” We speak here not of “the end of the meeting,” but of “at the close of synod.” This means clearly: when regional or general synod has come to the end

of its useful life. We also speak of “the next synod,” not “the next meeting.”

In the same article 47 it is stipulated: “At the last regional synod before the general synod delegates shall be chosen to that general synod.” We do not speak of “the last meeting of regional synod before the general synod,” but of “the last regional synod.” From here we go to Art. 49, and then it is clear that the last regional synod of each region is meant. Thus there is no fear at all that three times eight delegates from each region (i.e. 48 in total) show up for membership in the next general synod!

10. Contact with other federations a federal matter

If, from Art. 50, one would draw the conclusion that there must be a permanent synod, “meeting” all the time, because relation with foreign churches “shall be regulated by general synod,” I must again say that I cannot see how one could come to such a conclusion. What is stipulated here is simply that such contact is not a matter of “local church – foreign local church,” nor a matter of “Classis Pacific with Classis Kalgoorlie,” but a matter of federation with federation. And since matters concerning the whole federation rightfully are within the province of a general synod (Art. 30), this is a matter that is to be regulated at the general-synodical lev-

el. This is what we have done, the rules have been decided upon at a general synod, have been revised by our latest general synod, and a committee has been appointed by that general synod to execute this task. They will report to the future general synod, the one at Abbotsford 1995, the Lord willing. Copies of their report may be sent to the local churches, this is done only to keep the churches informed. They report, however, to the forthcoming *general synod*, for that is the level at which these matters are to be dealt with. If Dr. Plantinga's reasoning were correct, we would have to have a general synod as a permanent phenomenon, being constantly in session in case something comes up. This is something even the Christian Reformed Church does not have.

11. No new rule

I have not given a "rule" when stating that general synods do not exist. I have simply stated a fact with which every one within the Canadian Reformed Churches will agree, at least if he or she knows what has been going on in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands ever since the Doleantie and is somewhat aware of the switch in church polity that started around 1924 and following years, finding its culmination point (or deepest abyss) in 1944. It is the fear that via a wrong terminology wrong concepts will creep in that causes me to warn every time anew when wrong terms are used. I shall continue doing so. It is not just a question of "sloppy talk leads to sloppy thought," but of "wrong terms introduce wrong thoughts and from wrong thoughts come wrong practices." One can see also within the Christian Reformed Church what this development has led to. I take into account that the Christian Reformed Church came into "existence" as a result of immigration of Seceders and that these people never went through the Doleantie with its correct concept of church polity. But the influence of the Netherlands in this field resulted also in the classical deposition of Hoeksema in 1924 and the development has gone on to the purely hierarchical situation of today. I shall do whatever I can to prevent such influence from entering and subsequently ruining the Canadian Reformed Churches.

12. No fear for confusion

It will have become clear from the above, I trust, that there is no fear for confusion, if only one desires to get into the spirit of the Reformed church poli-

ty. No compromise is possible between this and an hierarchical system.

13. Our ecumenical aim

This brings me to Dr. Plantinga's ecumenical reason for writing. There may be apprehension about what we really believe concerning the church, such apprehension is unnecessary. I do not believe any more about it than what I have subscribed to in the Confessions. There may be some among us, who have rather sectarian ideas about the church, ideas they cannot base on what we confess. On the other hand, I appreciate the desire to prevent the erasure of lines and to resist falsely so called ecumenism. True ecumenism is the unity of all those who truly believe in God and receive the whole Scriptures as His infallible and inerrant revelation, having the heartfelt desire to live in accordance with His will. This desire to show this true ecumenism was also our reason (expressed already at the first "Classis Canada") for contacting the Christian Reformed Church. If our warnings had been heeded, the present situation within the Christian Reformed Church might not have come about. Now we do desire unity with those who have thrown off the hierarchical yoke and returned to the obedience to the Lord of the Church. What we warned against in our Appeals of 1963 and 1976 has become sad reality. Why should we not desire unity with those who, perhaps unbeknownst, have done what we urged the Christian Reformed Church to do via appeals and via contact with committees?

I do wish to state clearly that there are two things I would never accept: that is the Psalter Hymnal and that is the Church Order as it is in force in the Christian Reformed Church. In this respect I take the stand that the Church at Graafschap, MI, took at the Classis of April 8, 1857, when it mentioned as one of the reasons why it wanted to break with what is now the Reformed Church: of America: "the collection of Hymns, contrary to the Church Order." And I also express the wish that I have made clear in the above why I would never accept the Church Order as it is in force within the Christian Reformed Church.

14. Removing needless barriers

I certainly am willing to explain and have discussions for as long as I am able to conduct them. I do not demand that everyone shall be convinced right away of the truly Reformed character of our


church polity. I realize that it is difficult for someone to grow into the very "spirit" of our church polity (and this certainly not as something to be distinguished from the "letter"!!) when he has grown up and lived under an hierarchical system.

Dr. Plantinga quoted from *With Common Consent*. I do not claim at all to be an "expert," although I have made this field my special field of study. In my book – which I only call a "Guide to the Use of the Church Order" – I have clearly exposed what, in my conviction, is the Reformed church polity. I am willing to write more about it for as long as the Lord gives me strength and ability, and thus to contribute on my part to achieve what we have been wishing for ever since the first immigrants from the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands who cast off the yoke, or were cast out, came here. Tell me what the needless barriers to union are, and I'll try to remove them. I cannot see that what Dr. Plantinga wrote about in his article constitutes such a barrier. For by far the larger part of this article they are barriers which, in reality, are non-existent.

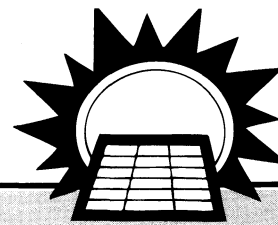
Dr. Plantinga asks for a positive exposition. My question is: "What is negative in my book in which I have tried to give such a positive exposition?" Tell me, and I'll try to elaborate on it, as I did in this response. What explanation then are you asking and waiting for?

If and when it comes to a union for which we both hope and pray, there should be safeguards right at the start, in order that we won't get a situation again such as developed in the Netherlands as well as in the Christian Reformed Church. I realize that we cannot take measures for many years to come, but my concern is the very start. If we do not insist on a truly Reformed (Scriptural) start also as far as church polity is concerned, we shall be in difficulties again before we are aware of it. When we start out on the right foot, we can always call people back to that beginning, if they deviate. If we make a wrong start, we are certain that the wrong turn will be taken. We have never yet seen hierarchy reverse itself! Stamp it out where it counts!

If, by means of this elucidation, I have contributed somewhat to a better understanding and brought unity a step closer, I shall be most grateful and well-rewarded.

And: if there are more questions, I'll gladly try to answer them to the best of my ability. 

RAY OF SUNSHINE



By Mrs. R. Ravensbergen

While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.

Genesis 8:22

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

When you read these lines most of the winter is behind us. Maybe you can see some signs of spring already. At least you can notice the lengthening of the days; that means spring is just around the corner.

How do we know that? Can we be sure that spring comes after the winter, and that it will be followed by summer? Could it be possible that it would not get summer this year, but winter will follow the spring?

The answer to that question is easy. No, it is not just because it always happens that way, or because the scientists explain to us that the sun is closer to our part of the world in the summertime. Even if we do not know any of that, we still know that the Lord gives us the seasons, and that He promised to us that He will never change that. We can read this in the Bible. It is the promise that the Lord gave to Noah when he came out of the ark. Noah had been in the ark for a long time. Between the day that he went into the ark and the day that the earth was completely dry, there was more than a year! During the time of the flood everything on the earth was destroyed. There had been no opportunity for seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter. But when it was all over, the Lord promised that such a thing would never happen again. While the earth remains, the continuation of the seasons shall not cease.

So we know that the Lord will always take care of His world, and of all His children who live in that world. What a promise that is! We can read more about it in Lord's Day 10 of the Heidelberg Catechism. There it says that everything happens not by chance, but by God's fatherly hand. Everything that we receive or that happens to us, or around us comes from God our Father, and from Him alone. Not only the big things like earthquakes and plane crashes, but also the little things that happen every day: the bread that comes on the table, a bout of flue, or a birthday card. It also includes all our handicaps, long term illnesses, seizures, inability to speak, our desire for things that we will never be able to do or have And it includes our blessings, too.

The catechism says, "by God's fatherly hand." A father gives to his children what he thinks is good for them. He knows his children - he knows exactly what they need. A father loves his children, he will help them whatever he can. When he knows that they have a difficult time, he will help them whatever he can. When he knows that they have a difficult time, he will help them. We can always go to our heavenly Father for help. Knowing that we can always go to Him helps us to deal with our problems. Knowing that our Father is in charge, that nothing happens by chance, and that He will be in control "while the earth remains," gives us the comfort to go on.

The Catechism also talks about prosperity and adversity. Prosperity means that everything goes very well. Adversity means that there are difficulties. It sometimes seems that there is more adversity than prosperity. All of us have some kind of a yoke to bear.

According to the Catechism we have to be patient in adversity. It means that you have to bear your burden in faith. Do not get upset or moody, but wait patiently, for there is salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Even adversity comes from our Father in heaven. He uses it to bring us closer to Him. It is difficult to be patient in adversity, but it is even more difficult to be thankful in prosperity. When things go well, we often take it for granted, and forget to thank the Lord for it!

So we go on in good times and bad times. All we have to do is accept the help from our Father and go with Him on the way that He shows us. Even when the path is difficult, He will help us along into the future of our life. There is nothing uncertain or fearful about our future, the goal of our life Christ bore adversity, more than anyone of us. He died on the cross for our sins, and now we may call God our Father. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Let us then recognize that God is in charge. He will continue to take care of the world and everything that is in it; everything happens by His fatherly hand. Glory and praise be to our heavenly Father. In spite of adversities, we are the luckiest people around, for we are His children, out of grace, through Jesus Christ.

*Praise the LORD who reigns forever!
O my soul, bring Him your praise.
I will bless my God and Maker
And exalt Him all my days.
Praises to my God I'll sing,
While I live, I'll laud my King.*

Psalm 146:1

From the mailbox:

The family Breukelman in Coaldale sent the following letter: "We would like to thank the families and several Ladies Aids groups for sending Bev, Alan, and Christine cards for their birthdays. We all appreciate it very much! All the cards are put in albums and from time to time we go through the albums, it is a very pleasant pastime! We would like to wish you all the Lord's blessing for 1993."

Birthdays in April:

On the 2nd **Derek Kok** will celebrate his 23rd birthday.
"Anchor" Home, 30 Road
RR2, Beamsville, ON, LOR 1B0

On the 19th **Marinus Foekens** will turn 41
27 O'Niel Street
Chatham, ON, N7M 3A4

On the 23rd **Arlene DeWit** will have her 32nd birthday.
c/o P. DeWit, Barnston Island
Surrey, B.C. V3T 4W2

I wish you all a very happy birthday.
Until next month,

Mrs. R. Ravensbergen
7462 Hwy 20, RR1
Smithville, ON, LOR 2A0

Report on the League Day of the Canadian Reformed Women's Societies in Ontario

Held on October 21, 1992 in Hamilton

On a cool, crisp fall day 442 women gathered together in Hamilton for a day of study and fellowship. The day began with the singing of four verses from Psalm 84 and the reading of Psalm 25. In her opening remarks entitled "Teach Me Thy Ways," the outgoing President of the League, Lynn VanDelden, emphasized our dependence upon the heavenly Father in dealing with day-to-day living.

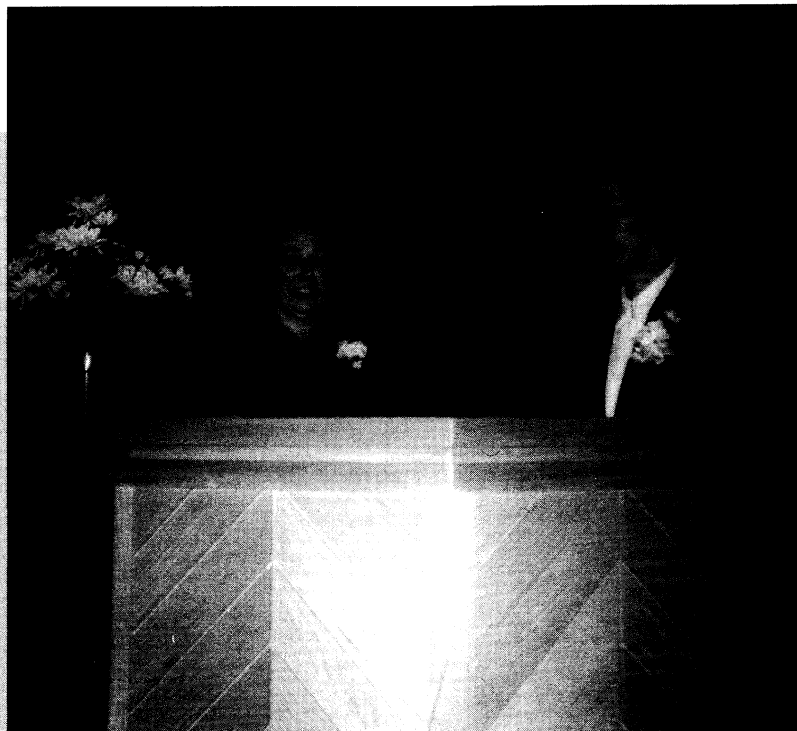
Following this, Mrs. VanDelden introduced the new President of the League, Ryma VanRaalte, and announced that the collection for the day would be for the Middle East Reformed Fellowship (MERF). A congratulatory letter from our sisters in Holland was read and it was announced that the next League Day will convene, the Lord willing, in Guelph.

After singing the League Song, we read together from Ephesians 5. Mrs. VanDelden then introduced the essayist for the morning, Mrs. Adriana VanderVen, whose topic was "Daughters of Eve – Bride of Christ." In her essay Mrs. VanderVen pointed out that we are co-workers with our husbands, but women and men have distinct roles, with the authority of the husband being a God-given task to ensure that all goes well. This was compared with radical feminism in which male domination is rejected and the Bible is scoffed at as a handbook for traditionalists. As unbelievers these feminists are under the curse of sin and separated from God. They are, in effect, the living-dead.

Mrs. VanderVen suggested a "recipe" for a marriage which would be pleasing to our Creator. Take two believers (male

and female). Let them love one another. Let them communicate . . . mix these three ingredients together. Let them exercise headship of the husband and submission of the wife. Let them never lose hope in God regardless of the adversities they may face. This blueprint for marriage is not just for married couples, however. It is actually a guide for the whole congregation.

We were reminded that motherhood is no hindrance to our fulfilment, but rather we shall be saved through child-bearing (1 Timothy 2:15). That unselfish sacrifice of caring and mothering, of working in kitchen and laundry, is work in God's kingdom. However, this is not to say that women who are childless are not saved. Mrs. VanderVen stressed that all who live and act in the commu-



The President, Mrs. Lynn VanDelden (left) introduces, the essayist, Mrs. Adriana VanderVen

nion of saint have truly fulfilled lives. All of us must first seek His kingdom!

God has given us a happy lot, for He has made it possible for Eve's daughters to live and communicate with our Head, Jesus Christ. He has promised that if we endure to the end, we will be saved. That is the comfort of our faith.

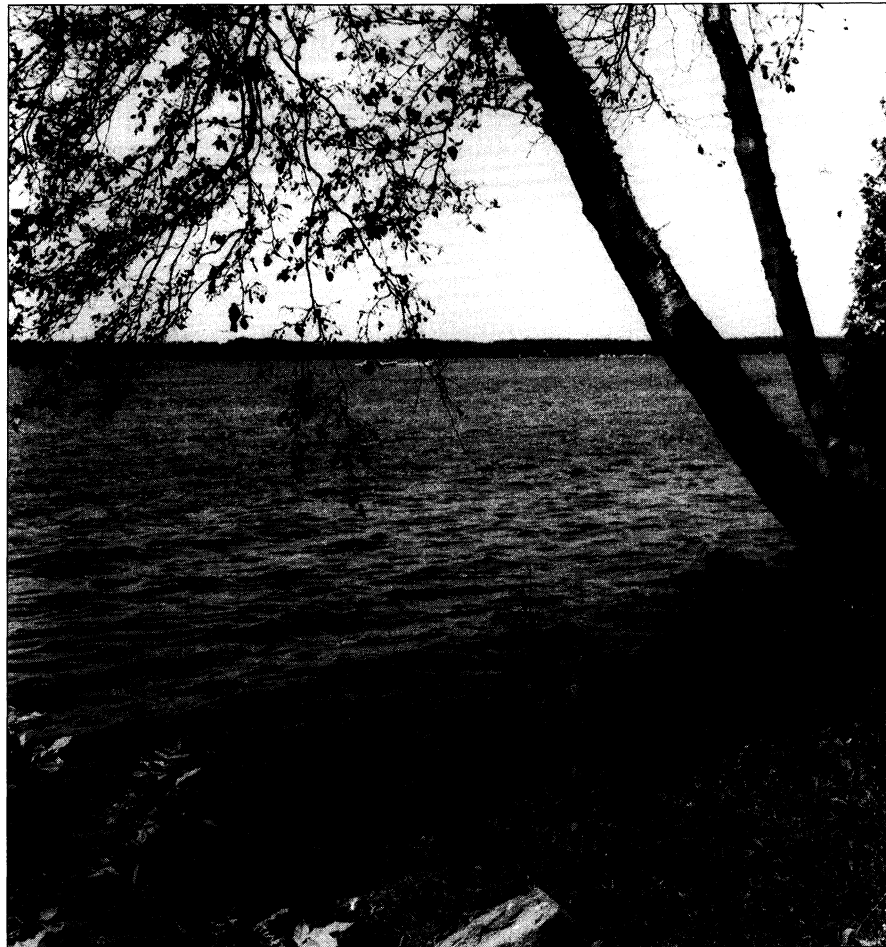
We sang Psalm 16: 1 and 3 with which Mrs. VanderVen had closed her essay. An interesting discussion followed in which it became apparent that this was a very pertinent topic for Reformed women as we are more and more faced with the world's view of feminism. After the discussion we had the collection for MERF which amounted to \$1200. We were then led in a closing prayer after which we enjoyed a lovely lunch.

The afternoon session was opened with the singing of our national anthem and a special welcome to Mrs. Versteeg who was visiting in Canada from Irian Jaya. Mrs. Snow, the music teacher at Guido de Bres High School, then turned nearly 450 ladies (and a few gentlemen) into a beautiful mass choir. We were all amazed that we could learn a new piece of music in just a few short minutes!

As an introduction to the afternoon's speech we sang two verses from Psalm 119 then listened intently to Rev. Clarence Stam's topic, "Tackling Teens – Trouble or Triumph." He began by stating that we raise our children from birth and find it a demanding task, but adolescence is an even more difficult time. Part of the problem stems from peer pressure which is immense, even in Christian schools.

Rev. Stam suggested that there are three phases through which a teen passes. The first is puerile (ages 10-14) in which the teen is beginning to search for independence and identity. The second is puberty (ages 14-17), a period of conflict caused by more awareness and more desire for freedom without knowing how to deal with it. He also suggested that laying down rules doesn't always work since an abundance of rules creates an abundance of transgressions. He recommended having fewer rules, but enforcing them. Children in this phase may be very moody. The final phase is adolescence when the teen is on the brink of maturity. By this point they do not get as angry as they did before.

The teen years are a great adventure of discovery. However, because teens



have such high expectations, they are also subject to great disillusionment. Parents need to give them careful guidance and much love in order to train them to become independent individuals. We should let them know that we are there to listen when they are ready to talk.

Some of the most serious problems result from conflicts over personal freedom, appearance, relationships and goals. However, we must be cautious that we do not express so much disapproval that the teen feels rejected. We must remember to praise them more than we criticize them. We must also respect our children and show them what the Lord Jesus requires of them. They need to be reminded that they are responsible to the Lord. Hopefully this will lead them to self-discipline.

After Rev. Stam's speech we sang four verses from Psalm 25 then discussed his speech. It was evident from the questions which arose that dealing with teens is of great concern to parents, especially when they see their child going the wrong way.

As the League Day drew to a close, Mrs. VanDelden thanked Mrs. Vander-

Ven and Rev. Stam for speaking to us on such pertinent topics. She also thanked Martha DeGelder, who is retiring from the Board of the ILPB, for her many years of service to that Board. The pianist for the day, Joanne Hordyk, was also thanked, as were the ladies of the hosting societies in Hamilton. Lastly she expressed her thanks to the LORD for health and guidance which she had received to do her work over the past ten years as President of the League. She asked us to sing together Hymn 6.

The Vice-All, Lies Schutten, thanked Mrs. VanDelden for all her work, then spoke a few words of farewell. On behalf of the League she presented Mrs. VanDelden with a covered crystal bowl as a token of our appreciation. We then sang Hymn 41 after which Rev. Stam led us in prayer.

We once again had the opportunity to enjoy fellowship and refreshments with our sisters before returning to our homes, refreshed spiritually as well as physically.

Willa Dale M. Smid
Recording Secretary



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

Your editorials regarding my comments in a guest-editorial in *The Messenger* about the November meeting of the ARC do require some response. I found your statement of having entered into conversation with me (your second editorial) a little strange. I have always understood conversation to be amiable dialogue; here, however, I found myself being shouted at. But, no doubt, that is a little over sensitive on my part. Since the readers of *The Messenger* will, for the most part, not be aware of this "conversation," I will limit my reply to this Letter to the Editor. I look for no further discussion.

Based on previous contacts with you (and some of your esteemed colleagues) I do believe that you have written with a sincere desire to serve the cause of the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. I have done the same thing. We differ on some issues. The way in which you have dealt with some of these proves my point that denominational ("organic") unity will be very difficult to achieve. Your maintaining what you state is the only Scriptural and Confessional view I find rather irksome; your dismissing any other considerations in these matters as being of less validity and even a forsaking of principles avowedly held dear, I find rather arrogant. This is a harsh way of saying it, but brother, perhaps it is time that someone tells you how this comes over. And, please, do not read this as "Schouls states that maintaining the Scriptures and Confessions is irksome," for that is not what I say.

I find it most regrettable that at this time, when there is a purported attempt on the part of your churches and other Reformed bodies to reach out to each other, you would write these articles. Your tone insinuates that I do not hold to the principles of the Secession of 1834 and much of that for which the Free Reformed Churches (and the CGKN) stand. When one asks questions such as "Is Rev. Schouls willing to give up the principle of the Secession of a church-seminary?" and "Does this, then, not mean that...Rev. Schouls does not maintain

this confession (sic), normative, obedient speaking according to God's Word?" or "Does obedience depend on the situation?" one must realize that these are not neutral questions but they are designed to make the reader doubt the degree of commitment which this Rev. Schouls may have on these points. Was it your place to ask these questions and to do so in this manner?

You have read far more into my remarks made at the ARC than ever I intended. You jump from a comment about possible co-operation in mission efforts to the information of a hierarchical mission board. You contrast this with the Canadian Reformed adherence to the New Testament principle of the local church doing missions. Perhaps you will someday have an opportunity to read the Free Reformed Mission Order. Meanwhile, please do not imply that others are not observing that same principle. You draw the Netherlands Reformed *Congregations* (not "Churches") into the picture with respect to a ministerial training program – hardly fair, considering the trials in which they are embroiled right now. It is very likely that they would not wish to participate in such a program but why did you not mention the fact that we, Free Reformed, did and with results which are not dissatisfactory? And we used the Theological School of the Canadian Reformed Churches! You dealt with some other suggestions in a like manner; in each instance you took a germ of a thought and developed it into the worst possible and most unworkable scenario. As stated, I do find this regrettable, to say the least.

I believe that behind all this lies your concept of the church and your rejection of anything that hints at the idea of "pluriformity." I find it remarkable to be accused of Kuyperianism at this point. Recently, one of your colleagues told me that we, Free Reformed people, are as Kuyperian as can be because of our acceptance of the idea of the pluriformity of the church. (I do not hold you responsible for what others may say but I guess you would agree with him.) You must know that "Kuype-

rianism" to a Free Reformed person has to do with Dr. Kuyper's views on the Covenant of Grace, baptism and justification. Of course, I am aware of some of the statements made in the debates around 1892 even as you must be aware of the writings of Dr. Bavinck who dealt with this entire concept of pluriformity in his *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek* (I refer especially to section 495, sub points 2 and 4). It is rather unfair to present this pluriformity matter as if it first came from the pen of Dr. Kuyper. Bavinck, correctly, points out that there has never been the kind of uniformity which you espouse and that, although the divisions in the church are part of the reality of sin, God can and does use them for His own purposes. "God loves diversity in unity," according to Bavinck. He goes so far as to say (translation mine): "If we, according to the New Testament usage of the language, understand by 'church' the local churches in all of Christendom, then there are no true or false churches in the absolute sense."

Your final paragraph, alluding to sectarianism on the part of those who "consider their own specific characteristics more important than confessional obedience," is the big club with which we have been threatened before. Your wielding of it at this point underscores your lack of understanding of the nature of our concerns. How can we argue against this without appearing to be what you hint we are – sectarian? How can we win when, every time we make a sound about why we are Free Reformed, the Canadian Reformed finger is thrust at us and the question is hurled at us "Do you hold to the Three Forms of Unity? Yes? Then we must be together as one!" Really, brother, if that is going to be the be-all and end-all of our discussions, I would rather be left alone. I sincerely wish it will not be this way.

One final thought – the polemical tone heard so often in your magazine (directed both inwardly and outwardly) is disheartening. It surely does not make you more attractive. The comment about pleasantries and the promotion of unity in the "News Medley" of February

12, I found downright painful and certainly not in concord with what you perhaps sing regularly, "Behold, how good, how pleasant is the union when brothers live together in communion" (Psalm 133; *Anglo-Genevan Psalter!*) Or is my interpretation of that communion too loose?

With brotherly greetings,
(Rev.) Carl Schouls

Editor's Comment:

If colleague Schouls does not want a discussion, and basically argues that we/I show a lack of friendliness and kindness, I see no need to respond with arguments. On the point of the church and the Union of 1892, I hope to come back later this year.

J. Geertsma

Esteemed Editor:

Allow me to make some remarks about the article in the Year-end issue of *Clarion* written by Prof. Faber. We all will agree that Canadian Reformed people are just as vulnerable for the desires of the world as anyone else. With Art. 28 B.C. we confess that all and everyone are obliged to join the church and unite with it, maintaining the unity of the church. They must submit themselves to its instruction and discipline What are those brothers and sisters doing who spend 5 or 6 months in Florida? They do not withdraw from the home church, but is the home church able to exercise discipline? Unless the whole consistory of the home church is also in Florida, that is not possible. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper can not be celebrated either. Discipline and sacraments are intrinsically related, for the 3 marks of the church cannot be separated. I will refer to Prof. Faber's book, *Essays in Reformed Doctrine*. I immensely have enjoyed reading it. On page 165, Prof. Faber says: To "the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth, which is built on Christ's petra, the administration of the keys of the kingdom of heaven has been given In accordance with the Word of His church, if that word is witness to His own gospel. God will judge both in this life and the life to come." What we in fact are seeing is that certain Canadian Reformed people are on a freewill basis in dispersion. They all have promised to submit willingly to the admonition and discipline of the church, but the church where they are mem-

bers of is not able to take care of them. Prof. Faber hopes that there will come a little more flexibility. (In Dutch we would say: de bakens verzetten). He refers to the time that the J.V. Bond organized "zomercongressen." That was in fact the start, that the 3 churches he mentioned, organized worship services there. People could go there with a travel attestation so that Christian discipline still could be exercised. With a floating population, it is not possible to institute a church with elders and deacons. When it is summer again, people return to Canada and the (eventual) church, ceases to exist.

The church should be where the people are, Prof. Faber says. In the book I mentioned, he emphasizes that believers have to join the church. I never heard that any investigation is done whether or not there are other places which are just as healthy, and which are in the vicinity of established sister churches. I am not judging anyone, but let us all be careful that we do not tie our "needs" to our "ability," or: if we are able to go there, then the need to go there becomes more urgent. "Especially on the day of rest, we shall attend diligently the church of God." I am not saying, that those who go there, are not, or will not be faithful. But there is more to a worship service than reading a sermon, how important it is. If the Christian discipline can not be exercised in the proper way, then the church is in danger.

W. DeHaan
Wardsville, ON

Response:

In an upcoming newsletter for *Clarion*, I will write a little more about this matter and the endeavours of the brothers and sisters in Florida.

J. Faber

To the readers of *Clarion*:

On Oct. 23, 1992 the consistory of the American Reformed Church, Denver met with representatives of the Providence Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Denver to discuss concerns arising from the article *History of the Reformed Church, Denver* recently printed in *Clarion*. As the result of this meeting several matters of misunderstanding were cleared up, some issues that divide us were identified, and the need for further discussion of these issues was realized. Further meetings



ACCEPTED to Ancaster, ON
Rev. H.M. Van Essen
of Hamilton, ON

•••

DECLINED to Brampton, ON,
Guelph, ON, Ottawa, ON,
and Neerlandia, AB

Rev. H.M. Van Essen
of Hamilton, ON

•••

CALLED to Edmonton
(Immanuel), AB

Rev. K.A. Kok
of Blue Bell, PA, U.S.A.

•••

DECLINED to Grand Rapids, MI,
U.S.A.

Rev. R.A. Schouten
of Calgary, AB

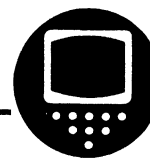
have been proposed, for which we are all grateful to the Lord.

One of the matters of concern to the OPC brothers was that our article left the impression that there were numerous, *official* meetings between our consistory and OPC sessions in Denver to discuss perceived problems in the OPC. There were no *official* meetings of this sort. Indeed, there was not even a consistory here until the congregation was instituted in July 1991. Our problems with the OPC were discussed on an individual basis with ministers, elders, and members of the OPC. One brother did voice his concerns with an OPC session numerous times during the 2 year period before the church was instituted.

In the interests of accuracy and unity we offer this clarification for your readers.

Sincerely,
Chairman, M. Pollock
Clerk, P. Brintjies
Consistory of American
Reformed Church, Denver





Classis Ontario-South, February 24, 1993 in Lincoln

1. On behalf of the convening church of Lincoln, Rev. G.A. Snip called the meeting to order and asked to sing Psalm 46:1,2. He then read Psalm 46, and opened with prayer. The delegates were welcomed.

2. The credentials were examined and found to be in good order. All the churches were duly represented. Rev. R. Sietsma was present as advisor. The church at Watford had two instructions.

3. Classis was constituted and the following moderamen was appointed: Rev. T. Hoogsteen, chairman, Rev. B.R.Hofford, clerk and Rev. J. DeGelder, vice-chairman.

The chairman mentioned the following items of memorabilia:

– Rev. D. Moes accepted the call to Vernon B.C.

– Rev. R.A. Schouten declined the call from Grand Rapids

– Rev. K.A. Kok received a call from Edmonton (Immanuel).

– Rev. H.M. VanEssen accepted the call to Ancaster.

– Br. H. Wildeboer, who was for many years an elder in the church at London, passed away.

4. The agenda was adopted.

5. The question period ad art. 44 C.O. was held, and it could be noted with thankfulness, that in all the churches the ministry of the office-bearers is continued, and the decisions of the major assemblies are honoured.

6. The Church at Ancaster requested the classical approbation of the call extended to Rev. H.M. VanEssen. Classis decided not to accede to this request, on the ground that the proper announcements to the congregation had not been completed. The Church at Ancaster was advised to request for a Classis Contracta in due time.

7. The Church at Watford asked for a letter of release for Rev. D. Moes; who accepted the call from the Church at Vernon B.C.

a. In closed session the report of the church visitation in the Church at Watford was read.

b. In closed session Classis dealt with several letters concerning the request of the Church at Watford for the release of Rev. D. Moes. Classis decided to inform the brothers about the decision taken with regard to this release.

c. Classis examined the necessary documents. They were found to be in good order. Classis decided to release Rev. D. Moes from his ministerial duties in Classis Ontario-South, with a letter of release that is in harmony with the letter of release given by the consistory of the Church at Watford, showing an honest picture of Rev. Moes' ministry.

8. Classis appointed Rev. G. Wieske as counsellor for the Church at Watford, and granted the Church at Watford monthly pulpit supply.

9. In closed session classis dealt with two appeals.

10. In closed session the reports were read of the church visitation in the churches at Ancaster, Grand Rapids, Rockway and Hamilton.

11. Replacing Rev. D. Moes, classis appointed Rev. G. Wieske as church visitor and examiner in diaconiology, and Rev. J. E. Ludwig as examiner in ethics.

12. The delegate from the Church at Chatham at the farewell-service of Rev. Moes on Feb. 28, br. F. VanGorkum, was requested to represent also Classis Ontario-South at this occasion.

13. Pulpit supply for the Church at Watford was arranged as follows: March – Rev. Wieske, April – Rev. DeGelder, May – Rev. Snip, June – Rev. Ludwig, July – Rev. Hoogsteen and August – Rev. Agema.

14. Next Classis Ontario-South will be held, the Lord willing, on June 9, 1993 in London, ON. Convening church is the Church at London, and suggested officers are: Rev. K.A. Kok, chairman; Rev. T. Hoogsteen, clerk and Rev. B.R. Hofford, vice-chairman.

15. Censure ad art. 44 C.O. is not needed.

50TH WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

MR. AND MRS. W.H. DEVRIES



- Married March 25, 1943 in Stadskanaal (Groningen).
- Emigrated to Canada 11 July 1951 aboard "Volendam" with 4 children.
- First to Coaldale, then to New Westminster area.
- For a couple of years to Slovan City, in the BC interior.
- In 1955 to Ontario – London area.
- In 1956 to Fergus – still here.

- Dad worked on farms and factories.
- Since retirement, Mom and Dad are busy with volunteer work.
- Both are in good health.
- They travel frequently, as 4 of their 8 children live in BC.
- Members of Elora congregation since its institution.

16. The Acts are read and adopted and the Press Release was read and approved.

17. In his closing remarks the chairman, Rev. Hoogsteen, spoke a few farewell-words to Rev. D. Moes, because of his departure to British Columbia. He referred to his ministry in the Church at Watford and his various tasks in Classis Ontario-South, and he wished him the Lord's blessing for

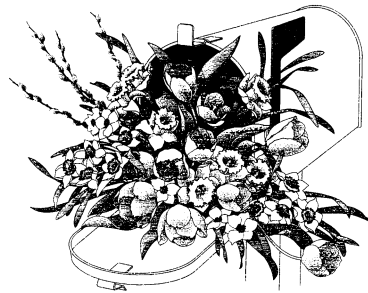
the future. Rev. Moes expressed his thankfulness for those words. He thanked for the fellowship he experienced in the churches in this classical region and commits the brothers delegates and the churches to the Lord.

The chairman expressed the hope that Rev. Sietsma could leave for Brazil as soon as possible. He wished the Church at Ancaster and Rev. VanEssen a blessed Sunday in connection with the

coming installation, and he encouraged the Churches at Grand Rapids and Watford in their efforts to get a new pastor and teacher.

18. The chairman led in thanksgiving, and closed the meeting after the singing of Hymn 6.

For Classis Ontario-South
of Feb. 24, 1993,
J. DeGelder, vice-chairman e.t.



With joy and thankfulness to the Lord who has made all things well, we announce the birth of our son

STEPHEN PAUL

Born February 8, 1993

A brother for *Nicole, Mark, Katie Tonia, and Jessica*

Nick and Wilma Torenvliet
(nee Jelsma)

27 Algonquin Avenue
Dundas, ON L9J 1A2

We praise God and thank Him for the blessing to our family of another covenant child

ROBERT EDWARD

Born on January 27, 1993

A brother for
Jocelyn, Billy and David

Rob and Joyce vanAmerongen
(nee Huinink)

4292 Fly Road
Campden, ON L0R 1G0

Hymn 65

We thank God, the Giver of life, for blessing our family with the birth of

DAVID ROBERT

Born on January 28, 1993

son of

John and Margaret Schoon
(nee Vandenberg)

and brother for

Gail, Kristen, and Peter

76 Tanager Square
Brampton, ON L6Z 1X2

With great thankfulness to the Lord who made all things well, we joyfully announce the birth of our two sons

JAMIE MARK

and

JARAD ANTHONY

Born December 23, 1992

Proud sisters:

Stephanie, Dana, Jolene

Mark and Brenda
Van Grootheest
(nee Beukema)

RR 4
Fergus, ON N1M 2W5

Make me understand the way of Thy precepts, and I will meditate on Thy wondrous works. Psalm 119:27

With great thankfulness to our heavenly Father, who has again richly blessed our marriage with another covenant child, we joyfully announce the safe arrival of our second daughter whom we named

LYDIA CORNELIA

Born February 13, 1993

A little sister for *Rachael Leanne*

John and Carla Bloemendal
(nee Devos)

298 Oak Avenue
Strathroy, ON N7G 3T2

Praise the Lord!

... for Thou hast done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure. Isaiah 25:1b

The Lord has granted us our fifth child, a son

COLLIN DALE

Born December 1, 1992

A brother for *Shawn, Daylinn Andre and Leon*

Henry and Val Lodder
(nee Kleine-Deters)

4201-26th Avenue
Vernon, BC V1T 1R2