

## The Fiftieth Anniversary of the Liberation 1944 - 1994

### Fifty years ago

This issue of our magazine is dedicated to the Liberation in 1944. We may celebrate the Liberation's fiftieth anniversary. Half a century ago, on August 11, 1944, individual church members, among them many office bearers, followed by entire congregations or larger or smaller parts of congregations began liberating themselves from synodical decisions on points of the Reformed doctrine and church polity. These decisions were laid upon the churches with a binding force. Why did so many liberate themselves from these binding decisions of succeeding synods in the first half of the forties? They saw and proved these decisions to be in conflict with God's Word and the confession of the churches and with the mutual agreements for the life of the churches together as adopted in the Church Order.

Half a century has gone by. Many among us are younger than fifty years and have not personally been involved in the Liberation. Of those who are between fifty and sixty and lived in the Netherlands at that time, most will not be able to remember much because they were children at that time. Only those who are older than sixty-five or even seventy among us will have personally experienced the Liberation. This is why we are thankful to be able to present in this issue a personal eye and ear witness report of what took place. The reader will find Rev. W.W.J. VanOene's account of the meeting in Den Haag on August 11, 1944 where the "Act of Liberation or Return" was read with which the Liberation became a fact.

Important is also to know what really went on in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands in those dark days of 1944, while the Second World War was still pressing heavily on the Dutch nation. Dr. J. De Jong gives us a historical picture that deals not so much with the facts but more with the background. With such information we can understand better not only what happened some fifty years ago but it also sheds light on our present time. There is always the danger that we forget what was received in the past. That danger is certainly not less there for the generations who were not involved and must receive their knowledge and insight from hearing and reading.

For that reason the third contribution contains a number of doctrinal statements about regeneration, baptism and covenant as they were made in 1905 and in the years 1942 - 1943. We do not go into details. Much more could have been brought forward. For further study in this respect I may refer not only to the books and brochures mentioned at the end but also to *Clarion*, vol. 22, nr. 16 (August 10, 1984). In our baptism, whether as adults or as infants God seals His promises to us as they are revealed and given to His people

in His covenant Word. This means that we, again both adults and infants who are growing up, are called to receive these promises with a believing heart, in obedience of faith. The Liberation itself was seen as an act of this obedience of faith. Those who liberated themselves did so because they wanted to be more obedient to God than to men.

### After fifty years

Will we preserve the heritage given to us in the Liberation? Will we give up and lose the enthusiasm and dedication of half a century ago? Have we lost a large part of it already? In the Liberation Dr. K. Schilder played an important role. He emphasized God's covenant with promise and obligation in his preaching and teaching as of basic significance for our life with the LORD God. Following Kuyper, Schilder, too, said that our covenant life with God is our whole life in all its aspects. It is this same emphasis that belongs to the heritage of the Liberation. The stress on continuing reformation in our whole life in all its areas is part of this heritage.

We, Canadian and American Reformed churches in North America, have our roots in the Liberation, too. We have received much in these roots. It is now our calling, let us say as second and third, and already up-coming fourth generation, to keep this root and continue to grow from this root as a healthy plant. For if we are cut off from our root or if the root rots away, the plant will wither and disappear. To keep the root and continue to grow from it, will only be possible if the older generation abides by its heritage and hands it over to the next generations, and when the next generation is willing to work hard on knowing and abiding by that heritage.

Our root is in the first place faith in the triune God of the Scriptures that lives by the Scriptures of this God in humble submission as these Scriptures are given. Our root is faithful adherence to the Three Forms of Unity in which the truth of these Scriptures about our triune God is confessed. Our root is faithful abiding by the Reformed Church Order of Dort since it is based on the teaching of Scripture as confessed in the Reformed Standards and as it seeks to ensure the churches' preservation by Scripture and confession in order to remain faithful to their Lord and Saviour.

May our commemoration of the Liberation serve a renewed attention for it and a holding onto its heritage, not as a formality but in a life of thankfulness to the Lord who gave us such a treasure of insight in the riches of His Word through the struggle of faith that was linked to the Liberation from wrong and sinful decisions and the Return to His Word, to the confession of the church and to the Reformed Church Order. C

# What led to the Liberation?

By J. Geertsema

## After the Union 1892 - 1905

In 1892 the Union took place between the churches of the Secession (1834), who had followed Rev. Hendrick de Cock and other ministers, and the churches of the "Doleantie" (1886) who had followed Dr. Abraham Kuyper. De Cock and those with him had been deposed from office or were not allowed to become minister by the Synod of the Dutch Reformed church. The basic reason was that Rev. De Cock and the others wanted to return to the truth of God's Word as this was confessed in the Three Forms of Unity of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. The people of the Secession also wanted to shake off the yoke of synodical hierarchy as this had taken hold of the Dutch Reformed church and go back to the Reformed Church Order of the Synod of Dort 1618-1619.

Kuyper and his followers, too, wanted to return to the Reformed doctrine and free themselves from the corrupt yoke of hierarchy of the Dutch Reformed church and return to the Church Order of Dort for their church life.

Two differences between the Secession and the Doleantie are the following:

1. The Secession leaders were a number of ministers together, not one great and dominating leader as Dr. Kuyper was in the "Doleantie."

2. The Secession placed relatively more emphasis on the confession than on the Church Order. Kuyper and his fellow worker, Dr. F.L. Rutgers, placed great emphasis on a return from a hierarchical church government to the Church Order of Dort, although the return to the Reformed confession was not unimportant for them. However, Kuyper worked more with the so-called "Reformed principles" and doctrinal constructions.

An example is that Kuyper based the Free University, established in 1880, on these "Reformed principles" rather than on the confessions of the Reformed churches, the Three Forms of Unity. The confession was for the church and church life, while the "Reformed principles" were to serve as basis for kingdom projects as education in Christian schools and political organizations. Leaders of the Secession churches raised objections against Kuyper's adoption of "Reformed Principles" as basis for the Free University instead of the confession.

## How and when are children regenerated?

The Union took place in spite of a number of objections of people of the Secession against certain teachings of Kuyper. In 1896 and 1905 some objections were brought to the General Synod of the united churches. One of those objections was against Kuyper's idea that regeneration must be presumed to have taken place in a baby and is the basis for its baptism. Kuyper reasoned further that, therefore, regeneration is worked by the Holy Spirit immediately, that is, without the means of God's Word. When (immediate) regeneration as fact that has happened in the baby is basis for its baptism, it can also be reasoned that, thus, the covenant is truly made only with the regenerated (and elected) children of believers.

One of the leaders opposing these ideas of Kuyper was Prof. L. Lindeboom in Kampen. Another opponent was Rev. T. Bos. They stated that the basis for baptism is not a (presumed) regeneration, something in the heart of a child, but God's covenant promises which are for the believers and their children and the command of God therefore that these children must be baptized. I may refer here to the Heidelberg Catechism, L.D. 27, Q.A. 74. The Synod of 1905

tried to maintain the peace in the churches with a pacifying declaration. It can be found in Art. 158 of the Acts of Synod 1905, p. 84-86. Part of this declaration reads:

With regard to the point of the "*immediate regeneration*", the Synod judges, that this expression can be used in a good sense, insofar our churches have always confessed over against the Lutheran and Roman church that regeneration does not take place through the Word or the sacraments as such but through the almighty and regenerating activity of the Holy Spirit; that, however, *this regenerating activity of the Holy Spirit must not be divorced from the preaching of the Word as if both were separate from each other*; for even though our Confession teaches that we should not have any doubt regarding the salvation of our children who die in their infancy although they have not heard the preaching of the Gospel, and further regarding the manner in which this regeneration takes place with these and other children *nowhere in our confession a pronouncement is made, that nevertheless on the other hand it is an established fact that the Gospel is a power of God unto salvation for every one who believes*, and that with the adults the regenerating activity of the Holy Spirit accompanies the preaching of the Gospel . . . (emphasis added. J.G.)

We notice in the first place that the Synod tried to combine the teaching of Kuyper ("the expression *immediate regeneration* . . . can be used in a good sense") with the views of his opponents by, at the same time, restricting Kuyper's teaching. In the second place we see that the basis and starting point for the teaching of an immediate regeneration, apart from God's Word, is the reasoning that children of believing

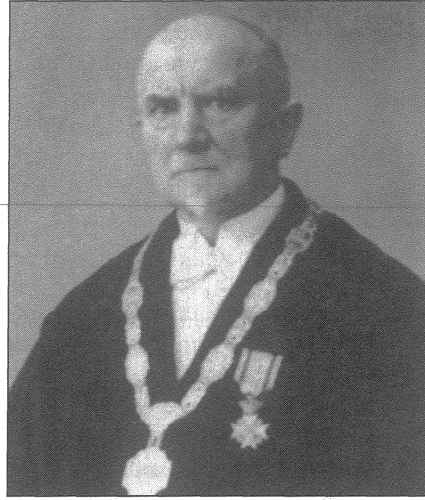
parents who are taken away in their infancy are saved (Canons of Dort, I, 17). Even though the Canons do not speak about regeneration in this context but only about election and salvation, Kuyper reasoned that if they are saved they must have been regenerated. Kuyper's conclusion was: if this regeneration takes place in such children that die in their infancy, regeneration can and must take place in all children in the covenant, that means, in all those

scendants (seed) shall be named (Rom. 9:6-7), so that the preaching must always insist on self-examination, since only those who have believed and have been baptized will be saved. Further, the Synod maintains with the Confession that "the sacraments are not void and meaningless so that they deceive us," but that they are "visible signs and seals of something internal and invisible, by means of which God works in us

*each elected child therefore must be regenerated already as a fact before its baptism cannot be proved either on the ground of Scripture nor on the ground of the Confession, since God fulfils His promise according to His sovereign power at His time, either before or during or after Baptism, so that the demand is to speak about this point in a careful way without wanting to be wise above what God has revealed to us (italics added).*



Professor Dr. K. Schilder



Professor Dr. S. Greijdanus

It is again clear that the Synod made a compromise. Its statements and quotations from the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism can be read and interpreted in the way of Kuyper's theological construction, as if baptism signifies and seals the fact that we have been regenerated. But in the whole of the declaration this is not possible. For the last paragraph states that it cannot be proved from Scripture or Confession when God's work of regeneration occurs, or rather, when God fulfils His promise to regenerate. That here is spoken about the promise to regenerate means that the declaration cannot be read in this sense that regeneration as a fact that has happened already is sealed. It must mean that the promise of (forgiveness and) regeneration is sealed, that is, the promise of what God inwardly does in the heart and which is pictured with the outward washing with water.<sup>1</sup> It is important to see this point. Not a factual regeneration, not something that has happened in the child, but the promise of God regarding what he gives in Christ as signified and sealed in baptism was the issue here for Lindeboom and those with him. This what they wanted to be maintained.

### From 1905 - 1936

Because of Kuyper's intense influence on the Reformed churches, it is not amazing that in the following years the voices with criticism on what he taught lost their impact and were hardly heard or read anymore. This counts also for the critical corrections of the Synod of Utrecht 1905 and the writings of Lindeboom and Bos. The adoption of the theology of Kuyper characterized the Reformed churches. The consequence was that the difference between the practical and concrete language of the Scriptures on regeneration, baptism and the covenant (maintained by the men of the Secession) and the theological construction of Kuyper was not clearly seen anymore.<sup>2</sup>

children whom God has elected. Since we do not know who are elected, we presume that these children have been regenerated. In this way Kuyper could reason that (presumed) factual regeneration in the child is the ground for baptism.

With regard to this point of the presumed regeneration the Synod declared that, according to the Confession of our Churches, the seed of the covenant must be taken for regenerated and sanctified in Christ until the opposite shows when they grow up; that it is less correct, however, to say that baptism is administered to the children of believers on the ground of their presumed regeneration because the ground for baptism is the command and promise of God; that further to the judgment of love with which the Church takes the seed of the covenant for regenerated certainly does not mean that therefore each child truly would be regenerated because God's Word teaches us that not all belong to Israel who are descended (seed) from Israel, and that through Isaac, it is said, your de-

through the power of the Holy Spirit" (Belgic Confession, Art. 33), and that especially baptism is called "the washing of regeneration" and "the washing away of sins," because God "will assure us by this divine pledge and sign that we are as truly cleansed from our sins spiritually as we are outwardly (bodily, L.D. 26 Q.A. 73) washed with water;" for this reason, in the prayer after Baptism, our Church "gives thanks and praise to God that He has forgiven us and our children all our sins through the blood of His beloved Son Jesus Christ and has adopted us as members of His only begotten Son and thus as His children and that He seals and confirms this with holy Baptism;" so that our confessions clearly teach that the sacrament of Baptism signifies and seals the washing away of sins through the blood and Spirit of Jesus Christ, that is, justification and renewal through the Holy Spirit as benefits which God has given to our seed.

In the meantime, the Synod is of the opinion that the thesis that

After Kuyper's death in 1920, Rev. C. Schilder became known. With others he published articles in *De Reformatie* which would become "his" weekly paper. In this period much attention was given to exegesis and many commentaries were published within the Reformed circles. Through all this the eyes of many were opened for the correctness of much of the criticism against parts of Kuyper's teaching. Schilder became one of the leaders. His aim was not to reject Kuyper's teachings, but to continue in Kuyper's line. However, in order to do so in faithfulness to Scripture and Confession, Schilder saw that corrections were necessary. These corrections were in line with the criticisms from the side of the men of the Secession.

However, Schilder's arguments and conclusions were rejected. Dr. H.H. Kuyper, son of Dr. A. Kuyper, suggested at the Synod of Amsterdam 1936, that the situation for the Reformed churches was very dangerous because of opinions deviating from the generally accepted teachings. In response, the Synod decided that it should deal with the "differences in doctrine." The Synod made this decision on its own authority, which is un-Reformed since the major assemblies can only deal with matters which the churches put on their table. They cannot themselves add matters to their agenda. To do this is a form of hierarchy and lording it over the churches.

### 1936 - 1944

Leaving out details, we give only the main points of what happened. A majority and minority report about the "doctrinal differences" were prepared. The Synod of Sneek/Utrecht (29 August) 1939 - (29 April) 1943 decided on 26 May 1942 to deal with the "differences in doctrine," in spite of requests from two regional synods, twenty-one classes and sixteen consistories (representing about two-thirds of the total membership of the churches) not to do so because of the difficult war situation. On 8 June 1942 the synod adopted doctrinal decisions, among others, regarding common grace and the covenant of grace and self-examination. These are the relevant decisions regarding the covenant of grace:

1. that the covenant of grace is of such a fundamental importance for a life in faith that both the preaching of God's Word and every other work of the church has to take

its starting point in it, and that every presentation or practice must be avoided that would not do justice to the importance of God's covenant;

2. that the Lord promises undoubtedly in the promise of the covenant to be the God not only of the believers but also of their seed (Gen. 17:7); that, however, He no less reveals in His Word to us that not all who descended from Israel are Israel (Rom. 9:6);

3. that, therefore, - according to what the Synod of Utrecht 1905 has declared - "the seed of the covenant must be taken for regenerated and sanctified in Christ in virtue of the promise of God until the opposite shows when they grow up; even though the synod (1905) correctly added that this "does not mean at all that therefore every child truly has been regenerated;"

5. that it is in conflict with the truthfulness of God to assume in Scripture such a duality that it says regarding the same task both yes and no and on the one hand teaches the perseverance of the saints and on the other hand those who are regenerated can fall away and perish;

6. that it is no less wrong to make a false contrast between an eternal covenant and a dispensation of the covenant in time; and to understand the manner of speaking of Scripture when it calls the members of the church in general believers in such a way that all church members are believers, but this in the sense of "believers-in-time" and therewith not yet "in God's eternal council;" this is in conflict with Scripture which also addresses the church members in general as "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father (1 Pet. 1:2, see Col. 3:12, Eph. 1:4-5).

The reference to the Synod 1905 took the fear of many away, even though the 1905 declaration was quoted one-sidedly. For the 1942 declaration quoted only the Kuyperian teaching that the children in the covenant must be "taken for regenerated." It did not quote the "corrections" from the Secession brothers.

However, the fear came back when the synod issued an *Explanation* on 6 October 1942 in which it declared that this doctrinal declaration on the covenant should be understood in accordance with the view of Kuyper.



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This *Explanation* says, for instance, "that the covenant of grace is not just an offer of grace but that it gives the grace" (p.12, 16f); and that it is incorrect "to identify the special position which all those baptized have with the covenant." It speaks of "the unconditional promise of salvation to the elect which is the special contents of covenant and sacrament" (p.21).

In other words, the sacrament of baptism does not signify and seal the promise of salvation, including regeneration, but it seals regeneration as already having taken place and, per consequence, the covenant is truly only made with the elect, the regenerated, and not with all the children of believing parents.

The next Synod of Utrecht (22 June) 1943 - (14 August) 1945 had to deal with about seventy appeals against the doctrinal decisions. They were rejected. This synod issued a document called "Prae-advies" (Pre-advice) in which it maintained the decisions and *Explanation* of the previous synod. This synod also rejected a "Verklaring van Gevoelen" (Declaration of Opinion) dated 2 November 1943 and signed by six ministers. It follows here:

We believe on the basis of Holy Scripture and confess in accordance with the Three Forms of Unity and the liturgical forms:

1. that all children are conceived and born in sin and are therefore subject to all sorts of misery, even to condemnation itself (Form of Baptism);

2. that God, in Christ, has established His covenant of grace with the believers and their seed (Gen. 17:7; Gal. 3:14, 29);

3. that therefore all the children of believers are covenant children (Acts 3:25);

4. that all those children are holy (1 Cor. 7:14) or sanctified in Christ (1 Cor. 1:2, Form of Baptism);

5 that therefore the covenant promise of salvation is for all those children (Acts 2:39);

6. that for all those children the administration of baptism is a signifying and sealing to them of the covenant of grace or this promise of salvation (Gen. 17:11, 13-14; Form of Baptism);

7. that, for this reason, all those children are called with great seriousness to accept this promise of salvation with a true faith (Hebr. 4:1);

8. that so many of those children who accept this promise with a believing heart, they do this through the grace and power of the regenerating Holy Spirit, according to God's eternal election (Jer. 24:7; Ezek. 11:19; 36:26-27);

9. that the children who do not accept this promise from the heart, because of this being breakers of the covenant, will receive a heavier judgment (Lev. 26:15, cf. 44; Deut. 31:20; Rom. 11:28-30; Hebr. 12:25, cf. 10:28-31);

10. that constantly the admonition must be kept in mind to take heed that not with any of those who share in the heavenly calling there is an evil and unbelieving heart to deviate from the living God (Hebr. 3:1, 12).

Not only did this Synod Utrecht 1943-45 reject appeals but it also forced its doctrines onto the churches. Ministers and consistories were to adhere to the doctrine as adopted and maintained by the synods. Candidates had to declare their agreement at their classical examination.

Besides doctrinal objections, many also seriously opposed hierarchical actions of the Synod. The Synod began to use disciplinary actions. Prof. K. Schilder and Prof. S. Greijdanus were suspended as professor and minister in the Reformed churches. Other ministers, elders and deacons followed. According to Reformed Church Polity

discipline is not in the province of a major assembly but only in the province of the consistory of the local church. However, Kuyper epigones thought they had to preserve and maintain the ideas and constructions of Kuyper. In their positions of power in the churches, as professors and ministers, they used their authority in the way of giving the General Synod a hierarchical power over the churches in order to maintain their positions and Kuyperian ideas. But in this way they denied and deviated from the strongest point of the Doleantie which was its emphatic return to the truly Reformed church polity of the Church Order of Dort 1619, in which hierarchy is so very much opposed.

All this led to the meeting on August 11, 1944 in the Lutheran Church in Den Haag where the Act of Liberation and Return was read and adopted. People liberated themselves from a binding to doctrinal statements they could not agree with, seeing these statements in conflict with Scripture and confession, and from a developing hierarchical governing system that obviously deviated from the Reformed Church Order. It was a return to Scripture, Confession and the Reformed Church Order.

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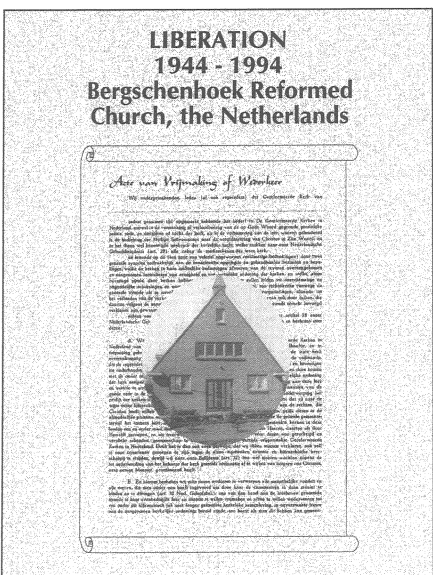
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Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>I may here refer to chapter 4, "Waardeer- ing en effect van '1905,'" in *Rondom 1905* by Dr. R.J. Dam, Rev. B. Holwdera, and Rev. C. Veenhof, Temeuzen: Littooij, 1945.

<sup>2</sup>See *Rondom 1905*, p. 125.

## OUR COVER



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# An Historic Meeting

By W.W.J. VanOene

As the number of survivors of those who attended the well-known meeting held on August 11, 1944 in the Lutheran Church in The Hague is dwindling, it seemed good to publish as yet a witness report from notes taken at that meeting.

The meeting we are referring to is the gathering of concerned brothers and sisters who came from all regions to discuss what must be done with respect to the situation in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands. A wave of suspensions and depositions roared over the country, suspensions and depositions by broader assemblies that did not have any right to take such measures.

I do not recall how I was informed of the scheduled meeting, but I am happy that I did keep my notes taken at it. What follows is a summary of these notes. I express the wish that I shall be able to convey some of the emotions that filled our hearts.

## In spite of danger

Especially during the last period of the Second World War we were happy to see the flyers of the Royal Air Force in their Mosquitoes and Spitfires in the skies over the Netherlands. They came in unexpectedly to strafe the German convoys or single vehicles. When we heard them zooming in on a German transport, we sometimes took shelter, sometimes just stayed outside, trusting that they would aim precisely and hit their quarry only. The whistling of the bullets was music in our ears, even though at times they came dangerously close.

Not only the trucks and other vehicles were targeted. There were also the relatively few trains that were still running. When a steam engine could be hit and perforated, this meant one fewer instrument of war, and so the German transportation system was wrecked even more. For the protection of the engineers and the fireman the engines most times carried a small concrete

shelter in which they could hide in case of an aerial attack.

Yet, in spite of danger and inconveniences hundreds of church members travelled to The Hague on August 11, 1944. For what purpose?

Word had been spread that a meeting would be held in that city of all who were concerned about the situation in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands. Matters had come to a head.

Pronouncements had been made by the general synod of 1939-1943 which were called "doctrinal pronouncements."

Initially it was hoped that they would be regarded as a compromise-formula, just as the one of 1905 was. But gradually the noose was pulled tighter until it was made clear that, according to the general-synodical claim, anyone who taught anything that was not in full accordance with these doctrinal pronouncements was guilty of breach of promise, since he allegedly violated the promises made when he signed the Form of Subscription.

From the one thing came the other. The still continuing general synod dared to suspend and depose ministers of the Word, wholly contrary to the adopted Church Order. It dared to send some of its members away because they expressed their disagreement with the pronouncements and the "disciplinary actions." Entire consistories were deposed, except those ministers, elders, and deacons, of course, who sided with the general synod and its hierarchical practices.

What to do?

There was hardly any ecclesiastical press left by means of which the membership in general could be kept informed. The war-time conditions made communication difficult, although not completely impossible. A meeting was scheduled for August 11, 1944. That was the reason why hundreds of church members traveled to The Hague, for there the meeting would be held. In

fact, so many came that the venue had to be changed. The Lutheran church building was large enough to contain the crowd.

Many of those present there were lonely "soldiers," sometimes the only office-bearer in a whole consistory who was concerned and could not accept the synodical pronouncements and actions. Sometimes there were several office-bearers from one church. But there were not only office-bearers. On the contrary, the majority of those present were "common" members, but they were people who had the interest of Jerusalem at heart and wanted to hear from others what they thought to be the course most pleasing to the Lord.

Thus they arrived in The Hague.

There was no "hurray mood," no spirit of revolution, no rejoicing because of the situation, although there was genuine joy when brothers and sisters from other parts of the country were recognized and when it was discovered that they, too, had the same concerns.

## The meeting itself

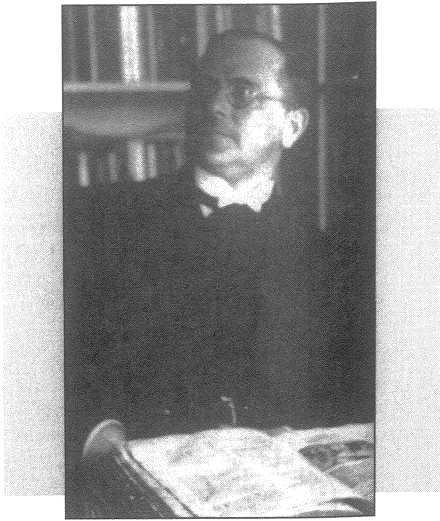
The Rev. H. Knoop of Rotterdam Delfshaven called the meeting to order.

Psalms 68:16 and 17 were sung. This is stanza 12 of our rhymed Psalm. Then the first eight verses of Micah 6 were read.

The Rev. Knoop gave the opening address. It deserves to be known by many.

He began by relating how that various faithful office-bearers were suspended and deposed in the trail of the general synod's actions in this respect. We remember them, he said, asking "Lord, vindicate me!" From all the actions of the general synod and its followers it is evident that they want a schism. No pleas for caution and patience were heeded. What are we to do in this situation? Today we shall try to answer that question.

Two things have become clear in these days: the deterioration of the



Rev. D. van Dijk

Reformed life in general and that of the Reformed ecclesiastical life in particular. This is not something in itself, but it is connected with the deformation of the Reformed life in all its aspects.

We realize that we *all* are guilty of these things, and we shall have to confess our personal and communal guilt.

There are two things to which I want to draw your attention: the great flourishing condition of Reformed life in general *and* the dangers to which this life was exposed and still is exposed.

Concerning this flourishing condition we see that "the Reformed" occupied an important place in our life as a nation. The men of the Secession found rest in isolation. They had little influence. Kuyper brought them out of the isolation and after 1892 the Reformed churches flourished. The Reformed confessors had a dominant influence in many fields. The secret behind this activity was the awareness that Christ has a right to be recognized and honoured everywhere. They wanted to be fellow-labourers with God.

But there were all sorts of dangers that were very acute here.

In the first place there was the feeling of having arrived. We were successful and expanded more and more. We also began to think in categories of power: small church – big church, church – synod. Yes, *Synod*, that is it! Then there came an aversion against any reformation. We were Reformed, were we not?

Reformation means labouring, confessing, sacrificing. The successful struggle was accompanied by a spiritual impoverishment. There was a lack of eschatological awareness, and we forget

that carrying the cross after Christ is an integral element in the life of a Christian. Materialism took over. Finances were often the most important thing. The antithesis was increasingly replaced by a shutting ourselves up within our own circles. There also came a distance between "clergy" and "laity."

Then God intervened. He brought us into the ordeal of the occupation. Did we fail?

In many instances we did not act honestly, as prophets who had to confess the Name of the Lord everywhere, as priests who knew about compassion, as kings who fought for their Lord. We tried to save our lives and therefore are in the process of losing it.



Rev. H. Knoop

First and foremost we must confess our common unfaithfulness and repent, otherwise we are hopelessly lost.

How did the church present itself? Our first calling is to be church and to form a strong front over against the outside. But we tried to save our life: in their broadest assembly the churches gave only spineless pieces of advice. There were ministers on the pulpit who did all they could to remain free from imprisonment. Instead of being a front against the outside, the front was turned against those inside. The churches came under a synodical yoke, a theological-scholarly yoke, which is harder than that of Christ. The rights of the Lord have been violated by the short-term disciplinary actions. The churches have been pushed into the direction of the sect. This is the way of dissolution.

Thus our strength towards the outside has been broken.

The Reformed churches are stuck. Perhaps the eyes have been held in order that seeing they should not see.

O God of the covenant, have mercy on us. If, showing no compassion, Thou shouldst our sins record . . .

The Reformed churches cannot proceed in this manner. Micah told us what the Lord demands of us.

We must arise *and* shake off the yoke that is not the yoke of Christ. If God had not blown the trumpet in 1834 and 1886, the church here would have gone under.

Where we take the reformation of the church to hand, we show our faithfulness to God.

May the almighty, faithful God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ help us in this through His Holy Spirit, Amen.

Psalm 130:2,3, and 4 were sung.

### Another speaker

One whom by far the most of us had not expected to see there was Dr. K. Schilder. Had he not gone "underground" (in hiding) when the Germans were after him to arrest him again? And was he not thereby prevented from attending the sessions of the general synod?

A few days before the meeting official word had reached his brother that the German Security Police would not impede his freedom of movement in any way and that there was no reason why he should remain in hiding any longer.

Herein, too, we acknowledged the good hand of our God upon us in that precisely at this crucial stage this official word was received.

Dr. Schilder began his address with saying that, when in June 1942 he gave his last lecture at the Seminary, he could not presume that that would be the last time he could do it on behalf of the Reformed churches. (He then had to go into hiding, and on March 23, 1944 he was suspended by the general synod of 1943-1945, and deposed on August 3rd, VO) We must acknowledge the hand of the Lord in what happened, and we are to see to it that the next step is done only in total obedience to the revealed Word.

Describing the situation and the development, Schilder stated that, although the circumstances differ, and the method is not the same, yet there is hierarchy: a lording it over the churches of Christ. This is the third hierarchy. The first one was that of Rome; of the second one, the one of the Netherlands Reformed Church, the brothers



spoke in 1886 in Frascati. Nowadays office-bearers are suspended and deposed without any regard for the local church.

What to do with respect to the recognition of the decisions of general synod? God is a God of order, and synodical decisions must be honoured in the churches, as long as these decisions are in accordance with the order. We have a powerful weapon against all hierarchy: Article 31 of the Church Order. Lately the Lord permitted that precisely at this point the churches fell short.

The "unless" of Art. 31 was changed into "until." It was made into "until the following synod has changed it." Thereby the church has been poisoned.

There are other things as well, particularly the doctrinal pronouncements. Would I could say that it is a matter of doctrine. Then I would have been suspended because of heresy. But sin has penetrated so far that the question of doctrine has become a matter of hierarchy. Dr. Greijdanus was suspended not because of heresy but because he attacked the pronouncements.

The church is never allowed to bind on earth unless it knows with certainty: our binding on earth is God's binding in heaven. Attacking pronouncements as such may never be a ground for suspension and such like.

Hierarchy is the great sin of our days. And one of the most serious stumbling blocks that satan puts in our way is: trying to compromise, to give and take, but woe to him who no longer binds the church to her own words in order to guarantee his own rest. The church has been violated as church when her documents are devalued and her oaths are regarded as no longer being oaths.

By the binding to the pronouncements not only the way to the pulpit is blocked but also an impediment has been placed in the way towards union of all who would unite on the basis of the Three Forms of Unity.

We recognize the right of the church to say: This is the truth, and that is not. It is her obligation to do so as well. She did so in 1926. But if the church does not dare to say: "This is from beginning to end the Word of God," then every pronouncement is a stumbling block for union.

What must we do now?

It is never allowed angrily to stalk out. We may never be accused of un-

necessarily having caused a schism or having aggravated it. The schism has been caused by the general synod and it is there in every sermon, at every baptism, every celebration of the Lord's Supper. We are not allowed to aggravate it, but neither are we permitted to act as if it were not there. The possibility of healing should not be cut off, but neither are we allowed to linger on for another three years.

### Dr. Greijdanus speaks

After an intermission Psalm 89: 7 and 8 were sung. After this the elderly Dr. S. Greijdanus appeared in the pulpit.

He began with saying that it was not necessary for him to tell the whole story, as he had written about it. But the whole course of events had saddened him greatly. No, you don't have to pity me, he said, but you must grieve because of the course that the ecclesiastical life took.

With the deposition of Prof. Schilder the final decision was made. Before that there was still a slight hope that there would be a turn for the better. Now the tear has been made.

In all my labour I have always tried to bind people to God's Word and not to my own person. Also during my active ministry it was my endeavour to bind the congregation to Christ in order that it should not perish with me.

Now we are faced with the question whether we must take for our account what the general synod did to Prof. Schilder. Can we not justify this before the Lord? Then we must make it known.

There are various possibilities. The one is an office-bearer, the other is not; an office-bearer may stand alone, or there may be more. But whatever the situation is: all have to state clearly that they cannot recognize the injustice done.

If a consistory judges this, either in its entirety or in majority, it may invite a suspended or deposed office-bearer (such as Dr. Schilder) to conduct services. Members can request their consistory to do so. They will get into trouble, we know that, but we must leave the further development in the hands of the Lord.

We must, as much as we can, investigate what the Lord has revealed and then accept the consequences.

### The Act of Liberation or Return

At this meeting Dr. Schilder read the Acts of Liberation or Return. Its style



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**Candidate J.D. Louwse**  
of Hamilton, ON

\*\*\*

**CALLED** to Abbotsford, BC

**Rev. R.A. Schouten**  
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\*\*\*

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was derived from three sources: In the first place from the Act of Secession of 1834, secondly, from documents drawn up by Dr. A. Kuyper and Dr. F.L. Rutgers, and thirdly from the Confessions and the Church Order.

This Act is too long to insert here. If our readers are interested in seeing it in its entirety, I am wholly prepared to publish it in my own translation. For the time being I have demanded your attention long enough.


A few words by the Rev. H. Knoop and the Rev. D. van Dijk concluded the speeches. The gathering was closed after the singing of Psalm 27:7.

Thus we went home, aware that there were many in the country that shared the same concerns and wanted to remain faithful to the Lord.

The meeting of August 11, 1944 was not a rally where campaign strategy was drawn up. It was a meeting where thoughts were exchanged and the call for faithfulness to the Lord was heard, irrespective of the consequences.

We had to think of what we read in Acts 28: 15: "On seeing them Paul thanked God and took courage."

We all took courage, and we needed it.

And following the ways the Lord showed, we were not put to shame. 

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# The Liberation of 1944

## A Curtain of Inevitability? Looking Back at the Liberation of 1944

By J. De Jong

### Fifty years ago

As we begin to enjoy the quieter days of summer, we can only be struck by the marked contrast between the summer of 1944 and the summer of 1994, fifty years ago. That was a summer of the severest tension, both in political and in ecclesiastical life. D-Day took place on June 6, 1944, and soon the allied troops were combing all of northwestern Europe. Slowly but surely the liberation spread from town to town.

In church life the encroaching power of hierarchy continued unabated. Dr. K. Schilder was suspended in March 23, 1944. On July 26, Dr. S. Greijdanus was suspended for three months. Then on Aug 3, Schilder was deposed as Professor of Theology at the seminary in Kampen, and as minister of the Word. And all this time, Schilder had been in hiding (dived under, as they said) because of a publication ban on his church paper, *De Reformatie*.

Then the breakthrough came! On August 11, a meeting was held in the Lutheran Church of The Hague, and there the Act of Liberation and Return was read. This Act was to be supplied to various consistories and used by them as the testimony of defence for their act of secession. The key argument of this defence was that no other recourse was left open for the churches wishing to remain faithful to the Scriptures, confession and the adopted church order but to secede. The forces of hierarchy had become so relentless and so all-pervasive that there was no other way out.

Anyone looking back at this period can only be amazed at the complex mix of factors that led to the Liberation. Could it not have been prevented? Or was it unavoidable? As sons and daughters of the Liberation we can

only confess that in a critical hour, God led His church out of the darkness of hierarchy and tyranny to light of freedom in fellowship of His word. No one planned this event, no one organized it, or developed a strategy in order to bring it about. Here, indeed, one can only point to the hand of God. He was present, for the safety and the wellbeing of His church!

### The synodicals

It is remarkable to read recent comments of leading synodical figures on the Liberation. In his autobiographical reflections, Dr. G.C. Berkouwer, who was chairman of the Synod that suspended and deposed Schilder, asks the question: How could this have happened? He speaks about a certain feeling of powerlessness that seemed to set in as the meetings continued throughout the years from 1942 on. He recalls how he was lecturing in America when the news reached him concerning Schilder's death in 1952. For him this represented the close of a chapter in his life. He says that it seemed to him as if a curtain fell, and a growing consciousness of the irrevocable set in.

Similar sentiments are expressed by another synodical spokesman, Rev. E. Overeem. As he puts it, polarization led to the formation of hostile camps that were no longer able to communicate with each other.<sup>2</sup> The climate became totally poisoned. But, says Overeem, we must blame the synod most of all. It let matters get out of hand, and it was not able to stay on top of the conflict. The forces of division were too powerful, and the wheels of strife were moving too fast.

### Why liberation?

What are we to make of these seemingly penitent and somewhat melan-

choly reflections? Can we really speak of inevitable forces, and of a conflict that had become unmanageable? We can judge these comments by forming a quick overview of what happened. We do not intend to cover all the dates and events leading to the Liberation, but simply wish to obtain a global picture. The danger of a picture like this is that it can be too simplistic; the benefit, however, is that it allows one to weigh different aspects of the conflict in a certain frame of reference.

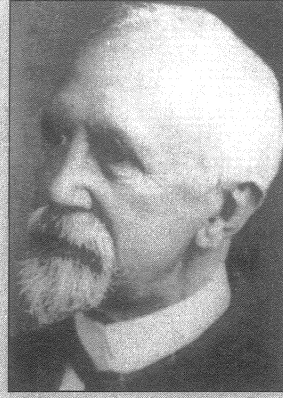
Here the thesis of Drs. H. Veldman can be of great help for us. Veldman, a teacher at the high school level, has recently written a detailed overview of the period surrounding the Liberation, as background for a series of lectures entitled "From Yesterday to Tomorrow."<sup>3</sup> His position is that there were three parties in the church in the period leading up to the Liberation. The dynamics of the interaction between these "parties" led to the Liberation of 1944.

How are the three parties to be identified? First, there was a strongly conservative party. These were the leading theologians and men of power in the church, as for example, H.H. Kuyper, V. Hepp, A.D.R. Polman, J. Ridderbos, and others. They defended a Kuyperian orthodoxy. In fact, the distinctions of Kuyper's system were more important for them than the confessions. For example, in the pursuit of promoting the principles of Kuyper's Calvinism on an international level, Hepp was rather disparaging in his view of the Reformed confessions. For him they were only ecclesiastical confessions, and could not serve to unite Reformed churches of many different backgrounds.

The second party in the church at the time was a younger group of ministers and authors who promoted a new modernism. They felt that the confes-



Professor Dr. V. Hepp



Professor Dr. H.H. Kuyper

sions, as historical documents, did not serve the need of the time. They were in favour of reformulating the confessions and so adapting them to the contemporary situation. This movement, called the "movement of the young men," pushed for a host of changes in church life in all areas: liturgy, confession, church practice, and mission. The central aim of the "young men" was to move the Reformed church out of what they saw as an internalizing shell, and bring it into contact and interaction with the universal Protestant Church. The hallmark of this group was *progressive liberalism*.

Then a third reformatory group formed, that returned to the teaching of Scripture and the confession. This group, led by K. Schilder and others, built on the abundance of new exegetical work that came out in the churches in the twenties and thirties. On the basis of this new exegetical work, some of the old established scholastic distinctions of Kuyperianism were criticized. Yet this was done for the most part in a sympathetic frame of reference. Schilder, for example, did not want to dispense with Kuyper, but only proposed marginal corrections, while retaining many elements of his Reformed world and life view. And these corrections were driven by a new understanding of the Scriptures, and by a return to, and a closer understanding of, the confessions.

What led to the Reformation of 1944? Veldman's thesis is: The first group decided to expel the third group, and in its strategy it found support from the second group. Later this second group, as the "laughing third party,"

walked away with the spoils. They became the leaders in the synodical Reformed churches, while the old guard was totally out-manoeuvred.

On the whole, this is an accurate description concerning what actually happened at the time of the Liberation. One notices immediately that it contrasts markedly with the position of Overeem and Berkouwer. They speak of forces beyond human control. But Veldman puts both the Kuyperians and the progressive "young men" in the driver's seat. The responsibility for the schism lies with them – each according to the role they played. And indeed, as Veldman has it, the progressives come out the worst as the "laughing third party."

Now while Veldman is generally correct in his overview of what happened, there are to my mind some elements in the dynamics leading to the Liberation that are more complex than his thesis suggests, and these dynamics serve to explain the apparent feeling of hopelessness and powerlessness expressed by figures like Berkouwer and Overeem. A review of some of these elements will clarify what I mean.

### Reformatory thrust

The first element in the dynamics leading to the Liberation is the reformatory movement of the thirties, (Veldman's third group). This was a broadly based movement, one which in many respects was made up of mixed voices. On the whole it represented a sensibility of dissatisfaction with the rationalistically tinted distinctions of Kuyperianism. And it also included a component that uncovered new riches in the Scriptures.

The movement was anti-scholastic, and anti-rationalistic. However, interspersed with it were spiritualistic and Bibliistic tendencies. The movement surrounding A. Janse of Biggekerke, for example, showed some of these overtones.

This group grew in recognition and influence throughout the thirties. It was represented in the periodical *De Reformatie*, which gained a steady increase in readership as the years progressed. The hallmark of this group was also a confessional integrity in opposition to the rising influence of Barthianism among the leading theologians of the Netherlands Reformed Church (the State Church), e.g. Haitjema, and Noordmans.

### The conservative backlash

As the reformatory movement of the thirties gained momentum, the staunch and towering bulwark of conservative Kuyperianism began to react. The reaction of this party (Veldman's Group One) was both defensive and offensive. The defensive reaction lacked any solid footing, because it was not confessionally qualified. The old guard simply took flight in antiquated Kuyperian concepts and distinctions. Offensively, this party also did a great deal of damage to itself, since it resorted to exaggeration, innuendo and scare tactics. And over time the attacks became personal. Without mentioning names, Hepp maligned both Schilder and the leading spokesmen of the Calvinistic reformatory philosophy, Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd. H.H. Kuyper was particularly harsh in his treatment of Schilder. Rather than deal with issues, the old guard resorted to discrediting leading figures in the reformatory movement, and painting them as suspect figures in the church.

As the conflict deepened, this party also resorted to violent distortions of the real state of affairs. They used the techniques of hysterics and exaggeration in order to incite opinion against the rising reformatory thinking. And they began to mobilize the ecclesiastical machinery against their opponents.<sup>4</sup>

### A laughing third party?

And the progressives? I do not think that they joined in with the Kuyperian caste as a potential "laughing third party" about to run away with the spoils. I do not believe the progressives employed a "divide and conquer" strategy. Some were aligned with the reformatory movement, (Berk-

ouwer!) and only in later stages did they align themselves with the old guard; others shielded themselves behind the old guard but were never in the position of forming a power bloc of their own. As the conflict developed, all these groups – the various progressives and the conservative ruling caste – came closer together. That happened even though the old Kuyperian guard had voiced a decisive No! to liberalism and progressive ideas in the previous decade. The conservative Kuyperian leaders formed a strong bulwark against liberal thinking, and solidified their position after the suspension of Rev. J.B. Netelenbos (1920) and Rev. J. Geelkerken (1926), both of whom championed progressive sentiments in the churches.

How did these two groups meet each other in the heat of the battle leading to the Liberation? With all their differences, they had one *common* ground. The Kuyperian defense was not based on the *confession*. Indeed, it tried to oppose the confessionally based reformatory party, and so increasingly distanced itself from sound confessional thinking. It was a flight into conservatism, with a loose connection to the confession. And the progressives, too, championed a loose connection to the confession. Thus, with all their differences, both parties adopted an essentially non-confessional standpoint, and on this basis – and only this basis – they formed a united front against the rising reformatory movement.

### Other factors

As the conflict unfolded, other factors contributed to the dynamics leading to the Liberation. Perhaps the most significant was the war; it created a whole new situation, and perhaps also contributed to a general climate of tension and fear. The Kuyperian party certainly tried to capitalize on the war for its own cause. They as well as anyone knew that communications were difficult, paper was scarce, and leading officers and church men were underground or in prison. For them it was an ideal time to root out what they saw as an infection in the life of the church. And indeed, the means of defense on the part of the reformational movement were meagre.

Another factor of significance was the drive to *radicalization* in the conflict. The use of hysterics and scare tactics served to create a climate of suspi-

cion. And it was not long before the suspicion led to a mood of absolute intolerance. At a certain point in the conflict the promoters of hierarchy settled into a relentless determination to remove what they saw as a bad leaven in the Reformed lump. At a certain point this drive to radicalization crossed a line after which there was no turning back, and this line was the collective unwillingness to seek – much less reach – a *consensus* to resolve matters communally for the sake of the unity of the church.

Coupled with this drive to radicalization was the anomalous and rather abrupt adoption of the new church polity, one which radically dispensed with the church polity of the Doleantie. First championed by H.H. Kuyper, it soon won adherents in many quarters, and became the primary ecclesiastical tool used to effect and impose the doctrinal sentiments of the Kuyperian old guard.

A third factor was the personality of one figure in particular, namely, Dr. K. Schilder. Schilder never wanted a conflict surrounding his person, and I believe he would have run miles to avoid anything like that. He never wanted the Liberation to be seen as *his* work or the Reformed Churches (Liberated) as a group of churches which represented in particular *his* way of thinking. But the fact remains that he was the central player in the conflict on the reformatory side. Why this is so is a point we cannot deal with here. But especially in the final stages of the conflict leading to the Liberation attention came to be increasingly focussed on the person of Prof. K. Schilder. For any outsider to the conflict, Liberated or otherwise, this is perhaps one of the saddest sides to the whole episode. And Berkouwer's personal reflections cannot conceal his love-hate relationship with the impact and work of Schilder. In fact, nothing can conceal the fact that one major component of the conflict concerned an attempt to silence Schilder, and to minimize – if not extinguish – his influence in the churches.

### Inevitable?

Can we really say that the Liberation was inevitable? That there was no recourse but to follow this route? This, too, is a caricature. For all his expressions of powerlessness, Berkouwer cannot deny that he was a major player in the drama leading to the Liberation.

Whether he himself saw all the ramifications of his position is another question. But who can brush aside his own responsibility by referring to a feeling of powerlessness? As chairman of a synod, one cannot easily convince others that he is in a powerless position.

### The trajectory of guilt

Many of our readers know that since the Liberation the Synodical churches have gone through what might be called a trajectory of guilt. It started with the "Replacement Formula" of 1946, an attempt to soften the harsh doctrinal binding of the Synod of 1943. It returned again in 1959, when the whole Replacement Formula was set aside. And the guilt factor arose again in 1988, when Berkouwer personally expressed his regret about his role in the conflict, a statement of guilt which was soon thereafter echoed by the Synod of Almere in 1988.

Yet this whole trajectory of guilt lacks the tone of *genuine* sorrow and repentance. For it takes its standpoint in two things: first, in the assertion of shared guilt – which only clouds the issues – and second, in the implicit conviction that the Kuyperian view still is the only correct view. In other words, this expression of guilt is not a true return to the confession or to the Scriptures. Rather, it represents the lament of the *progressive* party in their alignment with the intolerant tactics of the Kuyperian old guard.

Veldman's thesis is correct to this extent that the old guard was completely out-manouvred. In fact, however, it out-manouvred itself. For its defense mechanism – resorting to old Kuyperian categories – was completely out of touch with the mood of the time. The progressives knew the mood of the day! And they capitalized on that mood! This was the mood of *relativism*, and a humanistically-determined idea of toleration. This soon became the dominant climate in the synodical churches, and the resulting theological liberalism and relativism found its chief representatives in men like Harry Kuitert and Herman Wiersenga.

Why the trajectory of guilt? Because, try as it might, this progressive party cannot undo its blood alliance with the ruthless force of the ruling caste of the Synod of 1943 Utrecht. Even though the progressives had and still have an inner aversion to the scholasticism of the old guard, they could not escape their solidarity with

scholastic Kuyperianism in forming a united front against the reformatory movement of the thirties. They would like to free themselves from the *intolerance* of the conservative caste – hence, they keep trying to wash their hands with expressions of guilt. But they do not want to break their alliance with the confessional relativism initiated by the old guard. As such they are locked in what looks like an *unending* trajectory, because the door to true reconciliation – repentance and forgiveness – is ignored.

### Veni Creator Spiritus

Berkouwer ends his personal reflections with an expression of hope; however, the expression is rather lame. It amounts to no more than the old prayer of the early Church: Come Holy Spirit! For him, this is the only way that the cloud of inevitability can be removed.

But children of the Liberation can only have a different answer. How can one break the yoke of apparent fate? How do we remove the curtain of the inevitable? How do we stop resting in the facts as if they are irrevocable? We should not pray for the Spirit to come, but should open our hearts to the Spirit that is *present!* And He points repeatedly to the only way of reconciliation: repentance and admission of guilt, that is, an admission of guilt that is radical and comprehensive. Only then can one break the circle of hopelessness and find new unity with those who, now divided, were once of one house.

And we who have been set free must eschew every form of triumphalism. We were freed from hierarchy only by the grace of God! We are called in our time to build on the struggles of the past. Here many of us may be found wanting, because we hardly know what

the Liberation was all *about*. Fifty years is only a couple of generations. Do we, as sons and daughters of the Liberation, show the gratitude God requires by recounting His deeds to our children, and acknowledging His guidance in the history of His church. Only when we build on the past can we stand in the present, and live with hope and confidence in the future!

<sup>1</sup>G.C. Berkouwer, *Zoeken en Vinden. Herinneringen en ervaringen* (Kampen: Kok, 1989), pp. 313 ff.

<sup>2</sup>E. Overeem, "Achtergronden van een kerkscheuring" in D. Th. Kuiper, et al. (ed.) *Jaarboek voor de geschiedenis van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* (Kampen: Kok, 1992), pp. 167-196.

<sup>3</sup>H. Veldman, "De Gereformeerde Kerken in de twintigste eeuw" *Bijlage* behorende bij *De Reformatie* Vol. 68 (1993) #48. The series continues in Vol. 69, (1993) #6, Vol. 69 (1994) #16 and Vol. 69 (1994) #25.

<sup>4</sup>Overeem, p. 168.



# The Church is Catholic<sub>2</sub>

By C. Trimp

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### "One Catholic Church"

In this article we want to pay attention to the first sentence of BC article 27: "We believe and profess one catholic or universal Church." There is only one church in God's world: the church of Christ. According to Calvin's word there cannot be two or three churches unless Christ be torn asunder – which cannot happen (*Inst.* IV.i.2). The confession of this unity is related to the unique character of the church. But it is precisely in this way that this characteristic radiates toward the unison of the church: it is impossible to come up with two or three churches of Christ that would oppose and fight each other.

This unity of the church is not a statistical result of some world-encompassing empirical research. This unity is *in Christ*. It is by no means necessary that we ourselves see the church with our eyes or touch it with our hands. This unity lies embedded in faith, and we must – in Calvin's words – regard it no less since it passes our understanding than if it were clearly visible (*Inst.* IV.i.3).<sup>1</sup> Our confession is here using the language of the Nicene Creed, as it received its final form in 381 at the Council of Constantinople. If there is only one church of Christ, then this church is for *all* whom God calls to salvation (cf. in this connection the apostle's speaking in Rom. 3:29-30; 10:11-13; 1 Tim. 2:5-6).

Almost automatically, we come to that second word which demands our attention: the one church of Christ is "*catholic*." What does this word mean – this word which, for centuries already, belongs to the church's language of faith?<sup>2</sup> "Catholic" indicates that some-

thing is not limited, but **that** it aims for the whole. When **someone** believes and confesses that **the** church is "*catholic*" he is saying that the church of Christ is not limited to **some** people or to particular countries, races, and cultures in the world which God has created. The church is not limited **to** the Jews or to the white people or to North-America. The church is **universal**: a church for every one whom the **Lord** our God calls to Him. The church **is** also not limited to a few centuries, **but** has been since the creation of the world. It will be **until** the end of history. It is not a product of Medieval culture or of the European-American civilization.

The church is characterized by one thing: by "*embracing*" **its** one, living Lord. It remains in communion with this Lord by keeping His word (John 14:15ff.; 15:1-10). In its *doctrine*, **the** church has recorded and given account of how it does this. Therefore, its *doctrine* – as summary of the word of **its** Master – is the "*catholic*" doctrine: it **does** not push

a certain partial truth; it does not promote ideas in which it specializes; it does not have one thing on sale the one year, and something else the next; but the church lets itself be guided by the Spirit of Christ in the "whole truth." It is bent on maximizing the doctrine and the knowledge of this truth over against all attempts to minimize, to amputate, or to pluralize this doctrine.

The "identity" of the church lies in this "catholic" doctrine. Someone who does not remain in this doctrine of Christ is schismatic. He was *in* the church, but it appeared that he was not *from* or *of* the church (cf. 1 John 2:19). We owe the most beautiful description of the catholicity of the church to the man who himself took part in the Council of Constantinople: Cyril of Jerusalem (313-387):<sup>3</sup>

The church is called catholic because it exists over the entire world from the one end of the world to the other; and because it teaches entirely and completely all doctrines that people must get to know, regarding visible and invisible, regarding heavenly and earthly matters; and because it subjects the entire human race, governors and governed, learned and simple, to the true worship; and because it heals and cures together (literally: "in a catholic way") all kinds of sins which are committed in body and soul, and has in itself all varieties of what people call virtue, in works, and words, and various sorts of spiritual gifts.<sup>4</sup>

Thus the image emerges before our eyes of the church of Christ. By its preaching of the righteousness and holiness of Christ it offers the universal remedy which heals the world of all its wounds and sins.<sup>5</sup>

### Catholic church in and for the world

It is a brilliant scene which the confession manages to unfold in article 27. Taught by the revelation of God himself, the church is able to believe and to confess these wonderful things about itself. We would be very much mistaken and really get carried away if we would locate this church of Christ *above* the noise of this earthly society and *behind* the clouds. The Reformers of the sixteenth century have constantly objected to the reproach of their Roman Catholic opponents, as if the church would actually form some kind of "Platonic state" (i.e., a world of ideas without any relation to this earthly reality).<sup>6</sup>

Also the remaining text of article 27 refutes such a qualification. For it asks attention precisely for the history of the church and for the opposition which it experiences in times of oppression and persecution. The "perilous reign of Ahab" is here always *the* example of the violence which is unleashed against the church throughout history. Only for that reason already, we do well in connection with article 27 not to come up with the term "*invisible church*," which can be interpreted in several ways. It is noteworthy that De Brès has not adopted this terminology from Calvin.<sup>7</sup>

Undoubtedly, it is possible to give a good description of the meaning of the phrase "invisible church." But the possibility of misunderstanding is greater, especially when people start using this term in the direction of a "mystical body" of Christ which – removed from the changing scenes and the dynamics of this earthly history – is located in static rest at a heavenly level. This is a form of "idealizing" the church, which has rightly been opposed, in particular by K. Schilder.<sup>8</sup>

In article 27 we see the church of Christ before us in all its temptation. But at the same time, we discover its beauty and unassailable character, which is guaranteed by the presence of Christ and his Spirit. Therefore, when article 28 says that "the redeemed" assemble in the church, and that "there is no salvation outside of it," then that is simply a summary of the rich contents of article 27.<sup>9</sup> This old expression wants to put into words the great importance, yes, the indispensable character of Christ's church on earth. "No salvation outside of it" – this is not because "the office" (of bishop or pope) is there, but because the Spirit of Christ, the Righteous One, presents himself *there* and works the communion of faith with Christ *there* by the proclamation and the administration of the sacraments.<sup>10</sup>

### The local catholic church

The last paragraph of article 27 should now have our attention. Speaking about the one, holy, and catholic church of Christ, the confession teaches us not to look for this church in one particular place in the world. For the church is not limited or bound to that. Neither does it stand or fall with certain people.

It will be clear that the claim of the bishop of Rome is opposed here, since the pope considers himself as the center

of the church and has presented himself as such already for ages. After all, according to his own claim he is the successor of Peter and the vicar of Christ on earth. Our confession argues against this: Roman Catholicism is a contradiction in terms. "Roman" asks attention for one place; "catholicism" makes us see the world, the fullness of the dominion of the living Christ.

But the question becomes urgent: if the church is not established in one place, where is it then? We immediately get an answer to this question. The catholic church is "spread and dispersed throughout the entire world." Christ's universal church presents itself in many local churches. The believers are not called to make a yearly pilgrimage to one central sanctuary. It is not they who have to look for "the holy place." Instead, the Holy Spirit comes to them and makes them into a temple for God (cf. the Scripture proof from John 4:21-23).

Organizationally, the church creates the impression of a loose, scattered archipelago (cf. Isa. 40:15). But it is precisely the book of Acts which shows us how the Holy Spirit manages to reach distant coasts with the Gospel of Christ – as the fulfillment of the prophecy (cf. Isa. 42:4, 10, 12; 51:5; 60:9). When the apostle Paul looks back at this, he is able to write that marvelous chapter 10 in his letter to the Romans (see especially vv. 6-15). Therefore, the secret of the world church lies in the presence of the Spirit. He connects hearts and souls and unites these through faith to the one worship of God.

Here the confession opens up the deepest ground of federative unity and of international ecclesiastical correspondence: the bond of unity through one Spirit, according to Eph. 4:3-6. Federative unity is not formed or maintained by a common administration of members, by church political regulations, by national-ecclesiastical claims, or by pluralist thought patterns. Federative unity is a work of the Spirit, who joins and unites us through the power of faith. This is "communion" through the Spirit by virtue of "union" with Christ!

Concretely, this means that we may speak about the church of Christ in singular and in plural. There is one catholic church. This is how article 27 starts off. There are churches spread and dispersed throughout the entire world. These are the words of the conclusion. The Bible also speaks without any problem in the same way, in singular and plural.<sup>11</sup>

Our fathers have expressed this varied way of speaking with the help of the distinction between *universal* and *particular* church.<sup>12</sup> We must not picture the relation between “universal” and “particular” church as a relation between the “whole” and “parts” that are subject to it; neither as a relation between “invisible” church and “visible” manifestation, where the “invisible” church would be the essential, real, and eternally identical church (of the elect). Such constructions are not supported anywhere in Scripture, and they violate the mystery of the church. That mystery is this, that the one catholic church presents itself in that often homely looking local congregation.<sup>13</sup> There Christ wants to be present; there the Holy Spirit lives (Matt. 18:20; 1 Cor. 3:16).<sup>14</sup>

When we go to church, we go to the local catholic church. There Christ is; there the Spirit lives. There we know that we are united with our forefathers, and there we are standing in the space of the church of the ages. We hear the Word of God, that living and abiding Word. We confess the faith of the church of all times and places. We sing the psalms as the songs of the covenant. We celebrate the commemoration of Christ’s sacrifice with the bread and the cup, and we realize that this bread and this cup have been handed down and passed on to us through ages and countries. In the children that are carried to the baptismal font, we see tomorrow’s church.

It is not without reason that the Dutch edition of the Belgic Confession, both in article 27 and article 28, refers to Heb. 12:22-23. This Scripture reference can help us in understanding what the confession of the catholicity of the church means concretely in our going to church every Sunday.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, the assertion that article 28 does not deal with the same church as article 27 is the largest stumbling block which a believer can set up for himself.<sup>16</sup> **C**

<sup>1</sup>By way of illustration, we think of the apostle’s way of speaking in the letter to the Ephesians. He says in Eph. 4:21 that someone who gets to know Christ, who hears about him, is taught in him, has come to know the necessity and the character of his own (daily) repentance, “as the truth is in Jesus.” That which is true in him will, by virtue of the communion with Christ, subsequently demonstrate itself in us – in our lives and in our living together as congregation (cf. the argument of the apostle in Rom. 6:2-6). In the same way, we may speak of the unity of the church. Knowing Christ also implies: knowledge of the unity and of the unique charac-

ter of the church. This unity, which is given in Christ, will show itself in our lives and in our living together as congregation (cf. Eph. 2:14-19; 4:4ff.).

<sup>2</sup>The word “catholic” also occurs in the original text of the Apostles’ Creed. The word re-occurs in the revised version of the Dutch “Dankbaar edition” of 1983: “I believe the holy catholic church, the communion of saints.” We also find the word in the Athanasian Creed: “Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the catholic faith.” The official title of the “Dankbaar edition” is *De Nederlandse belijdenisgeschriften, uitgegeven in opdracht van de Generale Synode van de Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk/de Generale Synode van de Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland/de Generale Synode van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* (the Hague: Boekencentrum, 1983).

<sup>3</sup>Cf. K. Deddens, *Annus liturgicus? Een onderzoek naar de betekenis van Cyrillus van Jeruzalem voor de ontwikkeling van het “kerkelijk jaar”* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1975), pp. 33-40.

<sup>4</sup>This translation is based on the Dutch translation of H. Berkhof, *De katholiciteit der kerk* (Nijkerk, 1962), p. 13.

<sup>5</sup>For this topic, see further W.D. Jonker, “Catholicity, Unity and Truth,” in P.G. Schrotenboer, ed., *Catholicity and Secession: A Dilemma?* (Kampen, 1992), pp. 16-27; P. Steinacker, in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, 18.72-80; J. Faber, *Op. cit.*, pp. 71-130; B. Kamphuis, in *De Reformatie*, 68 (1992), 60-63; and J. van Genderen and W.H. Velema, *Beknopte gereformeerde dogmatiek* (Kapmen: Kok, 1992), pp. 650ff.

<sup>6</sup>*Bekennnisschriften der reformierten Kirche*, 238.

<sup>7</sup>C. Vonk, *De voorzeide leer*, IIIB (Barendrecht, 1956), p. 109.

<sup>8</sup>We follow the objections of J. Faber (*Op. cit.*, pp. 95f.) against Calvin’s use of the term “invisible church.” Cf. also E. Kinder, *Op. cit.*, pp. 43f.

<sup>9</sup>C. Vonk, *Op. cit.*, pp. 120-22.

<sup>10</sup>On this important point, we want to want to listen to some witnesses of the age of the Reformation, namely, Luther, Calvin, and Bullinger.

Luther avers in his *Larger Catechism* of 1529 that it is not a coincidence that the article on the “forgiveness of sins” in the Apostles’ Creed follows after the article on the church, which is the communion of saints. For the church is pure “forgiveness”: God forgives us and we forgive one another. Because we are in the church, we receive forgiveness. But the Gospel is not outside of it, and, therefore, there is also no forgiveness or holiness there. All those who seek and want to earn holiness by their own works rather than by the Gospel and by forgiveness, have already cast out and isolated themselves (*Bekennnisschriften der reformierten Kirche*, 658). In a sermon from the year 1522, Luther avers: The church is not a matter of wood and stone, but it is the crowd (“hauff”) of Christ-believing people. That’s what people have to hold on to, for these Christians most certainly have Christ with them. After all, outside the Christian churches there is no truth, no Christ, no salvation (WA 10,I,140,14ff.).

Calvin brings up the following in his treatment of the Apostles’ Creed in his Genevan Catechism (1545): “*What is the church? The body and communion of the believers whom God has destined to eternal life. Is this also a chapter which must necessarily be believed? Most certainly, unless we want to make Christ’s death inoperative and want to undo everything that has been mentioned thus far. For this is the only outcome of everything: that there is a church. Why do you connect the forgiveness of sins to the church? Because no man obtains pardon for his sins without being previously incorporated into the people of God, persevering in unity and communion with the Body of Christ in such a way as to be a true member of the church. And so outside the church there is nothing but damnation and death? Certainly, for all those who separate themselves from the community of the faithful to form a sect on its own, have no hope of salvation so long as they are in schism*” (Q/A 93, 94, 104, 105). Cf. also *Inst.* IV.i.3.

Bullinger, in his Second Helvetic Confession of 1566, devotes an extensive chapter to the doctrine of the church. In a separate paragraph, he pays attention to the expression “no salvation outside of the church.” Here, he maintains that no one can live before God who does not stand in fellowship with the true church of God and who separates himself from it. For as there was no salvation outside Noah’s ark when the world perished in the flood; so we believe that there is no salvation outside Christ; and hence we teach that those who wish to live ought not to be separated from the church of Christ. Cf. further, J. Faber, *Op. cit.*, pp. 107-08.

<sup>11</sup>We think of Matt. 16:18; Acts 9:31 (?); Eph. 1:22 (singular); and of Acts 14:23; 15:3, 4, 41; 16:5; Rom. 16:4, 16; Rev. 2:23; 22:16 (plural). Also the headings in the apostolic letters are very instructive here: Rom. 1:6-7; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:2; Col. 1:2; 4:16; 1 Thess. 1:7-8; 2 Thess. 1:4; etc. The alternation between singular and plural in the letters to the Corinthians is also noteworthy.

<sup>12</sup>Cf. the Leiden *Synopsis* (1625), XL.33.

<sup>13</sup>Cf. B. Gassmann, *Op. cit.*, p. 124.

<sup>14</sup>For this point, cf. C. Trimp, *De gemeente en haar liturgie* (Kampen: Van den Berg, 1983), pp. 15-21. An example may illustrate this point: someone who sees the ocean at Vancouver, does not see a branch, a section, or a manifestation of the ocean, but he sees the Pacific Ocean. A tourist may say the same thing when he is walking along the beach of the Pacific Ocean, regardless of whether he is walking in White Rock, Long Beach, or Nanaimo. After his holidays, he may tell everyone that he has been “at the ocean,” and that he has been swimming in the Pacific Ocean, or that he has been sailing on the Pacific Ocean. How does such a tourist know that beyond the horizon of his perception, there is a big ocean? Has he first checked out the entire ocean from Vancouver? Certainly not. It is enough to believe trustworthy information on it.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 63-68.

<sup>16</sup>Already from the text itself, this assertion can be refuted: article 28 speaks in the first sentence about “this holy assembly.”

By W.W.J. VanOene



To start with: A heartfelt "Thank You" to all the faithful brothers and sisters who did not despair when no newsmedley appeared for some time, but continued to send the bulletins to the well-known address. It seems that an alleged retirement-condition is no guarantee that one has to look for things to keep one occupied.

Sometimes, when reflecting on the past, I wonder how I could do all the things I did do before the retirement-age arrived. Perhaps life was more regimented, perhaps it was the pressure behind almost everything that made it possible to achieve something. There was a newsmedley in every issue of *Clarion*, and now this is only the third one this year, as far as I recall.

In any case: we have taken our place behind the keyboard and shall try to pass on some news from the churches.

By the way, in connection with the litanies found in several bulletins about shortfalls and threatening or real deficits, I was struck by a little story I saw in *Syaloom*, the bulletin of the Reformed Church of Papua New Guinea in Port Moresby. As our readers may know, the Australian sister churches have lent quite some help and are still doing it. Especially the labours of the late Rev. K. Bruning and his wife will be gratefully remembered. A pre-school was even named after him.

Here comes the little story. The heading reads *The Example of the Baptized Wallet*, and the story goes as follows:

"A man who was to be baptized came with his wallet in his hand. The minister told him to leave it at the side. He would find it there when he came out of the water. But the man said he wanted to be baptized with his wallet. He wanted it to belong to God too. By his action, he showed that he wanted God to control his money. He wanted his money to be used by God in His work. Have you brought your wallet to God? Have you given Him everything you possess?"

Wise words, to be pondered by not a few in our midst as well.

I was almost shouting "Hurray!" when reading the caption "A Second Church for Albany!!" Albany, as our readers may know, is on the Southern Ocean, located in the South-west of Western Australia. But let me pass on what I read further.

"Already since 1986 the church at Albany has been considering the establishment of a second congregation in the area. The growth in membership over the years has been very steady and has now passed the 600 mark.

The reason for the desire for two congregations in Albany were listed in Reports as: a high workload for the minister, the size of the congregation as an inhibiting factor in the exercise of Consistory supervision and care, and the size of the congregation affecting the proper functioning of the communion of saints. Added to this is the lack of seating room in the church building."

Originally the target date for institution of a second church was some time in May; now it has been set at August 7. The "new" congregation will number about 170.

As we are talking about Australia anyway, I found a biblical and wise response from the Armadale consistory to a letter from a brother. Let me pass on what was written and what reply the consistory gave.

"Consistory received a letter from a brother expressing concern about the church attendance of ex-members who are divorced from their spouses and are now living together in a de facto relationship. The brother states in his letter that this will give a wrong impression to youth, to whom it will seem that this action is condoned. He requests the consistory to take action, i.e. not to allow these ex-members to attend the church services.

"Consistory considers that the church services are public and will therefore not prevent anyone from attending. The preaching will never return empty. It will either lead to repentance or condemnation. Church attendance by ex- or non-members does in no way imply that the consistory condones the life-style of these persons."

This letter reminded me of the Donatists' ideas in the early church when even someone who repented was not immediately allowed to attend the services, but first had to stand outside for a long time, then to be admitted by stages into the building and ultimately, perhaps, into the auditorium proper!

Now that we are talking about warnings against certain practices, we may as well add one.

The Orangeville consistory (once again) discussed "smoking on church premises." It is not the only consistory that sees itself compelled to do so repeatedly. Time and again I read about it in bulletins. *The Sheepfold* contained the following.

"Due to the fact that some are still smoking on the church premises, and there is a misunderstanding of our policy in this regard, it was decided to **ban** smoking from (= "on", VO) the church premises. A sign will be posted."

I doubt very much that there is "a misunderstanding of our policy in this regard." The Orangeville consistory puts it very kindly and very mildly, but I am convinced that all church members are very well aware of the policy of our consistories. Yet, there are quite a few who act as if these decisions do not apply to them.

It is bad enough when they continue to smoke on the property of "their own" church; it is worse when they do it on that of others.

The Watford consistory informed the congregation that "the Watford congregation cannot rent the Kerwood United Church for the summer. Alternatives will be investigated." As a result of these investigations, the consistory decided to rent the Watford United Church for the summer months.



Since renters cannot be choosers, as they put it, the services were scheduled for 11:45 and 4:00 o'clock. But the consistory considered it necessary again to issue a strong warning that the "No Smoking Policy" of that United Church should be observed.

Recently the graduation ceremonies of the Credo High-school of Langley were held in a Pentecostal church building. The principal reminded everyone again expressly of the "No Smoking" rule. Yet, when we came outside, there were some boys smoking at the edge of the parking lot. I was told that this practice caused the refusal of the request for the use of a Mennonite church building that was available at previous graduations.

All in all, it does not show a God-fearing Christian attitude when consistory decisions in this respect are ignored and that offense is given to those outside.

Let's get on and come to some cheerier news.

We mentioned Watford. The congregation is growing in size and the need for expansion is there. It is difficult to come to a firm decision regarding the course to be followed. "As a first step, the consistory will present a proposal to the congregation to decide to build a new building at a location to be determined later on."

In Burlington South there is also a building committee that has quite a mandate.

Taber finds itself in the same situation. "Council gave the Committee of Administration the mandate to go on a building fund drive in order to find out the feasibility of the whole project and future budgets."

Port Kells has been busy now for some time to get the necessary permits, and some progress has been made. "Brother A. informed me that the plans for the church building were to be submitted to Langley Township to start the rezoning process this past week."

For visitors to that church we pass on that the afternoon services start at 2:15 instead of 2:30, such to accommodate members living on the Barnston Island, which is an island in the Fraser River that can be reached by ferry only (such for the information of "non-natives"!).

And to close the observations regarding building plans, we pass on that also in Aldergrove "the Committee of Administration is looking at various pieces of property. At this time nothing definite has happened. If you know of any cheap property in Aldergrove, please let the committee know." This last sentence is meant as a joke, I think, for the prices of properties in these regions have risen to what I consider to be astronomical heights. And there is no comet in sight to smash into those heights to lower them!

We are jumping back and forth somewhat. Sometimes this makes things more interesting.

"Upon having heard the congregation," the Aldergrove consistory wrote, "council decided to inform the congregation that the Lord's Supper will be celebrated around the table, using individual cups." That is already some improvement over and above the previous practice, taken along from Langley at the institution.

In Abbotsford "the concept of having the church purchase Bibles and *Books of Praise*, to be placed in the pews was discussed. Due to possible change in Bible translation, council decided not to proceed at this time."

Personally I don't think that it is a good idea to have Bibles and *Books of Praise* in the pews. For some years now I have been kept busy repairing these pew items and when I sometimes see how they are handled and given to little

children to "play" with during the service, I wished that each and every family brought their own Bibles and *Books of Praise*, then they would be more careful with them. How beautiful it is when you see older and younger members coming to church carrying their Bibles and songbooks.

A couple of years ago we were going to study at choir a piece in Dutch: "Altijd is Kortjakje ziek, Midden in de week, maar 's Zondags niet. 's Zondags gaat zij naar de kerk Met een Boek met zilverwerk." (Always is Kortjakje sick, In the middle of the week, but not on Sundays. On Sundays she goes to church with a Book with silver ornaments.) You can sing this on the tune of "Twinkle, twinkle, little star." I am always reminded of that piece when I see the members coming there with the most precious possession one can have.

Abbotsford's consistory also decided that the Apostles' Creed shall be sung on the fourth Sunday of the month and further upon the request of the minister. Until now it was sung only at the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Yarrow too decided that Hymn 1A shall be sung once a month. The congregation shall do so while being seated. Smithville, on the other hand, "decided as a general rule to have the congregation confess their faith through the singing of Hymn 1A. This practice will commence in June. The congregation will be requested to remain standing during this confession."

Another decision by the Yarrow consistory is "that all incoming attestations will be dealt with at a meeting of the consistory before announcements are made." It does not need any elaboration that I consider this to be the proper procedure. This does not mean that in the meantime the incoming member or members are "church-less," so to speak. But in order to consider whether someone can be accepted as a member of this church on the basis of an attestation received the consistory must examine this attestation. It is not a "notice of transfer," but a request from a sister church to receive this member on the basis of the testimony given. The decision to receive this member indeed can be made at a consistory meeting only, not during a casual being together on Sundays in the consistory room.

Contact with others is being continued in various places. The Rev. C. Van Spronsen reported in *Church News* on "his visit to a small group of concerned members of the Christian Reformed Church in Duncan in the process of seceding."

"A number of families in the Duncan area have come to the conclusion that they can no longer remain in the Christian Reformed Church and are therefore looking for alternate ways. For the time being they are conducting mid-week services and meetings in Mill Bay where ministers of the mainland have been invited. (Duncan is on the Vancouver Island, VO) I was in their midst on Wednesday, June 1, and was rather impressed by the sincerity and difficulty of this small group. They certainly need our help and support in their struggle to remain truly reformed."

It is always difficult to determine what action to take. On the one hand we should always be willing to help, to advise, and to give guidance. On the other hand, we are to avoid any impression that we are out to fish in muddy waters or that we are out to make proselytes, although we long for the unity of all that fear the Lord and want to live according to the demands of His covenant. For this reason we should be generous with our help and assistance whenever asked for it. I am not referring here to financial support, but to moral support and spiritual help. I always am

a little wary when the request for contact is more or less accompanied or even preceded by a request for financial assistance.

The borderline issue seems finally to have come somewhat closer to a solution in the Burlington area. Seeing how many, perhaps even countless hours have been spent on it, the result should be phenomenal. Maybe, if the brothers there have found a satisfactory solution, they can send the information to the Australian sister churches in the Perth metropolitan area, for there they are still "in troubled waters."

The need for a solution is the more obvious when we learn that at last count the Burlington West membership stood at 709!

The singing in the park continues, thanks to (renewed) permission. "We have broadened the scope of our 'sing-song' somewhat by adding accompaniment with other instruments, such as keyboard and trumpet. We thank the board of our mixed choir 'Soli Deo Gloria,' which has favoured our request for the choir to sing with us from their own selection in four-voice harmony, at the same time supporting our own 'performance.'"

I recall that in pre-war days there was always some "street-preaching" in the good old city of Kampen (and perhaps in other cities as well), and at those events there also was always a small choir that sang Psalms and other songs, attracting the people and keeping them interested in staying. Glad to hear that the choir lends its cooperation in Burlington, too.

From the *Vineyard* we quote the following.

"A(n) Historical Information and Documentation Centre for the Churches and School(s) in the Niagara Peninsula?

"The consistory at Attercliffe proposes that such a centre be established by the four Churches of the Peninsula to gather information and pictures, to interview older members, to preserve as much of their own heritage as is possible, and to publish this information when possible."

This is a lofty endeavour which deserves everyone's support. I do not know whether this is the task of consistories, but it may be sufficient that the idea has been launched. Too much valuable historical material has been lost through negligence and "un-concern." There will be many documents and personal letters hidden in attics and old trunks, perhaps to be thrown out carelessly by some progeny that does not know Dutch and doesn't care for all that "old stuff."

Recently a sister asked me to bind for her some handwritten pages in which very interesting particulars were recorded of the life of a family in the days around the Secession of 1834 and after. And one has to look only at a book such as was published in Carman, telling the history of the brothers and sisters there, to see how important it is that historical particulars are preserved. One does not have to flatter oneself with the hope that his letters will be published in bookform in order to be aware of the value of correspondence for later research. Think of the book by Dr. Herbert J. Brinks *Schrijf Spoedig Terug, Brieven van Immigranten in Amerika, 1847-1920*. (Write Back Soon, Letters of Immigrants in America.)

Yes, and herewith we have arrived at the end of the newsmedley proper. I hope you have enjoyed it and drawn from it the honey I have tried to sprinkle upon it.

Expressing the wish that you won't have to wait too long for the next one, I sign off

Faithfully Yours  
VO

P.S. There is an enormous number of church members that have the same first name. Time and again I read the name "Fam." Fortunately, they also have a second name, so that it may be possible to locate the one you want. There is Fam Adam Adams, there is Fam Ben Bensen, there is Fam Charles Charleston, there is Fam Dick Dickens, and so on.

I asked an expert what the reason was for these same given names with so many different families. He did not know it either.

It is always wise to seek a second opinion, and that's what I did. My second adviser thought that this Fam might not be a given name but be an abbreviation of "Family." That caused a bulb to light up somewhere.

When are our writers going to learn that "Fam. Adam Adams" is a Dutchism, and that they should write "The Adam Adams Family"? Should not, after more than forty years have elapsed since the institution of the first Canadian Reformed Church, the proper terms be used?

And when are our ministers (who should know better but sometimes give the impression that they do not know) going to stop speaking of "Classis meeting" and use the proper terminology "Classis is held" instead of "Classis will meet"?

I hope that these wrong things have been stamped out before my demise which, I hope, is still some time away.

Fondly  
VO  
C



By C. Van Dam



## CRC Synod says no to women ordination

The CRC synod meeting in June decided in a vote of 95 to 89 not to ratify last year's decision to open church offices to women (subject to ratification by this year's Synod).

In taking this decision, the Synod followed the majority report of its advisory committee. This report gave several grounds against the 1993 decision, among which were the following. The Biblical passages used to defend women in office were not convincing. Also, Scripture forbids women in the office of elder and minister. Furthermore, the 1993 Synod acted contrary to the Church Order.

Once this decision was made, Synod had to deal with the implications. According to *The Banner*, "delegates agreed that the decision eliminated any synodical decision allowing women to serve as elder, minister, or evangelist." In light of this Synod decided to "urge all councils that have ordained women elders, evangelists, or ministers to release them from office by June 1, 1995, and . . . not to ordain any additional women elders, evangelists, or ministers."

Another issue that had to be resolved was whether women were still allowed "to expound the Scriptures," which Synod 1992 had permitted. Synod 1994 decided that that decision was still valid. Women are therefore still allowed "to teach, expound the Word of God, and provide pastoral care, under the supervision of elders." To determine exactly what that means, Synod appointed a committee "to clarify how expounding differs from exhorting and preaching." In the meantime women students can continue to study for the Master of Divinity degree and do their preaching assignments in the churches as part of their field education.

### What now?

The decision not to ratify last year's decision is a good one since it is one that is based on Scripture. Arguments mentioned by *The Banner* against the majority report (which advised against the ordination of women) do not sound convincing: "bordered on idolizing the Scriptures," "its interpretation of Scripture was fundamentalistic," and "it has no heart at all." The CRC however remains deeply divided as the closeness of the vote indicates. Meanwhile 15 congregations have already ordained women office bearers.

The decision to exclude women from the special offices has gladdened the hearts of ministers who left the CRC. According to *Nederlands Dagblad*, they had not expected such a good and well founded decision. Yet they unfortunately see no reason to believe that a reformation has started in the church of which they were once part. According to the same paper, Rev. R. Leetsma, pastor emeritus in the independent church at Lynwood, Illinois, sees the Grand Rapids establishment unchanged. Their unreformed view of Scripture has not changed and this issue will be back on a future Synod. It is doubtful whether this decision will be vigorously applied and worked within the churches. Rev. W. Leigh, of Urban Nations, a mission effort in New York City, sees a political significance to this decision. This is to keep the conservatives satisfied. The left wing has also been mollified with the reaffirming of the women's right to expound the Scriptures.

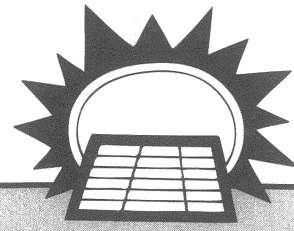
This somewhat pessimistic view of some who have left seems to be confirmed by the official paper of the CRC. In an editorial, John Suk writes:

Synod's decision to allow women to continue to exhort offers hope that the door has not been forever slammed shut. In fact, now that four synods since 1990 have said that women should either preach or expound, it seems inevitable that the offices of elder and minister and evangelist will eventually open to women.

May the Lord bless those who struggle for being faithful to Scripture both within the CRC and those who have left. **C**



# RAY OF SUNSHINE



By Mrs. R. Ravensbergen

*"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God."*

*Matthew 5:8*

## Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Do you have a garden? Or a backyard with some flowers? Or maybe plants on the balcony or in the house? Do you maybe take care of those plants?

It is nice to take care of a garden. It is a lot of work, too. Sometimes it is frustrating. First you have to prepare the soil, so the dirt is nice and loose without big lumps. Then you sow your seeds or plant the seedlings. From then on you have to watch the garden closely. You have to pull out the weeds, you have to water it when there is no rain for a while, you have to hoe around the plants to loosen up the soil. And then the plants start growing. Every time you look they have become a little bigger. But before the plant is big and produces flowers or fruits many things can go wrong with it yet. It may get pecked at by the birds, or eaten by a rabbit. It may dry out or get sick. Some plants simply do not want to grow fast, or they stay spindly or yellowish. Those plants need a lot of extra care. You try all you can to get them going with fertilizer, or spray, or trimming, or transplanting then to a sunnier or shadier or sandier spot.

What we are doing with those plants, that is what the Lord is doing with us. He planted us in the world. With His Holy Spirit He makes us grow. The Holy Spirit provides us with opportunities to grow and mature in our faith. He places us in a family where the Lord is served; He works into our hearts the willingness to go to church. He gives us everything we need to grow closer to the Lord and to recognize Him in all circumstances of our lives.

There are people who are not very healthy and strong. They are born with a physical handicap, or something happened to them later on in life with the result that they are handicapped. Some are developmentally handicapped. That means that their minds develop much slower than those of most people. Others have a terrible disease that cannot be cured, or they are terminally ill. But being faced with any of these challenges does not mean that we are outcasts. No, for to the Lord we are very special. Maybe we cannot be like a tall tree, providing nice, cool shade for the garden, or like a big shrub with beautiful flowers. But we can be like dainty little plants that fill up the flower garden. Without those little plants, there would be ugly bare spots. We may need a lot of extra care because we are not very strong, and because we cannot help ourselves with a lot of things. But to the Lord we are very important. The Lord surrounds us with His love. He keeps showing us that He is there for us. He helps, protects, shows us the way, and enables us to accomplish the very special task that He has chosen for each of us personally. Maybe someone has to sit in a wheelchair, so that she with her happy smile can show other people the way to the Lord. Another challenged person can teach others what it is to have a child-like faith. Someone else can teach the world around him that it is maybe easier to serve the Lord while you have a

handicap than when your whole world circles around a strong body, hard work and sports.

We as members of God's holy church need each other. Just like all the different plants fill up the garden, that is how all the different people fill up the church. We belong together, grow together, help each other, correct each other, worship the Lord together as one body of Christ.

God takes care of the church. He feeds it with His Holy Word. He pours out His Holy Spirit over it. In His Word He encourages the church members. He lets us know that we do not have to do anything on our own. He teaches us that our sins are forgiven through the Work of His Son. He makes us understand that we do not live to accomplish a whole lot in the eyes of the world. Our task here on earth is to praise and glorify His wonderful Name. And everyone can do that. The Lord wants us to do that, for He is wonderful, and the whole earth should know that. He made His covenant with us, sinners. His Son died for all our sins. He promises us a beautiful future. All God's children together will be praising Him in a perfect manner, with perfect bodies, perfect voices, and in perfect harmony. Then, finally, we all will be able to serve the Lord as we should. No sin, no satan, no handicap, no temptation, nobody and nothing will interfere with that. It will be on the day that Christ, the risen Lord will return on the clouds. What a day that shall be!

*'Tis as the dew on Hermon's brow descending,  
The dew that falls where Zion's slopes are bending,  
And makes their vintage overflow.  
So they who dwell in peace no want shall know,  
For there the Lord their God His blessing sends  
And grants the life that never ends.* Ps. 133:2

## Birthdays in September:

### Marsha Moesker

celebrates her 17th birthday on the 8th  
Gateway House, 4807 Georgia St., Delta, BC V4K 2T1

### Mary VandeBurgt

will have her 38th birthday on the 11th  
32553 Willington Cr., Clearbrook, BC V2T 1S2

### Jerry Bontekoe

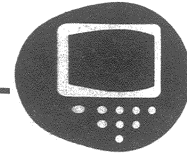
will be 30 on the 14th  
ANCHOR Home, 361 30 Rd. RR 2,  
Beamsville, ON L0R 1B0

**Paul Dieleman's** 25th birthday will be on the 29th  
Paul moved from Willowdale to Smithville. He and Philip Schuurman share a beautiful townhouse. Paul's address is:  
156 St. Catharines St., Unit 12,  
Smithville, ON L0R 2A0

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

*Mrs. R. Ravensbergen*

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



## Press Release of Synod 1994

The eighteenth Synod of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia opened in Byford on 14 June 1994 with a word of welcome and introduction from the chairman of the consistory of the convening church. On behalf of the convening church he urged the assembled brothers to recall one lesson from the Liberation of 1944 as they worked their way through the agenda before them, viz, that a meeting of the churches in Synod is to serve the local churches, is to assist the officebearers in shepherding the sheep of God's flock.

The examination of credentials revealed that all eight churches in the bond were represented by their primi delegates. This being established, the meeting could proceed with the election of the executive of Synod. The following responsibilities were given to the following persons:

Chairman - Br W. Huizinga  
Vice chairman - Br C. Bouwman  
First Clerk - Br A Slobe  
Second Clerk - Br C. Kleyn

The newly chosen chairman requested the delegates to rise from their seats to indicate their agreement with the Three Forms of Unity. The brothers did so. Herewith the basis for working together in the coming days was established. It was recognized that the brothers all stood on the one foundation of God's holy Word as summarized in the Confessions of the church.

By the way things turned out, the actual workings of this Synod can be divided into two distinct parts. Altogether, this eighteenth Synod met for two full weeks. The first week was devoted strictly to matters internal to the bond of churches, while the second week was dominated largely by matters connected to inter-church relations. The first week was characterized by a spirit of general agreement and mutual respect (be it that there was the predictable friendly fracas belonging to a meeting

of ministers), while the second week was characterized by much greater disagreement and even heated discussions.

Concerning the first week, the following decisions are of interest. In the first place, this Synod decided to part from the manner previous Synods were run, inasmuch as but little material was to be designated to committees. Instead (despite Byford's efforts to prepare adequate committee rooms and computer facilities), most items of the agenda would be dealt with in full session of Synod. It was hoped that in this way time would be saved, and a more accurate picture of sentiments among the delegates would emerge. Further, the Acts would be recast in a different format. Instead of the Observations, Considerations and Recommendations characterizing the Acts of the recent past, the new Acts would mention the Material used, the Decision made, and the grounds undergirding the decision. Next Synod, in fact, should be served by a general revision of the Rules of Synod.

Much time was spent in this first week on the Church Order. Article by article the meeting went through the text of the CO, considering the linguistic changes proposed by deputies as well as various submissions from the churches. The result is that the churches now possess a final edition of the Church Order. Though undoubtedly weaknesses will appear in the course of time, it is hoped that this product of years of labour will serve the churches for years to come. The Church Order is now to be published in workable format for the benefit of the membership.

The second major item attracting much time and interest in the first week of Synod was the matter of Bible Translation. Though the brothers held different sentiments on the matter of which translation should be recommended to the churches, the discussions could take

place in brotherly harmony and a decision be made that captured well the sentiments of the meeting. The final decision was "to endorse the NKJV as a faithful and reliable translation for use in the churches, as well as for study, instruction and family purposes." At the same time (since it is an acknowledged fact that no translation is perfect) room was allowed for "the NIV to be used in the church service, and for study, instruction and family purposes." Synod did not feel free at this time to "endorse" the NIV because past Synods had repeatedly cautioned against the NIV as well as because the churches had not yet tried the NIV on a trial basis. The churches would have a period of two years to move away from the RSV to one of these other two translations. It is thought that in time to come one translation may well emerge as the recommended translation for the churches.

On the matter of Training for the Ministry, Synod had to deal with a couple of requests to amend the existing rules. The rules as they now stand give to immediate relatives of the student the first responsibility to supply support for the young man, the church to which he belongs has responsibility after the family, and the churches as a whole have responsibility only in third place, after the family and local church feel the load is too heavy.

After a restful break on Saturday afternoon and the day of the Lord, Synod reconvened Monday morning and began straightaway the discussion on the International Conference of Reformed Churches. (Synod had earlier declined a request from one of the churches to deal with the matter in closed session.) To assist in the discussion with their advice were delegates from the sister churches in Holland and in Canada (all of whom rose upon request to express their agreement with the three Forms of Unity). By means of written

communication, the sister churches in South Africa and Korea also sought to assist us. The discussions on the ICRC demonstrated that there was amongst the brethren some very strong sentiments as to whether the Lord wanted us to remain member of the ICRC or not. Though very many words were spent in efforts to convince each other of the correctness and incorrectness of particular views, no clear consensus on the issue emerged. In the face of continuing disagreement, the decision was made by vote on Wednesday morning "to continue our membership in the ICRC." Herewith the decision was also made that we "consider the study of the concerns" related to our continuing membership completed.

As to the grounds used by Synod to shore up this decision, mention was made in first instance of the sentiment that "the ICRC is a conference" and "not an ecclesiastical assembly." Further, (so read the Grounds) "admission of member churches to this conference may not be equated with the official recognition of a bond of churches which is made by our broadest ecclesiastical assembly, the Synods." In the third place, the overall purpose of the ICRC ('to express and promote the unity of faith that the member churches have in Christ') is an overall goal to aim for, and is not to be construed as an exiting reality today. Finally, what is actually meant by "unit of faith" is specified by LD 7. Member churches in their reformed standards (be it the Three Forms of Unity or the Westminster Standards or perchance some other reformed confession) "confess and adhere to 'the sure knowledge' that everything from Genesis to Revelation is the truth, the Word of God." These member churches also "have shown their 'firm confidence' in all the promises of the Gospel", and so there are no grounds not to meet these churches at an international, reformed conference.

A further aspect of this decision to continue our membership in the ICRC is that the FRCA will propose to the next meeting of the ICRC a Constitutional Amendment to its first purpose. The formulation of the first purpose of the ICRC currently reads as follows: "to express and promote the unity of faith that the member churches have in Christ." Because this language, borrowed as it is from the confessions, suggests that the ICRC gives expression to *full* unity of faith (as is understood to exist between sister church-

es), it was considered beneficial to alter the formulation of this first purpose to the following: "to express and promote unity in the reformed faith which the member churches confess."

One would hope that this decision about our continued membership in the ICRC (together with its grounds) will bring to an end the discussions that have been ongoing in the churches for a number of years already. All of the sister churches who expressed themselves on the subject of our membership of the ICRC agreed to a man (church?) that the FRCA should not withdraw. Though it's certainly Scripturally correct to listen carefully to the warnings and pleadings of others (particularly if they all issue the same warning), before God it is nevertheless the responsibility of the FRCA alone what the Australian churches do with the ICRC. The churches will now need to consider whether the grounds brought forward by Synod to continue membership in the ICRC indeed give the necessary justification to this decision. Despite what one may think about the ICRC, however, it is surely the wish and prayer of all the delegates at this Synod that peace be restored in the churches.

The second main item on the menu of the second week concerned the relation we have with various Presbyterian churches, particularly the PCEA. On the matter of the PCEA, Synod had to work primarily with two documents. There was first of all a report from deputies recommending that the mandate be renewed to continue discussions with the PCEA so as to remove the remaining areas of concern. Secondly, there was a letter from the church of Legana urging Synod at this point to recognize the PCEA as a true and faithful church of the Lord. Synod decided to follow neither course of action. Instead, Synod saw need for study to be done on a number of questions, viz,

– what weight should the FRCA give to the areas of concern still mentioned as points for discussion in our relation with Presbyterian churches?

– should all these areas of concern be cleared away before the FRCA can progress with developing relations with Presbyterian churches?

– how can the FRCA fulfil, in a manageable and responsible way, the obligations we have towards churches geographically or culturally far away?

Accordingly, new deputies shall need to present to a future synod answers to these questions. It will be understood that as deputies do the work involved in this mandate, they will need to build on the decision made earlier in this Synod about the ICRC. As to the actual relations with the PCEA (as well as with the FCS, the EPCI, and the RPCI), this Synod decided to maintain the contacts at the current level, but leave the discussions with these churches on areas of concern in abeyance.

Beside the more controversial items of the ICRC and the PCEA, Synod had to make decisions also on contact with various other churches far and near. From the information tabled at Synod, it was concluded that the sister churches in the Netherlands, Canada, South Africa and Korea remained faithful to the truth of God's word, and so the sister relation with them could be continued. The same could be said for the Reformed Churches of Indonesia, whose representative – Rev. Doko – could be in our midst. Rev. Fangidae of the so-called Musyafir churches in Timor personally thanked the FRCA for their willingness to support Yonson Dethan in his studies for the ministry in Hamilton. Deputies were instructed to continue to support Yonson's studies, and were told also to assist the Musyafir churches in other ways so that they might remain reformed.

The Reformed Churches of New Zealand were represented in our midst in the person of Rev. M.A. Flinn. In time past the FRCA had insisted that the relation which the RCNZ had with the Reformed Churches of Australia was an impediment to any warming of relations between the RCNZ and the FRCA. Rev. Flinn made it clear that, though the RCNZ would very much appreciate a warming of contacts with the FRCA, the RCNZ had strong historical and emotional bonds with the RCA – a fact with which we in the FRCA must reckon. Deputies were instructed, consequently, to continue contact with the RCNZ and advise next Synod on "how the relation of the RCNZ with the RCA should impact our relation with the RCNZ."

Concerning the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Singapore, there appeared to be but little progress since these churches have a strong bond with the Protestant Reformed Churches of America. However, a working relationship with the ERCS has begun to develop, and so it seemed best to continue to develop this contact further.

From the Reformed Churches of Australia an invitation was received to "send an observer" to their forthcoming Synod in Perth. As grounds for this invitation was mentioned the fact that the FRCA is "in dialogue" with the RCA. Synod decided not to accept this invitation since the obstacles that separated the RCA from the FRCA in the past have not yet been officially cleared up. It would not do, Synod thought, to send the wrong signal to the RCA, as if our dialogue with the RCA implied some sort of recognition of the RCA as a church of Jesus Christ. Meanwhile, deputies could attend the RCA Synod on personal title.

Deputies had recommended to Synod to be instructed to keep an eye open

for useful information about the Free Reformed Churches of the Philippines, so that in turn the FRCA might consider whether contact with the FRCP should be initiated. This request was granted.

Besides matters related to inter-church relations, Synod dealt in this second week also with the text of the Ecumenical Creeds. The main decision on this topic concerns the Athanasian Creed, whereby the text as found in the newest edition of the *Book of Praise* was adopted. Earlier Synods had already adopted a new text of the Apostles' Creed. There awaits now another text on the Nicene Creed.

As final item that should receive a place in this press release of Synod is

the church visitation reports dealt with in closed session this morning. From these church visitation reports, it became clear that the eight churches in the bond of Free Reformed Churches may all rightly be called churches of Jesus Christ. None has yet reached the goal of perfection, all still struggle against sin and evil. Yet, by the grace of God, the reports of the visitors give evidence of the Lord's continuing church gathering and preserving work. It is His work in our midst that gives confidence for the future. To Him be the glory, now and forever.

C. Bouwman  
Vice Chairman, e.t. **C**

*This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. Psalm 118:23*

With thankfulness to the LORD who has made all things well, we announce the birth of our fourth child, a son

**EVAN FREDRIK**

Born July 12, 1994

A brother for *Blaine, Keith and Mark*

Proud parents:  
Ben and Willie Vandermeulen  
(nee Jelsma)

Box 1098  
Carman, MB R0G 0J0

With great thankfulness to our heavenly Father, the Creator of life, we joyfully announce the birth of our son

**ANDREW JOHN**

born on May 20, 1994

A brother for *Ryan and Sarah*  
Gerald and Cathy Bosscher  
(nee Smouter)

638 Artreva Crescent  
Burlington, ON L7L 2B6

With great thankfulness to the Lord, we are proud to announce the birth of our second child

**KAITLYN MICHELLE**

Born June 17, 1994

A sister for *Justin*

Norm and Nicole Vanderee  
(nee Vanderlaan)

641 Cumberland Avenue  
Burlington, ON L7N 2X4

With thankfulness to our Heavenly Father, the Giver of life, we announce the birth of our second child

**ROBYN JANE**

Born June 26, 1994

Gordon and Charlene Tenhage  
(nee Vanwoudenberg)

A sister for *Carrie*

Proud grandparents:  
Bert and Jane Tenhage  
Bill and Corrie Vanwoudenberg

5046 Harkwood Avenue  
Beamsville, ON L0R 1B5

*Before I formed you . . . , I knew you . . .*

*Jeremiah 1:5*

*Thou didst form my personality . . . Wonderful are Thy works!"*

*Psalm 139: 13,16*

In gratitude to the LORD, the Creator and Sustainer of life, we joyfully announce the birth of our fourth son

**KEVIN GERARD**

Born July 4, 1994

A brother for *Dirk*  
*James*  
*Gregory*

Wim and Cecile Kanis  
(nee Vanwoudenberg)

8741 Butchart Street  
Chilliwack, BC V2P 5S2

*He is the faithful God, keeping His covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep His commands. Deuteronomy 7:9b*

With thankfulness to the Lord, who made all things well, we, *Marty and Faith van Driel* (nee Schoen), announce the birth of our second child, a son

**ADRIAN HENDRIK**

Born July 22, 1994 in Winnipeg, Manitoba

A brother for *Andrew*

2nd grandchild for  
*Maarten and Jennie van Driel*

9th grandchild for  
*Henk and Jenny Schoen*

1195 Pandora Avenue West  
Winnipeg, MB R2C 1N4