

# Clarion

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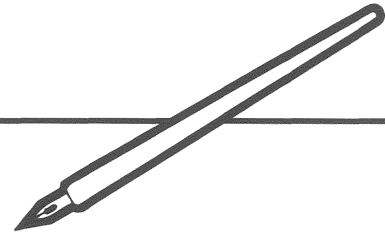


*View of  
Edinburgh, Scotland*

*Numbers*

10:1-10

By J. De Jong



## The Right Man on Our Side

One of the rather unexpected events in journalism this past year was *TIME'S* choice of Pope John Paul II as their **Man of the Year**. In the year 1994 the Pope did not do anything different from what he normally does. He did not stand out as a major player in any particular peace process. Yet he is termed by *TIME*: our Man of the year. Why did *TIME* choose him? Why did the attention of journalists now turn in this unexpected way to this leader? If anything, John Paul's year in the papal office has been a difficult one. He has been plagued with increasing signs of ill health. His world-wind tours are increasingly taking their toll. All this would make him an unlikely candidate for this dubious distinction of being **Man of the Year**.

Ad Kamsteeg of *Nederlands Dagblad* (December 31, 1994) suggests that the Pope was chosen primarily because there was no other suitable candidate. Never has the world seen such a poverty of sound leadership as we find in our day. Politicians of highest office appear to be more concerned about staying in office rather than promoting the good of their citizens. They change their opinions and positions by the day. What's more, there is a worldwide lack of moral fibre. We witness the killing of millions of people in Rwanda, Bosnia and Chechnya. But who does anything about it? The world stands by and watches. And the source of this inertia is not a lack of resources, for there are still plenty of those. Ultimately it is a lack of conviction and a lack of political will. The world has sunk into an abyss of self-interest, cowardice, and fear.

### Why this man?

One look at the coverage on the Pope bears out much of what Kamsteeg says. The Pope is not exactly praised for his views, even though *TIME* mentions them with due respect. The magazine also reminds the readers that he has most of the world against him. But what is to be admired is the fact that he holds to his convictions. He is "resolute about his ideals and eager to impose them on a world that often differs with him." Says *TIME*:

In a year when so many people lamented the decline in moral values or made excuses for bad behaviour, Pope John Paul forcefully set forth his vision of the good life and urged the world to follow it. For such rectitude – or recklessness, as his detractors would have it – he is *TIME'S* Man of the Year.

It's not so much his views that are praised. The magazine has too much business sense to take that kind of a position. What is really praised? "John Paul knows where he stands." He stands above the moral decay and political, social and economic ineptitude that makes up our modern world.

Some of the reporters waxed eloquent about their meeting with the Pope. For example, one interviewer said, "I felt something very special in his presence. One does sense that this is not an ordinary mortal. There is something about him that surpasses charisma and personality. You don't have to be a Roman Catholic, or even a believer in God, to feel something almost mystical in his presence." In other words, the reporter feels – and the material in the articles on Pope John corroborates this view – that the Pope is a partially *divine* figure. But what characterizes his divine aspect is not so much the views he champions as it is the *rigor* with which he maintains them.

### The right man?

If we briefly examine this stand point of *TIME*, we must acknowledge that this viewpoint is in its own way very revealing. For not only the choice of this man, but also the whole write up surrounding this choice makes clear that there is an inner longing for new and renewing *leadership*. If the early nineties were the years of renewed democracy, 1994 was an indication that even near universal democracy brings no alleviation of the deepest malaise facing the world. Bloodshed, civil strife, turmoil rage all over the world. No one seems to be in control. No one seems to show the courage, fortitude and moral rectitude required to set matters straight. Hence the turn to the Pope.

But this choice by its very nature shows the lack of moral fibre and conviction in the world of news journalism today. For it is not *what* the Pope says that is regarded with renewed attention, as much as it is *how* it is said. It is the resoluteness, the force and the authority with which he speaks that is acknowledged as having a good influence in a leader-less, lack-lustre age.

All this reminds one of what Dr. F.L. Rutgers said about the church destroying character of *hierarchy* during the struggle of the Doleantie in 1887. He said that the world and the state will always be prepared to join forces with ecclesiastical hierarchy because in essence they have the same root, and a common governing principle, i.e. conformity to the world. The servants become lords, and everything and everyone is bound to the voice of one person in control. This is the spirit of bondage, of worldliness, of the godless Antichrist. *This* is what manifests itself with increasing force in our day.

But what about the Pope's message? Does not he say many good things about the need for morals? Does not he seek to give good direction to the young, who often don't care about an imposed standard of right or wrong in their sexual behaviour? Indeed he does. But Rutgers also points out that hierarchy is always out to camouflage its real character. Even Satan can appear as an angel of light,

*continued on page 80*

# Meditation

By G.Ph. van Popta

Read Acts 4:13-22: “. . . for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”

## LISTEN TO GOD RATHER THAN MAN

In article 36 of the *Belgic Confession* we say that we “. . . ought to be subject to the civil officers, pay taxes, hold them in honour and respect, and obey them in all things which do not disagree with the Word of God.”

In this article the Confession has summarized what the Scriptures teach about our duty to obey the civil government. God demands that we obey the government. They are His servants for our good. There is no authority except from God. If we resist the civil government, we resist what God has appointed.

However, there is a limit to our obedience. We may not say: “My country! Right or wrong, my country!” Blind obedience is wrong. Acts 4:19 and 20 spell out the limit.

The Jewish authorities were annoyed with John and Peter. Not only had they caused a stir in Jerusalem when they had healed a lame beggar; even worse, they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus Christ the resurrection from the dead. In a very short while the followers of the Jesus whom they had killed and who, apparently, had risen from the dead had grown from 120 to over 3,000 (2:41) to 5,000 (4:4) – all because of the preaching of Peter, John and the other disciples. They arrested Peter and John and put them in custody.

The next day the authorities assembled in order to examine the trouble makers. Peter testified that they had healed the crippled man by the power of the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom the government had crucified but whom God had raised from the dead.

The distinguished members of the council were left speechless. They saw the man whom Peter had healed. There he was, living proof of the power of the name of Jesus Christ. They could not deny that a notable sign had been done. They had nothing to say in opposition. So they threw their weight around instead. They issued a gag order. They charged Peter and John not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

Peter and John answered: “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.” Later Peter would say to the same council: “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

And so the divine principle has been set down in the world. We must obey the government in all things and at all times except when the government would have us disobey God. That means, for example, that we must pay our taxes. Soon it will be time for you to declare your 1994 income and submit a tax return. No one likes paying taxes. There is no question that we are over-taxed. The governments ought to be cutting more and taxing less. The temptation will be there to fudge a bit on your tax return – not to declare “this” or “that” bit of income. The temptation is there to find ways to avoid paying the hated GST. But we would not be doing well. When the government taxes us, even heavily, it is not forcing us to disobey God.

In fact the apostle Paul had this to say about the oppressive Roman government: “Pay all of them their dues, taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due” (Rom. 13:7).

However, when it is a matter of listening either to the government or to God, we must listen to God. If the government were to forbid preaching and worship, we would need to find ways to disobey that law.

Living in democracies we may use the means available to let our Christian voice be heard speaking against laws offensive to God and the citizenry. We can write our political representatives, vote for the best candidates, seek to fill the offices with Christian legislators, run for office. But we must also be prepared to pay the price of persecution. We must listen to God and obey Him rather than man. And if God lays the cross of persecution across our shoulders, we will rejoice that He should count us worthy to suffer dishonour for the name of Jesus Christ.

**If the government were to forbid preaching and worship, we would need to find ways to disobey that law.**

## What's inside?

In the lead editorial, Dr. J. De Jong challenges *Time* magazine's choice of Pope John Paul II as 1994's Man of the Year. The true church of Jesus Christ looks to a different Man!

A point that is discussed with vigor in some quarters is the relationship between Reformed churches whose roots lie in the Continent and Reformed churches sprung from Scottish soil. In the feature article, Rev. E. Kampen presents historical data which shows that the North Sea was never too deep for the Dutch and the Scottish brotherhoods to find each other.

Dr. N.H. Gootjes reviews a recent publication commemorating the 350th anniversary of the Westminster Assembly, the English assembly which produced the Westminster Confession and Catechisms.

In the youth column, Rev. Schouten challenges the reader to recognize that preachers do not exist to entertain their audiences but to announce the will of the King to the citizens of the kingdom.

Among a few other things we hope will delight you, you will find a few letters to the editor. We remind our readers that we welcome letters, but ask that you keep them short and pointed.

GvP



2 Cor 11:14. Is not this the mark of the false prophet in Rev. 13? Yet precisely because more attention is given to the force of John Paul's words rather than the words themselves, one can see clearly where the hearts lie. *TIME'S* choice represents nothing less than the promotion of the godless principle of *hierarchy*, that destructive force which ultimately – if given free reign – leads to the loss of all freedom in both church and world.

### Our side

In this same year in which the Pope is hailed to be the man to whom we must look for direction, the churches arising out of the reformation in the Netherlands have commemorated events of a different kind. First, we remembered the Secession of 1834, now one hundred and sixty years ago. In that year the church was delivered from the binding hierarchy of the Classical

and Provincial Boards and brought back by the grace of God to the true doctrine and the order of freedom defended and drawn up by the Synod of Dort. And we commemorated the Liberation of 1944. In that year the church was delivered from a destructive synodical hierarchy which sought to bind the consciences of men and women to teachings and doctrines above and beyond Scripture. In both events we remembered that the only Head of the church, Jesus Christ, kept and led His church in the pastures of true *freedom*, the freedom of the holy gospel.

### The right man on our side

Ultimately this was, as we believe, not the work of men but the work of Christ Himself. He is the only Head of His Church, the only ruling King in the world. As apostasy acquires a more universal character, and as the signs of the opposition against the Son increase

all over the world one thing is clear. His work continued, also in 1994, and will continue in the future! Let no one think that His cause has no future. We should not think that the all-pervasive and all-penetrating principle of hierarchy – as it is also defended and promoted in *TIME'S* choice for the Man of the Year – will achieve a universal victory. For Christ will keep His own in the freedom of the true worship of His name.

We can still say in 1994 and 1995 with Luther: we have the right Man on our side! The Lord Sebaoth – He is the one who is truly divine. His reign spans all the years, and He leads His church and delivers it from all the vicious attacks of the evil one. With *His* government we may be sure that though lawlessness increases, God's truth, and the fellowship of free and redeemed service in that truth will prevail through His Spirit, even to the day of His return. **C**

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# Reformed and Presbyterian Contacts in Historic Perspective

By Rev. E. Kampen

## Introduction

An issue that causes unrest and has the potential of forming a shibboleth of orthodoxy is the issue of relations with Presbyterian churches. Though as churches we have official relations with the *Free Church of Scotland* and the *Presbyterian Church of Korea*, as well as contact with the *Orthodox Presbyterian Church* in the U.S.A., and there is contact with Presbyterian churches via the *International Conference of Reformed Churches*, the question that seems to be constantly asking for attention is this: Is such contact right? Is there really unity of faith between those who hold to the Three Forms of Unity and those who subscribe to the Westminster Standards? In a number of regional publications, there can be found a regular, systematic, critical analysis of the West-

minster Standards. The conclusion that is brought forward time and again is: These Standards are not the same as the Three Forms of Unity. These Standards contain Kuyperian elements. If we recognize Presbyterian churches, then we let the same type of teachings (for instance, pluriformity of the church, covenant with the elect, hierarchy) back into the church, thereby undoing the Liberation of 1944. It is thus a fear of losing what was gained in the Liberation of 1944 that makes many leery of such contacts. This fear should not be pushed aside lightly, for ultimately the Liberation was about faithfulness to the Word of God, and trust in that Word.

The pivotal point in the discussion thus is the Liberation from certain doctrinal statements in the 1940s in the Netherlands. Judging by the analysis of the Westminster Standards, using termi-

nology of the 1940s, one almost begins to wonder if the Liberation was not so much a rejection of being bound to human theological constructions as a rejection of the Westminster Standards. We know of course that the Liberation was about resisting that binding to theological constructions, where the Word of God was pushed aside in favour of the word of man.

It is thus important that the issue of contacts with Presbyterian churches be put into a broader perspective. The Liberation is not the only reformation in the history of the church. It will be of great value to know how the Reformed churches in the Netherlands looked at, and dealt with Presbyterian churches at other times in history. It will be of particular interest to look at the history of the churches since the Secession of 1834, where there was also a re-



turn to the Word of God, and a resisting to being bound to the decisions of man. How did those churches view Presbyterian churches, and how did they interact?

We realize of course that history is never normative, but it is informative. Just the same, there is the aspect of the catholicity of the Church, which also should be kept in mind when evaluating present day practices. It must be asked: are we in line with the catholic church, or are we an aberration? It may be said that just because a church has always done a certain thing a certain way does not make it right in itself. That is a truth no one can deny. Nevertheless, if a church has a practice which finds no support in the history of the church, then it must ask itself if perhaps it has departed from the catholic path, and set out on the road of sectarianism. It is thus the contention of this article that historically the Reformed churches in the Netherlands did not have trouble with Presbyterianism as such, but both approached each other as brothers in the Lord. Further, the churches after the Liberation, both in the Netherlands and Canada, also did not have any trouble with Presbyterianism as such. We will first look at some historical data which supports this contention, to be followed by some conclusions and applications for the situation today.

### The Churches of the Secession and the Presbyterians

When you begin to read the literature surrounding the Secession of 1834, then you are hard pressed to find any reference to contact with churches in other countries. This should not be a surprise to anyone. Those who separated themselves from the liberal state controlled church faced great hardship. Ministers were imprisoned. Many fines were imposed both on ministers and others. This was hardly a time to entertain the idea of contact with churches in other countries. It was a struggle to re-establish church life. Further, those days lacked the means of communication and travel we have come to take for granted. You could say that international contacts are only a possibility when the Churches enjoy a certain amount of stability, freedom, as well as time and money to attend to these things.

Once, however, the life of the churches became more settled and organized towards the middle of the century, we see that the eyes of the Seceders were not closed to churches in other countries. Like the churches in the Netherlands, the churches in Scotland went through a struggle, and the believers faced persecution and hardship. The Scottish believers experienced a secession of their own in 1843. In 1843, the provincial meeting of the "Scholtegroup" sent a letter to the Free Church of Scotland. Likewise, the churches in Overijssel and Gelderland decided in November 1843 to send a letter of brotherly fellowship to the Scottish Seceders.<sup>1</sup>

A number of personal contacts with men of the Free Church were established, especially in connection with plans for a Scottish Seminary in Amsterdam. The Synod of 1854 appointed S. vanVelzen, A. Brummelkamp and P.J. Oggel to a committee for contact with the Scottish churches. This committee sent a letter not long after this Synod to the Free Church of Scotland (F.C.) to establish fellowship.<sup>2</sup> The Synod of 1857, however, seems to be faced with the fact that the F.C. did not respond to this request. The Committee, however, was urged to try and establish contact with the F.C.<sup>3</sup>

It is interesting to note that there was contact not only with the Free Church of Scotland, but also with the United



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#### EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Editor: J. Geertsema  
Coeditors: J. De Jong, R.A. Schouten,  
C. Van Dam, G.Ph. van Popta

#### ADDRESS FOR EDITORIAL MATTERS:

CLARION  
P.O. Box 1121  
Taber, AB T0K 2G0  
Fax: (403) 223-0149  
E-Mail: CompuServe 74124,1377

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#### IN THIS ISSUE

Editorial – The Right Man on Our Side — J. De Jong .....	78
Meditation — G.Ph. van Popta .....	79
Reformed and Presbyterian Contacts in Historic Perspective — E. Kampen .....	80
Book Review – A commemoration of the Westminster Assembly — N.H. Gootjes .....	84
Letters to the Editor .....	86
Remember your Creator – I didn't get anything out of that sermon — R. Schouten .....	87
Reader's Forum .....	88
Middle East Reformed Fellowship .....	89
Canadian Reformed World Relief Fund .....	91
Press Review — C. Van Dam .....	93
Our Little Magazine — Aunt Betty .....	94

Presbyterian Church (U.P.C.). The United Presbyterian Church was formed in 1847 through a union of the Relief Church and the United Secession Church.<sup>4</sup> This contact was more personal. It is reported that some men from the United Presbyterian Church visited with Brummelkamp in 1858. The discussion of this visit led one of Scottish visitors to say: "We have a great historical family-likeness."<sup>5</sup> The extent and importance of this contact with the U.P.C. is apparent when Brummelkamp and van Velzen, upon invitation, attended the Synod of the U.P.C. in Edinburgh, May of 1859. This visit was reciprocated when three deputies from the U.P.C. visited the Synod of Hoogeveen in 1860.<sup>6</sup> An indication of the friendliness of this relationship, and the mutual trust, comes out from the fact that the U.P.C. deputies invited a number of students from the Netherlands to study at the U.P.C. seminary in Scotland. Two of Brummelkamp's sons studied in Scotland in the years 1862-1863.<sup>7</sup> In 1865, Brummelkamp visited Scotland for a second time, accompanied by De Cock. They acquainted themselves with both the Free Church and the U.P.C.<sup>8</sup>

The fact that there was contact with two groups, the F.C and the U.P.C gives rise to the question: why contact with two churches in one country? This fact did not escape the brothers of the previous century. In Scotland work was under way to come to unity between the F.C and the U.P.C. On the Synod of 1869, in the presence of four deputies from the U.P.C, Brummelkamp expressed the hope that next year in Edinburgh they would witness the united F.C. and U.P.C. By the Synod of 1875, however, there was still no unity, and the U.P.C deputy, Rev. Boyd, was asked why there was this delay. It appears that the contact with the U.P.C was more intense than with the F.C. A number of times it was noted that no invitation had been sent to the Free Church to send delegates.<sup>9</sup> By 1885 there was still no unity between the two Scottish groups. In 1885, however, both the F.C and the U.P.C send letters of greeting to the Synod held that year.

Though not directly related to the matter of contact with Presbyterian churches, it is of interest to note a number of decision by various Synods about matters of ministers coming from foreign churches, and the giving of attestations when people moved to other countries. The Synod of 1877 (Utrecht)

decided with respect to ministers coming from a foreign church, "that the Synodical Committee shall investigate whether the church, out of whose bosom they come, stand with us on the same foundation of faith, and gives a satisfactory academic education to its teachers." There would still be a need to investigate, if they were academically qualified, as well as to their doctrinal faithfulness.<sup>10</sup>

The Synod of Leeuwarden, 1890 (art. 24) in connection with attestations to foreign churches, stated that "when one moves to Belgium, one should hand in his attestation in the nearest church of Reformed confession. Where in other countries such a church cannot be found, one should seek fellowship with a sisterchurch, for example, a Lutheran church which maintains its confession, if such can be done without betraying one's own Reformed confession."<sup>11</sup>

We can notice then that there was much interaction between the Seceded churches in the Netherlands and the Free Church of Scotland (1843) and the United Presbyterian Church (1847). Further, there seemed to be a readiness to recognize other churches as acceptable, though they may not have had the same confessional documents. There was even room given for membership in a Lutheran church!

### **The Churches after the union of 1892 and the Presbyterians.**

The Union of 1892 forced the united churches to re-evaluate the whole practice of contact with foreign churches. The united synod of 1892 had appointed a committee to gather and arrange the corresponding regulations of both groups made up till that time with respect to foreign contacts, and to come forward with a proposal for new regulations. The Synod of 1893 dealt with this matter.<sup>12</sup>

At the Synod of 1893 a committee for contact with foreign churches of Reformed confession and Church government was appointed. It is not stated whether this included Presbyterian churches. We do find that in 1933 and 1936 Synods decided that correspondence "shall be maintained" with the Church of Scotland. In 1936 the mandate is given to, if possible, send representatives also to the assemblies of the Church of Scotland.<sup>13</sup>

Of interest is also the decision of Synod Groningen 1927 (Art. 161), where, in connection with attestations it was decided that "churches can al-

ways give attestations to its members who move to a foreign country. These attestations should be handed in to churches which in confession and church government are most closely related to the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. The acceptance of attestations issued by foreign churches is the responsibility of the consistories, which shall act after having evaluated the situation."<sup>14</sup>

From these facts it is apparent that the churches after the union continued in the line of the Secession churches, being open to dealings with Presbyterian churches. Further, there continues to be an openness to accepting churches in other countries as true churches, even though there is not a formal relationship, and such churches do not share the exact same confessional documents. The emphasis seems to be on churches that live in accordance with the Reformed faith.

### **The Churches after the Liberation and Presbyterian Churches.**

It is good to remember that a reformation is not so much a new beginning, which wipes away all previous history, but it is a separation from a wrong direction, and a return to the good path which was being abandoned. Great pain is usually taken to point out that the body that secedes in effect is the body that remains, that is, it continues in the well-beaten path while those who remain really secede from the truth, walking in a different direction. That can be seen in many cases where a reformation is followed by a struggle over who has the right to the name used before the schism. New names must usually be adopted because the part that has seceded doctrinally and refused to heed the call to reformation is larger in number.

What then was the direction of the churches of the Liberation with respect to Presbyterian churches? We see a continuation in approach. Among the mandate for contact with foreign churches, the synods of 1958 and 1961 instructed the committee for such contact to "seek contact with other churches in foreign countries, which accept the Holy Scriptures as the infallible Word of God and whose confession and church government cannot be considered in conflict with that of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands."<sup>15</sup> Synod Amersfoort 1966-67 reworded this instruction to read as follows: "to seek contact with churches in foreign countries, with

whom the possibility of contact may be suspected, with a view to further investigate this possibility and prepare an eventual realization of this contact according to the accepted rules."<sup>16</sup>

A final point that needs to be mentioned is also from that same Synod Amersfoort. It accepted the statement of the Regional Synod of Groningen that the Westminster Confession of Faith is a fully (Dutch: *voluit*) Reformed confession.<sup>17</sup> This shows that the churches after the Liberation did not exclude the possibility of contacts with others, even though they did not have the same confessional documents. It is extremely interesting how in 1958 and 1961 the emphasis was laid first on acceptance of the Holy Scriptures, and only then was the aspect of harmony with the Reformed Confessions brought in.

### **The Christian Reformed Churches and Presbyterian Churches**

Though the sad fact is that a separation has come about between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Christian Reformed Churches, its history is of relevance. After all, the Christian Reformed Churches grew out of the Secession churches. There was a sister church relationship between the Christian Reformed Churches and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. Before the second World War, immigrants would find a proper church home in the Christian Reformed Church. It is of interest then to know how the Christian Reformed Churches stood over against Presbyterian churches, especially since they had to deal with this issue as a church grown out of immigration. The relationship with Presbyterian churches could no longer simply be dealt with under the category of foreign churches since Reformed and Presbyterian churches now existed in the same country.

Typical of its position is no doubt what we find in the Church Order Commentary by Van Dellen and Monsma. The article dealing with relations with other churches reads as follows: "Churches whose usages differ from ours merely in non-essentials shall not be rejected." Comment is made that in contrast to the Dutch article, The C.R.C. Synod of 1914 "left out the adjective "foreign" inasmuch as we wanted the article to apply to Reformed denominations right in our own country, as well as to Reformed Churches of other countries."<sup>18</sup> It is also stated that there

is only full correspondence with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and the Reformed Churches of South Africa. We see here, however, an effort to come to grips with the new situation in North America, and an openness to the fact that there may be other faithful reformed churches. At the same time caution is expressed that not every church that carries the name Reformed or Presbyterian should automatically be acknowledged, because many of them neglect discipline and tolerate false doctrine.<sup>19</sup>

### **The Canadian Reformed Churches and Presbyterian Churches**

It is fully understandable that the members of the Canadian Reformed Churches maintained close ties with their country of origin. The historical, cultural, and above all, ecclesiastical ties were too strong to let go. Yet, it is remarkable that not many years after church life became established, there arose an interest in the Orthodox Presbyterian Churches (OPC). A Regional Synod of the churches in Ontario already proposed to the Synod of 1962 that deputies be appointed to enter into discussion with the OPC. A proposal came on the Synod table that this committee:

1. Inform the OPC of the confessions and form of government of the Canadian Reformed Churches, and ask if, based on this, the OPC could accept the Canadian Reformed Churches as true churches of the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. Discuss the differences in confessions and church government between the OPC and the Can. Ref. Churches, and test them by the Word of God.
3. Inform the OPC of our rules for correspondence, and enquire what their rules were.
4. Discuss correspondence with third parties
5. Keep the churches informed.

This proposal died on the Synod table on the ground that it had not been proven by the Regional Synod that the OPC was truly a communion which had returned to the true worship of the Lord.<sup>20</sup>

Undaunted, it appears, the churches in Ontario regrouped with a proposal to Synod Edmonton, 1965. This time they provided Synod with an extensive

historical report. The Synod concluded from this report that it is clear that:

1. The OPC is, as a Presbyterian Church, a fruit of the Calvinistic Reformation.
2. The OPC has confessions and a form of church government which are Calvinistic in character.
3. The OPC has in this century definitely chosen for orthodoxy and against modernism.

The Synod recognized that there were differences in confession and form of church government, and in terms of correspondence with other churches. This required a very thorough investigation of the situation. The end result was that the proposal to appoint deputies with the mandate as suggested in 1962 carried this time.<sup>21</sup>

The history of contact with the OPC since 1965 can be gleaned from the Acts of the various Synods. It is not necessary to really give any further details, beyond mentioning that the Synod of 1977 acknowledged that the OPC was a true church of the Lord Jesus Christ. The point that becomes clear is that even in the early years of the Canadian Reformed churches there was a willingness to consider fellowship with Presbyterian churches. As the report submitted to the 1965 shows, there was an eye for the work of the Lord. This report, as can be found as an appendix in the Acts of 1965 (pp. 89-98 in English!) concludes with these words, "It is the purpose of this report to show evidence which may prompt the next Synod to appoint deputies to study these matters more in detail and to see whether here we may have found the seven thousand on the American Continent, 'all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which has not kissed him.'" Remarkable indeed, that the very generation that tasted the Liberation did not hesitate to look at Presbyterian churches.

### **Concluding remarks**

From this historical information it can be concluded then that reformed churches, maintaining the Three Forms of Unity, have not automatically rejected Presbyterian Churches per se, due to their different confessions and form of church government. Rather than looking at them critically and suspiciously, Reformed Churches have looked at them favourably and sympathetically, while not being blind to the differences that exist. This attitude was



carried through after the Liberation, also by those who immigrated. There has been a consistent understanding that faithful Reformed and faithful Presbyterian churches are basically one in the faith, as fruits of the Calvinistic reformation. At the same time, there has been a clear understanding that there are certain differences, but these differences are not of such a character as to warrant the conclusion that there can be no fellowship. The relationship between Reformed and Presbyterians has never been one of tension and suspicion about conflicts between the two strains coming out of the Reformation of the 16th century.

We stated earlier that history though informative is not normative. Nevertheless, we can learn from the past, where there was not seen to exist a fundamental conflict between Reformed and Presbyterian churches; rather, they felt a natural attraction to each other, the attraction of the unity of faith. That brings to mind a little poem I came across many years ago.<sup>22</sup> In translation, it went like this: “

*“There were two children of the king,  
they loved each other so much,  
but they couldn’t reach each other,  
for the water was way too deep.”*

The water of the North Sea was not too deep for Reformed and Presbyterians

to recognize each other as the work of Jesus Christ. That attitude prevailed right through the Liberation. By that attitude of mutual recognition we continue in the line of our forefathers. It is that attitude of mutual recognition that sets a good climate for discussions about the weaknesses we may see in each other.

May the Lord grant wisdom in our discussions with Presbyterian churches, and grant that we do not make the water too deep.

Lines from an anonymous late middle age ballad.

*Het waren twee conincskinderen,  
Si hadden malcander so lief,  
Si conden bi malcander niet comen,  
Het water was veel te diep*

Quoted by Rev. L. Praamsma in *Het water was veel te diep*, 1972.

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>M. te Velde, *Anthony Brummelkamp*, (Barneveld: Uitgeverij De Vuurbaak, 1988). p. 372.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>For this, and other information from the Synods held during the 19th century I am indebted to a summary of contacts with various foreign churches gleaned from Synod Acts compiled by S.S. Cnossen.

<sup>4</sup>H. Bouwman, *Gereformeerd Kerkrecht*, (Kampen: Uitgeverij De Groot Goudriaan, 1985). p. 274.

<sup>5</sup>te Velde, *Anthony Brummelkamp*, p. 372

<sup>6</sup>Ibid. p. 373

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Synods of 1875 and 1879.

<sup>10</sup>This information can be found in a report to Synod Amersfoort GKN, 1966-67, Acta, p. 442. All translations are by the author.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

<sup>13</sup>H. Bouma, *Kerkenordening van De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*, (Enschede: Uitgeverij J. Boersma, 1948). pp. 148, 150.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid, p. 141

<sup>15</sup>Acta Synod Amersfoort, p. 452.

<sup>16</sup>Acta Synod Amersfoort, Art. 176B. p. 188.


<sup>17</sup>Acta Synod Amersfoort, Art. 241D. See Acts of Synod Coaldale of the Canadian Reformed Churches, 1977, p. 40.

<sup>18</sup>I. Van Dellen and M. Monsma, *The Church Order Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1941) p. 344

<sup>19</sup>Ibid, pp. 344-345

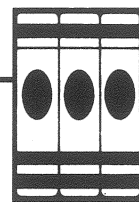
<sup>20</sup>Acts of Synod Hamilton of the Canadian Reformed Churches, 1962, art. 82, p. 26. The proposed mandate has been translated and summarized.

<sup>21</sup>Acts of Synod Edmonton of the Canadian Reformed Churches, 1965, Art. 141, p. 30.

<sup>22</sup>Quoted in *Het Water Was Veel te Diep*, 1972, by L. Praamsma, a series of letters written between L. Praamsma and an imaginary friend in the Netherlands. 

## BOOK REVIEW

Reviewed by N.H. Gootjes



# A commemoration of the Westminster Assembly

John L. Carson, David W. Hall, *To Glorify and Enjoy God: A Commemoration of the Westminster Assembly* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1994) 338 pages, hard cover, price \$32.95.

It is undeniable that the Westminster Assembly is one of the most important gatherings of reformed theologians ever held. These theologians came from

all over England, and there was even a delegation of Scottish commissioners. They met from July 1643 to February 1649 as an Assembly. The Parliament had called them together for the purpose of the reformation of the church in England.

Even though this Assembly was not a Synod it produced important documents: a Confession of Faith, two Cat-

echisms (a Shorter Catechism and a Larger Catechism); a Church Order (Form of Church Government) and regulations for worship (Directory for Public Worship). If all these documents had been adopted in the English church they could have had a positive influence on the church in England.

In the providence of God, however, this did not materialize. The Parliament

which had initiated this reform, went under in the struggles of the Cromwell period. The Church of England refused to go into the direction set out by the Westminster Assembly. The effort of over 150 ministers during a period of almost six years seemed to be in vain.

But as it turned out, their work bore fruit all over the world. The Church of Scotland adopted these Confessions and regulations. Many immigrants from England brought them to America, and from there they were exported to the other continents. Today, the Westminster Standards and Directories are used, mostly in adapted versions, in churches all over the world. The Westminster Standards are probably the most influential confessional statements among the reformed churches worldwide.

In commemoration of the Assembly which made these documents, speeches on aspects of its work and sermons on theological themes were presented at a conference held in that same London, in September 1993. These sermons and speeches are now published in one volume. The book gives much valuable information about the history and results of the Westminster Assembly. In the first part of the book some general aspects are discussed: the work, the parties and some important members, and the preaching at the Westminster Assembly. The middle part is the most important section. It deals with the documents produced at the Assembly. The third section contains the sermons preached at the commemorative meeting. These sermons deal with themes from the confessions: the sovereignty of God, the pre-eminence of Christ and the application of redemption. This is not the most satisfactory part of the book. These chapters are, on the one hand, too scholarly for sermons, but, on the other hand, not scholarly enough for confessional studies. Important appendices are added to the book: the unfinished first attempt for a catechism, a documented history of the relation between the Assembly and the Parliament and a valuable bibliography.

Through this book we receive valuable insights into the history of the church in England. To give an example, the quality of the people involved can be learned from their attitude toward the government. As has been remarked, the Assembly was called together by the Parliament. Behind this was the conviction on the side of the Parliament that the state had to decide in matters of religion, sometimes called the Erastian

view on church government. When the theologians made their confession they had to face the question who is responsible for church discipline, the state or the church. Dr. S. Logan says:

When they turned to expound the Biblical teaching on the relation between the Church and the Civil Magistrate, with respect to the question of who holds final authority in the area of church censures, they found that they could not, if they were to be faithful to their understanding of Scripture, fail to state clearly their anti-Erastian sentiments. (p. 44)

Even though they were paid by the government they were not bowing to the wishes of the government!

Study of this book can give us insight into the background of the confessional statements made by this Assembly. To give an example, the Westminster Confession deals with the church in ch. 25. We find here the following remark:

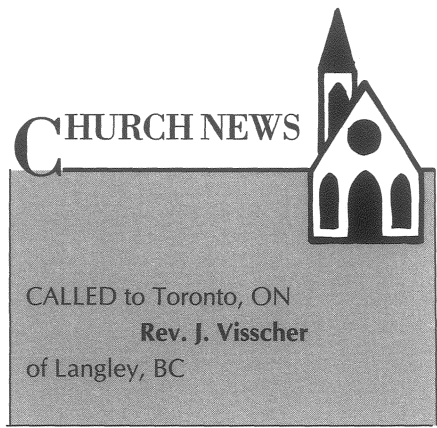
And particular churches, which are members thereof, are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them. (25,4)

There are voices today saying that we should add to the distinction made in the Belgic Confession between true and false churches, this distinction between more and less pure churches. Dr. C. Trimp has resisted this suggestion, see the articles translated in *Clarion*, and his recent article "Meer of minder zuivere ware kerk?" ("More or less pure true church?") in *De Reformatie* 70,6, Nov. 5, 1994. Trimp maintains that the Westminster Confession here speaks of difference in quality between local churches of the same federation. He proves this with the references to Rev. 2 and 3 and to 1 Cor. 5, added to this section of the Confession. We can add to this that all delegates were members of the same "church federation." W.S. Barker says:

All of the Westminster divines appointed by the Long Parliament in 1643 were ordained ministers in the Church of England, although many had refused to conform to some Anglican practices and some had temporarily gone into exile in the Netherlands. (p. 50)

J.R. de Witt makes this remark about the delegates:

It was an English body whose clerical members were all Puritans and ministers in the Church of England,



who had been episcopally ordained. (p. 146)

The "more or less pure churches," therefore, are churches belonging to the same Anglican Church.

One will not always agree with the authors. Dr. de Witt wrote a fine article on the Form of Church Government, but is not convincing in his attempt to make of the Westminster Assembly an ecclesiastical meeting more or less as the Synod of Dort. True, the Synod of Dort came together by order of the States General. (p. 147) But the delegations in the Netherlands had been elected by the provincial Synods, while the delegates of the Westminster Assembly were appointed by Parliament. The difference between the Westminster Assembly and the Synod of Dort is greater than is indicated by Dr. de Witt. At the same time, Dr. de Witt does not idolize the Westminster Assembly. I miss that distance in R.M. Norris' article on the preaching at the Assembly. Norris writes:

A doctrine was the articulation of the general principle on the basis of a specific Biblical text which gave it warrant. The status of the Scripture permitted a doctrine, though drawn from a particular passage, to be identified as a universally valid precept, proven "reasons" through the sober experience of the ages. (p. 74)

With due respect to these forceful theologians and influential preachers, an evaluation of strengths and weaknesses would have been in place. The book has not completely escaped the inherent danger of commemorative books to glorify the past.

It remains, however, that the Westminster Assembly has done good work for the Church of Christ. This volume can convince everyone of the importance of this Assembly. ©

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Please mail, e-mail or fax letters for publication to the editorial address.  
They should be 300 words or less. Those published may be edited for style or length.

**Dear Editor,**

**Once more, Palmetto**

I have read the News Report of the American Reformed Fellowship in Palmetto, Florida. The writers are well-known and esteemed brothers, but on the whole, their report scares me.

When is written about the freedom we have in Christ (where R.B. Kuiper is quoted), the relevant text is 1 Cor. 10:29 "... why should my liberty be determined by another man's scruples?" (RSV). That sounds great, but it would be well to also consider what it says in verse 24: "Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbour" (RSV). As a servant and child of the Lord I would not use this freedom, because I have also read 1 Cor. 8 (especially the last part).

Furthermore, are older people indeed wiser and do they not need the extensive care of and the spiritual food in the church anymore? Not so according to what happened in Solomon's life! And where is the borderline between "old" and "young?" And what about the example the "old" give to the "young?"

Also the quote of one of the others, "whenever you come together in My name, there I will be in your midst" (a rather free rendition of Mt. 18:20?) leaves me unconvinced. I have heard someone use this as an excuse for skipping the church service and spending his time on the lake instead!

In Lord's Day 38 it says, "... that, especially on the day of rest, I diligently attend the church of God to hear God's Word, to use the sacraments, to call publicly upon the LORD, and to give Christian offerings for the poor." What about that?

As for me, as long as there is no church in Palmetto, I would not feel free to use this liberty.

Yours in Christ,  
W. Kanis

**Dear Editor:**

You have printed letters and News Reports about the American Reformed Fellowship in Palmetto, Florida. I hope you will take another.

This writer does not begrudge brothers and sisters their time in the sun. I even share Dr. Faber's view of freedom in this respect. Each one of us will be called to account for our own words, deeds and thoughts (B.C. Art. 37).

I was struck, however, by a statement by M.v.d.V. (insert with Vol. 43, No. 24, Dec. 2, 1994) which reads: "They did not seek the easiest way out and attend worship services in other Reformed or Presbyterian churches" and I wonder if that is right? It may be easiest if you just go there and leave again after the service, without saying anything to anyone, but is it also easiest if you wish the unity in Christ? When Christians are relocated do they not have an obligation to seek the unity that is in Christ? Do we really believe that Christ gathers His church from all nations? Possibly even from that commercialized, high-crime state of Florida? Is there not an obligation to test if there is a church in your neighbourhood that meets the tests of Art. 29 of the Belgic Confessions? Our General Synod has even helped us by holding that the Orthodox Presbyterian Church meets the criteria of true church. I know that there are some of these in Florida, but note that there is no mention made of this church in the same newsletter. Of course, in the O.P.C. (and others) one may be confronted with different traditions. One might even be offered to participate in the celebration of the Lord's Supper and one may be called upon to explain, on the basis of Scripture, if one chooses not to participate, why not. Perhaps that choice is not even the easiest to be made. I only use this as an example why I submit that the Fellowship appears to have taken the easiest way by not confronting others, nor to be a help to other local believers with all the challenges commensurate with such action. To remain "among ourselves" comfortable in our own traditions is, I suggest, the easiest way.

Yours very truly,  
Cornelis Lindhout

**Dear Editor:**

Having read and agreeing with many of the other concerns brought up in pre-

vious letters about Palmetto I would like to make some additional comments in regards to the "News Report" added to the Dec. 2 issue in *Clarion*.

In the article "Freedom in Florida" Prof. Faber points to Gal. 5:1, "For freedom Christ has set us free, stand fast therefore and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery," to show the freedom we have in Christ Jesus. Indeed, I agree that we, through Christ, have been set free from the yoke of the countless Pharisaic laws.

Reading on though in Gal. 5:13, 14 we see that Paul, knowing the sinful nature of man, adds a word of caution. "For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love be servants of one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.'" This same love for neighbour is also seen in those beautiful chapters of Rom. 14, 15. Rom. 14:15 reads. "If your brother is being injured by what you eat you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died."

Till there is an established church body in accordance with the Church Order I feel that these "News Reports" should not be added to the *Clarion* for fear of drawing away the weaker, younger as well as older members from their congregational life, especially knowing the poor attendance of many study societies and even worship services.

Rather, "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not please ourselves; let each of us please his neighbour for his good to edify him." (Rom. 15:1,2) We should be careful not to place stumbling blocks, but instead, "let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding." (Rom. 14:19).

With brotherly greetings,  
Wilco DeHaan (Rockway, Ont.)

Editor's note: *For now we will not be publishing anymore letters about the American Reformed Fellowship in Palmetto, Fl.*





# REMEMBER YOUR CREATOR

By R. Schouten

## I didn't get anything out of that sermon

"What a great sermon!" Did you ever say such a thing? I hope so! Or, do you more often say: "What a boring sermon. His preaching is so irrelevant; it does nothing for me. I don't get anything out of it."

What basis do we have for making our judgments about preaching and preachers? Is there an objective standard by which to measure or is the response to preaching purely personal and subjective?

As a guide for reflection about our attitude to preaching and preachers, it will be helpful to study the words used in Scripture for preaching and preachers. One of the major word-groups used in Scripture to describe what happens on Sunday morning and afternoon has to do with the idea of a *herald*.

### The preacher as a herald

In ancient times, before the rise of modern communication technology, a herald had a very important role in society. If a head of state or some government assembly in earlier days wished to broadcast a political announcement, the figure of the herald was indispensable.

The herald would be sent by the person in authority to communicate the announcement to the population. Arriving at his destination, he would find the public square of that town, announce his presence with the sound of trumpets, and then in a loud, clear voice would convey the message of his superior.

Suppose, for example, that a great King like Caesar wishes to make known a new law for his many subjects. Let's imagine that it is a new tax law. The moment this law is announced by the herald it becomes binding on the people. From that instant, the citizens become responsible to pay the new tax. Or, imagine that the King sends a herald to a certain person with a message that needs a response. As soon as the herald brings the message, the response has to be given. To delay is to insult not the herald, but the King who sends him.

The point that needs to be understood is that the herald has no authority in himself. He has authority because he represents the King. To hear the herald is the same as hearing the King himself.

If we know that one of the most common Scriptural words for preaching actually means "heralding," we have some guidance for thinking about sermons and preachers.

### Implications for the preacher

First of all, we realize that the preacher as a herald or delegate of the Great King Jesus Christ, has a tremendous responsibility to bring the Message of the Great King plainly and faithfully. He is not permitted to bring his own word, but only the Word of his Master who sent him. It is the duty of the herald to truly let the Word of the Great King be heard among the citizens of the Kingdom as well as by the enemies of the Kingdom.

After all, if the herald does not bring the message of the King in a clear, intelligible manner, the Great King will hold him accountable. The Lord Jesus is not honoured when His powerful message of salvation is muddled in murky and incoherent speech. The preacher has a sacred responsibility to make sure that he creates no obstacles for people to receive the glad tidings of salvation. It is the preacher's task to make sure there is no other obstacle to faith and repentance than the folly of the cross itself (1 Cor. 1:18-25). When the people of the King hear the herald, they should have no doubt about what God would have them believe and do.

Surely all preachers have reason for constant self-examination and self-criticism when it comes to their preaching. They need to work very hard to understand and communicate clearly the content of God's Word. Constantly, they will have to grow in the knowledge of the Word. Without rest, they must seek to hone to a sharp edge their pulpit communication.



Congregations have every right to expect clear, understandable, uplifting messages on Sunday morning and afternoon. On the other hand, ministers have every right to expect that God's people gathered for worship show every effort to listen and come to grips with the authoritative message of the herald. After all, it is not the minister's word, but the Word of the Great King.

### Implications for the pew

If we realize that ministers of the Gospel are heralds of the Great King Jesus Christ, this will also have implications for the way we listen.

First of all, we will realize that we are in no position to make all kinds of stylistic demands on the preacher. Let's imagine that Caesar sent a herald to a certain province and town of his empire. Faithfully, the herald does his duty. He proclaims the will of Caesar. However, the people respond by saying: "Who can bear this herald's style? He is so boring. Why can't he dress up his message? Why can't he be more eloquent? Caesar should have sent a better herald, one with more pizzazz and power."

Suppose further that because they didn't appreciate the herald's style, these citizens ignored and disobeyed

the message of Caesar. Well, you can imagine the result: Casear's wrath would fall upon them! In disdain the herald, the people have shown indifference to Caesar himself.

The point that needs to be clearly understood is that the preacher does not make his message relevant by his own eloquence. Not his stylistic power nor his communication gimmicks give authority to the message. The message has power in itself. It is the living Word of the Great King which comes with imperative claims upon all who hear. It makes a claim upon all who hear simply because it comes from the Lord!

As people of the Great King, gathered for worship, we are not in a position to make too many demands of the herald. Our position is rather to listen in all humility to the revelation of the King's will for us.

Yes, we may ask for clear, understandable exposition. We may even demand that! Beyond this, however, we must not insist on a certain style. Nor should we too strongly state our preference for one pulpit personality over another. What counts is: did I hear the mind of Christ for me? What I addressed by my King this morning?

#### **Not entertainment**

In our own era, perhaps more than ever before, there is the temptation to de-

mand of the preacher that he satisfy our desire for a pleasant experience. After all, we live in a pleasure-oriented society. The masses are devoted to the entertainment of Hollywood. If our ears and minds are conditioned by the kind of communication we encounter on TV, we may come to expect the same of our minister. We will want his messages to be simple, short, pre-digested, sappy and always smooth. Messages from the pulpit that require diligent effort and focus on our part we won't really appreciate.

If the minister tries to compete with the communication methods of TV personalities and broadcasters, the preaching will soon degenerate into a pleasant, but mindless "tickling of the ears." The preacher will have the impossible duty of making God's Word relevant to people who are actually looking for entertainment instead of truth.

Listening to the herald of God will require the fullest concentration of our mind and the disciplining of our ears. Preaching is hard work, but listening is equally demanding. A couch potato disposition won't suffice if we hope to benefit from the Word. Preaching can only be fruitful if those who hear recognize that those who preach are heralds. These heralds do not make God's Word relevant. It is in itself eternally relevant. In fact, the heralds must firmly resist the temptation of trying to make

the living Word more relevant and authoritative by their own personality and pulpiteering ability.

#### **The sermon is our judge**

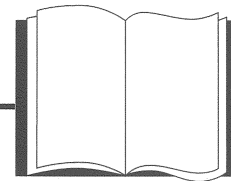
How relevant is the Word of the herald? Christ tells us in John 12:48: "He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last."

To his disciples, the Lord Jesus says: "He who hears you hears Me, and he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me, rejects Him who sent Me" (Luke 10:6).

Today, the Word of Christ goes out to the Churches through the office of the minister. How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation proclaimed to us (compare Heb. 2:3)? Let us see that we do not refuse Him who is speaking to us through the herald (compare Heb. 12:25). For the Great King will Himself inflict vengeance upon those who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus – as it comes to us through the herald (2 Thess. 1:8).

Today, when you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts by your unreasonable and unjustifiable expectation of a certain pulpit style. Do not tempt your preacher to rob the preaching of dignity and authority by catering to the modern expectation of entertainment instead of faithful instruction. **C**

## **R** EADER'S FORUM



In his article about the OPC in the year-end issue of *CLARION*, Prof. Van Dam responds to the anomaly of our federation establishing full ecclesiastical fellowship with the Presbyterian Church of Korea (PCK) and the Free Church of Scotland (FCS) while failing to consummate such a relationship with the OPC, given the similarities among all three groups. His answer, in brief, is that we should remove the anomaly by including posthaste the OPC within our circle of sister churches. He then seeks to explain how the three remaining obstacles to unity with the OPC should be removed.

Prof. Van Dam notes OPC perplexity about this state of affairs. If the OPC is correct in its understanding that the

PCK and the FCS hold views virtually identical to theirs on confessional membership and the Lord's Supper, and I suspect they do, as does Prof. Van Dam, then their charge of a double standard would be proper (see my letter to the Editor in the Feb. 11, 1994 *CLARION*).

The question then becomes, as Prof. Van Dam put it, whether or not these issues are "make or break" concerns. He argues that they are not. However, I would argue that especially the issues of confessional membership and the Lord's Supper are of such a nature.

In my letter to the editor of the October 21, 1994 *CLARION*, I made clear why the Lord's Supper issue is so significant. We are not, as Prof. Van Dam, and many in the OPC believe, dealing

simply with a question of degree or mere method. Rather we are dealing with two different views of the nature of the church. And we must not overlook the fact that the view held and practiced by the OPC is one which one of our Synods condemned as unscriptural and unconfessional (cf. Acts 1986, Art. 184, pp. 93-104). Furthermore, we must not take refuge in the illusion that only a minority in the OPC hold this view. It is the predominant and determinative position of the OPC. And it results in their view of how the sacrament is to be administered.

Inextricably tied to this Lord's Supper debate is the question of the validity of the history of the Laurel congregation as it dealt with this issue before

seceding from the OPC. If this secession was indeed a work of the Lord, and not just a schismatic action, then we as a federation must deal honestly and consistently with the implications of that struggle for our view of the OPC (cf. the letter to the editor by Mr. J. de Vos in the June 3, 1994 *CLARION*).

It is the same with the matter of confessional membership. Prof. Van Dam apparently doesn't recognize that the difference between our view of confessional membership and the view practiced in the OPC is also rooted in this same different view of the nature of the church. Again, it is not merely a matter of method or minor variations in wording.

In this matter, the history of Blue Bell is particularly significant. For, one of the reasons that the Blue Bell congregation withdrew from the OPC was their being told they could not practice confessional membership.

Prof. Van Dam indulges in specious comparisons of practice between us and the OPC that make it appear the difference is virtually non-existent. However, the reality is that the practices are quite different. There is a world of difference between a mentally handi-


capped person and one who consciously admits to not subscribing to the Reformed standards. It is one thing to deal pastorally with a member of one of our churches who may find themselves questioning infant baptism. It is quite another thing to admit into membership people who consciously refuse to have their children baptized, as an OPC General Assembly has determined may be done. In my almost 15 years as a minister in the OPC I never knew of one person actually disciplined for failure to come in line with the Westminster Standards after being admitted into membership, despite the promises to continue studying the issues in question.

If we as a federation do not come to terms openly and honestly with the underlying thinking and beliefs of the OPC regarding these two issues, then we are headed for serious conflict. Rev. De Boer's article on pluriformity versus confessional unity in this same issue clearly illustrates this point. Isn't it the course of wisdom, honesty, and love to openly acknowledge where we really differ and seek to discuss these matters until it is clear we share unity of the faith on this vital matter of the church?

Prof. Van Dam also raises a very interesting question at the end of his article. He says we are clearly not at the stage where we can talk about the Canadian Reformed churches and OPC becoming one church. And so he posits ecclesiastical fellowship as a kind of half-way step which, he argues, will enable us to grow towards each other.

Ecclesiastical fellowship was not designed as a half-way step towards full unity. Rather it was designed to regulate our relationship with churches abroad – ones which either language, distance, or culture would ordinarily prevent us from becoming one with. But this is clearly not the case with the OPC. We have the same language; we have the same culture; perhaps most importantly we both now have churches in Canada and the U.S.A. Is there then any principal reason why we shouldn't change our goal of establishing ecclesiastical fellowship and instead seek complete ecclesiastical unity with the OPC?

Sincerely,  
Rev. B.R. Hofford

Dr. C. Van Dam will respond in the next issue. 

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## Middle East Reformed Fellowship Canada

### Rev. V. Atallah visits Canada

In the beginning of December, Rev. V. Atallah, general director of the Middle East Reformed Fellowship, spoke in a number of congregations in Ontario as well as Winnipeg about "The Triumph of God's Grace in the Muslim World." He showed us how the Lord has guided world history through the ages. We know that He will continue to do so as He gathers His people "from every tribe and language and people and nation" until the great day of His return. We are very thankful that we could have the opportunity to have Rev. Atallah in our midst and so gain a better understanding of the work being done by MERF as they seek to be a truly Reformed witness in the Middle East and a support to the many churches who want to be faithful to His World.

### Training sessions at the Study Centre

We are very grateful that Rev. C. Stam was able to give a series of lectures at the Study Centre this past summer. His extensive report and interviews appeared in the November issues of *Clarion*.

The latest MERF newsletter describes a recent study term at the Study Center. Dr. P. Van Gorp of the Netherlands and Prof. D. MacKay of N. Ireland provided most of the instruction. Dr. Van Gorp led the group in a thrilling Christ-centered survey of the Bible. Prof. MacKay gave studies on the Bible's teaching about the Church's origins, purpose, structure and ministries. He put special emphasis on the marks and essential qualities of the true churches. The instruction led to many

discussions and generated a great deal of enthusiasm to return home to apply the teaching received. In the closing session, one of the trainees expressed the sentiments of many when he said, "I return knowing that the Bible not only makes a lot more sense to me, but also I have much more of a foundation from which to tell others about the reasons behind the hope we Christians have in Christ our Saviour."

### Radio Monte Carlo doubles its transmission power

Radio Monte Carlo (RMC), one of the world's most powerful medium wave stations has started building new transmission towers, twice as powerful as its present 600 KW towers. The project, whose completion is planned for early December 1994, will enable RMC to have the clearest reception in most





*The International Evangelical Church, Larnaca, Cyprus*

Arabic-speaking homes in the Middle East and North Africa. It will also be more easily heard as far away as Pakistan and the Horn of Africa. Already this commercial station claims to have more than 16 million regular Arabic-speaking listeners. It is considered the most objective news station in the Arab world. . . . For about 20 years, the independent board, which believes that Arab Christians have no other major means of having a voice for their faith, has allowed Christians to buy air time to express their religious point of view. MERF's "ANBA'ON SARRA" (Cheerful News) Arabic broadcasts are aired three times a week at 20:45 GMT on this powerful station. These broadcasts are aired just 15 minutes (of music) after the end of RMC's "Panorama," an extremely popular daily half-hour news analysis. . . . Close to 4000 letters were received in 1993 (from first-time respondents). 311 of these were Muslim listeners who expressed serious interest in the Gospel. Even though an increasing number of Muslim listeners are responding to the broadcasts, mail analysis studies indicate a great deal of reluctance on the part of Arab listeners to make written responses to Christian broadcasts, in the light of government monitoring outgoing and incoming mail. Commitments for regular support are needed to keep these broadcasts on the air and to possibly add one or two more weekly broadcasts.

### **The Lord is building the church in Sudan**

Fanatical Muslim Sudanese authorities have continued to inflict physical hardship and organized pressures on

the Christian communities in the Sudan. But instead of shrinking, the churches in these suffering communities of north, south and west Sudan are growing. The local MERF committee has confirmed earlier reports of two visiting Arab pastors that more and more people are attending both Sunday and midweek services. Refugee churches in the north and the south are asking for help to build larger facilities for their gatherings. . . . In the western regions of Sudan, near the borders of Libya and Chad, several native evangelists have reported much success in their outreach, especially among the Muslims. MERF is now seeking to provide small tents called "karoubas" for the use of these poor evangelists.

### **The church in Baghdad calls an Egyptian pastor**

The Evangelical (Presbyterian) Church in Baghdad, Iraq rejoices in the Lord's provision of a new shepherd. . . . Rev. Karam Farag of the Evangelical (Presbyterian) Church of Shoubra in Cairo, Egypt has accepted a call to lead the congregation. He and his wife and three children left Cairo by air to Amman, Jordan. From there they are taking the long desert road journey to Baghdad, Iraq. The Iraqi government has quickly provided the necessary work permit and visas for this Egyptian pastor and his family. This is an encouraging answer to prayer. The congregation in Baghdad has about 1,200 members and adherents. It has four services on Sundays as well as many other services throughout the week. The Lord has continued to bless the congregation with new contacts interested in the study of the Scriptures. Recently the Iraqi au-

thorities gave the church permission and material assistance to expand the present crowded facilities, an opportunity rarely given in other Arab states. The church has a number of active lay leaders. Two of them, including the moderator of the session, Elder Dia'a, have recently attended a two week training period at MERF's Study Center.

### **Continuing support**


We are grateful that contributions from congregations as well as individuals continue to come in faithfully. A special thank you to the Youth Conference Committee in Ontario for a donation of \$200. At the end of November \$10,5000 was forwarded to MERF to help cover the costs of radio broadcasting.

We praise the Lord for the opportunities which he still gives to bring a Reformed witness in the Middle East and we pray that He will supply the needs of the growing ministries of MERF. May we continue to support MERF with our prayers and donations as they strive to spread and strengthen the Reformed faith in the Middle East.

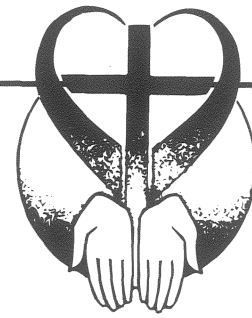
If you would like to make a personal donation please make your cheque payable to MERF - Canada and send it to

MERF - Canada  
1225 Highway 5, RR 1  
Burlington, ON L7R 3X4

The matter of obtaining charitable organization status is being actively pursued at this time. Hopefully this matter will be resolved in the near future, and we will be able to give donation receipts.

On behalf of MERF-Canada  
J. Mulder, chairman  
J. Van Dam, secretary 

# Canadian Reformed World Relief Fund



The tragedy of Rwanda cannot fail to touch our hearts. Yet there is hope in the midst of despair as is evident in the following article by Ray Elgersma, Canadian Director of the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee whose efforts in Rwanda we are supporting. Together with Jacob Kramer (also of C.R.W.R.C.), he recently visited Rwanda and neighbouring countries to assess the situation there.

He spoke of visiting a fieldstone church where a front-end loader was at work exhuming a mass grave. (U.N. teams are now at work investigating war crimes.) Six thousand, two hundred people had come there for refuge and all had been brutally murdered. The stench of death was still in the air. . . . Yet, in the midst of such awful destruction, many people are committed, not to revenge, but to reconciliation and renewal. They need our ongoing prayers.

We are grateful for your generous assistance received through special fundraising efforts, collections, and a host of personal cheques. By year end, we were able to send \$50,000 to assist Rwandans – both those in refugee camps and at home. The money, much of it channelled through the Canadian Food-grains Bank (where funds are matched four to one by the Canadian Government), has assisted in several ways.

It has provided emergency food aid (lentils, beans and cooking oil) and blankets to refugees in the huge camps in Tanzania, Burundi, and Zaire. Your gifts have also helped support the distribution of 18,000 hoes and 120 metric tonnes of seed to returning farmers. In Tanzania, food has also been distributed to 5,000 local families who had assisted refugees as they initially fled Rwanda and passed through. Their food stocks were depleted and without assistance, they would have been starving before the new crops could be harvested.

A fourth project supported is one which is concentrating on giving assistance to unaccompanied children and their foster families and to elderly people who have lost their families. In this

effort, 2,000 families (approx. 10,000 individuals) will receive assistance in the form of food, non-food, and medical support in order to care for the child/children or elderly person they have agreed to take into their home.

The needs are great, the challenge immense. May God in His great mercy bless our giving and all efforts to bring hope and healing to Rwanda.



Food being distributed near Kibuye, Rwanda.

Rwandan refugees at a U.N. camp.

Generally the camps are now orderly and well-orchestrated with latrines and feeding stations at regular intervals.



Warehouse with foodgrains in Rwanda.

## RWANDA

by Ray Elgersma

The Rwanda I visited in November is a land of horror and hope. I have never seen horror to match the church yard where 6,200 Christians were slaughtered. But I have never seen a Christian so dedicated and courageous as the young man the new government has put in charge of governing this shattered community.

Kablea Asiel has been in prison, almost lost his leg when soldiers shot him in 1990 and now has lost his parents and his brother. His father was pastor of a congregation. The president of the church council turned on the congregation and led the slaughter of 4,500 parishioners, including Asiel's family.

Asiel, who was studying for his Master's of Business Administration at UCLA in Los Angeles, said he would dearly love to be with his wife and four children in California. And he lives in daily fear because racial tensions continue to run high. "But I feel God has placed me in this place, that it's my duty to serve Him here," Asiel told me.

Asiel has to start from scratch. He has an office, but no desk, no chair, no typewriter, nothing. He has no car to get around. He has no salary, no budget. Only \$25 US in his pocket. He faces tremendous challenges, such as handling cases of refugees returning to find their homes, their fields and their businesses taken over by others.

There are teachers, but they're not teaching because there is no pay. The roads are in constant need of repair, but no money to hire road crews. The Pentecostal church has a plan to help this Christian governor get the community back on its feet. Why not use food to pay for teachers and other workers in essential services?

That's where the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee has come into the picture. Lou Haveman and Patsy Orkar, our workers in this area, have lined up 2,000 tonnes of food – about 1,700 tonnes of it from the United Nation's World Food Program and 300 tonnes from the Canadian Foodgrains Bank. Instead of simply giving the food away, now it will do double duty – feed needy people and help rebuild a shattered community.

Lou Haveman and Patsy Orkar have also distributed 23,000 hoes and 60 tonnes of seed to families who need help to start their lives anew and have

provided food supplement to 32,000 families. "One of my big challenges is to handle our food aid in ways that help needy people, yet don't create dependency," Haveman told me. It's a challenge that's familiar to the people who run our food banks and soup kitchens here in Canada.

Rwanda is a beautiful country – the most beautiful of the 23 countries I have visited. It's the Switzerland of Africa – hills and lakes, lush forests, waterfalls. Ten percent of the country is national parks. It was densely populated with about 7.5 million people and most were church-goers – Roman Catholics and members of Evangelical churches.

I saw all kinds of guns and arms in Rwanda. I now understand in an entirely new way why it's important for Christians to take a strong stand against the international arms trade. There is much more that we could and should be doing in this regard in Canada.

I also saw a tremendous need for peace and reconciliation, and an opportunity for Christians to serve in this regard. Other Christians are already showing us the way. Mennonites not only stand for peace, but also offer practical reconciliation services. The

International Bible Society has taken the lead to organize nine agencies in Burundi to reach and teach 2,000,000 Tutsis and Hutus within the next year so that country can avoid what has happened between the same two peoples in next-door Rwanda. The CRWRC is providing 800 metric tonnes of food to support this work.

Peacemaking is a gift from God and I think we could and should be calling gifted people forth from our congregations. Conflicts are a threat in 20 of the countries where the CRWRC is working today, so there are lots of opportunities to assist with peacekeeping and peacemaking all around our world.

I will never forget the horror of what we saw – blood and skin on the field-stone walls of that beautiful church in Kibuye, skulls and bones and the scent of death still lingering in the air. But I have been tremendously moved by the testimony of the people who have suffered so much. I feel it as a call to ministry, to live and work in solidarity with these Christian sisters and brothers. And not just during this crisis, but also in the longer-term effort to rebuild their communities and to bring peace and reconciliation. **C**

### By Janet Janz, a CRWRC missionary in Kenya

I met a Tutsi pastor who wonders if he will ever find the courage, mercy and faith to entertain a Hutu in his home.

When he was a boy of 12, walking home from school one day, he became frightened when he heard soldiers approaching. He climbed a tree. And watched as those soldiers slaughtered his mother, his father and all of his brothers and sisters. When it was safe, he climbed down and fled to an uncle's home.

The rich uncle raised him and paid for his education to become a pastor. He was married with children of his own when, 20 years after that terrible massacre, he experienced the same thing again. They killed his wife and children.

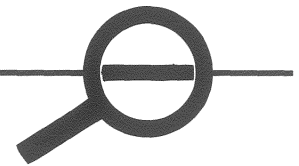
That's the challenge we face – peace and reconciliation amidst this pain and suffering. It's not humanly possible. It's only possible through repentance and the forgiveness and healing provided by our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

The first refugees that poured out of Rwanda last spring were mostly Tutsis heading for Tanzania. Most gathered in refugee camps, but some fanned out through the countryside where they have been taken in by Christians.

Ray Elgersma, director of the C.R.W.R.C., says many are poor people, yet they shared from their meagre resources, even though they knew it would leave them short of food before the next harvest in January. Not all of the people have been generous; some have taken advantage of the situation to sell food to refugees at inflated prices. And there has been some theft by refugees passing through the area on their way to the camps.

"But by and large, it's been a situation of incredible generosity. We could see what was happening in May, so our staff in Tanzania made arrangements with us to ship about 900 metric tonnes of beans through the Canadian Foodgrains Bank.





## Persecution of God's Children

In "A Prayer for all the Needs of Christendom" found in our *Book of Praise* we find the petition, "We pray Thee for all Thy children who suffer persecution for the sake of Thy name and the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." Although this particular petition originates in the bloody persecutions of the sixteenth century, it is a petition that should continue to ascent from our pulpits and homes. God's children are still severely persecuted.

It is very difficult to get reliable information about the persecution of Christians for the countries involved do not want to be portrayed as violating human rights. But the fact that there is terrible persecution against Christians in many places in the world is undeniable. What follows are from recent news clippings from *Nederlands Dagblad* on three selected countries.

### China

In spite of the current economic liberalization, the Chinese communist authorities still try to maintain a strong grip on the minds of their people and voices of dissent are smothered. According to "new" laws proclaimed in the spring of this year, all foreign missionary efforts are outlawed and it is illegal for a foreigner to import Christian books into China or convert Chinese to Christianity. (As a result Christian radio broadcasts into China have increased.) Also unregistered Christian congregations are banned and a target of harassment and oppression. Indeed, at the moment there is a large scale action against congregations quietly meeting in private homes. (About a million Christians come together this way.) One typical example of the oppression is the breaking up of a gathering of 80 Christians in the province of Henan. The leader of the group presented herself as responsible so the others can escape. She's arrested and a large sum of money (close to \$1,000) needs to be paid if she is to be set free. After four months, she is still in jail for in China such an amount is unpayable. It is unlikely that such a person would come out of jail very soon. Other Christian

leaders in this province have gone underground, not daring to return to their homes because they fear being arrested.

Christians in China are also martyred for their faith. An example, this time from the province of Hunan, concerns a certain Zheng Mushen who was arrested earlier this year during a police raid on a church service in a home. On the pretext of an unrelated false accusation, his house was raided for valuables and he was held in the police station. There he was hung up upside down and physically abused so that he died. The family was notified of his death eight days later.

### Sudan

Since 1989 authorities of this country south of Egypt have been vigorously attempting to promote the cause of Islam in this poverty struck nation. This means severe persecution of Christians who are usually converts from Islam. Christians often flee from their villages, but that does not bring peace to those who have remained. An example is that of two men, Abdulhai Yousif and Mahanna Muhammed, who were arrested in their village. They received three days to renounce the faith and become Muslim again. To help them make the "right" choice they were to be whipped with eighty lashes. Their tormentors predicted that after five lashes they would renounce the faith, but the Christians responded that they would not do so, even if their throats were cut out. These men were tortured in the presence of their family and friends. The one underwent the full eighty lashes, the other collapsed after five. After a two day hospitalization they were again told to report to the authorities. It has not been confirmed what has happened. Reports indicated that they have been crucified. Protests against death by crucifixion are dismissed because this manner of execution is Islamic law.

It has been confirmed that an Anglican priest, Rev. Aron, was crucified in Akon this past summer (July 7) along with two other believers. Elsewhere in Sudan (in Akot, Wwat and Akobo) Christians have died as martyrs by stoning.

There are also special places of torture throughout Sudan, run by an Islamic organization, where Christians are physically and mentally tormented. Foreign aid in the form of food often does not end up in Christian stomachs.

### Iran

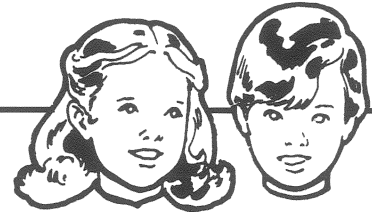
Also in this country, Christians are violently persecuted by the Muslim authorities. Especially those who are converts from Islam are targeted for oppression, harassment and death. A certain Rev. Dibaij who became a Christian last year was condemned to death and killed this year. The death of two other ministers is known as well. Harassment of believers by telephone and physical assaults is the order of the day for new Christians. The fanatic Muslim offensive against Christianity is so fierce that even visitors are not safe. A former Muslim who became a Christian travelled from the United States to visit his family in Iran this year, but has never been seen again. There are also Christians within Iran who are missing and presumably dead.

We are often powerless over against the oppression of God's children elsewhere. But, we can and *should* pray for them. Let us not neglect this. As the prayer in our *Book of Praise* puts it:

We pray Thee for all Thy children who suffer persecution for the sake of Thy Name and the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Comfort them with Thy Holy Spirit and deliver them from the hands of their enemies. Permit not the memory of Thy Name to be removed from the earth. Let not the enemies of Thy truth have occasion to dishonour and blaspheme Thy Name. But if it is Thy will that persecuted Christians by their death bear witness to the truth and glorify Thy Name, comfort them in their sufferings. May they accept their trials as from Thy fatherly hand and remain firm in life and death to the honour of Thy Name, to the edification of the Church, and to their salvation. **C**

# OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



## Hello Busy Beavers,

We have a fun computer game.  
It lets us get into a castle's secret tunnel!  
Sometimes there are gold and jewels in a secret store-room.

Sometimes we have to fight to escape.  
It's a cool game!

We have other games, too, of course.

And we can make neat homework assignments on the computer.

I was looking at a catalogue and thinking about some Bible study programs to try on our computer.

Neat!

How about you?

Do you spend time at a computer?

At home? At school?

Do you have games?

Who gets the highest scores?

How do YOU use your computer?

Is it your hobby?

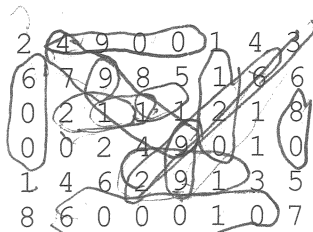
We'd love to hear how you "plug in!"

Please write to "COMPUTER WHIZ"  
c/o Busy Beaver Club  
Premier Printing Ltd.  
One Beghin Ave.  
Winnipeg MB  
R2J 3X5

## Quiz Time!

### NUMBER FIND

By Busy Beaver Luanne Feenstra



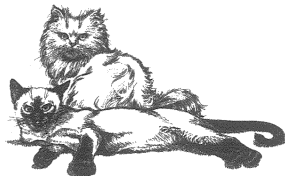
### Can you find these?

49 ✓  
4900 ✓  
600 ✓

99 ✓  
120 ✓  
2926 ✓

600010 ✓  
291 ✓  
12 ✓

11 ✓  
80 ✓  
919 ✓



## WHO SAID IT?

Can you match the SPEECH with the SPEAKER?

- |  |             |
|--|-------------|
| 1. "God will provide Himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son."                                       | a. Jacob    |
| 2. "First sell me your birthright."  | b. Joshua   |
| 3. "If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame in the sight of my father all my life." | c. Goliath  |
| 4. "Shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?"                     | d. Abraham  |
| 5. "... But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."   | e. Hezekiah |
| 6. "... where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge."   | f. Solomon  |
| 7. "I defy the ranks of Israel this day. . ."  | g. Miriam   |
| 8. "I will not put forth my hand against . . . the LORD's anointed."                                       | h. Elijah   |
| 9. "Give Thy servant therefore an understanding mind to govern Thy people."                                | i. Ruth     |
| 10. "There shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word."                                  | j. Judah    |
| 11. "What shall be the sign that the LORD will heal me?"   | k. David    |

## BIRTHDAY WISHES

I hope you all have a very happy birthday celebrating with your family and friends. May our Heavenly Father bless and keep you in the year ahead.

Virginia Jager	March 1	Janina Veldman	10
Brian Dykstra		Julie Bratcher	11
Jessica Bos	3	John Boerema	13
Candace Schuurman	3	Monica Dalhuisen	14
Nicholas Koolsbergen	7	Suzanne Schouten	26
Andrew Bos	8	Elisa Vandergaag	27
Lisa VanRaalte	8	Erin Buitenwerf	29
Meghan Ludwig	9	Jacqueline Post	30
Melanie Muis	10		

## FUN FROM "DOWN UNDER"

The wind was soft and warm  
The sky was very blue,  
The birds were singing sweet,  
IS THAT A KANGAROO?

By Busy Beaver Michael Janssens