



Clarion

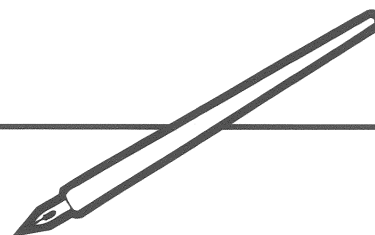
THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE
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Cults

Numbers

10:1-10



Angels Everywhere

One can no longer avoid them. Angels are everywhere. You find them on posters, art reproductions, calendars, and even on such disparate places like school binders, trays and candles. Books on angels sell well as do CD's and tapes featuring Gregorian chants with angels on their covers. If retailers had their way, angel figurines (often under the likeness of mischievous looking cherubs) would also be looking at you in the bathroom and other parts of the house. Clearly modern man is suddenly very interested in angels. Angels have become a hot consumer item. How does one explain this phenomenon? What does it tell us?

It has been said, and rightly so, that as church attendance in our country continues its steady decline, our secular fellow citizens still remain hungry for spiritual certainties and sustenance. The present surge of interest in the angel world can be interpreted as a longing for more than the offerings materialism can provide. As such the enchantment with and the drooling over angel images and collecting angel memorabilia betrays a rather pathetic desire for a panacea which can do little to help satisfy the need of the spiritual hunger that is undoubtedly out there.

This rather piteous state of affairs, does however have two pluses that we should note. The first is that if people are seeking spiritual certainty, then the gospel provides that. There is an answer to spiritual hunger. If the liberal "churches" had not been pandering to every fad, but had preached the full gospel then the large scale desertion from these assemblies would probably not have taken place. It is a great privilege of divine grace to believe in the unchanging and trustworthy Word of God! It is also a great responsibility. As believers we have the only message that will satisfy the restlessness and hunger of those who seek spiritual solace and comfort. Also in this time, the light of the gospel must shine. Individually and collectively we have obligations here.

There is another aspect of the sudden popularity of angels that is of advantage. It reminds us that there is indeed a created reality that is unseen, and that there really are angels. Furthermore, in spite of the fact that they are creatures, they indeed can be almost everywhere! The reality of real angels is however not so sweet and sugary as many of the pictures and figurines would suggest.

To begin with, there are the evil angels who rebelled against God (cf. 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6) and who wage war against the children of God. Indeed, our arch enemy Satan is a fallen angel and he is busy seeking to devour whomever he can (1 Pet. 5:8). He has the help of a mighty host of angels (cf. Matt. 25:41; Eph. 2:2) so that our struggle to serve God and be holy to Him is not just a struggle on the

human level against flesh and blood, "but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12).

It is in this context good for us to reflect on the fact that the Lord our God has a vast army of angels at His disposal. They wage war against Satan's hosts. Because of the work of the Christ, the evil angels are doomed. Satan and his angels were thrown out of heaven and down to earth (Rev. 12:7-9). Yes, the evil hosts have been consigned to hell. Although they can still work on earth, they are, as Calvin notes, dragging their chains with them wherever they go (cf. 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6). Our enemy Satan, along with his angels, is extremely dangerous, but he has been defeated!

All this is most heartening for the children of God. Even more so when one considers that angels who serve God also have a specific task over against us. Scripture says of these beings: "Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation?" (Heb. 1:14). God sends His angels out for the sake of His people. According to His promise, God will give His angels charge of those who make the Lord their refuge. They will not be hurt but be victorious over the enemy (Ps. 91:9-13). Especially the little ones have the attention of our God as He sends His angels to watch over them. They do so and regularly appear before God for their welfare (cf. Matt. 18:10).

The angels' involvement is also evident from the fact that they notice God's joy when a sinner returns from his sin and they share in the Father's joy in heaven (Luke 15:7, 10). The angels are interested in the salvation of God's people (cf. 1 Pet. 1:12) and they will serve in the second coming of our Lord (cf. Matt. 16:27; 2 Thess. 1:7-8). As we have in view the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, we also come "to innumerable angels in festal gathering" (Heb. 12:22).

Angels, unseen now, but they are wherever the Lord wants them to work and minister. Angels, creatures of God to remember and in one sense at least to emulate, namely that we too may carry out the duties of our office and calling "as willingly and faithfully as the angels in heaven" (Heid. Cat., Q.A. 124).

Angels – their ministry reveals God's goodness and gives us reason to rejoice! Angels, let us not forget them! They are for real. But, their remembrance must never simply serve as a sentimental cure-all to soothe the troubled souls of disenchanting materialistic man. Rather, remembering them must move us to praise and giving glory to their Creator. He rules, and He comes, – with His angels. **C**

Meditation

By G.Ph. van Popta

Read Acts 4:23-31: *“The kings of the earth set themselves in array . . . to do whatever Thy hand and Thy plan had predestined to take place.”*

THE SOVEREIGN LORD

The Jewish council had issued a restraining order forbidding Peter and John to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus Christ. After adding a few more threats they let them go. Peter and John went to their fellow believers and told them what the council had said. When the church heard about it, they prayed to God. They addressed God as “Sovereign Lord,” and then prayed the words of Psalm 2.

God is the Sovereign Lord. He is the Master, the Ruler, the King. He holds absolute authority over all things, people and events. He made heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them. He rules and governs all things he has made. Nothing happens without his direction.

The Lord also took men such as King David into his service in order to speak by them. Through David in the second Psalm the Holy Spirit spoke about Gentiles raging and people plotting, about the kings and rulers of the earth gathering against the Lord and his Anointed.

The church understood that in this Psalm the Lord was speaking about events that had recently happened in Jerusalem. The kings and the rulers were King Herod and the Roman governor Pontius Pilate. The raging Gentiles were the Roman soldiers. The plotting people were the Jews. All these, Jews and Gentiles, kings and governors, had gathered against the Anointed of the Lord, Jesus Christ. They raged against the Lord Jesus. They plotted to take His life. They set themselves up against the Christ. In the end they killed Him.

But the Sovereign Lord was in control. The Jews and the Gentiles, the king and the ruler, only did whatever the hand and plan of God had predestined to take place. The Lord Jesus was not the tragic victim of a dastardly plot. He was not merely the scapegoat of the jealous anger of the Jews. He was crucified according to the sovereign plan of the Sovereign Lord who made heaven and earth. God knows how to bring about His good work even when devils and evil men act wickedly.

This does not absolve the murderers of any responsibility. The Jewish leaders are accountable for their hatred of Jesus Christ and for accepting false testimony. Pilate will need to answer for condemning a man whom he had declared innocent three times. Read John 18 and 19. Three times Pilate said: “I find no crime in him” (John 18:38; 19:4,6). The raging people killed Jesus of Nazareth because they wanted to kill him; yet, they only did whatever the hand and plan of the Sovereign Lord had predestined to take place. As the Lord Jesus had said at the Last Supper: *“The Son of man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.”*

Peter, John and the others asked the Sovereign Lord to give them boldness to speak the Word of God in the face of the council’s threats. They asked the Lord to do sovereign signs and wonders through the name of Jesus.

When they had finished praying, the Lord God who is in control of all things shook the place where they were. He filled them with the Holy Spirit and with boldness.

This Sovereign Lord who made heaven and earth used the rage of the world and the false church against Jesus Christ to bring about His plan of salvation. This Sovereign Lord filled the early church with boldness to preach in the face of all opposition. He powerfully and convincingly confirmed His promises to the church by an earthquake. He still is the Sovereign Lord. He is our Sovereign Lord as well.

He is in control of all things. He rules over history, over nature, over the world rulers. This fills us with great consolation. Nothing happens to us by chance, but only by the direction of our gracious heavenly Father. Be bold. Be courageous in the face of opposition. We often feel small in the world. But listen: We have the Sovereign Lord on our side!

What’s inside?

In the editorial, Dr. C. Van Dam writes about the surging fascination in angels and things “spiritual.” He reminds the reader what the Bible teaches about the angels.

This issue features several articles about cults and the New Age Movement. They were written by the Rev. J. Van Rietschoten, minister emeritus of the church at Chatham, ON, and the Rev. R. Schouten, minister of the church at Calgary. As we learned several months ago, the cults literally “play with fire.” We heard about the Solar Temple cult. The devotees planned a voyage to the star Sirius, but believed they could get there only after going through a fiery death. More than 60 cultists died in arsons and executions in Quebec and Switzerland.

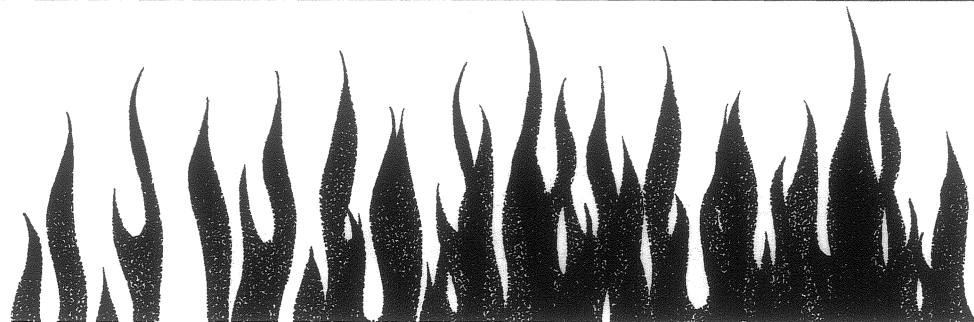
The youth column deals with the painful subject of teen suicide and the dangers of the godless contemporary music which promotes it – music which often promotes cultism as well.

The cults and the New Age Movement enslave and lead to death – physical, spiritual and eternal. But we have life in Jesus Christ.

GvP

Cults

By J. Van Rietschoten



Cults and Evolution

It may seem strange to start an article on cults linking cults with evolution, yet, evolution is one of the major goals of cult practice. The truth of this has most recently been demonstrated by the "leap" into a next stage of evolution by members of the Order of the Solar cult. The death of members of this Order, both in Switzerland and in Montreal, Quebec, was the result of exercising a choice to die for the purpose of evolving to a higher plane of existence. From the communications which the leadership of those who died left behind we know that this modern cult derives its concept of evolution from a very old cult. The members of the Order of the Solar Temple also call themselves members of the Rose and the Croix, or Rosicrucians. The ancient cult of the Rosicrucians holds that a number of worlds have preceded our present day world. Our present world is evolving to a point where the next world will take over.

Western Report of Oct. 24, 1994 published the following excerpt from a letter written on behalf of the Rosicrucian Order of the Solar Temple and obtained by French sociologist Jean-Francois Mayer.

"WE ADDRESS THIS LAST MESSAGE TO THOSE WHO CAN YET UNDERSTAND THE VOICE OF WISDOM

The current chaos leads man inescapably to face the failure of his Destiny.

As time goes by, the cycles follow one another . . . with precise patterns and laws. Different civilizations disappeared in cataclysms . . . destructive but regenerative. However, none of these attained the level of decadence as ours.

Subjected to the devastating effects of individual and collective egocentricity, marked by a total ignorance of the Laws of the Spirit

and Life, this civilization will no longer escape a precipitated self-destruction. . . .

We, the Servants of the Rose Croix, possessors of an authentic and ancestral Wisdom, have worked throughout time towards the Evolution of Consciousness. . . . [But] . . . false slanders and treason . . . have sounded the knell of this last attempt to regenerate Consciousness.

Those who have breached our Code of Honour are traitors. They have suffered and will suffer the punishment they deserve for the ages of the ages . . . we are in truth the righters of wrongs appointed by a Superior Order.

We Servants of the Rose Croix . . . affirm . . . that we refuse to participate in systems set up by decadent humanity . . . that we have planned in full consciousness, without any fanaticism, our transit, which has nothing to do with suicide in the human sense of the term. . . .

To you who are receptive . . . Know that from where we will be, we will always hold our arms open to receive those who are worthy of joining us."

Several expressions in this excerpt indicate that the death of these cultists was indeed a leap into a next, evolutionary, plane of existence. In typical Rosicrucian fashion they speak of the destructive but regenerative disappearance of different civilizations. During their life in Switzerland and Canada these cult members had worked towards the Evolution of Consciousness. Their death is a transit planned in full consciousness.

The word transit clearly signals the belief that they were transferring to a higher plane of existence. Their use of the phrase Evolution of Consciousness reveals a connection with those who speak of Consciousness as the "Self."

Seeing God

The desire to see God (god) *is common to all of mankind. The way in which to have that desire fulfilled depends on a person's conception of God. Christians do not have a conception of God. Christians have received revelation from God. God has revealed Himself verbally in the Bible. God has revealed Himself visibly in God the Son, Jesus Christ.*

The Christian's desire to see God is fulfilled by God Himself. The Christian knows that it is unnecessary to try to climb up to God in order to see Him. God draws the Christian to Himself. Not we come to God but God comes to us and draws us to Himself.

On this earth it is the Christian's greatest good to be "filled with all the fulness of God" Eph. 3:19. *From this same revelation the Christian knows that the church is "His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all" Eph. 1:23. Christ lives in the Christian. The glory of the Gospel is "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 2:20).*

A Christian has no need to reach God through a high level of mystical meditation and concentration. Christ comes and fills the Christian personally. God does that in the way of grace and faith. The inspired apostle Paul writes in Eph. 3:17, "And that Christ may dwell in your heart *by faith.*" Faith is the Christian's outright trust in God's power to make His Son dwell in your heart. Nothing more is needed. God does what He promises for those who believe.

Christ has promised the Christian "I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you will be also" (John 14:3). The Christian has no need to leave this world for a higher world. The Christian will be taken to the new world by Christ Himself.

Seeing god

The picture drastically changes when we desire to see god instead of God. Desire to see god is a desire to see a god of human conception. The desire of cultists to see god is not a desire to see a *person* who is god. The desire is to be divine yourself. To be divine is to belong to a better world and to be in a state of bliss.

Some try to reach divine bliss here on earth. Others, like the members of the Rosicrucian Order of the Solar Temple try to reach divine bliss by escaping to a so-called higher plane.

Those who remain on earth use meditation, yoga, chanting of mantras, wearing of mandalas, to temporarily and intermittently reach that state. Evolution of higher Consciousness is equal to reaching divine bliss. When we read or hear of reaching the "higher Self" it is yet another way of referring to the higher plane of being god.

Hallucinatory drugs and seeing god

Reaching the higher plane of divine bliss via meditation and yoga takes a long time. A shorter way of reaching the same goal was found in the use of hallucinatory drugs. Revealing in this respect are quotes from the well-known author Aldous Huxley (1894-1963). Anne Bancroft in her book *Twentieth-century Mystics and Sages* devotes a section to Aldous Huxley.

Aldous Huxley rebelled against the biological view of evolution of his grandfather T.M. Huxley and his brother Sir Julian Huxley. Aldous had become familiar with the Hindu and Buddhist way of rising above "suffering;" the way of evolution through meditation. In 1952 Huxley discovered that the drug *mescaline* would produce divine bliss. Later he found the use of lisergic acid (LSD) more effective. Bancroft writes of Huxley, "Now that we have discovered the chemical conditions for self-transcendence, he said, . . . it is pointless to go in for years of meditations or spiritual exercises when everything can be obtained in half an hour by the use of a drug." Her own comment is, ". . . perhaps he was right. Even though the action of LSD does not always bring "gratuitous Grace," a whole new generation of "aspiring mystics" has emerged who are demanding transcendental experience – an unheard of situation before the wide use of LSD."

Seeking divine bliss is a temptation for depressed Christians

Life experiences can be hard, dirty, sickening. Such experiences are depressing. There is hardly a person who escapes being hurt physically, mentally, spiritually. The desire to escape this all has a strong pull. Christians are no exception to this situation.

Some withdraw into schizophrenia, others into drug abuse, while yet others join a cult which promises divine bliss through withdrawal. Those who withdraw by means of any of these methods become escapists. The escape does not bring the desired state of serenity nor does the withdrawal lead to a higher plane. Loneliness increases and so does despair.

The cults are formed by circles of people. The circle tightens and chokes. There is no fellowship in a cult for each member egotistically seeks to escape. The cults do not heal. Neither do the cults prepare a depressed, hurt, person for return to love, home, family, job and community. The circle of escapists by means of hallucinatory drugs has exactly the same result.



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What about the Church? We Christians in the church are also a circle. Does our circle close in on people or does our circle heal people? Is the lonely one really never alone in the church? Do those who are hurt by the dirty and sickening experiences of life find our circle a tight-knit circle of love? Love, learned from Christ. Self-denying, self-sacrificing love?

Are there any who have escaped into the cults whose escape was unnoticed?

What assets do Christians have to surround each other, uphold each other, even protect each other? The answer is "faith, and love, and hope" (1 Cor. 13). Christ lives in the hearts of us who believe in Christ. God has poured His love into our hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:1-4). "Christ in you the hope of glory" (Col. 2:20).

Christians have received gifts of the Spirit to be a hand and a foot to the lame, the hurt, those stumbling. We must use them.

Will no confused, or hurt, or depressed person among us then ever escape into the tentacles of the cults? It may very well be that this happens. But if it happens it may not be because the tight-knit circle of believers choked this needy member out. It may neither be because we were egotistically busy with only our own salvation. If it would happen it must be in spite of our effort of faith and love and hope. **C**

Some literature on Cults

Some books that are written from a Biblical perspective:

J.K. Van Baalen, *The Chaos of the Cults*. Grand Rapids Mich, Eerdmans, 1972.

This book continues to be a good guide to Christian evaluation of many of the cults. Specially the chapter on Rosicrucians will be helpful to understand the icons found in the worship centre of the farmhouse in Switzerland occupied by members of the Rosicrucian Order of the Solar Temple.

Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults*. Minneapolis, Min. Bethany House Publ. 1985.

This book continues to rank with Van Baalen's book as one of the most lucid guides to Christian evaluation of the cults. Extremely valuable is his chapter "Scaling the Language Barrier." Many of the cults use Biblical language but do they use this biblically? Martin calls it "term switching." A Christian should always ask the cultist, "what do you mean by this?"

Naively thinking that the cultist's use of Biblical terms provides common ground between the Christian and the cultist makes for wasted time. When a cultist mentions the name of Christ, find out what the cultist means by that name so that you may show him or her the true Christ.

Earl Schipper, *Cults in North America* Grand Rapids Mich. Christian Schools International 1982.

A pocket-sized book, limited in scope but clearly written and very useful.

Johanna Michaelsen, *Like Lambs to the Slaughter*, Your Child and the Occult. Eugene Or. Harvest House Publ. 1989.

This book is written to signal the infiltration of the New Age cults into the schools and into teacher training. The background evidently is the State of California. The situation found in California may not necessarily be the same in other States or in Canada. Nevertheless, this book is very instructive for parents, students at universities and colleges, members of school boards etc. This book helps us to gain insight into how the Buddhist idea of the "higher Self" is used in teaching children to find their higher Self. Her chapter on Hatha Yoga should not be missed by anyone. Of the many forms of Yoga this is the most

dangerous. Reading Johanna Michaelson will cure us of naively accepting seemingly innocent exercises which in reality lead our children, and us, into occult practices.

Some books not written from a Biblical perspective which show us how the cults could so rapidly grow.

Anne Bancroft, *Twentieth Century Mystics and Sages*. Penguin Arkana books 1989. (Arkana books is the philosophy division of Penguin in which specially authors of the New Age Movement publish their writings.)

Anne Bancroft introduces modern mystics and sages quoting from their own writings. She extensively annotates and introduces in a manner which shows her sympathy with these mystics and sages. This is not just an objective account. Bancroft promotes a cause. This must be kept in mind when reading the book. Some of the mystics she introduces are, Aldous Huxley, Alan Watts, Krishnamurti, Pak Subu, Mahara Ji, The Maharshi, Dion Fortune and others. This book is helpful to gain an insight into the pagan spirit of our times.

J.H. Garabedian and O. Coombs, *Eastern Religions in an Electric Age*, Christ is dead – Buddha lives. New York, Grosset and Dunlop, 1969 paper.

On the cover this book is announced as "the controversial book about the moral revolt in America – why millions of young people are rejecting their own traditions and seeking new answers in the ideas and religions of the East."

The authors seemingly present their material in neutral, journalistic and objective manner. Upon reading this book I would classify their writing as "tongue in cheek." Sympathy with the religions of the East is acknowledged immediately in the Introduction to the book. Nevertheless, the book does indeed make good on its claim. It presents us with eye-openers. One quote must suffice, "But the importance of hallucinogenic drugs in arousing an interest in new ways of perceiving and believing should not be ignored. Psychedelic drugs, particularly LSD, have dangers that we neither fully understand nor intend to dismiss lightly, but they have, in altering thinking and perception, literally "turned on" thousands of young people to Eastern religions."

Their analysis of Buddhism and Zen-Buddhism helps us to understand the ways of the hippies as well as of the yuppies of our day.

The New Age Christ

By R. Schouten

“But who do you say that I am?” This was the question posed by the Lord Jesus to his disciples, as recorded in Matthew 16:15. It was a question joyfully answered by Simon Peter: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” When Peter made this tremendous confession, his meaning was clear. His Master was the unique, eternal Son of God, the one and only Christ, the Anointed one of God in whom there was salvation for sinners. Peter’s use of the terms “Christ” and “Son of the living God” was biblically controlled.

The terms used by Peter are also used by other people. However, for a great many of them, these terms have an entirely different meaning which is not biblically but satanically controlled. Scripture reveals to us that Satan is crafty and cunning; we are warned to be cautious of his wiles. Chief among his deceitful ploys is always the usurping of Christian terminology for the theology of hell. When people use the name “Christ,” we will not be able to lazily assume that they are referring to the same Christ we confess, the Christ whose name we bear as Christians.

In the second century A.D., the Church faced a struggle to the death with the heresy known as Gnosticism. Gnosticism was a wide-spread movement throughout the ancient world. To define it may well prove impossible. It existed prior to Christianity and contained elements from a bewildering variety of sources, such as the philosophy of Plato, the religion of Persia, heterodox Judaism, Egyptian myths, astrology and a variety of local mythologies. If you want to know more about the details of this heresy, a Bible dictionary such as the *New Bible Dictionary* or the *International Standard Bible Dictionary* will provide a good start and also references for further reading.

The word “Gnosticism” contains the Greek word *gnosis* (gnosis) which means “knowledge.” If we look at the unifying ideas of the complex movement called Gnosticism, we find that each part of it stressed a secret knowledge necessary for salvation. While

this secret knowledge was often conveyed in the form of different myths and stories, the basic content was the same.

What knowledge is necessary for salvation? The Gnostic answer is that all people need to come to the awareness of their own divine nature. Gnosticism teaches that in each human being there is a spark of original divinity. Somehow, this divine kernel has been caught up in the evil prison of the flesh. Salvation involves coming to the awareness of your true divinity and escaping the world of matter. People who have been enlightened as to their true divinity will be united with God upon death. God, however, is not defined by Gnostics in personal terms. God becomes simply the impersonal, unifying principle of the universe. To be united with God means to become one with the universe. To be united with God means to lose your individuality in the great, unnamable “All.”

The Gnostics adopt Christ

In a variety of forms, the Gnostic religion predates Christianity. It was a part of the confusing religion scene of the first and second centuries. Our interest lies in the Gnostic absorption of Christian terms and ideas. Because this false religion was inherently syncretistic, it had no difficulty in taking over certain Christian ideas and terms. Specifically, Gnosticism could put to good use the concept of “Christ.” Pre-Christian Gnosticism often included the idea of a divine Saviour. The function of such a saviour was to bring revelation to the chosen ones.

What was the content of the revelation brought by a Gnostic saviour? Invariably, it involved the news that man is divine. The Gnostic messenger of salvation had to wake up the sleepers from their slumber. His task was to make people aware of who they really were. According to Gnostic teaching, most people have forgotten their true origin and destiny. The true, divine self remains anesthetized until awakened by the divine messenger. Through the

messenger, the divine spark in the hearer is fanned into life.

You can already see where this is leading. The Gnostics could not resist the temptation to adopt Christ as one of their own. In their writings, Christ is transformed into a messenger who proclaims the essential divinity of man. In Gnostic writings, Christ is not a Saviour who dies for sin to redeem the lost, but is rather a Holy Man who comes to enlighten the world. According to the Gnostics, Christ is not the only Saviour. Instead, he becomes one of many heavenly messengers who all bring the same gospel of human divinity.

In Gnostic thought, then, Christ is no longer the one and only Son of God. Instead, the name “Christ” becomes a symbol for a state of consciousness. People are not saved by faith in the person and work of Christ. Instead, the goal is that by listening to the teaching of Christ, they will themselves become “Christs,” or attain a “Christ-consciousness.” In the Gnostic Gospels, Christ does not appear as the one who dies for sin, but only as an example for all to follow on the road to becoming divine.

The church fathers of the second century raged against the Gnostic philosophy. They recognized it as a terrible threat to the Gospel. Around the year 150, the tide began to turn against Gnostic ideas and eventually they lost their formerly powerful influence. Tertullian and Iranaeus were two giants who led the struggle against heresy. They understood that the Gnostic Gospel left no room for the doctrine of the atonement. It is remarkable that while the Gospels of the Christian canon are devoted in large measure to the passion narratives, the Gnostic Gospels pay no attention at all to Christ’s suffering. Salvation for the Gnostic did not mean deliverance from sin, but only self-discovery of one’s own divinity. The Gnostic Christ could not command worship and adoration. He is not the unique, virgin-born Saviour who by His one sacrifice made redemption a reality for God’s elect.

Twentieth Century Gnosticism

While the Gnostic heresy was basically defeated by the fifth century, it has always remained as a substratum in Christian countries. Throughout the ages, there have been those who talked and wrote of Christ as a mystical teacher instead of as the Lamb of God who died for sinners. In the 19th and twentieth centuries, however, there has been an explosive revival of ancient gnostic ideas. Especially in the last decade, a great deal of interest has been aroused in alternative views of Christ.¹ Nineteenth century theosophical ideas have percolated into mainstream culture via the writings of people like Benjamin Creme (The Reappearance of the Christ and the Masters of Wisdom. North Hollywood, Calif.: Tara Center, 1980), Elizabeth Clare Prophet (The Lost Years of Jesus. Livingston, Mont.: Summit University Press, 1987), David Spangler (Reflections on the Christ. Forres, Scotland: Findhorn, 1981) and George Trevelyan (A Vision of the Aquarian Age: The Emerging Spiritual World View. Walpole, N.H.: Stillpoint, 1984).

While these authors differ on details, the basic outline is consistent. Jesus Christ, they teach, is not the one who died for sins in order to make atonement with God. Instead, Christ manifested himself as one who had a highly-evolved God-consciousness. Christ is an example of a truly self-realized man, a human being who was truly aware of his own divinity. He came to this world as an emissary to lead us into the knowledge of our own divinity. These authors exhort Christians to get Christ off the pedestal on which we have placed Him. We are called to salute Him as an example of what we could become.

Basically, then, New Age thought reduces the Lord Jesus Christ to a way-shower. He is the best example we have in western civilization of somebody who is attuned to the divine. He is not the only Saviour, but merely the best available prototype for what we can all become. Christ provides a pattern which we ought to emulate. For the New Age adherent, salvation means the realization that the self is divine. While orthodox Christianity confesses the consubstantiality of the Son of God with the Father, New Age thinking confesses the consubstantiality of the self with God. This means that people are of the same essence as God. Between God and people, there is no boundary. We are one and the same.

Clearly, this New Age version of Christ and of salvation can have no patience with orthodox views about sin.

Christians see sin as rebellion against the Creator. Sin is ethical. It means violation of the law of God. Sin is the pride and arrogance of the creature before the face of the Maker. To be saved means to repent of this sin, to humble oneself before God and to find forgiveness in the sacrifice of Christ.

For the New Ager, however, sin is basically equated with ignorance. Of ignorance, of course, people need not repent. The antidote to ignorance is not repentance and humility, but enlightenment. You need to get the gnosis. Therefore, words like sin, guilt, repentance and forgiveness are exceedingly unpopular in New Age writings. Salvation comes through the deeply personal intuition that you are divine. To be saved does not mean to become something spiritually and ethically new, but simply to become aware of what you already are.

Imitators of Christ?

We must utterly reject the New Age Christ. Christ our Saviour is not merely a way-shower. Instead, He is the way-maker. By the sacrifice of His flesh, He has made a new and living way for us to God (Heb. 10:19). He does not only point to the way; no, He is the Way, the truth and the life (John 14:9). It is by faith in His atoning sacrifice that we find peace with God. In finding peace with God, we remain what we are, namely creatures. The pursuit of deity is the age-old delusion spawned by the powers of darkness.

Does Christ bring knowledge? Does He reveal secrets? Yes, but these are the secrets of God's Kingdom, the secrets of redemption through His own self-sacrifice. Yes, Christ does bring enlightenment, but according to Scripture the mystery He reveals is that of God's grace and truth revealed finally and sufficiently in Himself. Christ never refers to Himself as a mere way-shower, but as the final and supreme revelation of the grace and truth of God. In Him, the fullness of God was pleased to dwell bodily and nowhere else. He does not refer to Himself as merely an example, but as the object of faith, love and obedience.

Is Christ in any way a prototype for us? Yes He is, but not as described in the demonically-inspired dreams of the New Agers. We do not follow Christ in the way of developing our own Christ-consciousness. Romans 8:29 reveals that God has predestined His people to be conformed to the image of His Son. Christ remains always the unique, eternal Son of God. However, we who be-



LONDON, ON

The times of the services have been changed effective March 1, 1995, to 9:30 AM and 3:00 PM.


lieve may become sons and daughters of God by adoption. As adopted children, we are to be conformed to the image of the firstborn, glorious Son of God.

Primarily, this reference of Rom. 8:29 has an ethical implication. Conformity to the image of the beloved Son of God means to be holy and righteous as He is holy and righteous. In Lord's Day 32, we confess that "Christ, having redeemed us by His blood also renews us by His Holy Spirit to be His image." How do we show the image of Christ? The answer is by doing good works, works of obedience just as were done by Christ.

Is Christ then a prototype? Yes, He is the prototype of a new humanity, the Church of God. He is the first of many righteous and holy people who will dwell in the new creation. In this sense, we may reverently say that what Christ is, we in principle are and will soon become in fullness (compare also Phil. 3:21 and 1 John 3:2).

Does this mean that we take Christ from His pedestal and regard Him as just one of the crowd? No, it would be blasphemy to do so. He remains always the unique Saviour, the only-begotten of the Father. We are *like* Him, but not identical to Him. As Church, we worship and adore Christ for the saving work He has done for us.

Let's watch out for false Christs in the books of the New Age philosophy. He who says "Christ, Christ," is not necessarily a Christian. Test the spirits, to see whether they are of God or of Satan.

¹There are several informative books available for those looking for further reading about the false Christ of the New Age movement. Allow me to recommend the following: Douglas Groothuis, *Revealing the New Age Jesus: Challenges to the Orthodox Views of Christ* (Downer's Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1990); Peter Jones, *The Gnostic Empire Strikes Back* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1992); Ron Rhodes, *The Counterfeit Christ of the New Age Movement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1990). 

REMEMBER YOUR CREATOR

By G.Ph. van Popta

Teen suicide

In the last decade there has been an increase in teen suicides, even among good income mainstream families. By pointing to communities of despair such as Davis Inlet, a bleak, alcohol- and welfare-stricken Innu village of 500 on a tiny island off the Labrador Coast, we could try to say that teen suicide is not a mainstream society problem, but we would be lying. The average of 4.5 attempted suicides per month in Davis Inlet is shockingly high – much higher than the national average, but teen suicide is a problem in all sectors of society. This problem does not pass by the church either.

For the past while I have been writing articles for this column in which I have been trying to remind you, the young people of the churches, about the implications of the Ten Commandments for your lives. My last article, in the Year End issue of Clarion, was about the Sixth Commandment, "You shall not kill." Before I go to the Seventh, I would yet like to stay with the Sixth and focus on one line of Lord's Day 40, your catechism's explanation of this commandment. You have learned it. You say there: *"Moreover, I am not to harm or recklessly endanger myself."* That rules out suicide. The Sixth Commandment forbids you to take your own life.

Sometimes believers commit suicide. That is very difficult for the spouse, children, parents, other relatives and friends. The Lord forbids suicide, but at the same time I want to say that we ought to be very careful in judging suicide victims. Yes, I said "victims," because in a real sense they are victims: victims of their own despair or mental illness; victims of loneliness; and often, to the shame of the church community, victims of social ostracism. Sometimes they feel they have no place in the community and are driven to total despair. We leave the judgment of their motives and deed in God's hands, knowing that God is more merci-

ful than we are. We are comforted by the *knowledge* that God is more merciful than we can possibly imagine.

Teen suicide, heavy metal and grunge rock

I want to say something about teen suicide, and specifically about how teen suicide relates to heavy metal and grunge rock. Much of what passes for music promotes a culture of death. The executives of the music recording companies want you to believe that little has changed since Elvis and the Beatles. Don't believe it because *much* has changed. A lot of the tapes and CD's available at the record stores promote death. The band Ice-T and Body Count have a song out called "Cop Killer." The group Venom in its song "Sacrifice" sings about sacrificing a virgin girl to Lucifer, their god. This music has no single redeeming quality. In addition to these bands and songs pushing violence, rape and the occult, there are also those groups which, in their lyrics, hold out suicide as a valid option. In what follows I will give three examples of songs from singers you may have heard of. Read the lyrics and decide what they are advocating.

*Life it seems will fade away
Drifting further every day
Getting lost within myself
Nothing matters, no one else
I have lost the will to live
Simply nothing more to give
There is nothing more for me
Need the end to set me free.*
("Fade to Black" by Metallica)

*Breaking laws, knocking doors,
but there's no one at home.
Made your bed, rest your head,
but you lie there and moan.
Where to hide, suicide is the
only way out.
Don't you know what it's really about?*
("Suicide Solution" by Ozzy Osbourne)



*Suicide's an alternative
Sick of life – it sucks
Sick and tired – no one cares
Sick of myself – Don't wanna live
Sick of living – Gonna die!
Suicide's an alternative.*

("Suicide's an alternative" by Suicidal Tendencies)

You might say: "Well, those are just words. They have no effect on me. I can listen to that kind of music. It won't influence me." Don't say that too quickly. The press has reported a number of cases recently of suicides by young people who were fans of this type of music. Not so long ago two young Niagara Falls men, seventeen and nineteen, friends, hanged themselves after becoming devoted fans of rock music with lyrics about death. One hanged himself in the basement of his home; the other hanged himself in a park. They were fans of groups like Deicide (which means "to kill God"), Slayer and Megadeth. One of Deicide's albums has titles like: "Sacrificial Suicide" and "Dead but Dreaming." They were also fans of Nirvana, a grunge rock band, whose lead singer, Kurt Cobain, shot himself last year. His death sparked several copy cat suicides among youths in North America. Three young men from Quebec drove across the continent to Langley, BC where they gassed themselves to death in a mini-warehouse. They had kept a journal as they drove in which they wrote of their admiration

for Kurt Cobain. One of the young men said that he wished he could shoot himself with Kurt's gun.

Suicide held out as an option

This music glorifies death. In addition to promoting rape, murder, and violence, it presents suicide as a valid way to escape the frustrations of life.

Ozzy Osbourne claims that his music does *not* promote suicide. I seriously doubt his word since pictures of him have appeared many times in fan magazines over the last decade which show him holding a gun to his head. The media reported awhile ago that a young man in the States shot himself while lying on his bed. He had his head phones on and had been listening to the Ozzy Osbourne album which has "Suicide Solution" on it.

I cannot say that this young man shot himself *because* he listened to "Suicide Solution" once or twice or a hundred times. It is very likely that the three guys in Langley and the two youths in Niagara Falls had other problems besides a devotion to Kurt Cobain and Deicide. I am not suggesting a one-to-one correspondence between these bands and teen suicide. The jury is still out on whether despairing teenagers are drawn to this music or whether this music produces teenagers who despair. However, I do want to make the point, and to emphasize it, that *these singers,*

"Heavy metal and grunge rock validate the message that suicide is an alternative."

their music and their lyrics, validate the idea that suicide is an alternative. Ozzy Osbourne and his ilk preach the message that killing yourself is an acceptable way to escape parents whom you think hassle you, loneliness, and all the frustrations and difficulties of life.

If you like this kind of music, please consider how dangerous it is. If you are frustrated about something, don't let yourself be drawn to this music. It will only plunge you farther into a whirlpool of despair – one which may lead you to harm yourself. If you have children or friends who listen to this kind of music, there is reason for concern.

You may be reading this and thinking that I am being alarmist – that none of *our* young people listen to this type of music. Don't be fooled! There is often little difference between how pop culture affects "good kids from Christian homes" and the young people of the world. This stuff is deadly. It kills spiritually and often physically.

The standard for making choices

"Well, what can we listen to?" you ask. There is a lot of contemporary music put out by Christian artists. I am not going to mention any singers, groups or titles. Opinions will vary in our circles on whether or not we ought to allow contemporary Christian music in our homes. You'll have to sort that one out with your parents – with maybe some help from your minister, elder, or Christian school teacher. Instead, I am going to end with reminding you of the standard the Bible holds up for each decision we must make including decisions about music we listen to. In Phil. 4:8, the apostle Paul said:

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Compare the music to which you listen to this standard. Are Metallica's, Ozzy Osbourne's, and Nirvana's music and lyrics *lovely*? Can you honestly say they are *gracious*? Does their music contain any *excellence*? Is it *worthy of praise*?

When you learn Lord's Day 40, you learn to say: "Moreover, I am not to harm or recklessly endanger myself." That also has a bearing on the kind of music you listen to. **C**

THE HI-LITER

By C. Van Spronsen

Classis Ontario-North of early December dealt with a proposal of Ottawa re the Reformed Church of Quebec (E.R.Q.) and decided as follows: "The information provided by the Church of Ottawa demonstrates that the E.R.Q. can be recognized as a true Church of Christ. Therefore Classis requests that Synod 1995 respond to the request of the E.R.Q. by mandating the Committee for Relationships with Churches Abroad to intensify and confirm the contact initiated by the Church of Ottawa with a view to entering a relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship." (From the "Sheepfold" of Orangeville).

The 40th anniversary of the Ebenezer Canadian Reformed Church (Burlington-East) will be remembered on Sunday, May 7, 1995. A commemorative bulletin will be issued which will contain the history of the church.

In Burlington-South it is proven that it is still worthwhile to count your pennies. The Women's Savings Action collected 20,600 pennies (besides other coins, bills and cheques)!

Several Churches organized "Christmas caroling" in the neighbourhood. Cloverdale reports: "About 50-60

members came out so we could split into 3 groups. We don't know what lasting result this caroling will have. May it be a seed that grows for the great harvest of the Lord." A number of positive reactions were received from the neighbourhood!

* * *

The Congregation in Cloverdale also participates in the Reformed Christian Ministries (formerly: Christian Caribbean Ministries). "A number of our members within our congregation have taken it upon themselves to sponsor 50 students for a course length (about a year long) with the mailing and marking, under auspices of the consistory."

* * *

Now that we are on the topic of "Outreach" in the Fraser Valley: we also have an information update on the newly established Youth Drop-In Centre in Langley. "We have now been open one night a week for the past 6 weeks. The response has been marvellous. Each night we have approximately 12 to 15 young street people come to the center. Of these quite a few have come three or four times. It is the hope that we might be able to build lasting relationships with these young people in order to point them to Christ."

* * *

The H. Plug family arrived in Hamilton from Byford, Australia. They left for Brazil in December in order to begin their Mission Aid work in Maceió, Brazil, "specifically in the area of educating the children of the missionary families." Their first impression: "not as bad as we expected!"

* * *

In Grand Rapids, Mich., "discussion of the use of cups at the Lord's Supper continued. Consistory decided not to use individual cups in the Lord's Supper at this time."

* * *

It appears that another school is about to arise, this time in the Attercliffe area. The "Family Post" writes: "This last week was a historic week in our life as congregation. The meeting which we had last week Wednesday is certainly a memorable one. What a joy to hear that enough funds are available to proceed with building our own school."

* * *

We all make history and some preserve history. "The Committee for the Historical Information & Documentation Centre of the Niagara Canadian Reformed Churches has met recently in response to the request of the consistories to record and preserve information concerning church and school life of the past 50 years. Our aim is to gather personal recollections and to start official documentation of the local area churches; i.e. bills, record books, bulletins, photos and negatives, in short, anything of historical value."

* * *

The Bulletin of the Providence Church in Edmonton informs us on the "Areopagus Project," "a modest evangelism project for the University of Alberta." They hope to set up an information table in a prominent location providing various pamphlets, confessional excerpts and Bibles. "If there is

sufficient interest, we hope to establish a Reformed Bible study on campus."

(A similar project was done on the University of Ottawa campus.)

* * *

Speaking of evangelism, in Winnipeg the members are encouraged by the Evangelism Committee "to seek contact with people who are newcomers to your street. We suggest this to be done by presenting a welcome gift (e.g. flower arrangement) on behalf of the Canadian Reformed Church, informing them of the place and time of our worship services. Our pamphlet "A call to come and worship" could be included. We will take care of the expenses."

* * *

Rev. K. Jonker addresses the matter of delegation to assemblies of people who were previously involved in matters on the agenda. Quote: "The 'funny thing' happened on this Reg. Synod (West, Dec. 6-7, '94) that they decided to send 8 delegates to General Synod who were delegates of their own meeting. This means that, if there are appeals against the decisions of Regional synod-West of December 1994, then those delegates are again judges of their own decisions. My question is: where is the proper cause of justice within the federation of our church? We have a good and reformed Church Order, but somehow it does not work!"

* * *

Schools in the Burlington area are intensifying their efforts to expand their base of income. "To encourage all of you to contribute to Christian education, we have issued 1995 school envelope sets to all professing members of our Burlington Churches, with two exceptions (in most cases): the most senior members who are unable to contribute, and the young people who are continuing their studies in either college or university."

* * *

In Burlington-East a pledge sheet is used for Church contributions. "Soon you will receive a pledge sheet for 1995 Regular Voluntary Contributions. Please fill in the form and return it to your ward elder by January 8. Last year we did this for the first time and the response was favourable. This year we look for even greater participation since the 'system' worked well."


* * *

In Launceston, Tasmania, no New Year's Eve worship service was held, it being a Saturday night. However, "consistory felt that it is a good thing to come together as a congregation on New Year's Eve. Therefore there will be a kind of prayer meeting. We hope to sing and pray, to listen to the reading of the Word of God and an appropriate meditation by the minister."

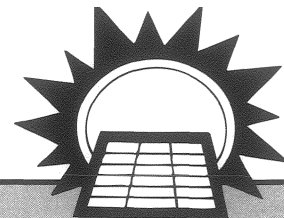
* * *

On the same island people are reminded that "some churches seem to be sound in doctrine, but they are also sound asleep."

* * *

The Church at Burlington South has adopted a name and is now known as the "Fellowship Canadian Reformed Church of Burlington South." 

RAY OF SUNSHINE



By Mrs. R. Ravensbergen

“... he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live,
and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.”

John 11:25, 26

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

There is one thing that is very sure to all of us: We are alive, and one day we will die. Everyone knows that, but not everyone feels the same about it. A person's feelings about his/her life, and even more so about his/her death depend on what lives deep inside his/her heart. Some people are very scared to even think about death. They do not want to talk about it, and try to push the thought of dying far away. Other people think they have to accomplish a lot first to become popular, so at least they will be remembered after they are gone. There are also people who long for the day of their death so that they will be free from pain and misery. Their life has become so difficult that they do not know how to go on anymore.

And we, what do we expect from our lives, and how do we feel about dying? Do we dare to talk about it, and can we help other people when they have a problem with it? As members of the Church of Jesus Christ we are fortunate people. For in the Church we confess that “I am not my own, but belong with body and soul, both in life and in death, to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ.” (H.C. Answer 1) The Lord created us, He gave us life. That life started with the creation of Adam and Eve in Paradise. At that time life was perfect, for God's whole creation was perfect. There was not even a sign of death yet. That came after the fall into sin. God's beautiful creation was then ruined, the consequences of sin were everywhere. We still experience them today: sicknesses, handicaps, confinement to bed, suffering, poverty, sorrow, and . . . death which comes to everyone.

No matter how much sadness death brings into our lives, we must always remember how it started: God created man to *live*, not to die! Life comes from God, but death is a consequence of our fall into sin. Therefore death is our enemy, and it is natural that we are afraid of that enemy. But now comes the good news: through Christ's suffering, death and resurrection the punishment of death has been taken away. Everyone who believes in Him is given the assurance that death is not the end of everything, but it is the beginning of a new life without sin.

Until the end of time death will be here as our “last enemy” (“the last enemy to be destroyed is death” 1 Cor. 15:26). No one can escape the moment that he has to die. To some it comes when they are very old, or after they have been sick for a long time. Others die suddenly, or when they are very young. We do not know how and when, but death will come for everyone.

So death is our enemy, and it will come some day also for us. But do we have to be scared? NO! For death does not have any power on its own. Christ, through His death and resurrection, overcame the devil, death and hell. At His ascension He received from the Father all power in heaven and on earth. Therefore our Lord Jesus Christ has the final say in that matter. Through the Holy Spirit He works into our hearts the faith and sure knowledge that indeed we belong to our Saviour in life and in death. We do not have to fear death, but we may live and enjoy the life which the Lord gave us. God created man to serve Him, to praise Him, and to enjoy His beautiful creation. In faith we may make use of the things He has given us. We may live in His light, because Jesus Christ made that light shine again.

Now death will not make us scared anymore. We can think about it and talk about it without fear. We can also talk about it to those who do not live in the light, and explain to them that Christ has bought peace for all those who believe in Him as their Lord and Saviour. The Church of Jesus Christ has been bought by His blood. He has paid for us, and there is nothing left to fear. For He will be there when we have to face our last enemy. And He has already won the battle for all those who belong to Him.

*The wondrous deeds of Thy salvation
Shall I praise all day long
With joyful psalm and song.
Their number, Lord, is past my knowledge.
I'll show Thy deeds so mighty;
Thy righteousness delights me. Psalm 71:8*

Birthdays in April:

2: Derek Kok

ANCHOR Home, 30 Road, RR 2
Beamsville, ON L0R 1B0

19: Marinus Foekens

27 O'Niel Street
Chatham, ON N7M 3A4

23: Arlene DeWit

c/o P. DeWit
Barnston Island, Surrey, BC V3T 4W2

I wish you all a very happy birthday, and until next month,

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

OPC and Canadian Reformed – A response to criticism

By C. Van Dam

In the previous issue of *Clarion*, Rev. B. R. Hofford voiced his concerns about an earlier article "OPC and Canadian Reformed – What Now?" It is good that one's concerns are put forward for perhaps through discussion some of the issues will become clearer. In responding, I will try to be brief and to the point and touch on the main issues only, otherwise we get side-tracked. Besides, one cannot say everything in one article.

Rev. Hofford argues that the issues of confessional membership and the manner of admission to the Lord's Supper are make or break issues which will prevent us from having ecclesiastical fellowship with the OPC. However, and let us be clear about this point, although he does not specifically say so, according to his reasoning, these same two issues will also make it impossible for us to recognize the OPC as a true church of Jesus Christ. One will understand that these two items (of formal recognition as true church and ecclesiastical fellowship) cannot be separated. Indeed, Rev. Hofford raises in the context of this very point the question of the validity of the history of the Laurel congregation in seceding from the OPC (while he was their minister) and joining the Canadian Reformed Churches. He suggests that if the OPC is a true church, their leaving it would have been schismatic and that such schism can only be justified if the OPC is indeed a false church.

The question therefore is whether the issues of confessional membership and admittance to the Lord's Table are issues that prevent us from recognizing the OPC as a faithful and true church of our Lord. Rev. Hofford says yes, because in his view these two matters reflect a different view of the nature of the church.

View of the Church in the OPC

In discussions like the present one it is tempting to go by what one has heard or what one has experienced. In all fairness though a church should be judged by its confessional standards and any other official documents that

deal with the issue at hand, in this case, the church. The OPC subscribe to the Westminster Standards. Our deputies for contact with the OPC who were appointed by the Synod of Orangeville in 1968 received the mandate

to examine the divergencies in confession . . . and to compare these divergencies with the Word of God and to evaluate them as to the question whether they are of such a nature that they would prevent the Canadian Reformed Churches from recognizing the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as a true church of the Lord Jesus Christ and from entering into correspondence with this church (*Acts 1968*, Art. 154).

After studying the matter, including the doctrine of the church, these deputies reported on the matter of divergencies in confession that

the divergencies in confession between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church are not of such a nature that they should prevent the Canadian Reformed Churches from recognizing the Orthodox Presbyterian Church as a true church of the Lord Jesus Christ and from entering into correspondence with this church (their report as appended to *Acts 1971*, p. 66).

Synod Coaldale 1977 in coming to a decision to recognize the OPC as a true church according to Article 29 of our Belgic confession acted according to the conclusions of the deputies in their 1971 report and noted that our sister churches in The Netherlands in their General synod of 1967 accepted the statement that the Westminster Confession of Faith is "a fully Reformed Confession" ("een voluit Gereformeerd belijdenisgeschrift") (*Acts 1977*, Art. 91).

Deputies for Contact with the OPC appointed in 1983 were mandated to publish a detailed evaluation of confessional divergencies. In their report to the Synod of Burlington in 1986, they concluded their doctrinal study of the visible and invisible church as follows:

In concluding this part of the evaluation of the doctrinal divergencies we may add that our Synod of Edmonton 1965 already declared that in this century the OPC had decidedly chosen for orthodoxy and against modernism. This choice with its accompanying Church struggle was not impeded by the Westminster Confession but stimulated by it, e.g., by what it states concerning the purity of particular Churches which are members of the catholic visible Church. The OPC itself is fruit of Church Reformation in the twentieth century, not in spite of the Westminster Standards but because of faithful adherence to them. (their report as appended to *Acts 1986*, p. 145)

It should also be noted that the OPC produced an official document entitled *Biblical Principles on the Unity of the Church* (which has been printed in our *Acts 1989* on pages 182-186). The OPC asked our deputies for contact with the OPC to offer criticisms to this paper, which they did. It should however be noted that the document met with considerable appreciation from our deputies. They stated, for example, that "it is laudable that this statement does not flee into fantasies about an 'invisible church' in order to escape the Scriptural demand for ecclesiastical union" (*Acts 1989*, p. 186).

Rev. Hofford states that the view of the church which is held and practiced by the OPC is unscriptural and unconfessional. In light of the above, such a statement is unfounded. The situation is instead that after having studied the documents, the Canadian Reformed Churches have maintained the recognition of the OPC as true churches of the Lord.

Leaving the OPC over the Lord's Supper and confessional membership

Now of course Rev. Hofford does not speak and write in a vacuum. He notes that "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." He also raises the question whether this secession of Laurel was schismatic or not. In reflecting on this matter, it would be good to keep several things in mind.

In the first place, in the detailed report on the Laurel secession which was submitted by our Committee for Contact with the OPC (CCOPC) to Synod Burlington 1986, it was noted that when the General Assembly of the OPC denied the complaint of Hofford and others that the Lord's Table was not adequately fenced, it did not condemn Rev. Hofford's views but simply denied a complaint that a Session was not fully executing their responsibility in supervising the Lord's Table. The General Assembly in its answer stressed individual responsibility in the admission of guests. Our CCOPC while acknowledging the need for individual responsibility would have preferred to see more emphasis on the responsibility of the Session in admitting guests.

Our CCOPC then continued in their concluding comments:

On the other hand, we should not take too rigoristic an approach, as though the admission to the Lord's Table of someone who does not have an attestation from a sister Church, is against the Bible, Confessions, and the Church Order. . . . Accepting guests from other Churches under certain conditions is not disallowed in our Church Order, and should be decided by the local Church council. That the General Assembly approved of this same procedure in the Burtonsville Session cannot thus be outrightly condemned. At the same time we mention that more direct measures should be taken by the overseers to insure that their guidelines are kept.

The CCOPC concludes this section by stating that "the General Assembly has not allowed deviation from their standards, nor has it sanctioned heresy such as would require us to break off our relations with the OPC."¹

In the second place, with respect to Blue Bell, Hofford writes that one of the reasons why Blue Bell withdrew from the OPC was because they were told that they could not practice confessional membership. We have to be more precise here. One of the leaders of the Interim Session suggested this, but he did not necessarily reflect the view of the whole interim Session nor of the Presbytery of Philadelphia. This was a local controversy and the key issues

were not adjudicated by the Presbytery or the General Assembly.²

In the third place, we do well to remember that miserable things can take place in a church federation, but that is not always reason enough to leave the fellowship of that church, either as an individual or as a congregation. Calvin earnestly warned against breaking fellowship with a church too easily (*Institutes*, IV.1.10-22). Even if "some fault may creep into the administration of either doctrine or sacraments" one must be very careful not to break the unity of the faith too readily (*Institutes* IV.1.12). The church is holy "in the sense that it is daily advancing and is not yet perfect" (*Institutes* IV.1.17; also see IV.1.13).

In the fourth place, it is important to note that when Rev. Hofford along with his congregation was received into the fellowship of the Canadian Reformed Churches, Classis Ontario South made no judgement about his leaving the OPC. It is the considered view of Synod Lincoln 1992 that because of the manner in which Laurel and Blue Bell were admitted into the federation of the Canadian Reformed Churches "these admitted churches are therefore under obligation to pursue, together with the Canadian Reformed Churches, unity with the OPC" (*Acts 1992*, Art 72, IV.A.2.iv).

In the fifth place, Rev. Hofford's contention is highly dubious when he asserts that the OPC view of church membership is different from our confessional membership view because the OPC has a different view of the nature of the church. Dr. N. H. Gootjes has published a careful study of the brochure of Rev. Hofford entitled *Open Communion and the OPC* in which Dr. Gootjes has shown that the idea of the invisible church as formulated in the Westminster Confession is not the reason for an "easier" admission to the Lord's Supper.³

Does all this now mean that Laurel and Blue Bell's actions were schismatic? I cannot judge that and Classis Ontario South of the Canadian Reformed Churches did not sit in judgment on this point. In this respect I would like to give the necessary room for freedom of conscience. Rev. Hofford should also respect the same in others who feel conscience bound with good reason to seek a Biblical ecumenicity with the OPC, all the more since he came to the Canadian Reformed Churches knowing our desire in this respect. Because of the limitations of the present age of weakness and sin, I have less difficulty with the presence of congregations in Laurel and Blue Bell being in the federation of

the Canadian/American Reformed Churches than others may have. It has happened. We have admitted these brothers and sisters who wanted to be under Reformed confession and polity rather than Presbyterian and they should feel welcome in our midst. These churches should in turn respect the relations that have developed between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the OPC over almost thirty years. Rev. Hofford should not use his admission into the Canadian Reformed Churches as a lever against the OPC. The Canadian Reformed Churches have admitted Laurel and him while maintaining their tie to the OPC.

Confessional membership

Rev. Hofford accuses me of indulging in false comparisons of practice between the OPC and the Canadian Reformed Churches with respect to confessional membership. He gives as an example that an OPC General Assembly has determined that one can be admitted into the OPC although that person consciously refuses to have their children baptized. Although Rev. Hofford does not mention this, he presumably means the Thirty-fourth General Assembly which met in 1967. To give a full picture, Rev. Hofford should have added that this decision, as well as the report on which it was based, made the exceptional nature of such an admission clear, for the OPC is a confessional church. Such a person should therefore also promise to submit to the Reformed teaching of the church on this point. What follows is the text of the decision of the Thirty-fourth General Assembly (1967).

It is the opinion of this General Assembly that while it is normal, according to the constitution of the church, that the members of the church should submit their children for baptism: ". . . infants of one, or both, believing parents, are to be baptized" and it is "a great sin to condemn or neglect this ordinance" (*Confession of Faith*, XXVIII:4-5) nevertheless it is to be recognized that, with regard to the admission to membership of those who cannot at that time in good conscience present their children for baptism, the session may judge in the special circumstances that such persons, having been informed of the position of the church, may be admitted if they are willing to answer sincerely and affirmatively the questions asked of those being admitted to communicant membership in the church (*Directory for Worship* V:5).⁴

It may surprise Rev. Hofford, but this decision, made for exceptional circumstances and with pastoral concern for the persons involved, is in full accord with Reformed practice that goes all the way back to 1620.

During the period following the decision against the Remonstrants in the Synod of Dordt in 1618, the question arose how to treat Arminian church members who wanted to be received into the communion of the Reformed Churches. The Regional Synod of Gouda (1620) decided that those who were willing to be instructed in the Reformed doctrine could be received into the church. They were not to make propaganda for their un-Biblical views and were to acknowledge the correctness of the Reformed doctrine.⁵ A related example is that the Synod of The Hague (1914) of our Dutch sister churches decided that toleration can be exercised toward a brother who in good conscience errs in a point of doctrine (in this case, infant baptism). According to the Synod this followed the example of the apostolic church. Again such a person would be expected to submit to Reformed teaching on the subject.⁶

In light of the above, as well as the arguments brought forward in my earlier article in the Year End issue of *Clarion* (1994), such as the questions asked of those who profess their faith in the OPC, the conclusion can be drawn that the OPC stands in the Reformed tradition and wants to guard its Reformed character by demanding adherence to

the Reformed doctrine. It can also be concluded that whatever differences there are, these differences can be discussed within the framework of an ecclesiastical fellowship.

The issue

Over the years, synod after synod has reaffirmed with good reason that the OPC is a faithful church of our Lord. The amount of time and energy we have expended on examining this body is to my knowledge unprecedented in the entire history of the Reformed churches and ecumenical endeavour. That in itself can be a good thing. After all we deal with matters of the church of our Lord and one must be careful. However, in all our investigations about whether the OPC is faithful, we are in great danger of forgetting that we may have become less than faithful to our own confession about the church and what constitutes the church. Our confession clearly states that the true and false "are easily recognized and distinguished from each other" (Art 29, Belgic Confession). Granting some allowance for the different situation in the twentieth century, do we no longer believe these words? We have recognized the OPC in 1977 for what it is, a church of Jesus Christ. No substantiated accusation could be brought against this body on this score for the last seventeen years.⁷ When it is now urged that we must do with deeds what we already did with words in 1977 and draw the consequences of our recognition of the OPC, this is not acting "posthaste"

as Rev. Hofford has alleged. But, then we deal according to our own confession and our own rich Reformed heritage where ecumenical ties with Presbyterians were honoured.⁸

In answer to Rev. Hofford's last question, different histories and different traditions compel us to enter into a relation of ecclesiastical fellowship rather than becoming physically one with the OPC at this time. As I mentioned in my article we should not "abandon the pursuit of unity as a long term goal. But surely we can best grow towards each other when we are in a relationship of ecclesiastical fellowship with each other and fully acknowledge each other for what we have acknowledged each other to be, churches of the same Lord and Saviour."

¹For the full text of the above see *Acts 1986*, pp. 131-139.

²See the report as appended to *Acts 1986*, 130-131.


³See *Clarion* 40:7 (1991) 155-158.

⁴Quoted from *Minutes of the Thirty-fourth General Assembly of the OPC* [1967], p. 136.

⁵See J. Jansen, *De Leertucht over de leden der kerk* (1936), 28-29.

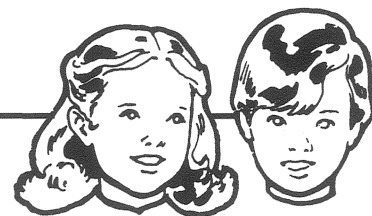
⁶See F. L. Bos, *De Orde der kerk* (1950), 226. For a Canadian Reformed example, see *Clarion* 38:9 (1989) 205.

⁷See *Acts 1992*, Art 72 IV.B.

⁸See, e.g., the report of Deputies for Contact with the OPC in *Acts 1986*, p. 151; *Clarion* 43:3 (1994), p. 69. 

OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



Dear Busy Beavers,

This is a true story.

Lisa read the pretty text. It has just three words, "God is love" 1 John 4:8. Lisa was surprised. "That's nice!" she thought. She like the idea of God and love. But then she started to wonder. "I don't know. I never heard of that before! Is that in our Bible? There are people who don't read the Bible the right way. Maybe this text comes from them. I know! I will check it out in our very own Bible. I'm going to find out."

It was hard to find 1 John 4 in the Bible but Lisa found it. Yes! There it was, "God is love." Oh that was wonderful to read! God is love! But then she started wondering again. "Is that true, still, today? Sure God was good to David – he

got to be king. And Hezekiah was healed, but that was in the Bible. Think God knows the road I live on? I'm just small and unimportant. Think He knows about us? I don't know. I just hope I can stay out of trouble with my Mom, and maybe my best friend's grandma will give us candy after school."

That's what Lisa thought then. Later she read more in the Bible, and even found, ". . . you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you" in Isaiah 43.

Isn't it wonderful to be able to say"

"Jesus loves me, this I know,
FOR THE BIBLE TELLS ME SO."



Quiz Time!

CHARIOTS, HORSES AND RIDERS

- ...the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw; and behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of _____ round about _____. 2 Kings 6:17
- And (Pharaoh) made him to ride in his second _____; and they cried before him, " _____ the knee!" Gen. 41:43
- And the driving is like the driving of _____ the son of Nimshi; for he drives _____. 2 Kings 9:20
- So Haman took the robes and the _____, and he arrayed Mordecai and made him ride through the open square of the city, proclaiming, "Thus shall it be done to the man whom the _____ delights to honour." Esther 6:11
- ...and _____ alighted from his chariot and fled away on _____. Judges 4:15
- And as they still went on and talked, behold, a chariot of fire and horses of fire separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a _____ into _____. 2 Kings 2:11
- Sing to the Lord, for He has triumphed _____; the horse and his _____ he has thrown into the sea. Ex. 15:21
- And _____ gather together chariots and _____; he had fourteen hundred chariots and twelve thousand horsemen whom he stationed in the chariot cities. . . 1 Kings 10:26

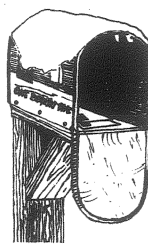
ANIMAL WORD SEARCH

by Busy Beaver Art Smit

H I S Q U E R E E H O H O Z M D S T A F S
 O E U M E C L C I M T T R B O T H D Y Q
 R E E G E L A F G F I D A G H N E E R U
 S K E E M U T A B R A B B I T K R A A
 E A N Z E B R A B I X L I S O N Q E E S
 I N A L E Y S N G R A E T F O A L T Y H
 R G W F K B A I T T O R H D J E A N D F
 B A H G Y M D B A N D R S R R K Z T R S
 E R N F Z W N A B I R I B I S D A O A U
 Z O F D K E A E T S C U U B N T G L T H
 D O G O A L P E E H S Q U I R I L M S A
 K Z R N I Z E B A Q S S A R D T R I D E
 F Q I K Z E G O A T T R I B E A F F Q I
 R U L E M R O W L Y O U S R Q F N T A O
 A G I P G A K L R T I P C R E V A E B U

Can you find these words?

Dog	Kangaroo	Rats	Squirrel	Cat
Sheep	Worm	Bat	Bird	Camel
Frog	Horse	Zebra	Donkey	Pig
Gazelle	Monkey	Owl	Beaver	Rabbit
Goat	Fish	Panda		



From the Mailbox

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Kayleigh Linde*. It was interesting to "meet" your family in your letter. It must be neat to have your Mom in your own classroom, too. Thanks for the horse picture. I can see you

like art. Bye, Kayleigh.

Hi, *Eritia Smit*. Boy, it must have been exciting to be part of the cow chase! Sounds like those cows really gave the owners a hard time! Did you get to ride one of the horses? Bye, Eritia.

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Jacquie Selles*. Do you like living in Smithers? What grade does your Dad teach? I hope you enjoy being a member of the Busy Beaver Club. Bye, Jacquie.

Hi, *Rieneke Huijgen*. It was good to hear from you again. Did you have fun in the snow while it was around? Hopefully by now it's all gone! Bye, Rieneke.

Hello, *Michael Janssens*. Thank you for the interesting story. Keep up the writing, Michael. Do you also enjoy reading? Bye.

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *David Smeding*. Thanks for writing about your favourite book. Do you also enjoy puzzles and games? When is your birthday? Bye, David.

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, too, *Rachelle Smeding*. I'm glad to see you like books, too. When is your birthday, Rachelle, so I can put your name on the birthday list. Bye.

Hi, *Miranda Barendregt*. Nice to hear from you again! The book you wrote about sure sounds interesting. Sounds like your house is going to be extra busy when the baby comes! Bye, Miranda.

Hi, *Lorelle Barendregt*. Thanks for writing about your favourite book and sending it in. I'm sure some other Busy Beavers will also enjoy it. How do you like having your school at home? Bye, Lorelle.

Hello, *Erica Broekema*. So you are often busy writing letters, are you? It's good to keep in touch with your family. The book about Anna sure sounds interesting. Actually, it's one of my favourites, too. Keep reading and writing, Erica! Bye.

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Shaun Smeding*. Your book sounds really exciting, as you said. When is your birthday, Shaun? I hope you enjoy the activities. Bye.

Hello, *Nicole Alderliesten*. Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club. Thanks for writing in about your favourite book. Are mystery stories your favourite? Bye, Nicole.

Hi, *Laurence Kingma*. Thanks for the neatly typed letter. Do you enjoy using the computer? Is it in your home? I was sad to hear about your dog, too. Maybe you can get another one soon. Bye, Laurence.

Hello, *Jonathan Kingma*. It's really too bad that your puppy and your neighbour's dog were killed. Are you planning to get another dog soon? Write back and tell me about it. Bye, Jonathan.

Bye for now, Busy Beavers.

Love, Aunt Betty

