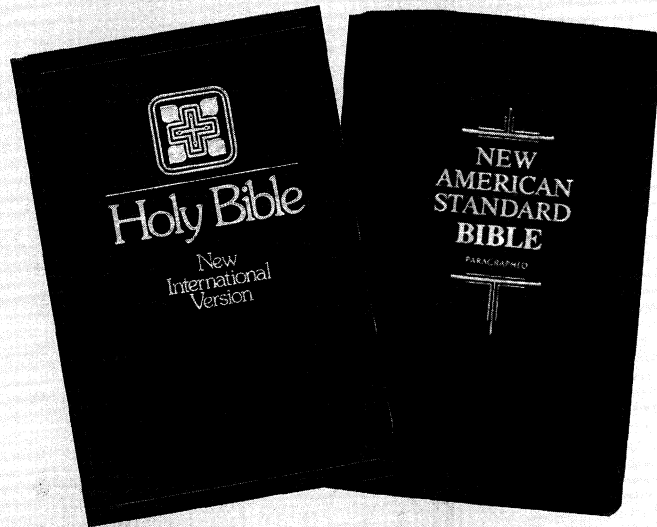




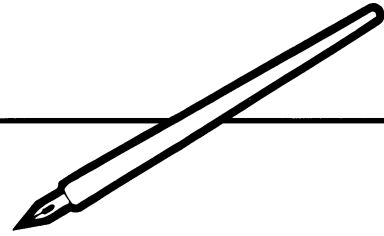
Clarion

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*The
New American Standard Bible
and the
New International Version*

By G.Ph. van Popta



Dear General Synod 1995: Clear judgments, please!

Broader assemblies are *judicial* assemblies. As judicial assemblies, they must make clear decisions and judgments. When a consistory or a member of a congregation appeals to a classis, regional synod or general synod, then that broader assembly must make a very clear statement about that appeal. It must either grant it or deny it, supporting its decision with some clear and well-chosen grounds.

Troubles increase when broader assemblies try to be pastoral. When broader assemblies take upon themselves pastoral duties and begin governing rather than acting as they ought – as judges – matters become foggy.

The Lord Christ has given ministers and elders to rule and govern His churches and to do pastoral work. The only governing body in our church life is the consistory. Classes and synods are not governing agencies. Perhaps it is because the broader assemblies are made up of elders and ministers that these assemblies at times assume governing duties. Maybe it is a matter of habit. It is, we are sure, well-intentioned. Ministers and elders are delegated by their consistories to a classis (or by classis to a regional synod, or by regional synod to a general synod). Though they are still ministers and elders they do not sit at the broader assembly as the ruling body of the church nor in a pastoral office. They are there to serve the churches as adjudicators. They must grant or deny appeals and overtures laid before them on the basis of the Word of God, the Confessions of the Church and the adopted Church Order.

In Canada there is a bad trend in the secular courts. The secular courts are lately *making* law instead of granting or denying a person's case based on the law. Those called to be judges are presuming to be governors. Matters are no longer clear. Let the ecclesiastical courts not follow the secular courts in this.

The Acts of our last General Synod contain an example where the assembly did not speak as it was required to do and left a cloud of confusion behind. Article 127 is, at first glance, a typical decision made up of the familiar MATERIAL, OBSERVATIONS, CONSIDERATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS – all of which were adopted. Upon reading article 127, however, one discovers that something is missing. It contains no decision. It says nothing.

Three churches and a brother appealed a decision of Regional Synod West 1992. We read: "All of the letters appeal the decision by Regional Synod West. . . ." The church at Carman requested General Synod **to judge** that Regional Synod West erred in its judgment. The church at Winnipeg urged General Synod **to rule** that the Regional Synod West erred in upholding a decision of a classis. A brother W. De Haan appealed to General Synod **to declare** that Regional Synod West acted carelessly.

These churches and a brother asked General Synod to make clear statements about the actions of Regional Synod

West. From the OBSERVATIONS, it seems that General Synod understood well enough what the churches and the brother wanted. They wanted General Synod **to judge, to rule, and to declare** that Regional Synod West had erred – that it had even acted carelessly.

General Synod was required to do one of two things: Grant the appeals or deny the appeals. It did neither. It neither upheld nor rejected the appeals. Instead, it considered a number of different angles. It expressed its regret. It suggested that a certain line of action may yet be beneficial. It felt that Regional Synod West could have taken a few other things into consideration. At the same time, it thought that the appellants had expected the Regional Synod West to do and say too much – more than a regional synod may say. The considerations of article 127 see-saw back and forth trying to span two different opinions. In the end General Synod said nothing. Under RECOMMENDATIONS we read that synod decided ". . . to send the above considerations as a response to the submissions of the churches . . . and brother. . . ." It neglected to either grant or deny the appeals.

There are other examples of this type of "decision." A broader assembly is confronted with some strong and opposing opinions on a matter. To circumvent the difficult situation and attempting some "damage control," the assembly makes a number of considerations meant somehow to strike a middle way between the different positions and ends up with a non-decision or a self-contradictory one. The churches in Alberta and Manitoba have, over the past two years, had to grapple with several such decisions. Experience proves that decisions of this kind are not helpful for the churches.

Perhaps the brotherhood in Australia is showing the better way. At their General Synod 1994 they decided to go the way of MATERIAL, DECISION and GROUNDS when judging overtures and appeals. With this format no broader assembly could neglect to provide grounds for its decision. The assembly would need to look at the material laid on its table by a church, weigh it, make a decision, and then support the decision with some grounds. It is much better for a classis or synod to make a clear decision that cuts to the heart of the issue and which is supported by a few strong grounds than to teeter-totter back and forth trying to find a middle way. Such procedure leaves no one content – again, as ecclesiastical experience on the Prairies has lately demonstrated.

The benefits of being in a federation of churches under Dort polity are great. We help to keep one another under the Word of God. We have agreed that if we have grievances, we may lay them before the churches as they meet in their assemblies for adjudication. But churches and members who do appeal to the broader assemblies deserve clear answers to their appeals and overtures. Let it be a decisive "Yes" or "No." And let the Yes or No be supported by a few solid grounds.

General Synod 1995! Clear judgments, please!



Meditation

By G.Ph. van Popta

Read Acts 6:1-7: “. . . the Hellenists murmured against the Hebrews. . . .”

ONE BODY

The Lord Jesus Christ brings people from diverse backgrounds and cultures into one body through the cross. The apostle Paul spoke of that in Ephesians 2:11-22. Speaking to Gentiles, Paul reminded them that once they had been separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But God brought those Gentiles, who once were far off, near to Himself by the blood of Christ. God took believing Jews and believing Gentiles and made one body out of the two. Together Jews and Gentiles became fellow citizens and members of the household of God. God built both as one on the foundation of the apostles and prophets of which Christ Himself is the cornerstone. In Christ they were joined together as a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

That God was able to bring Jews and Gentiles into one body was quite a thing. No line of division was as definite as the line between Jews and non-Jews. But God can do it. This is clear from the book of Acts. Not only Jews and Gentiles, but all sorts of sects, groups and races – Pharisees and Saducees, priests and Levites, Samaritans, Ethiopians, Asians and Romans – were gathered together into one holy church.

Jerusalem had many synagogues. You could go to the synagogue of your choice. Everyone was in the business of fencing in their own distinctives. The Pharisees had their synagogue. The Saducees had another. These were the Hebrew- and Aramaic-speaking synagogues. Then there were the synagogues where the liturgy was conducted in Greek. The Hellenists went to these. Hellenists were Jews born in places like Alexandria, Cyrene and Cilicia. They spoke Greek. Many of these Greek-speaking Jews ended up in Jerusalem. They established their own synagogues. They drew in the Gentile converts to Judaism as well. There was even a synagogue of the Freedmen – former slaves who had bought their freedom.

The gospel of Christ won thousands. The disciples were increasing rapidly. People were drawn from the

various sects. This caused a problem. There were now Christian converts from the Hebrew-speaking synagogues as well as the Hellenist, the Greek-speaking synagogues. Hebrew believers were in charge of the daily distribution of food to the needy. The Hellenist widows were being neglected. Perhaps the Hebrew believers did not know who the needy were among the Hellenist Christians. Maybe they did not know where they lived or did not know the customs of the Hellenists. Whatever the reason, the Hellenist widows were going hungry.

The Hellenists began to murmur against the Hebrews. A split was threatening to tear the body in half. The twelve apostles summoned all the believers together in order to settle the quarrel. They reminded the church that Christ had called them, the apostles, to preach the Word and to pray. It would not do for them to neglect that work in order to wait on tables. They told the believers to pick seven men to do this work.

This pleased the whole multitude and solved the problem. The rift was quickly healed. The Word of God increased. The number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem. Even many priests, realizing that the sacrifices had become redundant, gave up their jobs and their pensions and became obedient to the faith.

The believers of various backgrounds were gathered into one body. When a dispute threatened to tear the body apart, they solved it promptly.

Today, as well, the church is made up of people who come from many different backgrounds, cultures and nations. A Quebecois can have communion with a British Columbian. A Tasmanian with a Western Australian. A Frisian with a Zealander. A Scot with a Korean. A resident of the steamy jungles of Irian Jaya with a native from the concrete jungles of the United States of America. All because of the cross of Christ!

When conflicts threaten to tear apart the beautiful work of Christ, let us do what we must to settle the disputes. Quickly. Decisively.

What's inside?

April 14th is Good Friday. We remember the death of Christ. He died for our sins. But He could not stay dead! As Peter said on the day of Pentecost: “God raised Him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for Him to be held by it (Acts 2:24).” Christ could not remain in the bleak shadows of Sheol for He was a righteous man. God had said: “The wages of sin is death.” Sinners die! Righteous people live! Christ, bearing *our* sins, died, but the grave had to acknowledge that here was a stranger, a sinless man. It had to let Him go. And we, righteous in Christ, live forever. In “Christ Crucified: Heaven Opened . . . Opened Eyes” Rev. Bill Wielenga writes about this good news.

This issue also contains the second installment from the Committee on Bible Translations. It ends with telling us which *one* translation the committee has recommended to the upcoming General Synod.

GvP

Christ Crucified: Heaven Opened . . . Opened Eyes.

Mark 15:37-39

By W. Wielenga

(Among the commentaries used, one was especially helpful: J. Van Bruggen, *Marcus: Het evangelie volgens Petrus*, [CNT, 3rd series], [Kampen: Kok, 1988], pp. 377-84.)

Good Friday is the day on which we commemorate the death of our Savior for our sins. It is a day on which we “cherish the blessed memory of the bitter death” (Lord’s Supper Form prayer, p. 599 of the Book of Praise) of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. A bitter death does not seem to be something to commemorate, to cherish the memory of, and yet we do. In fact, the death of Christ on the cross is at the heart of gospel; it is good news, proclamation. As the apostle Paul wrote in 1 Cor 1: the church preaches Christ crucified (v. 23). The cross, the bitter death, is worthy of proclamation. To be sure, the cross is a stumbling block to the Jews, complete foolishness to the Greeks. Yet, the cross is the power of God and the wisdom of God to those who are called, both Jew and Greek. On Good Friday we can and we do commemorate the shameful suffering and bitter death of Christ on the cross, because God was at work there for the salvation of His people. Christ crucified is not our stumbling block, but the power of God to new life through the forgiveness of sins, for us. Christ crucified is not foolishness to us; it is God’s wisdom, His perfectly planned and executed way of salvation, for us.

What Paul was speaking about in his letter to the Corinthians – stumbling block to Jews, folly to Greeks – we see at the cross on Golgotha on that day of Christ’s death. The Jews were asking for a sign. They called out “Save yourself, and come down from the cross!” (Mark 15:30-32.) Give us a sign of power and then we will believe, they cried. Also

the soldiers, the Gentiles, were mocking the Lord Jesus Christ. What foolishness, they said, to have such a King! King of the Jews, indeed. They knew only the type of king they had, an emperor in Rome’s splendor and glitter and power. As far as the Jews and the Greeks were concerned, the power of God and the wisdom from God was not in this Jesus of Nazareth. Despite their many differences, despite the hatred of the Jews for the oppressing heathen Romans, despite the hatred of the Romans for that troublesome Jewish province, Jew and Greek were completely united in mocking, rejecting and reviling the Lord Jesus. As far as both were concerned, this was not a work of God. This Jesus was not the Savior of the Jews and was nothing but trouble for the Greeks. Right at the cross we can see it: Christ crucified, a stumbling block for Jews, folly to the Greeks.

Yet, the Lord God was accomplishing His purpose at the cross. It is as the congregation of Jerusalem said in its praise of God at a later time: “Truly, in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Thy hand and Thy plan had predestined to take place” (Acts 4:27). God was at work. That’s what we also see on that day at the cross where the Jews were mocking and the Gentiles reviling.

Heaven opened

We can read through Mark 15 to see how it all went up to the moment of Christ’s death. The Lord Jesus was handed over by Pontius Pilate to be crucified. The soldiers immediately took the Lord away, inside the palace (v.16). They called the whole batallion together, probably including also the

centurion of verse 39. There, inside the palace, the soldiers mocked the Lord Jesus. With a purple robe and a crown of thorns they set Him up as the king He claimed to be. They saluted Him, they struck Him, they spat on Him, they knelt down in homage to Him. This was their sport, their mockery. Where is God? Doesn’t God step in? Does He let it go on?

It goes on. The Lord God lets it go on. It had to go on, and the Lord Jesus knew it. It was the will of God to bruise Him, and Christ submitted to the will of the Father above all else. “Not what I will, but what Thou wilt,” he had prayed in the agony of Gethsemane. We do not see God intervene now. Neither do we see Christ trying to get out of His suffering. “When He was reviled He did not revile in return; when He suffered He did not threaten; but He trusted to Him who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:23). He went as a Lamb to the slaughter, to take away the sins of the world.

The suffering went on. The Lord Jesus was crucified. They divided His garments. He was executed with the criminals. Still the mockery and the reviling and the suffering went on. Those who passed by derided Him, wagging their heads. “You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!” Also the chief priests with the scribes mocked Him. “He saved others; He cannot save Himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.” They do not see God in this man hanging on the cross. Also the robbers reviled Him; He is an outcast even among the outcasts. The abuse and the suffering of Christ went on.

The suffering became heavier yet. The darkness set in from the sixth hour to the ninth. The light of the sun was

withdrawn from Christ. God Himself took the light away. The Lord Jesus stayed on the cross in the midst of the darkness. "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" It became light again, but the mocking continued. Still the Lord God did not intervene. There was the mockery about Elijah. The Lord God let the mockery and the suffering continue. He did not put an end to it. Christ had to go on to the end. The end was His death, the death of the cross: "And Jesus uttered a loud cry, and breathed His last."

The Jews were already convinced that this Jesus was not the Messiah. To the Gentiles this man was nothing but a trouble-maker. Surely, the death of Christ, His last breath, only put a stamp on what they already so firmly believed. Now they could say: see, He is dead. This was not and could not be a man of God; what He did was not the work of God. Much less was this the Son of God. How are the Jews ever to believe that this is the Son of God, their Messiah, in whom is their salvation through faith in Him? How would you even begin to tell the Gentiles that this Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior of the world? Jesus of Nazareth is dead. Where is God? The Jews did not see Him here and neither did the Gentiles. Jesus did not come down from the cross. God did not intervene to take Him down. For that matter, neither did Elijah. He was forsaken by God and man. So He died. A failure?

It was not a failure. Contrary to all appearances, contrary to all the expectations of men, the crucified Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Exactly here in the death of Christ on the cross, God's purpose was accomplished. Immediately, then and there, God showed His purpose in the death of Jesus. He made it clear that all these things had to happen in this way to make satisfaction for sin, for salvation.

Christ died. The curtain of the temple was torn from top to bottom into two parts. Such a tear from the top down was clearly an act of God; it could not be anything but that. Christ's death effected that tear. In His death, the temple ministry came to an end, for the living way was made open. The shadows were abolished; the substance of them was Christ crucified. By His death He opened the way for His people to enter the heavenly sanctuary by His blood. The whole Old Testament temple service as God gave it to Israel was now fulfilled in God's Christ. Through faith in this crucified Christ,

the living way to God in the heavenly sanctuary is opened.

To the Jewish leaders, to the chief priests and the scribes, to those religious experts who had reviled the Christ of God, God revealed that this was His work, salvation work, temple work, heavenly sanctuary work accomplished on the cross for His people. Christ was High Priest and He was the once for all sacrifice. He put an end to the work of the chief priests. The scribes who studied the Word had the answer in Christ crucified to their Scripture searching. Christ crucified is the way to the throne of God. Thus, in this sign, God vindicated His Christ, at the very place where it would really count for the Jews – at the temple, the holy of holies.

The cross is the victory we commemorate. Christ's victory was that He did not come down from the cross as the Jews wanted. He could have done so. Christ, however, went God's way, even though forsaken by God on the way. Through this way of God, the heavens are opened. God and His people enjoy fellowship through the forgiveness of sins. "We have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which He opened for us through the curtain,

that is through His flesh" (Heb 10.19-20; cf. Heb 12.22-24).

Opened eyes

Something else happened at the moment of the death of Christ. Christ's death also accomplished something at the foot of the cross. "When the centurion, who stood facing Him, saw that He thus breathed His last, he said, 'Truly this man was the Son of God!'" Mark tells us only that the Lord Jesus uttered a loud cry. He does not tell us what that cry was. We do know that the Lord Jesus spoke more words before He died: "It is finished;" "Father, into Thy hands I commit my spirit." Mark, however, does not tell us the contents of Christ's loud cry. Apparently, we are to pay heed only to the fact of the cry, rather than its content. With this cry, whatever it was, Christ announced His death for all to hear. Everyone present is called to pay attention, to see Christ's death. That is what the centurion did. He heard the cry, he paid attention and he was amazed at what he saw.

Who was this centurion? He was a soldier in the Roman army, the army of the occupying powers. He belonged to the heathen, the Gentiles. The centurion served the emperor of Rome, who was considered by his loyal forces to be

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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: 74124.1377@CompuServe.COM

ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS: (subscriptions, advertisements, etc.):

CLARION, Premier Printing Ltd.
One Beghin Avenue
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nothing less than a god, or the son of a god. The centurion was also a man of title; a centurion was an officer in charge of a hundred men. Quite possibly this centurion was the one in charge of the situation there on Golgotha. He was standing before the Lord Jesus, seeing to it that the cross was indeed the end with this trouble-maker. The centurion was a man doing his job right the first time. He was in charge of Christ's death. That was his priority (cf. Mark 15:44-45).

When this man saw the way Christ died, how He cried loudly and breathed His last (for that is all we are told that he saw) he was amazed and said, "Truly, this was God's Son." Those were not just any words which the centurion spoke. They have an earlier reference point. This claim of Christ to be the Son of God was, in fact, the whole matter surrounding the sentencing of the Lord Jesus by the Sanhedrin. Jesus of Nazareth testified that He was the Son of God (Mark 14.64). Blasphemy! cried the Jews. Crucify Him! He says He is the Son of God! Away with Him. That is what it had all been about.


But now the centurion sees it before his very eyes and declares: "Truly, He was the Son of God." This means: it's just like He said; He is who He just as He claimed He was! Uptil this point everyone had been mocking the Lord Jesus because all had thought it was one big joke: this man the Son of God? They

mocked and reviled Him. Now, however, the centurion's eyes were opened. He realize: this man was right. He is innocent. He died innocently; right to the end He is innocent. He is the Son of God, as he said. That awesome revelation came to the centurion through Christ's death. Instead of the Lord's death on the shameful cross being the final sign that this could not be the Son of God, His death was the revelation that He was the Son of God as He had said. His death brought to light the truth about His life. In His death, the Lord Jesus was vindicated out of the mouth of this Roman centurion.

We can ask, of course, how it is that this man, this centurion of all people, comes to the conclusion that this was the Son of God? What does he know? But that is the whole point. Exactly because this centurion knows the least, and yet says so much, we learn that God himself is at work in the death of His Son, to open the eyes of this heathen centurion whose only task was to make sure the trouble-maker was dead. His morbid task of confirming death is changed by the power and wisdom of God in the death of His Son, to the beautiful task of what is actually gospel proclamation, when he says, "Truly, beyond a doubt, this was the Son of God." It is the Lord God himself who is behind the words of this Roman centurion, to vindicate His own Son.

Where was God on that day when the Lord Jesus died on the cross? There was God, showing his justice in His wrath against sin, showing His full fury, there in the death of His Son. Where was God? There was God, showing His love and mercy, showing His sovereign grace, there in the death of His Son. It looked like the end. It looked like the death was it. But it was God's fullest self-revelation. So great was that self-revelation that this centurion was stunned with what he saw. The truth of God opened up his eyes. No one less than God's Son suffered there, was crucified there, was forsaken there and died there.

Heaven opened, opened eyes. Truly, the cross, Christ crucified, is the power of God and the wisdom of God. For Jews, He is the promised Messiah, who fulfilled the temple service, to open the way to the heavenly sanctuary by His blood. For Gentiles, He is the Savior of the world, who opens the eyes of the blind, whose truth will be proclaimed and will prevail even in the midst of the darkness, to overcome the darkness. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

The author is minister of the American Reformed Church in Lynden, WA. 

REMEMBER YOUR CREATOR

By G.Ph. van Popta

Gambling: An ungodly attempt to acquire wealth

The Bible teaches that there are two legitimate ways to acquire wealth: labour and inheritance.

Labour

In Ephesians 4:28 the apostle Paul wrote: *Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labour, doing honest work with his hands, so that he may be*

able to give to those in need. God commands us to work. God commanded Adam and Eve to work. God placed man over all of creation. He put him in charge of the earth, including the wealth of the earth. Gen. 2:10ff speaks about the wealth God placed in the earth for man to discover, use and enjoy. Four rivers flowed out of Eden.

The river Pishon flowed around the whole land of Havilah where there was gold – *good* gold (Gen. 2:12). There were also precious stones – bdellium and onyx stone.

God put this wealth in creation. He put man in dominion over it. Man had to work in creation. By his work, his labour, he could enjoy and use the

wealth that God had placed there. The first legitimate way to acquire wealth is by way of labour.

Inheritance

The second rightful way to gain wealth is by way of inheritance. The OT says a lot about inheritance. God had given each tribe, clan and family land in the Promise Land. It was to remain in the family, passed on down through the generations. The book of Proverbs says things like: "House and wealth are inherited from fathers . . . and . . . a good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children." Somewhere Paul wrote that parents lay up for their children.

The Bible speaks of these two ways to acquire wealth – hard work and inheritance. It forbids theft and dishonest business practices. It forbids gambling as a way to get wealth.

Gambling

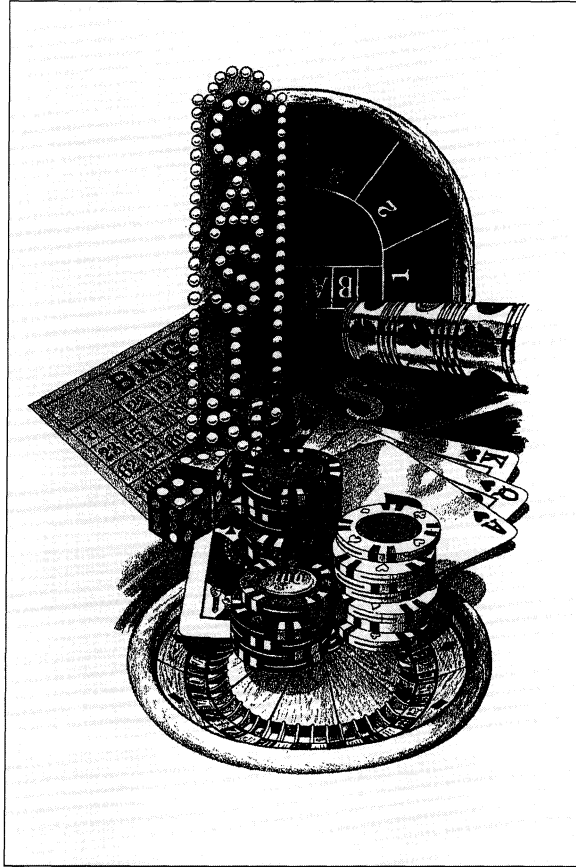
The opportunities for gambling abound. Travel agencies offer discount package tours to Reno and Las Vegas, the two holy cities for gamblers – Mecca and Jerusalem for gambling pilgrims. TV commercials try to convince you that you had better not miss out on buying your lottery ticket because your number might come up this week. And if you haven't bought your ticket, you'll have to walk around in shame with a bag over your head.

A survey of a couple of years ago showed that 85% of Canadians, coming from every age and income bracket, have played the lottery at some time. About 50% of Canadian adults buy lottery tickets on a regular basis, spending an average of \$8.50 per month. Buying lottery tickets is pure stupidity. You are 3 1/2 times more likely to be struck by lightning than to win a state or provincial lottery (Tom Watson in *Don't Bet On It!*).

VLTs

Provincial lotteries have been around for quite some time. An even worse curse has been inflicted upon our communities lately: the VLT (Video Lottery Terminal). VLT! It could stand for Very Lousy Transaction! There are people who spend most if not all of their

paycheque at the altar of the VLT. They cash their cheque into dollar coins and feed their children's food into the mouth of their god. It's a great transaction for the government, for the hotel owner, and for the owner of the VLT. It's a *Very Lousy Transaction* for the gambler and his children.



The ungodly thing about gambling – whether at the casino in Las Vegas, at the ticket counter at the drugstore, or in front of the highly addictive and mesmerizing VLT – is that you are no longer depending upon God. You have exchanged the true God for Lady Luck, Dame Fortune. Gambling is a form of idolatry. It is a religious activity, a form of worship. If you gamble in whatever form and place then you are bowing down before the goddess Lady Luck. You are bringing a sacrifice, an offering, to the altar of chance. You are praying: "O Lady Luck. Bless me and keep me; make your face to shine upon me and be gracious to me; lift up our countenance upon me, and give me luck. Let me win big!" As they pay their money and take their chances, gamblers say: "Please, please, let me win!" That's a prayer. Not a prayer to the LORD God. A prayer to another god.

We ought to be warned by what the apostle Paul said in Ephesians 5:5 – *Be sure of this, that no fornicator or impure man, or one who is covetous (that is, an idolater [and that surely includes all gamblers]), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.* The old Lord's Supper form, before it was "improved," barred gamblers from the Table, and rightfully so considering they are barred from the kingdom of Christ and of God.

God said what he would do to those who depended upon Luck in Is. 65:11,12:

But you who forsake the LORD, who forget My holy mountain, who set a table for Fortune and fill cups of mixed wine for Destiny; I will destine you to the sword . . . because . . . you did what was evil in My eyes, and chose what I did not delight in.

Fortune and Destiny were heathen gods of luck and chance. Israel had begun worshipping them. These gods are still around. Their temple is the casino. Their altar is the ticket counter. Their mouths are the slots on the VLTs.

The office betting pool

We can also bring the office betting pool into the picture. You know – the little betting pool of cash won by whomever gets the closest in the basketball or football scores. You might say: "Now you're going too far. The office betting pool is just a bit of harmless fun." Well, not really. The office betting pool is like shop-lifting a candy bar. You are not committing armed robbery but it is still theft. It's like being angry, or hating. It is not murder in the physical sense but your catechism certainly lines it up as a sin against the commandment: "You shall not kill." In the office betting pool you are not stuffing your whole paycheque into the mouth of the VLT, but you are still gambling.

The commandment: "You shall not steal," forbids all greed and all abuse or squandering of God's gifts. That covers all gambling. Gambling, in whatever form, is not one of the ways God allows us to acquire wealth.



The New American Standard Bible and the New International Version

Second of three parts

In the previous issue of *Clarion*, some theoretical questions relevant to the work of translating were dealt with under the title "Faithfulness in Translating." As mentioned there, the report and its appendices has much more to say about such questions. It would be good now to summarize to some degree what the committee's evaluation and recommendation was with respect to two of the three studied translations of Holy Scripture. What follows here this time then, is a selection of part of the actual report, somewhat adapted for our purposes.

G.H. Visscher

The New American Standard Bible

There is no doubt that the translators of the NASB have attempted to produce a faithful translation of the Word of God. And in their estimation, faithful involves "literal." As a pamphlet provided by the Lockman Foundation, entitled "Translators of the NASB," tells us: "The translators did not attempt to interpret Scripture through translation. Instead, the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE translation team adhered to the principles of literal translation. This is the most exacting and demanding method of translation, requiring a word for word translation that is both accurate and readable. This method follows the word and sentence patterns of the original authors in order to enable the readers to study Scripture in its most literal format and to glimpse the individual personalities of the original authors."

Indeed, with respect to the matter of faithfulness to the original languages, we have a lot of admiration for this translation. Often a reader can judge

what is happening in the original language by referring to the NASB. The noting system (in the *Reference Editions*) is also very extensive, giving many meanings that are even more literal as well as many further text references.¹ While it would of course be possible to bring up references to texts where one would disagree with the translation, it cannot be doubted that the NASB is an accurate, reliable translation.

That does not mean however that it has always consistently followed this literal approach. In Appendix 3 § 2.1, we have noted some examples of texts where the NASB is surprisingly free and less accurate.

It is especially, however, with respect to its clarity and readability that the NASB is too often found wanting. Literal is not always better, as meaning and clarity are often sacrificed. Our extensive usage of this translation led us to the conclusion that it is simply too stiff, not lucid enough, and fails to use words the way they are used today. Proper sentence structure is often lacking. Young people would encounter numerous unnecessary problems in reading this translation; even adults often will not grasp its meaning. The fact that it does not arrange the text in a paragraphed manner but treats every verse as a separate unit starting again at the beginning of the page every time even further detracts from its readability.² Thus, it is difficult to recommend this translation as *the one translation* to be used by the churches. That does not mean that it should not be used. On occasion, the NASB has distinguished itself in providing idiomatic translations. The reader who cannot read the original languages, as well as the reader who can,

will find this translation very helpful in studying God's Word. But for reading in other contexts, it simply lacks sufficient fluency and clarity.

We should note that this judgment also agrees with that of previous synod committees. The majority report of the deputies who reported to synod 1980 also came to the conclusion that "the NASB is often too literal to be lucid and clear, and does not render itself suitable for liturgical use."³

This judgment also agrees with that of our Australian sister churches. The Committee reporting to Synod 1990 said:

Putting it quite simply: the NASB's wooden style, lack of clarity and poor readability are its major drawbacks. . . .

Is the NASB a valuable translation of the Scriptures? The answer must be "Yes." But its value lies not in its potential as a family, Church or school Bible. It is a reliable translation which provides valuable information to anyone studying the Scriptures. Its aim of staying close to the Greek and Hebrew provides the attentive student (whether theologian or "layman") with a wealth of information about original languages, and a useful check on other more idiomatic translations such as the RSV or the NIV. This is where its strength lies.⁴

In the light of all this then, while our committee felt that the NASB was too literal and stiff for use in the worship services and many other contexts, we did not feel right about passing it entirely by. Especially for study purposes, this translation is of great worth. Hence, while cognizant of the fact that synod

mandated us to recommend *one* translation, we still took the liberty in our final recommendations to urge synod to “remind the churches about the usefulness of the *New American Standard Bible* for study purposes.”

The New International Version

The Preface to this translation tells us that their goal has been to produce more than just a literal translation. “The first concern for the translators has been the accuracy of the translation and its fidelity to the thought of the biblical writers. . . . At the same time, they have striven for more than a word-for-word translation. Because thought patterns and syntax differ from language to language, faithful communication of the meaning of the writers of the Bible demands frequent modifications in sentence structure and constant regard for the contextual meanings of words.” Its promotional literature tells us furthermore, that

its method is an eclectic one with the emphasis for the most part on a flexible use of concordance and equivalence, but with a minimum of literalism, paraphrase, or outright dynamic equivalence. In other words, the NIV stands on middle ground – by no means the easiest position to occupy. It may fairly be said that the translators were convinced that, through long patience in seeking the right words, it is possible to attain a high degree of faithfulness in putting into clear and idiomatic English what the Hebrew and Greek texts say. Whatever literary distinction the NIV has is the result of the persistence with which this course was pursued.⁵

In using this translation then, there is absolutely no doubt about the fact that of the three, the NIV presents us with the best and the most modern English. For its readability and its clarity, this translation deserves much praise. Here is language those in the pew will have little difficulty understanding; nor does it take much to warm the hearts of children to its word usage.

It is the question of accuracy that has kept us busy, however. Is this translation accurate enough or its translation methodology such that there simply is too much freedom taken with the text? As a result of a great deal of study of the translation and also the theory of translation, however, there are several points which should be noted.

i. The NIV has wrestled to a greater degree with the need for *clarity* in trans-

lation, as Professor Holwerda has urged (see our final article). It has attempted to strike a balance between a high degree of faithfulness to the text and clarity for the modern reader in the best possible English.

ii. The NIV is a *fresh* translation of the Bible. Unlike the NASB and the NKJV, which are revisions of existing translations, the NIV has been willing to look at the text anew and follow it rather than tradition, if necessary. This is a positive point; while not neglecting how previous generations have understood the Word, it is still the Word that is normative and not the understanding of previous generations.

iii. This does *not* mean the NIV is a *perfect* translation. There are no perfect translations. We have found occasions when the NIV is more free than we believe to be acceptable and on these points the translators really should be called to account on the basis of their own commitment to the authority of Scripture. In fact, one of the positive factors about the NIV (and the NASB for that matter) is the fact that regular revisions are planned and that their executive committee has assured us that they “would welcome comments and suggestions” that any synod committee of ours might make. When we remember that our previous synod committees have been influential on the RSV, this is an important point which we can make ample use of especially in the light of their commitment to the authority of Scripture.

iv. It should be noted, however, that both as committee and as individuals it was frequently our experience that very often when our initial reaction to a NIV translation was negative, further study and investigation convinced us that the NIV translators had taken into account all the factors involved and had actually rendered the *best translation* of the three versions. If it is true that the NIV has a reputation for being too free, this is no doubt partly due to the fact that the resources and abilities to check out the readings are not always present.

v. In light of the above, it is not correct to say the NIV is a “dynamic equivalent translation.” Whereas an undisciplined use of the dynamic equivalence method can lead to outright paraphrases such as *The Good News for Modern Man (Today’s English Version)*, *the Living Bible, etc.*,⁶ the NIV makes only a cautious use of this method and has no intention of being a dynamic equivalent translation. Our text studies also con-

firm that in practice it does not predominantly follow this approach. The NIV undoubtedly has dynamic equivalent aspects within it – more so than the other translations no doubt – but that does not make it a dynamic equivalent translation. Rather than belong in Beekman and Callow’s category of unacceptable types (unduly free), the NIV has to be placed in the category of the *acceptable types* (modified literal or idiomatic). (See our previous article, figure 2).

vi. It should also be noted that in Christian circles in general the NIV has met with a great deal of receptivity. This is a version that has shown its staying power as opposed to so many others that have risen only to disappear from sight shortly thereafter. Moreover, it is apparent as well from the reviews that we have received that the NIV has a high degree of respect in scholarly circles. Biblical scholars clearly acknowledge that this is a translation that must be reckoned with.

It is good to alert our community to the fact that the NIV’s popularity and positive aspects does not mean that it is not being opposed. We are told that even the translators of the King James Bible had to face this problem as they were accused of relegating correct renderings to the margin by those who stubbornly clung to the Geneva Bible, the Great Bible or the Bishops’ Bible.⁷ J. P. Lewis mentions that “the NIV translators are now in the throes of that process.”⁸ Our readers may know, for instance, of a book by Robert Martin, entitled *Accuracy of Translation and the New International Version*, which is very critical of the NIV and initially alarming. We would refer those who have read this book, however, to our appendix 9 where we have carefully reviewed it and shown that his views are often simplistic, his demands extreme, and his concerns unrealistic. Our conclusion there is that “Martin is not very helpful in assessing the NIV because his understanding of the process of translation is oversimplified and his criterion for a good translation is unbalanced.”⁹ While we certainly need to be on guard against unfaithfulness in translation, it is no less true that we need to be on guard against those who falsely make such accusations.

It should also be mentioned that many of the other concerns that are often raised against the NIV need to be seen out of the perspective that the NIV has attempted to reach a better quality of English than many other translations. One might object, for instance, to

shortening some of the longer Greek sentences. Similarly, the omission of words like "and," "for," etc. is particularly troubling to the reader who knows the original languages and recognizes behind them their original equivalent. The NIV translators would defend all this however, from the perspective of the nature of the English language. It is a rule in the English language that lengthy sentences be avoided – one sentence should contain basically one thought. Likewise, in English it is considered improper to begin sentences with words like "and" or "for", etc.; whereas they might add something to the Greek or Hebrew, if they do not add anything to the understanding of the English reader the rule is that they should be omitted. A key to lucid English is the omission of all unnecessary words. As committee, we have mixed feelings on this point. While the goal of high quality English is certainly laudable and it is good to realize that this is the NIV motive, we are not convinced that all of this is really necessary. This too may very well be a matter for further study and review, with possible recommendations to the NIV Translation Center. In the meantime however, it is good to remember the comment of one authority: "The NIV is closer in style and form to the RSV than to any other English version. . . . The principles that guided it in textual, exegetical, linguistic and stylistic matters are hardly distinguishable from those which guided the RSV." For us then it will continue to "sound like the Bible."¹⁰

Another concern to our membership may be the fact that the NIV has abandoned the use of "thee" and "thou" in reference to God. Many in our membership will lament this fact. It is important to note two points here, however. First, since there is nothing in the original language that necessitates the use of these formal pronouns for God, to what degree can we insist on their usage? Must it not remain therefore a matter of preference rather than principle? Second, one who objects to the NIV on this point will have to object to the NKJV on the very same point, and will undoubtedly have to object to the next edition of the NASB. The demise of such language appears inevitable.

In summary then, we would be the last ones to maintain that the NIV is a perfect translation. In an imperfect world, perfection is not attainable even here. But in our considered opinion, the New International Version is the best al-

ternative before us. Hence, while reminding synod about the limited usefulness of the NASB, we have advised Synod Abbotsford 1995 that the *New International Version* should be considered the "one translation which can be positively recommended for use by the churches."¹¹ Moreover, with respect to the future, we have recommended that Synod also "appoint a committee which would receive comments from churches and/or members about passages in the NIV in need of improvement, scrutinize those comments, and pass on valid concerns to the NIV Translation Center."

In conclusion, perhaps the best we can do is consider the final words of our third appendix to the effect that the NIV is simply the finest translation when all the criteria and the relative importance of the different factors are taken into consideration. Furthermore, this translation takes all of Scripture into account and is true to the Word of God.

The clarity and readability of the NIV may spark a renewed interest in personal Bible reading and study among young and old and stimulate anew the exploring of the treasures of God's Word. It is somehow difficult to imagine the English of the NASB and NKJV sparking that kind of response.

¹⁰It should be pointed out however that not all editions of the NASB make this available. One needs to look specifically for a "Reference Edition" of the NASB.

¹¹It should be noted though that "paragraphed" editions have been printed by Holman Bible Publishers. But this is not generally the policy of the Lockman Foundation and one has to specifically search for such an edition.

¹²*Acts of General Synod Smithville 1980*, 232. More about this point is mentioned in our Appendix 3, § 3.3.1.

¹³*Acts of 1990 Synod and Reports of the 1990 Synod of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia*, 150-1.

¹⁴*The Story of the New International Version*, (N.J.: International Bible Society, 1978), 12-13.

¹⁵It is important to remember, for example, that when Dr. J. van Bruggen in *The Future of the Bible* (Nelson, 1978) critiques dynamic equivalent translations he has especially these latter versions in mind rather than the NIV.

¹⁶S.L. Greenslade, "English Versions of the Bible, 1525-1611," *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, volume 3. Edited by S.L. Greenslade. (Cambridge, 1963), 167-8. Cf. F.F. Bruce, *History of the Bible in English* (3rd ed., Oxford, 1978), 106-7.

¹⁷*The English Bible from KJV to NIV: A History and Evaluation* (Baker, 1991), 328.

¹⁸170. Another book that is very critical of the NIV is *The NIV Reconsidered: a Fresh Look at a Popular Translation* by Earl Radmacher and Zane Hodges, which we have reviewed in appendix 8. This book too suffers from a bias in that it wishes to persuade us that only the NKJV is a faithful translation.

¹⁹R.G.Bratcher, as quoted in appendix 1, 41.

²⁰Mandate for the committee, *Acts Synod Lincoln 1992*, article 35, 22. **C**

TO ALL VBS VOLUNTEERS IN SOUTHERN ONTARIO

We have operated an annual Vacation Bible School in Burlington (East) for around 30 years, and we still wonder if we can improve in our approach, our programs, our contact with the parents, our promotion efforts, etc.

In short, are we on the right track? We all know that we should not always be looking out for immediate results. After all, the Lord only expects us to be faithful, and we are assured that He will do the rest!

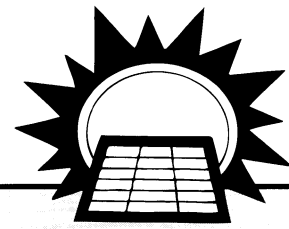
We have the evening of **April 21, 1995** set aside to talk about these matters, and we have found our Rev. G. VanDooren willing to give us a little inspirational talk of about 10 minutes. And then take ample time to exchange views and ideas with everyone present. The meeting starts at 8:00 p.m. The coffee is on us, and we will meet in the Fellowship Hall, which will hold about 100 people.

And instead of just doing this for our own volunteer staff, this invitation is hereby extended to anyone who is interested. You may be living in a congregation where VBS has never been offered, or where VBS has not worked too well. It does not matter, please come to listen. You may have a good feeling about the way your program has been running, please come and tell us about it! Let us share our experiences for the sake of our work in God's Kingdom.

If you have any questions about this invitation, please contact any of the following: Marg Spithoff (905) 639-7452; Henny Alkema (905) 632-5154; Tinie Koning (905) 634-9479, or the undersigned at (905) 632-2125.

Hope to see you on April 21, D.V.

Arie J. Hordyk,
1995 VBC Director
3386 Regal Rd.,
Burlington, ON L7N 1L8



By Mrs. R. Ravensbergen

"My soul longs, yea faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God."
Psalm 84:2

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

The Lord has taken care of His people right from the time of Creation. His Creation was perfect right into the smallest details. God created the world as a place where His children could live and serve Him. He knew what we, people, would need in order to function well. Therefore the Lord did not create a chaotic world, but it was a place with order and structure. Every animal, plant, star and insect had his own place and task. There were boundaries for the seas, the oceans, the lakes and the rivers. There was a time to work and there was a time to sleep. There was also one day out of seven to rest from the everyday activities and to worship the Lord. That is how the Lord wanted it, because He knew the needs of His children: they needed to rest from their work, but even more they needed to be reminded of God, their Creator. On that seventh day of the week God wanted to be praised and glorified. The parents could tell their children all the things they knew about the Lord and all the people together could worship Him and thank Him.

The time of the Old Testament is long ago and many things have changed. But the Lord is still the same, and so is His creation with its laws and structures. We experience that, because we still have that routine of six days of work and one day of rest. Fortunately we live in a country where we are allowed to carry on with that and where we can say "No" to working on Sundays. We are also allowed to have our churches and to worship the Lord as members of the Church of Jesus Christ.

To go to church on Sundays is not just a thing that we are used to doing. It is a privilege, something we are allowed to do and at the same time the Lord wants us to do it. By going to His House and worshipping Him, we show our thankfulness to the Lord for being His children; we also do it in obedience to Him. God calls His covenant children to come together in His name and to listen to what He has to say to us.

Sometimes "Sunday" is called "the Day of the Lord." That is a good name for the Sunday, for it shows that it is a day set apart for the Lord. When you want to celebrate that special day for the Lord you do not stay home and worship Him all alone. If at all possible you want to go to God's house, where His people are, and where He speaks to His people. When we worship together as a congregation, that is as members of the body of Christ, then we are in the presence of the most holy God. That is the reason why we go to church; to worship the Lord in His congregation. By the mouth of the minister, or maybe sometimes an elder, the Lord speaks to us: in His blessing, in His law, in the reading of His Word, and in the sermon. And we may respond to that by singing, by confessing our sins, by praying and by putting our money into the collection bag.

The church service is a time of visiting with the Lord. He speaks to us and we are allowed to return to Him some of His gifts to us. After the fall into sin our lives were lost. But the Lord gave us His Son. By dying for us the Son renewed our lives. He took away our sins so that the Lord could accept us again as His children. We now can be assured that all God's promises for eternal happiness are for us. That is a lot to be thankful for. Of course, we serve the Lord everyday, but on Sundays the Lord gives us a special opportunity to meet Him, to thank Him, and to praise Him for His wonderful deeds. Would you want to miss that opportunity? To hear from His

Word that all those things are really true. To receive His blessing so that we can do our work again for the week that lays ahead. And to be together with all the other members of the congregation, all our brothers and sisters in the Lord, like members of a big family. If you go to church because you have to, or because you like the minister, or the organist, or because your friend goes there, your enthusiasm will soon die down. If you go to church for the people then you will be disappointed and you may find the church services rather boring. But if you go there because the Lord calls you and you participate in everything with all your might, then it is the most exciting thing of the whole week.

What if you cannot go to church because you are sick or bedridden, maybe for a very long time? Then you have to miss out on meeting with the Lord and His congregation, and that is not easy. Probably the minister and the elders will come to visit you regularly, and you may be able to listen to tapes. For even when you are sick, you are still a member of the congregation. You will experience that the congregation prays for you in church, and many of the members will do that, too, at home. Those prayers will be heard by the Lord, and He will help you to cope with your circumstances. His Holy Spirit will also work in your heart the sure knowledge that you are His child. That through Christ Jesus, our Saviour, also your sins are forgiven. Then you can still celebrate the Lord's Day by trying to participate in your mind in all the things that are going on in church, and the Lord will help you in that. For even though He is meeting with His people in church, He will be with you at the same time. And so, even from a distance, you can thank the Lord for all His goodness, you can praise His name and you can even receive His blessing.

The church of Jesus Christ includes all God's people, whether they are gathered in large numbers or small numbers, even when a member is sick at home or in a hospital. That church prays and continues to pray for the fulfillment of God's promises. And all together we wait for the final Day of the Lord, on which He will return to renew the heaven and the earth, to restore sickness and handicaps, and to enable us to enter the place where we will meet with the Lord for ever and ever.

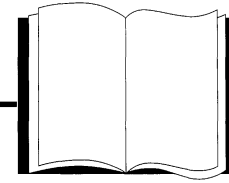
*From strength to strength God's people go,
and He to them His face will show
In Zion's courts, His holy dwelling.
O LORD, Thou God of hosts, give ear;
O Jacob's God, in mercy hear,
Thy steadfast promises fulfilling.
O God, our king and shield behold;
To him Thy power and love unfold* Psalm 84:4

Birthdays in May:

- 4: Debbie Veenstra**, RR 1, Sherkeston, ON L0S 1R0
- 26: Dan Hlozyk**, c/o R. Ravensbergen, 7462 Hwy. 20, RR 1, Smithville, ON L0R 2A0
- 30: Bernie DeVos**, "ANCHOR HOME," 361 30 Rd. RR 2, Beamsville, ON L0R 1B0

Happy Birthday to all of you and until next month,

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



The last days and covenant judgment

The views expressed in Readers's Forum are not necessarily those of the editorial committee or the publisher. Submissions should not exceed 900 words. Those published may be edited for style or length.

The 900 word limitation imposed on letters to the editor is too restricted to do justice to the matter I would like to address. I will nonetheless attempt to stay within the bounds.

In my opinion a thought construction is prevalent in our circles concerning what is called "the last days," "antichrist," and the explication of Matthew 24 and corresponding Scripture passages.

In *Clarion*, January 13, 1995, Rev. R. Aasman writes about "Scripture passages which speak of great apostasy in the last days, as well as the persecution of the church (Rev. 13)" (page 5). On page 8 we read: "The day of the Lord Jesus Christ marks the end of the last days. Another way of saying this is that the Day of Christ means the end of 'the present age' (see, for example, Matt. 13:39-40, 49) and the beginning of the 'age to come' (Matt. 12:32)."

A mere *reference* to the above passages does not necessarily explain them. For in Matt. 13:14 the Lord Jesus says: "With them (the unbelieving Jews - HdJ) indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah which says: . . ." (please read what follows in the verses 14 and 15).

It is clear that these words do not apply to the whole wide world, but to the unbelieving Jews. In verse 36 of the same chapter the disciples ask for further explanation, and in verse 37 the Lord Jesus says: "He who sows the good seed is the Son of man; the field is the world." Where was the Lord Jesus sowing: in the whole wide world, or in Israel? As said before, the prophecy of Isaiah applied to the unbelieving Jews - they were the world, the field. Therefore

verse 36 says: "Then he left the crowds and went into the house." The Greek word "cosmos" that is here translated with "world" can have several meanings, depending on the context (space does not allow further elaboration).

Rev. Schouten already pointed out that the Jews used the terms "the present age" and "the age to come" (see above). "The present age" was the time in which they lived, and "the age to come," also called the messianic era, follows this period. The last days of "the present age" were in sight. The last days fall within the apostolic era (see also Calvin's Commentary on Micah 4:1, 2).

The Hebrews could see the Day drawing near (Heb. 10:25), namely by the signs foretold by the Lord Jesus, amongst others in Matt. 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. The writer to the Hebrews significantly refers to "these last days" in chapter 1:2. Much more can be said about this and the preceding, but not in 900 words.

Rev. Schouten says: "It is no surprise, then, that the New Testament proclaims the Day of the Lord Jesus to be 'near'." That is true, but this does not refer to the last coming of the Lord Jesus, but to his coming in wrath against the unbelieving Jews, in covenant judgment by the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem. *That is when the Lord Jesus came.*

This judgment is described in prophetic language in Matt 13:39, 40 as well as in Matt. 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. The earlier prophets spoke in similar terms, for instance Is. 13:10, 34:4, 27:13; Dan. 7:13,14; Zech. 12:11-14, etc. The disciples understood this ter-

minology, which they had heard from their youth in the synagogue.

Rev. Schouten is correct when he states that the Lord Jesus can come any day. This statement immediately nullifies the tale that the antichrist would have to come first, as is so often claimed (see *Clarion* 43, 9, 10, 11).

I would like to end by noting that various opinions are preached in the name of the Lord concerning the coming of the Lord Jesus, antichrist, the persecution of the church, etc. There is nothing in passages such as Matt. 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 that refers to the final coming of the Lord Jesus, while this is often presented from the pulpit, without any real proof. Can such preaching be considered true administering of the Word? The apostle Paul says in 1 Cor. 4:6: "I have applied all this to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brethren, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written." This is enough for us.

Thank you for publishing this letter.

H. DeJong
Edmonton



CORRECTION:

A reference to a source used for my article "Teen Suicide" (44, 5, pp. 113-14) fell away. I gratefully acknowledge the use of the Focus on the Family video by Bob de Moss entitled *Learn to Discern*.

G. van Popta

By Karen Kuik

Shout For Joy!

The 1995 CRTA Convention (Ontario) and the CRTA 25th Anniversary Celebration

As if to set the mood for the annual two-day Canadian Reformed Teachers' Association Convention, the morning of Thursday, February 16, dawned with bright skies and beautiful sunshine. Approximately 140 people participated in the well-organized convention held at the Maranatha-Emmanuel School in Fergus, including teachers of all grade levels, speakers, an education committee member and other guests. The theme of the convention was taken from Psalm 47:1, "Clap your hands, all peoples! Shout to God with loud songs of joy!"

Our first morning began with an inspirational address on the theme, Shout for Joy. Interspersed with singing, a slide show and a choral recitation, Rev. C. Bosch made the theme come alive for us. A vibrant speaker, he reminded us that the forces of this world are trying to rob us of our joy, but that the Bible speaks in the imperative: shout for joy. Learning involves actively interpreting the meaning of God's Word, and what better reason could there be for joy? It is, after all, our Father's world, even though others may sing, We are the world. Realistically, of course, Reformed teachers may know discouragement, but we should not be surprised, for the Invader also has a program and a methodology of attack. Let us be careful to wear the armour of God, to do much earnest and practical searching of His Word and to carry our joy beyond Sunday and singing, into all areas of life, including our classrooms.

Thus encouraged, we proceeded through the remainder of this day by attending our selected workshops, of which there was a variety. Some workshops focused on a curriculum area (math, music, language arts, geography, science), and some on a broader topic (special learners, classroom activities, the bullied child). It was evident from these workshops that much can be learned from sharing each other's tal-

ents, and the practical advice and shared concerns rejuvenated us to return with joy and commitment to our teaching. The afternoon concluded with a business meeting and a rousing game of volleyball for those interested.

After a supper break, the participants returned to the school to join a large crowd, all interested in hearing a panel presentation on "Christian Education: Do We Really Have Something to Shout About?" The moderator for the evening was Mr. Peter Witten, principal of the Fergus school, who introduced the topic and the four speakers.

The first speaker was Mr. Allan Buist, past graduate of Guido de Brès High School and current law student. He began by reminding us that an emphasis on the weaknesses of our schools does not imply a lack of confidence in them, but a sincere desire to continue investing our talents. We have perhaps allowed Christian education to become a habit, rather than a reflective process. He identified two premises: Christian schools do not teach different things, but the same things differently; and, process is paramount to content. Among other things, he further observed that we must improve in teaching students to think critically, and make them more aware of ambiguities: in university, people are not so much antagonistic to God as they simply do not account for Him at all. Students should also learn that other Christians, although different from ourselves, are not thereby hypocrites, and can form a support group in the face of the broader struggle.

The second speaker was Mr. Henry Plantinga, former teacher off-time board member and parent. He defined worldly wisdom as the worship of self, and Satan's weapons as ideas and beliefs. He emphasized the importance of a strong Christian family life. Our schools can only be something to shout for joy about if our families are. We must not forfeit responsibility to our

schools. He asked several questions to provoke thoughts: who or what sets the standards in our homes? are parents taking an active role in the attitudes of their children, also at school? do our children see that we live by our words? is it obvious in our homes that we love what God loves and hate what God hates? do our lives rely totally on God's grace?

The third speaker was Mr. Johan Plug, former teacher, current student at our Theological College, and parent. He noted that shouting can be a signal of war as well as victory, which are both appropriate for us. Psalm 47 was sung by Israel, God's Old Testament people, segregated from the world. This segregation was a blessing, but it had its dangers, namely, developing a sense of superiority and taking blessings for granted. Defeat sometimes came because of a hollowing out of the inside, not an attack from outside. Likewise our Christian schools face dangers. Too much ignorance of the world can cause students to rely on stereotypes that do not represent the reality they will later face. Filtered material used in our schools does not contain any evidence of Christian living, which should be our reality. A high degree of similarity among our students can lead to self-satisfaction and lack of awareness of the need for daily conversion. The school family, if not functioning properly, can lead to alienation even from the church.

The final speaker was Mr. Ronn VanAndel, high school teacher and parent. He identified the connection between parents and teachers as being best able to assist our schools, in that both parents and teachers must be role models. It is not up to the schools to produce Christ-confessing graduates. The entire community has the task of modelling. School and home must have fundamental similarities, and when they don't, students must still see that adults interact in a loving, caring manner. In this way they will understand



Our surprise speaker, Mr. Ewoud Gosker, highlight of our 25th anniversary celebration.



Sing "Clap Your Hands," based on Psalm 47, the text and our theme.



Panel members listening attentively to questions from the audience. From left to right: Mr. Allan Buist, Mr. Henry Plantinga, Mr. Johan Plug, Mr. Ronn Van Anel

that Scripture must be internalized and lived. The supremacy of the family is the ultimate factor in education.

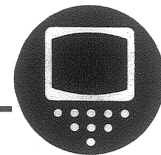
A discussion period followed these presentations, in which the audience showed as genuine a concern for improving Christian education as the speakers had done, as well as a great deal of thankfulness for the blessings we already have.

A good night's rest prepared us for our second day. After devotions, we proceeded to another two rounds of workshops, and then came the special highlight: the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the CRTA. We began with a roast beef dinner, ably prepared and served by students of the Fergus high school, under the direction of the Convention Committee. To enliven our celebration, we matched voices to names. Various teachers had been recorded (unawares) while answering the question: What does teaching mean to you? The responses were truly varied, and some were probably not what would have been spoken had the tape

recorder been in sight! We were then entertained by the Maranatha-Emmanuel Student Chorus, under the direction of Mrs. Bonnie Bouwman, accompanied by Miss Lydia VanVeen. Following three devotional selections, the students brought smiles to our faces by singing about lost homework, Friday afternoon desk clean-up and its discoveries, and hoping for a snow day. We then could turn our attention to our much-anticipated surprise guest speaker. The planning committee and generous business donations had made it possible to bring Mr. Ewoud Gosker to our convention from Meppel, The Netherlands. Mr. Gosker was a teacher in Smithers and Hamilton in the 1970s, was instrumental in the planning stages of Guido de Brès High School, was a participant in the CRTA's beginnings, and is well-remembered (by the "old-timers") for the enthusiasm he brought to teaching. He addressed us with humility, as only a "small cog in the kingdom wheel of education," but with sincerity and joy, reminiscing on his early

experiences in Canada. He reflected on the idealism which he held at that time, which may since have been tempered by realism, but which contained his real desire to have God shown in everything, since indeed, He is everywhere. He reminded us that being active in our work is good, but we must not steal time for this work from our families. With other anecdotes and heartfelt words, he brought home to us again our theme of joy, speaking also of his envy at the size of our group: larger than the 1970s, but not so large that we cannot reach each other anymore: something to treasure.

Our convention drew to a close with words of thanks being expressed for the work of Miss Ann Wierenga and Mrs. Rikki Westrik, organizers of the successful two days. Suitable words were expressed in the closing remarks and prayer and we ended our 1995 CRTA Convention with renewed joy in the gifts of Christian fellowship and service. C



Press Release of Classis Ontario South of March 8-9, 1995, held at Smithville, ON

1. Rev. K. Kok, on behalf of the convening church at Blue Bell, opened with requesting the delegates to sing Psalm 1:1-3 and reading 1 Tim. 6:11-21, and leading in prayer. He noted the following items of memorabilia: Rev. Cl. Stam declined a call to Toronto; Rev. G. Snip is considering a call to Edmonton; Rev. P. Kingma continues to have health concerns. Rev. Kok welcomed all visitors, especially Br. M. Hoogerdijk who came for his preparatory exam, and the students of John Calvin School.

2. The credentials were examined by the delegates of the convening church and were found to be in good order.

3. Classis was declared constituted with the following moderamen; chairman, Rev. J. DeGelder; clerk, Rev. G. Wieske; vice-chairman, Rev. J. VanWoudenberg.

4. The chairman thanked Blue Bell for its work as convening church. The agenda was adopted with some additions.

5. Preparatory exam of Br. M. Hoogerdijk:

a. Br. M. Hoogerdijk presented the proper documentation to classis for the preparatory exam. He then presented his sermon proposal on Luke 7:11-16. In closed session classis decided the exam could continue.

b. Rev. D.G. J. Agema led the exam of Old Testament exegesis, examining specifically on 2 Sam 6:1-23.

c. After lunch, singing Psalm 85:1, and roll call, Rev. J. VanWoudenberg led the exam of New Testament exegesis, examining specifically on Acts 19:1-22.

d. Rev. Cl. Stam led the exam on doctrine and creeds.

e. In closed session classis decided not to declare Br. Hoogerdijk eligible for call. This decision was conveyed to Br. Hoogerdijk by the moderamen.

6. With regards to the appeals, classis decided to break till supper to allow the members of classis to read the appeals with a view to deciding on admissibility.

7. After supper the chairman reopened the meeting, requesting the brothers to sing Psalm 147:1,2. Roll call was held and a special welcome was extended to all the visitors who came to hear the discussion about the relationship between the Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church at Hamilton and the Hamilton Independent Christian Reformed Church.

a. Classis decided to express its joy over the relationship which has grown between the Cornerstone Canadian Re-

formed Church and the Mt. Hamilton Independent Christian Reformed Church.

b. Cornerstone Church asked classis to give advice on the following: "that individual requests regarding admission of each other's members to the Lord's Supper celebration, after due consideration and the presentation of a suitable attestation, be considered acceptable by classis for our local situation." Classis advised Cornerstone Church not to proceed in this way (C.O. 61).

c. Cornerstone Church asked classis to give advice on the following: "that Rev. R. Sikkema be permitted to conduct worship services in the Cornerstone Church, when invited by the consistory, as well as Rev. Cl. Stam conducting the same in the Mount Hamilton Independent Christian Reformed Church. This is to be seen as a local arrangement only. To further this end, both ministers are willing to undergo an official "colloquium" with their respective consistories, of which a report will be sent to classis. (Note: it is to be understood that the arrangement does not make Rev. R. Sikkema a minister in the Canadian Reformed Churches)." Classis advised Cornerstone Church not to proceed in this way.

d. Cornerstone Church asked classis to give advice on the following: "that after proper consultation and upon mutual agreement, transfer of membership (be attestation) between the two congregations may be considered on a case to case basis (e.g. in situations of marriage)." Classis advised Cornerstone Church not to proceed in this way (C.O. 62). The chairman requested the delegates to sing Hymn 6, and led in prayer. Classis adjourned till March 9 at 9:00 a.m.

e. The chairman reopened the meeting by requesting to sing Psalm 111:1,2. He then read Luke 18:18-30 and led in prayer. He welcomed all the delegates and visitors. Roll call was held: two delegates were replaced by their alternates. Classis decided to advise Cornerstone Church that representatives from the Hamilton Independent Christian Reformed Church be welcomed at classis as observers and receive the privilege of the floor at the discretion of classis.

f. Cornerstone Church asked classis to give advice on this point: "that co-operation is maintained by both congregations with respect to mission work and evangelism." Classis advised not to go in this direction.

h. Classis decided to request Cornerstone Church to send on a regular basis relevant information regarding the developments in the local situation in Hamilton,

to the churches in Classis Ontario South, as well as to future classes.

i. The chairman wished the consistory of Cornerstone Church the blessings of the Lord in their contact with the Independent Christian Reformed Church of Hamilton.

8. With regards to the appeal of the Presbytery of the Mid-Atlantic, classis decided this appeal was inadmissible, because non-church members have no admittance to the major assemblies. Their possibility of appeal begins and ends at the level of consistory.

9. In closed session classis began to deal with three appeals. After lunch the chairman requested classis to sing Psalm 119:49. Classis continued to deal with the appeals. After supper the chairman requested classis to sing Hymn 29:1,2. Roll call was held. Classis then finished the appeals.

10. Question Period (C.O. 44) was held. Classis took note that it should be kept in mind that Church Visitors be appointed from among the more experienced ministers (C.O. 46). In closed session a number of discipline cases were discussed. Classis gave its advice.

11. Classis decided to gratefully accept the report of the Fund for Needy Churches and to accept the assessment for 1995 of \$18.00 per communicant member. The Ancaster Church was thanked for its work in the past year, and reappointed to administer the fund for the coming year.

12. Church visitation reports to Rockway, Smithville and London were given.

13. Appointments:

a. convening church for next classis: Chatham.

b. date for next classis: June 14, 1995.

c. place for next classis: Ancaster.

d. suggested moderamen: Rev. D.G.J. Agema (chairman), Rev. J. DeGelder (clerk), Rev. G. Wieske (vice-chairman).

14. Personal question period was held.

15. Censure (C.O. 44) was not necessary. The chairman expressed much gratitude for this.

16. The Acts and the press release were read and adopted.

17. On behalf of classis, the vice-chairman thanked the chairman for his very able chairmanship. The chairman thanked the women who served classis with meals and coffee for two full days. He then requested classis to sing Hymn 64:1,4. The clerk then led in prayer of thanksgiving, after which the chairman closed classis.

For Classis Ontario South
March 8-9, 1995,

Rev. J. VanWoudenberg
(vice-chairman e.t.)

