



Clarion

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*Suffering
Servant . . .
Saved Sinners*



Hebrews 5:7,8

Numbers

10:1-10



The Character of Confessions

For many people, the word *doctrine* has a negative meaning. The term makes them think of statements that are merely abstract and theoretical. Doctrine is regarded as lacking in feeling, emotion, warmth and experience. Who, they ask, can get excited about cold doctrine in a confessional statement? Perhaps this was possible fifty years ago, but for us who live in the “post-modern” era, this is unworkable. For our generation, doctrine has no attraction and hence no real importance. What is needed in this time is personal and individual excitement rather than some communal, cold and impersonal truths.

Many people, then, perceive a contrast between the needs of today and what they regard as the thinking of yesterday. By “yesterday,” we mean the period of thirty to fifty years ago, when many of our parents and grandparents were involved in a struggle about the doctrines of the church, baptism and covenant. In contrast with that era of doctrinal emphasis and struggle, there are many in our time who assert that we must be much more oriented to personal life experience of God. The stress in our time is on Christ as one’s personal Saviour. The important questions of today are not focused on good and sound doctrine. Instead, the focus is on whether one has made a personal decision for Christ and has personally committed his life to Christ?

In what follows, I will endeavour to show that this way of thinking sets up a false contrast between doctrine and personal faith. Lord’s Day Seven of the *Heidelberg Catechism* shows us the right direction for a truly Scriptural and hence Reformed way of thinking about the connection between doctrine and personal faith. In this article I make use of

what Dr. K. Schilder wrote in his work on the Catechism (see also box).

The Answer

In Question and Answer twenty-one of the Catechism, we confess that true faith is a **sure knowledge** whereby I accept as true all that God has revealed to us in His Word and is at the same time . . . a **firm confidence** that not only to others, but also to me, God has granted forgiveness of sins. In other words, true faith is sure knowledge of and firm confidence in what God promises us in His Word, that is, in the Gospel. Thus, Lord’s Day seven describes faith as knowing and trusting. Here faith means the faith with which we believe.

Just as important for our present topic is Question and Answer twenty-two. In response to the Question, *What, then, must a Christian believe?*, the Catechism states, *All that is promised us in the Gospel, which the articles of our catholic and undoubted Christian faith teach us in a summary.*

In its use of the term “promised,” Answer twenty-two is remarkable and noteworthy. After all, Answer twenty-one of the Catechism defined faith as consisting in part of “a sure knowledge whereby I accept as true all that God has revealed to us in His Word.” On the basis of this Answer’s stress on knowledge, one could expect as Answer to the next Question (“What, then, must a Christian believe?”) something like “All that is **taught** us in the Gospel.” Yet, the Catechism does not use the word “taught.” Instead, it uses the word “promised.” Naturally, this word does not undermine the reality that in our confessions we have teachings or doctrine. Yet, by using the word “promised,” the Catechism gives a specific charac-

Dr. K. Schilder wrote the following on the last pages of vol. 2 of his explanation of the Heidelberg Catechism: The Heidelberg Catechism dares to call the contents of the Twelve Articles an explication of the contents of the promises of God. And since our faith is faith in the triune God as our God, this faith, being the fruit of God’s own regenerating power, implies a living communion (levensgemeenschap) with the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. This faith is that always again, in trusting surrender, turning to the Founder and Finisher [of faith, Christ Jesus] in such a way that there is between these two [the Lord and the believer] that intimate bond of life (levensverbintenis) which shows itself in this living, warm relation (levenswarme relatie) (p.597-598).

Schilder continues:

[H]erewith the character of every confession, every so-called symbol, including the Apostles’ Creed, is determined. Exactly because the confessor does not proclaim just a set of “truths” but confesses to have and possess this [triune] God as his portion, for that very reason the symbol [creed, confession] cannot be explained as a set of “truths”-without-life (“waarheden”-zonder-leven) (p.598).

What counts for the truth, the doctrine, as summarized in the Apostles’ Creed, says Schilder, counts just as much for the Three Forms of Unity and other confessions, in which the teachings of God’s Word are formulated more elaborately and more precisely and distinctly. Schilder says further:

That which just trumpets forth “truths” is not a symbol but, at the most, an ukase [an emperor’s edict]. And so, if people, for the sake of “ecumenicity” agree to drop the more detailed and more precisely formulated confessions in order to go back to the Twelve Articles, they are, in fact, breaking down the essential character of the Apostles’ Creed. For whenever the church formulates its confession in greater detail, it expresses more precisely the riches she has in the Living God, her God. We speak of a being rich unto [in] God, because the Bible itself mentions this being rich unto [in] God (Luke 12:21) (p.598-599).

ter to the doctrine that is confessed. The doctrine is nothing other than a summary of what God promises.

The use of the term “promise” in our confession makes clear that we are dealing with a living relationship of love, namely, the covenant relationship between God and His people. In this relationship, God gives Himself in promise to His people and His people respond to their God with thankful love.

Schilder describes the covenant relationship between God and His people in a variety of rich Scriptural images. In Scripture, the relationship between God and His people is compared to that of a man and his wife as well as to that of a father and his children. In the long history of God and His people, God made Himself known in His mighty deeds of deliverance as well as in deeds of wrath. God also added to His actions a wealth of prophetic explanation. Thus, by the LORD’s actions and words, His children or His wife came to know Him more and more.

Already in Scripture, we see that God’s children speak about Him in accordance with His revelation. We notice this, for example, when they address Him in their prayers. Such prayers as found in Scripture are in themselves also further revelation. However, we can notice in both Psalms and prophets also an element of confessing God in accordance with God’s preceding self-revelation. With great and thankful joy of faith, inspired authors such as David and Isaiah can speak about the LORD as their God. The LORD is their God and the God of all Israel; He is Israel’s Maker and Husband and the Father for all His children.

The confessions of the church should be compared to this Scriptural way of confessing God found in Psalms and Prophets. After listening to God’s self-revelation in His Word about who and what He is and wants to be for His people, the church responds by confessing as with a shout of great and thankful joy that “this God is our God – how marvelously rich we are with Him.

Seen in this Scriptural light, we realize that while our creeds and confessions are certainly doctrinal statements about the truth of God, they are, at the same time, much more than doctrinal statements. They are statements of God’s “Wife” about her marvellous “Husband.” They are expressions of excited children who are proud of this Father as their Father! Yes, in the confessions, God’s children speak about the One who is their Triune God – God their Almighty Father in heaven, their Maker, and God the Son, their Redeemer and God the Holy Spirit Who dwells in them, sanctifying them and renewing them on the way to eternal glory with Him.

Is the confession simply cold doctrine? Perhaps those who dare to say such things are really not interested in what God has revealed about Himself.

If we listen to Schilder, (part of yesterday’s generation), we notice a thankful excitement and deep joy about God as the God of the church and about God as his own God. We also taste in Schilder the will to be obedient to this God by confessing Him precisely according to His Self-revelation. We see in Schilder the desire to speak about the LORD’s Name in no other way that He has spoken about Himself in His Word and not to use His name in vain.

If we seek personal excitement and a personal relationship with God while we reject the confessions as cold, dead doctrine, we create a false contrast and we lose our rich heritage. In fact, we do not merely lose our heritage but actually reject it! If we do this, we are in danger of creating our own image of God as it suits us, an image that is not the God of His Word. Let’s be watchful.



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By H.J.J. Feenstra

BE WISE WITH WISDOM

Wisdom demands that you listen to her

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Lady Wisdom and Miss Foolishness

We continue with the theme of the antithesis. Once your attention has been drawn to it you will discover how often wisdom is contrasted with foolishness. This is especially the case in chapter 9, the last of the introductory chapters, Chapter 10 starts with the same words as Chapter 1: *The Proverbs of Solomon*. Therefore, chapter 10 makes a second start. The chapters 1 - 9 take a peculiar place within the whole book of Proverbs. It is a long introduction to wisdom, dealing with all kinds of preliminary questions: What is wisdom? For whom is wisdom meant? How can it be learned? What is the alternative? In addition, wisdom is praised and sung about. These chapters give a taste of what is in store for you and what you can do with it.

This introduction concludes with chapter 9 by pointing once more and quite clearly to the antithetical nature of true wisdom. Wisdom is represented as a lady, and over against her is placed a restless, noisy woman, Miss Foolishness. Both offer a meal; both send an in-

itation. Yet what a difference in quality, in presentation, in stature; a difference which is ultimately a difference between life and death.

Study this chapter closely and identify the differences between these two ladies.

From Scripture

Proverbs 9

Wisdom – A most serious business

After this short excursion to chapter 9 we return to Proverbs 1. We noted that wisdom can be represented as a person, and in chapter 1 this happens for the first time.

*Wisdom cries aloud in the street;
in the markets she raises her voice. . .*

When we read what this voice has to say (verses 20-33) then we are confronted by the seriousness of the covenant! Already in the third verse of chapter 1 is mention of the covenant. This verse speaks of *righteousness*, and that means living a life in accordance with the right which the Lord has over you and over your life. In other words, this means that you must live in accordance with the covenant which the Lord has made with you and according to which He calls you.

When wisdom warns about the destruction of those who do not listen to her, she makes abundantly clear how serious that warning is. *Give heed to my*

reproof, take my lessons seriously, she calls. Her invitation cannot be compared to a TV spot-advertisement which competes with so many others for the attention of the viewers. She does not say, "Have a look at me also, since you are considering various courses which you might want to follow." Instruction in wisdom is not a course for which you may or may not enrol. It is an essential and vital basic course for your life; it is indispensable. Wisdom says, if you do not come and study with me, things will go wrong. You will then choose for foolishness and for destruction.

The covenant is not a game; wisdom is not a toy. It concerns basic things in complete seriousness. He who listens well shall fare well. The seriousness of the covenant forms the backdrop for this instruction in wisdom. We have to listen because of the serious background of these words; we may listen because of God's election. Therefore, because of the covenant, listening to wisdom can be a most joyful matter. Christians know the connection between *have to* and *may*, between the obligation and the privilege, and the joy this brings. Children already know about this: they have to go to church and they may go to church – both!

Proverbs is also included in Christ's statement that the Scriptures witness of Him. Christ, in whom all the proverbs

What's inside?

"There He was bound that He might free us from our sins. He suffered countless insults that we might never be put to shame. He was innocently condemned to death that we might be acquitted. . . ."

So run the familiar words of the Lord's Supper Form as we hear them read to us every two or three months. The Son who became the Servant suffered to save us sinners. Rev. J. Ludwig of London, ON, writes about this Good Friday theme.

Our editor-in-chief, Prof. Geertsema, writes about the character of confessions. He reminds us of some very good words of the later Dr. K. Schilder.

Dr. J. Boersma continues to place the charismatic movement under the scrutiny of the Scriptures. He arrives at some conclusions about "speaking in tongues."

Rev. Van Oene, a familiar name to *Clarion* readers, begins an examination of the Acts of the past General Synod.

In this issue, you will find a copy of *Evangel*. By this we hope to raise the profile and awareness of this quarterly magazine. The editor, the Rev. D. Moes, asks that you pass it on to a neighbour, a friend or a colleague who needs to hear the evangel.

GvP

have been fulfilled as well, is the truly Wise One. When Proverbs often accuses us and exposes our shortcomings, we may know that He who lived wisdom in full perfection has covered our folly. This faith in Christ will not fail to stimulate us to new obedience, to a

thankful accepting and following of the wisdom taught in this book.

Such wisdom protects and provides safety, especially in contrast to foolishness. Wisdom speaks,
... but he who listens to me will dwell secure

and will be at ease, without dread of evil.

From Scripture Proverbs 1:20 - 33

John 5:39

1 Corinthians 1:18 - 2:16

Compare: Matthew 11:27 - 30 

Miracles, Wonders and Signs

Theological reflections on the charismatic movement⁶

By J. Boersma

The revelatory contents of prophecy and tongues give an indication that they have ceased with the closing of the canon. The question may be asked, however, whether this conclusion is in keeping with the role which tongues played according to the New Testament. Therefore, it is to the question of the role and the purpose of tongues that I now turn. In his Pentecost sermon Peter quotes Joel 2, which had prophesied of Pentecost and in this context had announced “wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth beneath” (Acts 2:19). When Peter applies this passage to the events that are taking place, he comments: “Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs” (2:22). Peter uses the same words that Joel used: wonders and signs. This would make one expect that he would apply the expression “wonders and signs” to the outpouring of the Spirit. This is not the case, however. Peter uses this phrase not to refer to Pentecost, but to Jesus of Nazareth. The wonders and signs that Jesus did were an attestation or an accreditation to his identity.

Why does Peter do this? Why does he speak of the “miracles, wonders and signs” which Jesus did, rather than those which the Holy Spirit is doing now at Pentecost? To understand this we must keep the purpose of the book of Acts in mind. In the very first verse of this account, Luke states that in his gospel he wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach. This means that

Acts is the *continuing* account of Jesus’ acts and teachings. The book of Acts witnesses the exalted Lord at work. Why does Peter speak of the “miracles, wonders and signs” which Jesus did when he was on earth? Peter himself alludes to the reason in the remainder of his speech. With an appeal to Psalm 16 he states that Jesus, the Lord, has been raised and exalted to the right hand of God. From there, Peter says, “He received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.” In other words, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is the work of the exalted Lord. The outpouring of the Spirit is one of those acts which Jesus *continues* to do now that He is at the right hand of the Father. Just as Jesus did “wonders and signs” when He was on earth, so He does “wonders and signs” when He pours out His Spirit.

Attestations

Peter not only speaks of “wonders and signs.” He precedes this phrase with the word “miracles.” The word translated by “miracles” (*dunameis*) is a word that Luke has also used in his “former book.” There the word describes miracles that Jesus does to authenticate himself. These miracles give Him accreditation. On their basis the Jews must accept Him. Luke makes clear, however, that the Jews in Galilee reject him. In Luke 10:13 Jesus chides the cities of Galilee, where he performed many of His miracles: “Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida!

For if the miracles [!] that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago.” Similarly, during Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem the crowd of disciples praise God “for all the miracles [!] they had seen” (Luke 19:37). The miracles are an attestation and proof that Jesus is the messianic King who comes in the name of the Lord (cf. 4:36; 5:17; 6:19; 8:46).

It was the function of Jesus’ “miracles” to provide proof of His identity as the Messiah. But Peter is not satisfied simply to speak of the Jesus’ miraculous acts as “miracles.” Going by Joel 2, he adds the qualification “wonders and signs.” In so doing, he uses a phrase that in the Old Testament is often connected to the exodus from Egypt.¹ The “signs and wonders” surrounding the exodus are *attestations* that prove the very presence of God. God is present for the good of His own and with vengeance for those who oppose Him. Signs and wonders can either be positive or negative. For example, they can be positive signs and wonders for Israel, but negative signs and wonders to Pharaoh. They are “an indication of God’s attitude”² or, perhaps better, an indication of God’s presence, a presence which either comes with a blessing or with a curse. At Pentecost some believed, while others mocked.

Signs and wonders were an *attestation* of God’s powerful presence in leading out His people Israel. Miracles, signs and wonders were an *attestation* of Jesus’ identity as the Christ during

His stay on earth (Acts 2:22). Similarly, signs and wonders were an *attestation* of the presence of the exalted Christ in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:19,22).³ The attestation itself is never the key element. It always comes with a message in order to underline it. Acts makes clear that it is the message which counts.⁴ When in Acts 4 the Sanhedrin sets Peter and John free, they pray with their friends: "Lord, enable your servants to *speak your word* with great boldness." Then they add: "Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous *signs and wonders*" (4:30). The result of their prayer is that all are filled with the Holy Spirit and *speak the word of God* boldly (4:31). In this passage the signs and wonders are, so to speak, sandwiched in between two references about the proclamation of the Gospel. The signs and wonders are an attestation with a message. It is the message which counts.


Later, when Philip proclaims the Gospel in a city of Samaria, the crowds *hear* him and see the miraculous *signs* that he does (8:6). Also here the hearing of the message and the signs by way of attestation are closely connected. Finally, when Paul and Barnabas are in Iconium they *speak* boldly for the Lord. The Lord then *bears witness* to the message with *signs and wonders* (14:3). The signs are there by way of support to bring people to faith in the message, and, ultimately, to bring people to faith in Christ, the exalted Lord who performs these signs and wonders. The same point is made by the author of the letter to the Hebrews, when he states that our salvation was *confirmed* to us by eyewitnesses, and that God also *testified* to this salvation by signs, wonders, and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit (Heb. 2:3-4).

Tongues and upbuilding

The role of the "signs and wonders" in Acts is primarily positive. It is an attestation to the message of Christ, to the presence of Christ in the proclamation of the apostles.⁵ This "sign" character of tongues functioned by way of worship and praise to God. Paul speaks of prayer, of blessing and of thanksgiving as being the contents of speaking in tongues (1 Cor. 14:13-17). This element of praise is a constant element also in the book of Acts. At Pentecost people from all over the world hear the 120 believers "declaring the wonders of God"

(2:11). When the Holy Spirit is poured out on Cornelius and his relatives and friends, they speak in tongues and praise God (10:46). Tongues-speaking was an inspired form of praise, of worship. This *could* be in the context of a public worship service, but this was not always necessarily so. Paul indicates that he speaks more in tongues than all of the Corinthians (14:18). Given this character of praise it is no wonder that Paul says that speaking in tongues is edifying for the person who does it (14:4). The combined evidence of the occurrences in Acts and of Paul's statements to the Corinthians make it more than likely that speaking in tongues was done in private as well as in the public worship service. Floor even goes a step further: "The gift of speaking in tongues . . . lies entirely in the personal sphere, and this gift is only of use for the upbuilding of the congregation if a second gift is added: the gift to explain languages or to translate tongues (1 Cor. 12:10)."⁶

This does not mean that "signs" are invariably positive. I already noted that they could either be an attestation of blessing or of curse. Both come to the fore in a difficult passage in 1 Corinthians 14. In the context, the apostle has been urging the Corinthians to consider prophecy of greater value than tongues. Prophecies, although they also must be tested, interpreted and evaluated, are nevertheless understandable the way they are. Tongues need interpretation to be of use. Prophecies are upbuilding as it is; tongues can only build up the church if they are interpreted (14:1-17).⁷ The upbuilding of the church is an important criterion by which to judge the value of speaking in tongues. After he has paid attention to prophecies and tongues in connection with the internal upbuilding of the church, Paul turns to the external growth of the church in the verses 20-25. He appeals to the Corinthians to stop thinking like children.⁸ He does so with a quotation from Isaiah 28:11-12. There the Israelites are upset with Isaiah for talking to them like small children who have just been weaned from their mother's milk (vv. 9-10). At that point Isaiah comments that by way of punishment they will get a real dose of the medicine which they so much despise. God will *really* come to them with a language which they do not understand: the language of the Assyrians. The Assyrians will invade: "Very well then, with foreign lips and strange



CHURCH NEWS

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tongues God will speak to this people" (28:11).

Paul picks up on this statement in his discussion on tongues-speaking. He quotes Isaiah as follows: "Through men of strange tongues and through the lips of foreigners I will speak to this people, but even then they will not listen to me."⁹ Paul then continues to explain that tongues are a "sign" for unbelievers (14:22). For, he states, an unbeliever who would come into their worship service might well think that they have gone mad. Their tongues-speaking might turn him away from the Gospel. This would mean that their tongues-speaking would result in judgment on this unbeliever. Thus, Paul applies Isaiah's words about the *Israelites* not listening to God's message to the *unbelievers* who enter the worship service. In this way, tongues become a negative "sign" for the unbelievers.¹⁰

Prophecy and outreach

It is the other way around with prophecy. Prophecy is a sign for believers. Here, however, the sign is not negative, but positive. Prophecy does not need interpretation or translation to make it understandable. This means that an unbeliever coming into the worship service will have no problem understanding what is being said. The prophetic proclamation of the Gospel message may touch his heart.¹¹ He may so be convicted of his sins and be "examined" by all.¹² If the prophecy of the Corinthians would so "examine" unbelievers who happen to enter the worship service, they would truly show themselves to be "spiritual" people who are in a position to examine and to judge.

In this way the unbeliever might be won for Christ. He might exclaim, "God is really among you!" This would be a positive sign.¹³ It would be a positive sign for the believers, who may observe that their prophetic utterances leads to numerical church growth. Carson rightly concludes: "The point is that even so far as outreach is concerned, tongues must take a back seat to prophecy. The question of intelligibility has returned, but now with reference to unbelievers."¹⁴

What may we conclude are some of the functions of speaking in tongues? According to Acts 2, tongues play a role at a particular point in the history of salvation, where they are *attestations* pointing to the message of the gospel and so to the very presence of God.¹⁵ This salvation-historical function of tongues means that they accompanied the spread of the kingdom of God from Jerusalem, to Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth, as this is recorded in Acts. Perhaps this historically determined role of tongues does not provide incontrovertible proof that they have ceased. Nevertheless, it strongly leads in this direction. Such a conclusion is certainly in keeping with the notion that tongues, as a means of revelation, have come to an end with the closing of the canon. It is within this salvation-historical context that the Holy Spirit gave some the gift of speaking in tongues in order to praise God, and so for their personal edification. It could function in the public worship service if it were accompanied by interpretation. If used wrongly, however, it could – as a side-effect – become a negative sign that would turn unbelievers away from the Gospel.

¹Cf. Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) VII.216.

²The phrase is from Wayne Grudem, "1 Corinthians 14.20-25: Prophecy and Tongues as Signs of God's Attitude," *Westminster Theological Journal* 41 (1979) 389. Grudem comments: "These indications are either positive or negative: positive toward those who believe and obey God, but negative toward those who disbelieve and disobey him."

³Cf. C. Trimp's comment that signs were a "cooperation of the exalted Lord with the apostles and a confirmation of the word that they spoke" ("De charismatische gemeente," in *De gemeente en haar liturgie: Een leesboek voor kerkgangers* [Kampen: Van den Berg, 1983], p. 34).

⁴The word "sign" by itself occurs in Acts 4:16,22; 8:6. The combination of "wonders and signs" or "signs and wonders" occurs in 2:19; 2:22; 2:43; 4:30; 5:12; 6:8; 7:36; 8:13; 14:3; 15:12.

⁵It is interesting that the "signs and wonders" are always connected with the apostles or with those who had received the laying on of hands, such as Philip and Stephen (Acts 6:7). Perhaps this point must not be stressed, seeing that tongues and prophecy were also "signs" in the congregation of Corinth (1 Cor. 14:22). But see 2 Cor. 12:12: these things "mark an apostle." Cf. 2 Thess. 2:9; Heb. 2:4.

⁶L. Floor, *De doop met de Heilige Geest* (Kampen: Kok, 1982), p. 201. J.W. Maris argues against any possible private use of tongues. He takes exception to the positions of L. Floor and Richard B. Gaffin. According to Maris, as well as Stott, Paul uses irony when he says that tongues edify the speaker himself (*Geloof en ervaring: Van Wesley tot de pinksterbeweging* [Leiden: Groen, 1992], pp. 241-42); John R.W. Stott, *Baptism and Fullness: The Work of the Holy Spirit Today*, 2nd ed. [London: Inter-Varsity, 1975], pp. 114-15). However, as indicated above, 1 Cor. 14:4 is not the only text pleading for a private use of tongues. Moreover, there is no indication that Paul means this particular statement in an ironic fashion. Gordon D. Fee correctly notes: "The edifying of oneself is not a bad thing; it simply is not the point of gathered worship" (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], p. 653; cf. p. 657).

⁷Note the consistent emphasis on "upbuilding." Paul uses this terminology six times in this passage (vv. 3,4[2x],5,12,17).

⁸Cf. similar charges of childishness in 1 Cor. 3:1-2; 13:11.

⁹Paul does not quote the Hebrew text literally, nor does he stick to the Septuagint. For a careful textual analysis, see Fee, *1 Corinthians*, p. 680.

¹⁰Some have taken this negative "sign" element one step further. O. Palmer Robertson states that when Isaiah announces that a foreign nation will overrun Israel's borders, he is "simply applying to his day the covenantal curse of Deuteronomy 28:49" ("Tongues: Sign of Covenantal Curse and Blessing," *Westminster Theological Journal* 38 [1975] 44). This text warns that the Lord would punish His people with a nation "whose language you will not understand." In other words, via a quotation of Isaiah, Paul would be reaching back to the covenantal language of Deut 28. According to Robertson, tongues "serve as a sign of covenantal curse" ("Tongues," 46). Concludes Robertson: "In a very literal sense, the 'tongues' of Pentecost represented the taking of the kingdom away from Israel and the giving of the kingdom to men of all nations ("Tongues," 47). Such an interpretation requires that Paul sees the "sign" of tongues as a covenantal sign against God's own unrepentant people, rather than as a sign against outsiders. Gaffin, who also adopts

this line of thinking, argues that the Gospel is facing Jewish opposition in Corinth, and that tongues are a covenantal sign against these Jews (*Perspectives on Pentecost*, p. 108; cf. also J.W. Maris, *Geloof en ervaring*, pp. 239-41). Gaffin rightly acknowledges, however, that 1 Corinthians 14:22a applies not only to unbelieving Jews, but to *all* unbelievers. This is indeed the case. Seeing tongues are a "sign" to all unbelievers, would it not be better to leave out the reference to Deut. 28:49 altogether? Nowhere in 1 Corinthians does Paul intimate that he is opposing the Jews. All in all, it seems to me that the negative "sign" function, while present, must not be overplayed.

¹¹It is not likely that the Corinthian prophecies actually mentioned specific sins, and that this led to their public exposure. Grudem is of the opinion that this is the case, seeing that the verb "to lay bare" or "to manifest" (*phaneroō*) always refers to "a public, external manifestation" ("1 Corinthians 14.20-25," 394). It must be kept in mind, however, that the prophecy is directed toward believers, not unbelievers. The latter simply overhear what is going on in the Christian assembly. The prophecies have the mysteries of the gospel as their contents (13:2). So it is the gospel of salvation which convicts unbelievers of their sinfulness before God. Cf. D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), p. 116, n. 22.

¹²Paul has used the verb "examine" (*anakrinō*) earlier in his letter. In chapter 2 Paul makes clear that the spiritual man "examines" all things, and that this spiritual man himself is "examined" by no one (2:15). In chapter 4 Paul defends himself against the charge that he is a weakling as an apostle. In response, he comments that he would consider it a very minor thing if the Corinthians were to "examine" him. He does not even "examine" himself. It is only the Lord who "examines" him (4:3-4). It is clear from this that the apostle is of the opinion that the Corinthians cannot be treated as "spiritual" people. They are in no position to "examine" the apostle Paul. In chapter 6 the apostle argues against using civil courts for problems among brothers. He reminds them that saints will "judge" (*krinō*) the world, that they will "judge" angels. The Corinthians are "examining" and "judging" Paul, but they don't even seem to be able to find some wise person in their midst to investigate and deal with a problem between believers in the congregation. They certainly don't act like the "spiritual" people that they are supposed to be.

¹³Cf. Isa. 45:14 and Zech. 8:23 for similar exclamations of recognition on the part of heathen nations that God is present among His people Israel.

¹⁴Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, pp. 116-17.

¹⁵Cf. Carson's comment that the "essentially salvation-historical structure of the Book of Acts is too often overlooked" (*Showing the Spirit*, p. 150).

Suffering Servant . . . Saved Sinners

(Hebrews 5:7,8)

By J. Ludwig

Every time we celebrate the Supper of our Lord we remember the inexpressible suffering of our Saviour. The *Form* words it so beautifully: "We cherish the *blessed* memory of the *bitter* death of Thy dear Son Jesus Christ." It is not that we derive pleasure from remembering Christ in His pain and agony. That is not our motive at all. God has commanded us to search the *entire* Scriptures, not just those sections about the resurrection and ascension of Christ but also those about His humiliation and death. Since the Holy Spirit revealed facts about the suffering of Christ to David, Isaiah, Matthew and others, then we are obligated to try and understand that suffering, however difficult that may be. And difficult it is because no human being has ever suffered anything that could vaguely compare with what Christ had to undergo. No one can say from their own experiences: "I know exactly what He was going through back then." His passion is totally unique. It has and will have no sequel in history. Christ is not our "friend" in affliction. He is our Lord in redemption. That's the significance for us: His *suffering* is intimately connected with *our salvation*.

It appears that the Hebrews were for the greatest part Christianized Jews who were having difficulties accepting the high priesthood of Jesus Christ. For centuries they had accepted the sacrifices and the prayers offered up on their behalf by the sons of Aaron, the true legitimate priesthood according to the law. Now, suddenly, all that was abolished by the one sacrifice of Jesus of Nazareth, a man not even from the tribe of Levi. How, they were wondering, do we justify that obvious discrepancy? Who now mediates between us and God – Aaron's son or Mary's? This is an important issue because the mediatorial work of the high priest was connected with the atonement of their sins

before God. If you have the wrong high priest, you have the wrong atonement. And if you have the wrong atonement, then you do not share in the forgiveness of sins and life eternal.

The author to the Hebrews, therefore, devotes his entire letter to explaining how Christ is indeed their only authentic high priest. In chapter 5 he demonstrates this truth by comparing Christ to the high priesthood of Aaron. Just as Aaron was called by God so Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest but He was appointed by God. The writer proves this to them from Scripture, citing Psalm 2 and Psalm 110. This Jesus is actually far superior to Aaron because He is the King-priest: royal son of the Most High God and at the same time an eternal priest after the order of Melchizedek.

Both Aaron and Christ, then, have a divine calling. But they also share something else. Both have the *necessary quality* of a high priest. Both are sympathetic toward the people whom they represent before the throne of God. Aaron can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward since "he himself is beset with weakness" (v.2). That has its counterpart in the verses 7 and 8 which reveal something of the complete humanity of Christ. He suffered as a true man, *in body and soul*, and therefore is able to sympathize with our weaknesses.

In the days of his flesh

"In the days of his flesh," we read, "Jesus offered up prayers and supplication. . . ." The "days of his flesh" designates that time-frame when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. The author has to stipulate here that he means the period of Christ's *earthly* ministry because in chapter 4:14 he had said: "We have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens. . . ." There in heaven He makes intercession

for us before the Father. He does this in His glorified body.

But the point *now* is that on earth Christ in His humanity was of the same nature as His fellow men. He had a weak body that was subject to pain and death, to mental anxiety and spiritual torment. The same aches and emotions that we feel Christ also experienced but then, of course, much more acutely since none of His senses were dulled by the guilt or pollution of sin. The gospels mention His hunger, anger, sorrow, joy, and fatigue. But even more than that, the fact that He constantly turned to the Father in prayer shows how much He was like you and me. He was not some kind of "superman" who solved His own problems and was completely independent from God! No, for then He would not be like us *in all things*. He was God and yet He emptied Himself. The source of His strength and His comfort was in God. That's why you constantly find references in the gospels to Jesus withdrawing alone to pray. If only we prayed as much as the Son of Man!

He offered up prayers and supplications

He "offered up" prayers and supplications. The context indicates that the author has in mind a particular occasion rather than a general practice, since these prayers and supplications were offered up with loud cries and tears, that is, in a situation of extreme anguish. Besides that, they were addressed to Him who "was able to save Him from death" which implies a situation in which Christ was facing the prospect of death.

The occasion intended here must be Christ's agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. He offered up "prayers and supplications." Both words together stress the *intensity* with which he prayed. On the night of His betray-

al, Jesus said, "My soul is very sorrowful even to death, remain here and watch." Christ was coming face to face now with the awful reality of the cross. Sure, He knew for years already the bitter death that awaited Him. At the beginning of His ministry He said to Nicodemus: "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up" (Jn. 3:14). Then it was not His hour, but now the hour had come. Jesus sensed the overwhelming horror of the ordeal that lay before Him, so He fell upon the ground and prayed. From Luke's account we read, "And being in agony He prayed more earnestly" (22:44). Three times He besought His Father that the cup might be removed. He did so, says the author of *Hebrews*, with "loud cries and tears." These words testify that Christ did not have an "iron heart." He prayed this petition with fervency and ardor. He poured out His soul to God – loud cries, tears, prayers and supplications. Notice that in the depths of His suffering He continues seeking the living God. Here is the perfect fulfilment of the words of David in Psalm 56, "When I am afraid, I put my trust in Thee. In God whose word I praise. . . ."

He prays in faith and out of the natural relationship that He holds with God, "Father, I am your Son. Can that not be taken into consideration? With Thee all things are possible." Perhaps you have asked yourself: "Why does Christ offer up such prayers when He knows so well that His death on the cross has been decreed from eternity? How could Christ even ask that the cup be removed knowing that God's decree is unchangeable?" God's eternal counsel and will, however, was not made ABOUT the Son, but WITH the Son. Unlike us He had an active role in that eternal decree. He willingly offered Himself as a sacrifice for sin. With the shadow of the cross looming over His head the Son must still say, "To do Thy will O God is my delight." He may not just suffer death as His fate. He must accept it as His righteous judgment.

Some have asked, "What kind of Saviour is this who weeps and wails and trembles and falls on the ground? Why can He not be like other men who have withstood death with poise and composure – like the martyrs in Rome who died at the stake, singing psalms?"

The answer lies in that the agony of Christ in Gethsemane was occasioned by something far deeper than the fear of physical death. Any Christian who dies, dies in the comfort that Christ has overcome death and the grave for him. Christ had to look death squarely in the face and triumph over it. He came so that "through death He might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil" (2:14)

What Christ faced was not simply a painful exit from this life. It was the severe judgment of the holy God against sin . . . yours and mine. And that judgment is the experience of the second death. In all His innocence and purity He submitted Himself in the place of sinners to the fierceness of God's wrath. He realized that Golgotha meant an experience incomparable in the horror of its torment. And His whole being – body, soul and mind – shrank back instinctively, "If it be Thy will, remove this cup of gall from me O Father."

Yes, He prayed with "loud cries and tears" . . . because He foresaw the separation that would culminate in that cry from the cross, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me." The dread with which He approached the cross has to be seen in the light of God's curse and the necessity to wrestle with the total sum of human pollution and guilt and the very powers of darkness themselves. There on Golgotha the doors of eternal death were thrown open. Nevertheless, Christ retained His meekness and His submission. "If it Thy will then I will drink the cup of Thy wrath to the last drop. I will go as a Lamb to the slaughter. Wound me for their transgressions; bruise me for their iniquities; cut me off from the land of living so that they may have life forever more." In a very real way Christ took our sins, the sins of the whole world, upon Himself at Calvary in order that He might bear the judgment of eternal death. God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for our sake, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God. Indeed, what a blessed memory of his bitter suffering!

He was heard for His godly fear

We are told further that Christ prayed "to Him who was able to save Him from death, and He was heard for His godly fear." The Holy Spirit wants to point out that Christ directed

His prayers to the proper address, to the only true God who has power over life and death. Christ in temptation and suffering needed to rely on God in prayer. This underlines the weakness of His lowly flesh. The fact that He was the Son of God did not make it easier for Him to endure suffering or to withstand temptation. It is not the case that whenever He felt pain that His divine nature took over and blocked out all the normal human feelings. How could He sympathize with us if that were true? He *felt* the suffering and the pain. And through it all He expressed His dependence on the Father by means of literal beggings, pitiful pleadings with agonized crying and unrestrained tears. Even the Sinless One called upon God who was able to save Him from death.

How were Christ's prayers in the garden heard? You could argue that He was "saved from death" seeing that on the third day He rose triumphantly over the grave. And yet there is a much more immediate and direct sense. When Christ had finished praying, "Father, if it be Thy will remove this cup" then an angel appeared to Him strengthening Him. The Father heard the prayer of His Son and He sends an angel to encourage Him: "My counsel shall stand. My plan of salvation shall be accomplished. My cup of judgment shall not be removed. Take it and drink to the last drop. Go on to Golgotha. Take up your cross for that is my will." With this visit from a heavenly servant Christ is given a moment of comfort only so that He can go on to the everlasting punishment that awaits Him. Prof. K. Schilder explains in his *Trilogy* on the suffering of Christ that the arrival of the angel is a gift of consolation, but on the other it is a deepening of His humiliation and an aggravation of His suffering? Just try to picture the scene. There kneels the LORD of the Angels, who must be strengthened by one of His SERVANTS. He came to die for men but they are sleeping under the olive trees instead of comforting and praying for their Saviour in His atoning agony. The vicarious suffering of Christ was not for angels but for men, and yet an angel is beside Him in His agony.

His prayer was heard, "for His godly fear." That does not mean He was heard because of His fright of death, rather, He was heard because of His

concern for the honour of God. The Father gave heed to Him because He showed reverent submission to God's will. Even in that black night of misery He prayed, "If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. Father, glorify Thy name." No longer does He ask for the cup to be removed. The will of God has been revealed – the cup remains.


There was only one way for Him – the way of the cross. There He humbled himself, in body and soul, to the deepest shame and anguish of hell. He was forsaken by God so that we might never more be forsaken by Him. The nadir of His sorrow becomes the zenith of our joy. Through His curse we are blessed. In His death we have life.

That His prayers were heard, even at the lowest point of His suffering, is a guarantee to us that God will hear our prayers for Jesus' sake. For now He is seated in glory at the right hand of the heavenly Majesty where He prays day

and night for us. We have a greater high priest than Aaron. Aaron? He could only enter the holy of holies once per year to bring atonement. But Christ *lives and reigns* in the holy of holies. He is a priest *forever* after the order of Melchizedek and the blood of His sacrifice is constantly before the Lord. If He was heard in Gethsemane, when the wrath of God made Him sweat blood, how much more today seated in glory at the Father's right hand? Let us, then, with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

The writer concludes with the words: "Although He was a Son, He learned obedience through what He suffered." He *learned* obedience. Learning implies progress and development. Not that Christ advanced in degrees from a disobedient child to an obedient adult. No, He never was dis-

obedient. He always had the desire to do God's will and He carried out that desire perfectly. With every new experience of temptation, trial and suffering He responded in obedience. Just as He grew in wisdom so He grew in His obedience to God. His was the obedience that results from listening to God's Word. He not only willingly executed the *demands* of the law but He also willingly took the *penalty* of the law. In so doing He fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, "I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I hid not my face from shame and spitting" (50:6).

Look to Him who learned obedience through suffering. Embrace Him in faith. Confess Him before the world. Obey Him in love. For by His obedience He has become the source of our eternal salvation. 

PRESS REVIEW

By C. Van Dam



Ecclesiastical News Briefs

40th Anniversary Prof. Ohmann

On February 12, 1996 Professor H. M. Ohmann, emeritus Professor of Old Testament in Kampen, celebrated his 40th anniversary in the office of minister of the divine Word. Professor Ohmann started his task as minister in Hoek (1962) and then went to Dokkum (1968). He left the Netherlands in 1971 to become Professor of Old Testament at our Theological College in Hamilton and then returned to the Netherlands in 1981 to become Professor in Kampen. Also from this place our congratulations to Professor and Mrs. Ohmann! (*Nederlands Dagblad*)

South African Synod

On October 20, 1995, our South African sister churches, Die Vrye Gereformeerde Kerke (VGK), decided in a meeting of an *ad hoc* synod to admit into the federation the congregation of Rev. P. Nel in Bethal (which is 120 km

east of Johannesburg). Rev. Nel was also admitted in his office as minister after a discussion on doctrine. The unanimous decisions were made with great joy and they signal the end of the struggles and separate existence of this congregation and their minister. Rev. Nel had left the Nederduitsch Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK) because his original consistory wanted to force him to accept synod decisions of the NGK which went contrary to Scripture. About sixty members of the congregation followed him and by the time they were admitted into the VGK their number had doubled. The VGK now total four congregations. (*Kompas*)

Society to Translate Dutch Reformed Theological Heritage

The Dutch Reformed Translation Society has been established to translate Reformed Dutch theological literature into English. The first project, al-

ready well underway, is the translation of Dr. Herman Bavinck's four volume work on doctrinal theology or dogmatics. The complete work has never been translated into English before. The work of Bavinck (1854-1921) is rightly regarded as superior to that of Louis Berkhof and G. C. Berkouwer and therefore this project is of great importance. A selection of Bavinck's work dealing with the last things is due to appear this spring from Baker Book House. After Bavinck has been translated, the society will move to other worthwhile devotional and doctrinal literature.

There are twelve founding members of this society coming from a variety of backgrounds including the Christian Reformed, Free Reformed, Protestant Reformed, and the Reformed Church of America. Baker Book House is also represented. Those desiring more information can write: Dutch Reforma-

tion Translation Society, P.O. Box 7083, Grand Rapids, MI 49510. (*Christian Observer*)

Interclassical Conference Letter sent to CRC Synod 1996

As reported on in an earlier *Clarion*, conservatives within the CRC decided in an interclassical conference last fall to send a call to repentance to Synod 1996. That letter has now gone out. It lists the sins and shortcomings of all in the church, liberal and conservative, and specifically mentions some examples. The following are some excerpts from this letter:

Through the entire decades-long debate over the hermeneutics of the women in office issue, several sad things have happened. One is that the CRC has lost the unity of her faith and witness. Another is that she has come to appear to be indecisive and wavering on Biblical truth – one year prohibiting on Biblical grounds, the next permitting “by declaring the word ‘male’ inoperative.” But no consequence of this sad history is more grievous than that our people have lost confidence in the text of Scripture. . . . In the way we have handled the Bible in our synodical debates in recent years, we have committed a heinous sin. We have so trifled with the text that our people have lost the ability to use Scripture believingly, lovingly, trustingly. We have affirmed “infallibility” (if not “inerrancy”), but we have effected confusion. We have established anew what the Reformers sought with blood to abolish: a priesthood that stood between the people and the Bible. This new priesthood is different than that in the days of Luther and Calvin. It is one of scholars, of hermeneutical experts, of theologians who tell the people why the plain words on the page of the Bible don’t mean what they obviously say. But the effect is the same: God’s people stop picking up the Bible because they believe they cannot understand it. . . .

Brothers, Synod must take leadership in these times, lest the Lord become disgusted with our lack of faith. We call on you to lead our churches in confession and repentance of the sin that has resulted in this grievous situation. . . . We call on you to plead with our churches

to return to the view of Scripture that has marked the Reformation from generation to generation; such a high view of the words on the page, such a high regard for the plain meaning of the sentences and words written down for our instruction, that we have for centuries declared without hesitation, that Scripture has “perspicuity” or “clarity.”

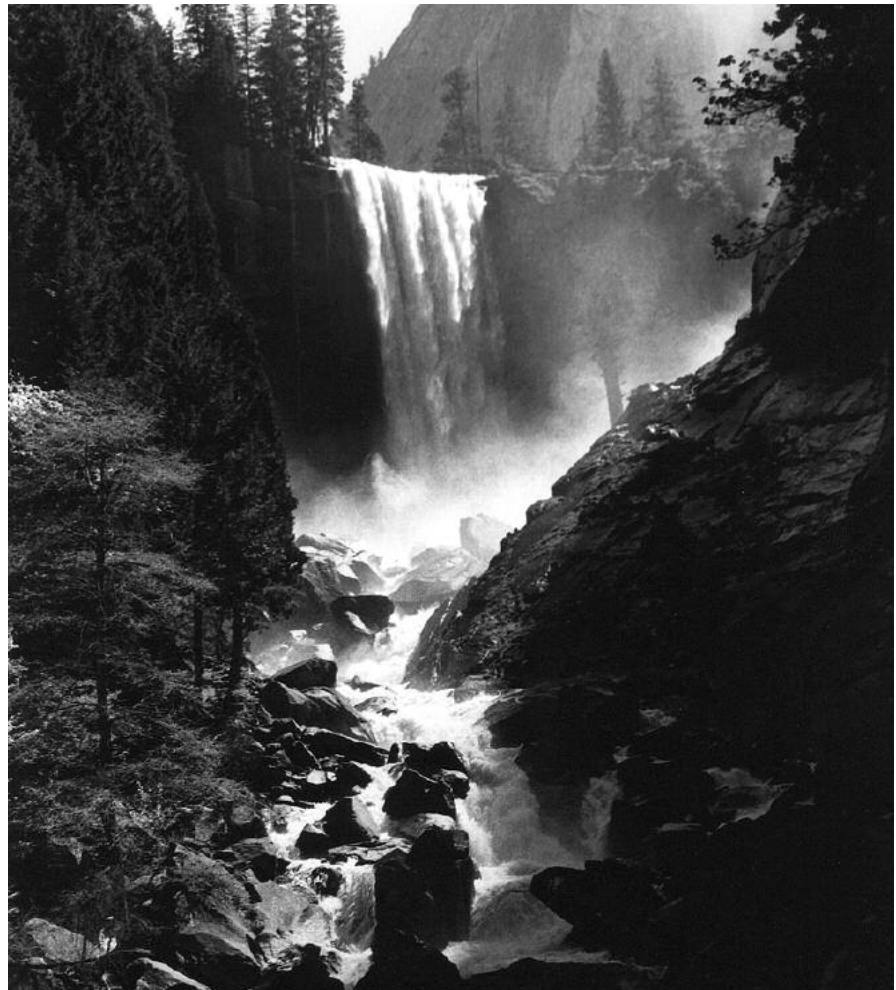
If God does not grant such a heart response at the Synod of 1996 it will break our hearts and it may well break our bond. We earnestly pray that our denomination will not break asunder, as have so many in recent years. But we also affirm that denominational federation must stand on solid ground of confession and practice, not on the superficial ground of a bygone tradition and the superfluous ground of a bureaucratic structure.

Should you not lead our churches in repentance for sin and a return to the high view of the text of Scripture for which the CRC has historically been known . . . we will be

forced to convene next year to consider painful options, one of which must be a proposal to form a new or different denominational federation. We hope and pray that this will not be. (*Christian Renewal*)

G. C. Berkouwer Passes Away

The well-known Reformed theologian Dr. Gerrit C. Berkouwer passed away on January 25 at the age of 92. Berkouwer had played a critical role in Dutch church history, since he was the president of the 1943-1945 General Synod of the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, whose decisions resulted in the ecclesiastical Liberation (*Vrijmaking*) of 1944. Over the years Berkouwer’s thinking underwent a shift. Especially during the 1950s, Berkouwer departed from the classic Reformed viewpoint on several issues. For example, a comparison between his earlier and later writings shows a shift of viewpoint regarding matters like the authority of Scripture and original sin. (*United Reformed News Service*)



Abbotsford's Acts

By W.W.J. vanOene

The Acts of our youngest general synod have been among us for quite a few months by now, and it is high time that we honour the brothers who laboured in Abbotsford for fifteen days by scrutinizing their work.

Actually, when speaking of our "youngest" general synod, we use an incorrect term. Synods never grow old: they all die young, but our readers will know what we mean by the term, namely, the last-held, the latest one, the one of Abbotsford 1995, our fourteenth general synod.

The Acts proper cover 84 pages, the Appendices account for 115 of a total of 204 pages. This shows that the brothers did not waste any time, nor did they rush matters. Several times an advisory committee took a proposal back for further consideration after a discussion in full synod.

As for the way in which the various proposals were set up and formulated, this synod followed the method used at previous such gatherings, and with a little bit of study one can easily understand why synod took this or that decision. It is helpful that in general the various observations, considerations, and recommendations are complete sentences.

One thing struck me again as being peculiar: the Acts were written in the present tense: "On behalf of the convening church at Abbotsford B.C., Rev. M.VanderWel calls the meeting to order. He requestS . . . etc." Or: "Synod IS adjourned."

Is putting the records of ecclesiastical assemblies in the present tense typically Dutch? I am convinced that the past tense should be used: "Synod was adjourned," since the Acts are not a contemporaneous witness-account ("Now Number 31 has the puck. He shoots, he scores!") but a description of what happened and WAS done.

One more aspect should be mentioned before we go into the material, namely the language aspect. The Acts contain a number of errors. I do not

know whether each instance is the result of typing errors, accidental omission, or making a mistake.¹

It may be said that for by far the largest part the Acts have been read with agreement. It is my conviction that even when the brothers decided not to deal with a certain matter, this was never a question of trying to get rid of an unwanted item but from a desire to stay within the limits of their mandate.

Private submissions

Take for example the manner in which various submissions from individual members were dealt with.

Quite a few times synod had to deal with proposals, overtures, or whatever other name might be given to them, coming not from ecclesiastical assemblies but from individual members. What to do with these?

One of the difficulties synod faced was that previous synods sometimes did deal with such personal submissions. Insofar as I was personally co-responsible for such dealing with private proposals at general synods I bow my head in shame: Yes, it was wrong, and I, for one, should have seen this at that time. The agenda of broader assemblies is composed by the churches and not by church-members. There are no "private member's bills." The only way in which a member can bring a matter to a broader assembly is via an appeal, when he complains that he has been wronged by a decision of the minor assembly.

Great caution should be exercised here, for a member must not only complain that he has been wronged in the above sense, but he must also clearly indicate in what respect he has been wronged and must prove it to the broader assembly. That one disagrees with a consistory decision certainly does not give one the right to "appeal." Any broader assembly should refuse to deal with a "sham appeal," a submission

that clearly is no appeal as the churches have qualified it in Art. 31 C.O.

When various submissions by individual members reached Synod Abbotsford, the question came up whether these should be dealt with indeed.

Synod decided that "It would be unfair to declare the personal submissions mentioned above invalid for this Synod because past Synods have been inconsistent in this." Art. 72, 86, 115, 122.

The point was raised earlier, when there was a letter from a brother "requesting a change to Art. 32 C.O. regarding the sending of delegates to broader assemblies." There was also a letter from a church, and synod declared these letters inadmissible on the ground of Art. 30 C.O.: the minor assemblies must first have dealt with a matter.

Imagine that there had been just that personal letter and that synod had dealt with it! Then the churches could have been faced with a change in the church order for which no church ever asked, of which the churches were not even aware!

Understandably, it was asked "whether individual church members have the right to bring matters directly to Synod without involving their local consistories."

At that point the chairman ruled that it was not the proper moment to discuss that point, but it came up later on again. See the articles mentioned above.

When synod considered that it would be unfair to declare such submissions inadmissible because previous synods were inconsistent in this respect, we fully agree with this. One should never change horses in midstream. Yet we see here anew the grave danger posed by precedents!

For this reason we would plead very strongly for a firm, for the correct course or action in the future.

Now that the point of admissibility of private submissions and of inconsistency has been raised several times at this synod, is it not high time that our synods do become consistent and from

now on refuse to deal with submissions from individual members? An appeal to inconsistency in the past cannot go on for ever! The dangers inherent in it are too great and too grave.

Our members have to be educated and here is a golden opportunity for the next general synod to declare submissions by members inadmissible. Every one now knows what to expect if, contrary to the rules, he submits a "private member's bill," so to speak.

Another argument

Besides the above argument of inconsistency (with which *at this stage* we are in full agreement) there is another argument used by synod that is extremely dangerous and opens the flood-gates. I am referring to the argument used in Art. 115 and 121.

Here I see a gate opened that can lead to dangerous situations in the future.

An appeal is admissible or it is not. Period.

If it is not admissible, no other grounds should be sought on which what had to be shown out the front door can surreptitiously be let in via the back door or through a basement window.

One shows the greatest justice by abiding by the rules and by not arbitrarily judging that a matter is "of great concern in the churches," and therefore should be dealt with although, in fact, the submission was inadmissible.

Here synod left the sound track that we noted before and became "pastoral," something a broader assembly should avoid at all times.

According to synod's reasoning in this consideration anything will go.

Please!

Book of Praise

Following the Acts, we come to the *Book of Praise*.

What draws our attention first of all is the question of an "alternate melody" to Hymn 1A.

It is to be deplored that this matter has not been put to rest once and for all, as proposed by the churches at Burlington East and Langley, and by the Advisory Committee.

The Standing Committee for the *Book of Praise* did not make any recommendation on "alternate melodies," and I still have to meet the first member who is favourably impressed by any of them.

It is regrettable that synod did not go in the direction as proposed by the two above-mentioned churches but instead adopted a motion from its own midst to give a "test period" to one melody that was rejected by the churches in the past, as well as to another melody mentioned by the Standing Committee.

Apparently the un-ecumenical insertion of the word "Christian" in the Apostles' Creed must be accommodated by having an "alternate melody," cost what may. It seems that efforts to that end will continue to occupy the time of the Standing Committee as well as of general synods until the goal has been reached.

Too bad.

No frequent changes

One of the considerations of synod was that "new editions (printing) of the *Book of Praise* should appear as infrequently as possible to avoid financial costs and for the benefit of the church members."

One cannot but agree wholeheartedly with this, and this for more than one reason.

I sadly missed this consideration when scanning the decision regarding replacing the RSV by the NIV as the recommended version to be used by the churches. This recommendation will cost the membership an estimated quarter of a million dollars, if not more. Members, churches, and schools will be compelled to buy new Bibles, whenever and wherever this recommendation is followed up.

It is with the more gratitude that I read the above consideration regarding the *Book of Praise*. Here synod reasoned in a down-to-earth manner.

There is another argument why we should limit to a minimum, and then only when absolutely necessary, any changes with respect to the *Book of Praise* as well as to Bible translations.

Many mothers complained loudly and frequently about various changes made in subsequent editions of the *Book of Praise*. These different editions were necessary because both the rhymings of the Psalms and Hymns and the text of the forms had not yet been adopted definitively.

Yet children had to memorize Psalms and Hymns for school, and the mothers learned them along with their children. And now there came another edition! They got mixed up. With all those changes there would never come a solid, permanent store of songs

from which the children could draw in later life.

The older ones among us still remember the old Psalms they learned in their youth, and they feel like strangers when they visit the Netherlands and have to sing from a new and to them unfamiliar rhyming. It no longer "speaks" to them.

We here in Canada had to start from scratch as far as the *Book of Praise* is concerned, and for that reason subsequent editions showed corrections and improvements. Even now the Standing Committee was mandated "to keep a running file of adopted improvements to the *Book of Praise* for a future edition of the *Book of Praise*," but the changes should be kept to a minimum to preserve continuity, also for the sake of the children.

It is not necessary at all (as I heard from some overly-concerned members) that the *Book of Praise* has to be changed now that the NIV has been recommended by synod. I would not know what should be changed in our *Book of Praise* as a result of that recommendation. The only thing I could think of is the texts quoted literally in the Forms, but it is not even absolutely necessary to go into that trouble.

Musical notation

Another tall order for the Standing Committee is "to investigate the possibility of repeating the musical notation when a psalm or hymn continues overleaf and to make a recommendation to the next general synod."

Well, the Committee does not have to "investigate the possibility," for the possibility is there and has been there all the time. As a former member of this Committee I can tell our readers that this point was discussed more than once, but that no steps were taken to follow it up due to the considerable cost involved.

Whoever is not familiar with the printing processes has no idea of the work involved and, consequently, the cost. Although I have no shares nor ever had any in any printing company (let this be said to the reassurance of those who apparently think otherwise) I have always followed the printing business with great interest, in the Netherlands as well as in Canada.

I saw how the music-notation for our *Book of Praise* was done on a modified typewriter; and the computer-age has rendered the process even more simple and less complicated. Still,

repeating the musical notation overleaf requires labour and also more paper. Not only will the music have to be set anew for the overleaf page, the text of the stanza to go with it will also have to be re-typed. All in all, it was not deemed feasible in the past.

And why would the music have to be repeated overleaf? This will be unnecessary if we sing not only selected and familiar tunes, but also learn the ones we are not so familiar with. Here our families and our schools have great opportunities and possibilities, not to forget our choirs!

We'll see what the Committee comes up with and what its recommendation to the next synod will be.

Women's voting

The following point demanding our attention is "Women's Participation in Election of Office-Bearers."

As our readers may know, our Netherlands sister churches dealt with this issue as well, and their decisions regarding it were quoted, although I fail to see how the Dutch decisions could be presented as "new grounds" for our own previous decisions, as meant in Art. 30 C.O.

Likewise I cannot see that "the issue lives in the churches" can function as such a "new ground." There are many issues that "live in the churches," but this definitely would not justify dealing with them (anew) at a general synod.

Synod considered that it is debatable whether the matter of women's voting does or does not live within the churches. This is expressing it very carefully.

I think that, except perhaps in a few places, the issue is not very much alive in the churches at all. Thus we can be thankful for the caution exercised by Synod Abbotsford 1995.

About one element I should like to make a remark, also in order to keep possible discussions on the right track. It is an element in the overture by the church at Langley as quoted in Art. 51, Observation III,C. "We believe that the Canadian Reformed Churches would be well served by a new committee studying the issue of women's participation (especially single sisters and widows) in the voting and election of office-bearers in the light of developments in the last twelve years."

It is in particular the words "especially single sisters and widows" that pull the train of thought into the wrong

direction. This is done almost more so by the mention made of "developments in the last twelve years."

It is possible, of course, that Langley's letter contained a further explanation of these "developments," for I did not receive a copy of the documents sent to synod, but I deem it extremely dangerous to let "developments" be part of an ecclesiastical argumentation.

Already at an earlier occasion, some years ago, I objected to the singling out of single sisters and widows. We do not know of a "heads-of-household franchise" and our thoughts should not go into that direction either, for then we bring in impure elements.

There are, I am convinced, only two questions to be answered.

The one is whether choosing from a certain slate of candidates, presented by the consistory to the congregation to learn its "preference," so to speak, is an act of governing or simply an advice to the consistory, by which advice the consistory is not even bound.

And the second question is what the criterion for such participation should be. The only criterion that can stand in my opinion is whether one is an "adult" member of the congregation, in other words: whether one has made profession of faith or not.

I do not need lengthy reasonings or considerations of "developments" and

such like to answer these two basic questions. If voting is a matter of "governing," the sisters are out, whether married, single, or widowed. If it is not, having made profession of faith is the standard to go by.

(Rev. Van Oene will conclude his review of the Acts in the next issue.)

'In Art. 61 "to" is missing: Elder A. responds [to] his words.'

Art. 67: "... to judge that Synod 1992 was incorrect to send. . . ." In my view this should be "in sending."

Art. 72: "one cannot have principle objections. . . ." "Principle" is a noun. Should it not have been "principal objections"?

Same article, III,C,1 "... but also [to] leave the local churches. . . ."

Art. 73, II A: "... with a view to entering [into] a . . ."

B: "... they contend . . ."

Art. 101. A.5: "... as regards . . ."


V.B: "... is correct [in stating] that . . ."

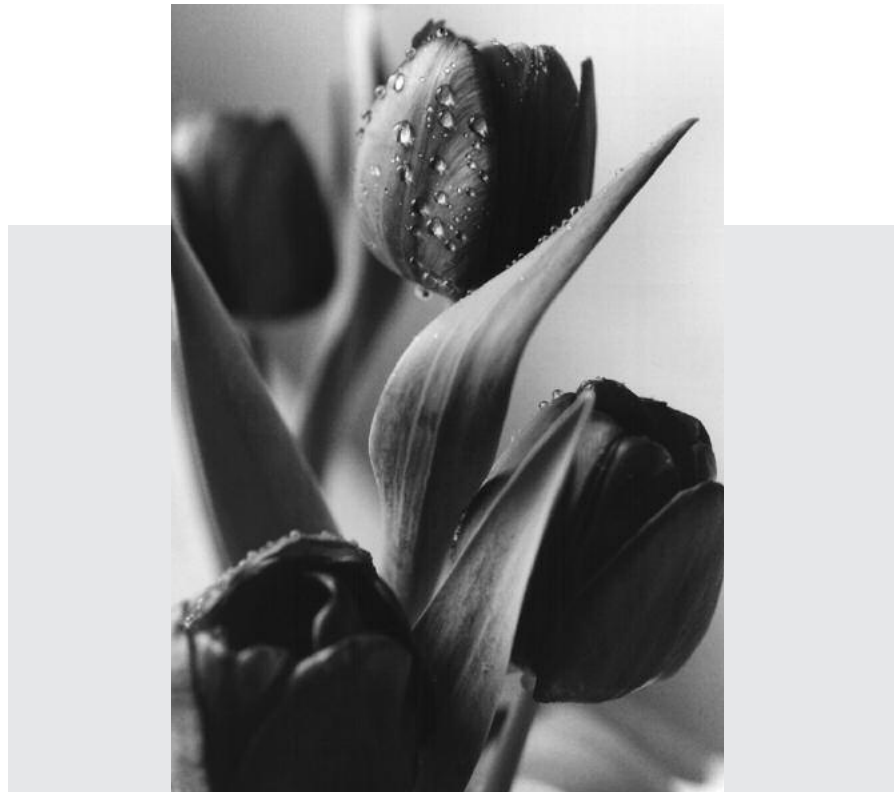
Art. 106. C.1.b: "... that we share the exact same . . ." does not sound correct. Should it not have been "exactly the same"?

Art. 110 B 2: "... no decisions is made. . . ." Either "decision" or "are."

Art. 115 IV A: "... is in an interim . . ."

Art. 121 IV B: "... he is wrong to downplay . . ." Should it not have been "in (or: when) downplaying. . . ?"

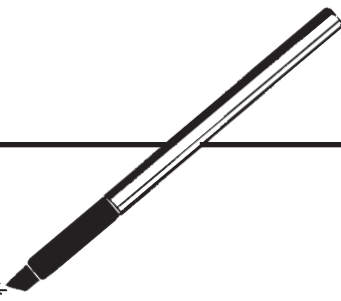
The above may serve as proof that the Acts have been read attentively and with great interest. 



THE HI-LITER

News from Here and There

By C. Van Spronsen



In Burlington South the Home Mission Committee organizes a "Fellowship Supper/Sing Along" after the afternoon service. Everyone is asked to pack along their evening meal (picnic style) and their best singing voices for a time of fun and fellowship.

In Toronto each of the deacons has been assigned to a district. During the coming year, each district deacon will attempt to visit, formally or informally, with each of those in their district. In this way they hope to obtain a total picture not only of the particular needs in the congregation but also of the means and abilities of the membership to participate in helping to assist those in need. A sound idea!

The officebearers of the Providence Canadian Reformed Church and the Free Church of Scotland (known as the Presbyterian Reformed Church in Edmonton) had a joint meeting on Jan. 29/96. The Edmonton congregation of the FCS is under supervision of the Toronto FCS. There are nine congregations and four ministers in Prince Edward Island and a congregation in Detroit.

In a short report of this joint meeting it is noted that the most obvious differences with the Canadian Reformed Churches are that they do not sing any Hymns nor use the accompaniment of any musical instruments during the worship services. Neither do they celebrate the special feast-days such as Christmas etc. Since we have ecclesiastical fellowship with the FCS further areas of possible cooperation are being looked into.

Burlington West decided to switch from A to the B Order of Worship (See: Book of Praise, pages 581-583). In the Bulletin Rev. G. H. Visscher expounds the merits of the latter as well as the fact that the B Order dates back to the Reformation. The innovation was the A Order. His preference is clearly for the B Order and after recommending some literature on the subject he concludes: "Or, take it from me. I've used both. A is *good* but B is *better*. And you must agree: in the worship of the Lord nothing but the *best* should be offered to the Lord!" I will support that conclusion!

The Free Reformed Churches in Tasmania have come out with a new format bulletin, an attractively looking booklet called "The King's Bridge." An explanation of the name is given:

"It refers in the first place to the well-known old bridge over the South Esk River. As you know the South Esk River and the Tamar River is the boundary line between the two congregations in Tasmania. Where the river divides both congregations, the King's Bridge connects them again. Our bulletin in its new format will serve the aim to keep the congregations together."

In Armadale, WA, they have the peculiarity of combining a Thanksgiving service with a service in which we pray God to bless the crops and our labour in the year ahead. Puzzled? So is the local pastor, Rev. W. Huizinga, who writes: "Why the two are combined I can only guess, e.g., that we are not very close to the farming communities with the harvests of grain, so that we 'city folk' choose to combine them. It would not be allowed in a farming community, I can assure you!"

In Edmonton, AB the matter of the handshake before and after the church services by the serving elder was given in discussion at a council meeting and "no compelling reasons are brought forward to introduce this practice again."

The Surrey Orthodox Reformed Church approached the churches in the Fraser Valley seeking support for more meetings like the "Reformation Rally," for example around Lent and Advent in order to advance the cause of unity. This request is receiving different reactions. Some feel obliged to act negatively. The Church at Chilliwack replies that although they are in favour of promoting unity, "this is not the route we should take to bring this about. Unity should not start with people coming together at gatherings of this kind, but true unity with our Lord Jesus Christ would be established first." It is sad when we give the impression that there is only one correct way which happens to be our way. Furthermore, it would be interesting to know how "true unity with our Lord Jesus Christ" would be defined and established. What is really wrong with seeking different ways to get to know each other better? We have the same confessions and basically the same Church Order and have shown that we seek to live by them by seceding from those who became unfaithful. Is this not an answer to our prayers over the years of our separation?

In the Fraser Valley, BC, a Christian Labour Pool has been formed to assist bringing employers and employees together. This is a non-profit organization seeking to be of service to those seeking work as well as those looking for workers. May it be of good service to the broader communion of saints!

The Council of the Langley Church has a Study Committee which deals with a large range of topics: music, women's voting and church planting. We read in the Press Release that "Council was of the opinion that the matter of women's voting should be re-studied by synod and agreed that an overture regarding women's voting should be drafted and go by way of classis and regional synod to general synod. Council also discussed the matter of church planting possibly on Vancouver Island or some other place in B.C."

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

As a faithful reader of "Clarion," I am aware of the several explanations that have been given of Matthew 24. My conclusion is that all writers agree that in that chapter Jesus spoke to His disciples about the destruction of the temple and of Jerusalem and about the terrors of those days. And, indeed, when the disciples pointed out to Jesus the buildings of the temple, He answered that not one stone would be left upon another. The disciples also refer to the destruction of the temple when they asked about the time that it would happen.

So far, I can agree with what I have read. But I cannot agree with those who try to explain that all or the greater part of Matthew 24 is about Jerusalem's destruction. When the disciples asked Jesus about the time of the destruction of the temple, they also have a *second* question: What will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age? One gets the impression that the disciples were thinking that the destruction of the temple and of Jerusalem would at the same time also be the end of this world when Christ would return.

But Jesus told them that amidst coming temptations by means of false prophets and while there would be wars and rumours of wars, first the Gospel would have to be preached throughout the whole world before the end and the close of the age would come (verse 14). It is clear that Jesus replied here to the *second* question of the disciples. Sure, Jesus also answered the first question about the time of the destruction of the temple: "when you see the desolating sacrilege standing in the holy place." But His view was not restricted to the destruction of temple and Jerusalem. He looked farther into the future. He saw the destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple as part of the one history of God's salvation and of God's judgments on earth, a history that would find its climax in Christ's coming on the clouds as the Judge of the earth (verses 30,31).

When we look closely at Matthew 24, we may see that the destruction of the temple and of Jerusalem is not only God's judgment over the unbelief of the people in Jesus' days, but is also meant as a foreboding of God's judgment over all unbelief and apostasy throughout the ages. And the temptations and tribulations for God's chil-

dren at the time of Jerusalem's destruction are an example and foreshadowing of the trials and struggles of the believers of all ages to endure in the faith till the return of Christ.

In Matthew 24 Jesus used images and colours of the time of Jerusalem's destruction to picture the future of the world and of His church till the close of the age. We are convinced that we should read that chapter as Jesus' prophecy about the history of the world from the time that the temple was destroyed till the final judgment, a history in which God will execute His judgments and preserve those who are His.

We can be confirmed in that conviction when we read the second part of that chapter 24, where Jesus spoke of the lesson of the fig tree and about His sudden appearance. In Matthew 24 the world of unbelief of all ages is told about God's judgments. And God's children of all ages are admonished to endure in their tribulations and to be faithful to the end when the Son of man will come on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory to gather His elect from the four winds.

P. Van Assen
Edmonton, Alberta

PRESS RELEASE



Meeting of the Inter-League Publication Board (Board of Directors with Administration Committee) on Friday, November 17, 1995 at the Canadian Reformed Church building, Ancaster, ON

Present from the I.L.P.B.:

- from the Men's League: George Helder and Keith Sikkema
- from the Women's League: Jane Oosterhoff and Joanne Van-Middlekoop
- from the Young People's League: John Smid and John Smith

Present from the Administration Committee:

Pete Engbers, Elaine Spriensma, Irene Boeringa, Rennie Pieterman, Lynda Schouten, Nick de Boer

The meeting was opened with the singing of Ps. 119:10, and the chairman, George Helder, read 1 Cor. 1.18-2.5, prayed, and welcomed everyone present.

The agenda was amended and adopted.

Administration Committee Reports

1. *Progress*
 1. *Watching Movies: No? Yes? How?* by Prof. Gootjes, J. Plug and J. Poppe is almost ready for the printers.
 2. A 3-volume set on Luke by C. Hagens will be printed in 1996.
 3. *Job's Perseverance* by P. de Jong is now in stock.
2. *Sales* – sales have been decreasing lately.

3. *Marketing* – letters have been sent to contact persons in the Independent Christian Reformed Churches, and also to the study societies in the Canadian Reformed Churches
4. *Financial* – our net income has decreased slightly from last year.

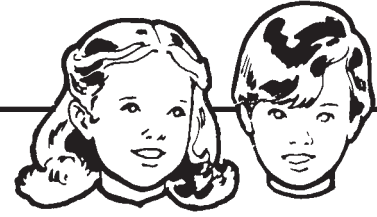
Proposed Projects

1. Rev. C. Stam is working on a book on the salvation holidays (Christmas, Easter, etc.)
2. I.L.P.B. will be reprinting *None Like Thee* by Rev. C. Stam.
The next combined meeting is scheduled for 8 March, 1996 in London. Keith Sikkema closed in prayer and the chairman adjourned the meeting.

On behalf of the I.L.P.B.
John Smith

OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



Dear Busy Beavers,

It is the time of year we celebrate Easter!

What do we remember?

These days, most people think that we celebrate Spring, Easter bunnies, and chocolate.

But that's wrong!

We celebrate the rising from the dead of our Saviour, Jesus Christ!

One early morning, long ago in Palestine, a sad-looking group of women walked along the road. They were very quiet.

Do you know why?

They were very sad. Their Teacher had been killed.

Now they were going to His grave to put sweet-smelling spices on His body.

That's all they could do for Him now.

They arrived at the tomb.

To their surprise, the huge stone was rolled away from the front!

"Who could have done this?" they asked each other.

Suddenly, two men stood by them in dazzling clothes. The women were scared, and bowed to the ground.

"Why are you looking for the living among the dead?" one of the men asked.

"Remember how He told you that the Son of Man must be given up, crucified, and on the third day rise?"

Then the women remembered, and quickly went back to the disciples of Jesus, and told them what they had seen and heard.

Jesus rose from the dead!

He conquered death and the grave!

That's a lot more to celebrate than the coming of spring! Hallelujah, Jesus Christ lives!

April Birthdays

Happy Birthday to all these Busy Beavers who are celebrating their birthdays in April! Have a great day with your family and friends!

Alyson Bosch	April 9	Megan Strating	16
Jeremy DeHaan	9	Jason Linde	18
Kimberly Tuininga	9	Rianne Lodder	24
Allison VanderVeen	10	Tim Sikkema	25
Bradley Bergsma	12	Lynette DeHaas	29
Pamela Hulst	13	Jonathan Vandenbos	30

Quiz Time!

ADD WORDS

To finish each biblical person below, add a word for the number of letters shown by the dots. A clue is given in brackets. Answers at the end.

1. NI . . . EMUS (fish)
2. . . . IPHAR (vessel)
3. R L (pain)
4. TI Y (night insect)
5. HO . . . (ocean)
6. US (summer month)
7. SAN AT (toy)
8. . . . PORAH (fastener)
9. ABAS (storehouse)
10. RAB H (tremble)

FILL IN THE BLANKS

Put the right word in the blank, and if you can't think of it, the texts are at the end of the column.

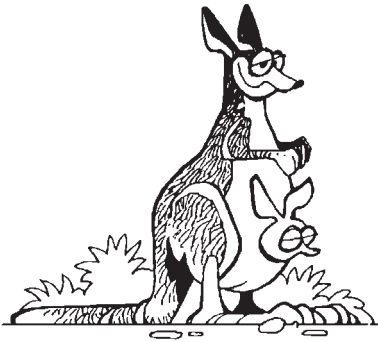
1. "So God created man in his own _____."
2. "When the _____ is in the clouds, I will look upon it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature."
3. "God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I _____.'"
4. Moses said to the people, "The LORD will _____ for you, and you have only to be still."
5. "Serve the LORD with fear, with trembling kiss his feet, lest he be _____, and you perish in the way."
6. "But let all who take refuge in thee _____, let them sing for joy."
7. "O LORD, thou wilt hear the desire of the _____; thou wilt strengthen their heart."
8. "My _____ are ever toward the LORD, for he will pluck my feet out of the net."
9. "Make a joyful noise to God, all the _____."
10. "_____ is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good."

BIBLE NAMES WORD SEARCH

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

Can you find?

Peter	Gethsemane	Jesus
Caiaphas	Pontius Pilate	Herod
Barabbas	Judas Iscariot	Joanna
Mary	Mary Magdalene	Emmaus
Passover		



CODE

by Busy Beaver *Jacque Selles*

A 1	G 7	M 13	S 19	Y 25
B 2	H 8	N 14	T 20	Z 26
C 3	I 9	O 15	U 21	
D 4	J 10	P 16	V 22	
E 5	K 11	Q 17	W 23	
F 6	L 12	R 18	X 24	

3 8 18 19 20 6 18 8 1 19 8 18 19 5 14

7 1 12 12 5 12 21 10 1 8!

MAZE

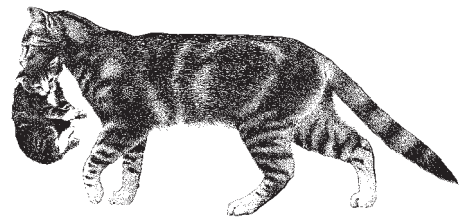
by Busy Beaver *Barbara Bultena*



SCRAMBLED BIBLE NAMES

by Busy Beaver *Marja Vandekamp*

1. obj _____
2. hrut _____
3. arkm _____
4. eukl _____
5. unmbres _____
6. mraons _____
7. shojua _____
8. jusjed _____
9. iseseng _____
10. esuxdo _____
11. ahtmtwe _____



Answers to Bible Puzzles

Add Words
 1. cod, 2. pot, 3. ache, 4. moth, 5. sea, 6. August, 7. ball, 8. zip, 9. barn, 10. shake

Fill in the Blanks

1. Genesis 1:27, 2. Genesis 9:16, 3. Exodus 3:14, 4. Exodus 14:14, 5. Psalm 2:12, 6. Psalm 5:11, 7. Psalm 10:17, 8. Psalm 25:15, 9. Psalm 66:1, 10. Ecclesiastes 9:18

That's all for this time!

Love to you all,
 Aunt Betty

