

Clarion

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Minister of
Foreign Affairs

Ministre des
Affaires étrangères

*The
Prime Minister
has forwarded me a copy of
your letter regarding the
situation in Sudan . . .*

Numbers

10:1-10

By J. De Jong



Signs of Hope!

I have in front of me the Acts of the Synod of the Free Reformed Churches of North America held in Hamilton on June 7-9, 1995. In many ways these Acts show a body of churches seeking to be faithful to the Word of God, and that can only fill our hearts with thankfulness! The Acts indicate that the Free Reformed churches are an active group of churches, maintaining activities in areas like world relief, evangelism, publications and missions. It was especially interesting to read about the developments towards the institution of the church in Cubulco, Guatemala. The mission there is being conducted by one of our graduates, Rev. Ken Herfst, and we rejoice with Rev. Herfst and the sending church that the work has seen so much progress in a relatively short space of time.

Contact with others

Of particular interest for our purposes is the decision recorded in Article 59 of the Acts regarding contact with our churches. The Synod dealt with an overture of the Emmanuel Free Reformed Church in Abbotsford, B.C. proposing to synod that a committee be formed "(1) to take up contact with the Canadian and American Reformed Churches with a view to close contact and eventual unity; (2) to help us as local congregation(s) in taking any further steps in seeking contact and unity with one another." This proposal was discussed extensively at the Synod, and, judging from the comments made as recorded in the Acts, one can ascertain an open attitude to the Canadian Reformed Churches. A reason for thankfulness! Rev. Bilkes said: "We have found on the local level between them and us no difference." Another minister said: "many of them are losing their ideology of the true church idea." I could say a few things about this remark; however, let me leave that for now. Speaking **objectively** one cannot really fault it. The only question is what this "ideology" is all about. Should not every church strive to maintain the confession concerning the true church, Article 28 B.C.? Yet all in all we do not come out too badly.

Perceived differences

The synod did not accept the proposal of the Emmanuel church. From the discussions as they are recorded in the Acts (more may have been said, JDJ) it appears that some delegates saw a considerable difference between the two churches in the area of **preaching**. Rev. Westerink says: "there is a different view on how we are applying and preaching the truth." And one of the considerations in the decision states that there is "the perception in some of our churches that the Canadian Reformed Churches, in general, do not have the same definition of nor appreciation for experiential and applicatory preaching that is prevalent in the Free Reformed churches." Another consideration highlights the present situation of the Free Reformed churches. The synod wanted to take note of "the reality of the situation in our churches in which the experiential preaching is not only highly valued but also perceived to be, to various degrees, threatened."

Now we must not overlook the positive note in this decision. While the overture of the Abbotsford congregation was rejected, the matter was referred to the External Relations Committee with the mandate that the Committee is "encouraged to consider establishing contacts with the Canadian Reformed churches as well as other Reformed bodies." To this I can only say: here we have signs of hope, and signs of a renewed sense of ecumenicity among our brothers in the Free Reformed churches! The decision also specifically makes mention of the prayer of the Lord "that they may all be one." A hopeful sign indeed!

Yet we need to give attention to the perceived differences as recorded in the considerations. How far apart are we? What is it that the Free Reformed churches are trying to conserve for their own people, and what is it that we are perceived to be lacking? Rev. Westerink said: "Among them (our churches, JDJ) there is a growing sense of experience in preaching." Once again, this statement can evoke considerable discussion. However, taken objectively I think Rev. Westerink is correct. That is another reason why we cannot simply brush off the Free Reformed churches by suggesting that we leave them to their own distinctives. For they will say the same things about us! And we cannot begin to make any progress in ecumenicity by simply brushing churches aside.

We need to sit down and reflect on the things that divide us, and on the relative weight and importance we must attach to them. We have much in common in our immediate history! And we need each other more and more in an increasingly troubled time! We can learn from each other! Allow me to briefly focus on some areas which I think need further attention and discussion.

Experiential preaching

On the point of preaching I noticed another interesting comment in the Acts of Synod. Rev. Westerink said: "But we should distinguish between emotional preaching proper and experiential preaching. Emotional preaching can come from the flesh, experiential preaching comes from the Holy Spirit." Here we can only agree! And there is hardly a minister among us who doubts the need for experiential preaching. Preaching which does not engage the person in the pew or speak to his heart is preaching which misses the mark, and essentially wastes everyone's time. We go to church to be fed by the Word, and if it does not affect us in any way, how are we fed?

The general perception among us is growing that the redemptive-historical method of preaching has at times resulted in a rather objective, distant, and formal style of address in which the minister says many things about the account and the persons in the text, but says very little with regard to the life and duty of the person in the pew. The text is opened, but not applied to the situation of the listener. Now this is for the most part the result of a faulty understanding and application of the method.¹ Nevertheless, it is generally recognized that applying the text to the present situation of the parishioner is one of the more difficult elements in the redemptive-historical method of preaching.

One can ask whether the kind of preaching presently practised in the Canadian Reformed churches is sufficiently experiential in the proper sense of the term. We must ask whether or not we have not become too distant in our preaching and whether or not over the years there has been somewhat of a short-circuit between the pulpit and the pew. This can reside in the pulpit or in the pew. But then pulpit should be prepared to examine its own responsibility!

True Reformed preaching should be experiential in the right sense of the term. That is, it must seek to apply the word of God to the *hearts* and *life* of the hearers. It must include the **personal** element. This line is found in the confessions and echoes Holy Scripture itself. The apostle Paul often spoke in the first person; so we may also bring the personal dimension into the preaching, and apply the word of God individually in the life of the congregation. The life of faith has communal basis, and involves communal expression. But it also includes the personal dimension, which is not to be forgotten.

Here the central question is What is meant by the term **experiential**? How do the Free Reformed churches define this kind of preaching? If this kind of preaching is the only kind of preaching that comes from the Holy Spirit, how do we acquire the skill to preach this way? From the Reformed perspective, I would suggest that experiential preaching implies that the minister has truly appropriated the message of the text, and made it a part of his own life, that is, a message which he applies first of all to himself. This self-appropriation does not eliminate the need for further appropriation of the preaching by the minister himself, but is, one might say, an initial stage in that appropriation.

However, the accent in the preaching will never rest on our experience, but on the **magnalia dei**, the great deeds of God effected throughout history for our salvation. The primary frame of reference is a theocentric one. Is not this the only safeguard against moralistic and man-centered, emotionalistic preaching? Indeed, I would see the difference between experiential preaching and emotional preaching precisely in this way: one is based on the text, and on a theocentric perspective on the text, whereas the other is based on man, his feelings, and subordinates the message of the text to a predetermined and prejudiced set of ideas on the various states of one's soul and on the entire spectrum of religious emotions one may encounter at any point in his life.

Discriminating preaching?

One aspect of the "experiential preaching" which the Free Reformed churches wish to conserve is the question: how do we view the congregation? This matter is increasingly being discussed among us. We have always stressed that one must see the congregation as a unity. The congregation is the covenant community of the Lord. Parents and children, old and young, married and single: all form one family in the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore the preacher must not divide the congregation into various groups with regard to their stage in progress to salvation, as, for example, the saved, the unsaved, the straggling, the weak, the doubters, and so on.

Yet we must defend that true Reformed preaching is discriminating in the Scriptural sense of the term! Paul implies that the preaching of the gospel is a fragrance of life to those who believe, but a fragrance of death to the unbelieving and unrepentant, 2 Cor. 2:15,16. Therefore, the minister must first present to the congregation the riches of the work of Christ for the gathered covenant people of God. But he must also call everyone to repentance in his preaching, and warn those who do not repent that the judgement of God abides on them as long as they are not converted.² That is a discrimination in the preaching moulded on the principles of the gospel itself. Besides, the minister ought also to encourage the weak, lift up

the fainthearted, admonish the wayward, expose and punish the wrongs, and direct everyone to the proper conduct outlined in the Word of God. Does the Word itself not give us the proper guidelines for "discriminating preaching?"

Law before Gospel?

Another central characteristic of the kind of preaching that our Free Reformed brothers strongly feel must be conserved is, if I correctly understand them, a preaching which puts the law before the gospel. Here the question is: how can one come to the grace in Christ unless he has been convicted in his heart that he is an unworthy sinner, worthy of nothing but complete and eternal damnation? Must not one become fully convicted of sin through the law, before his heart can receive the truths of the gospel and its grace?

This insistence on a **chronological** pattern needs our attention and discussion. There is no doubt that we need to be made aware of our total depravity, and our utter unworthiness before God. We need to confront the reality of our sin and misery! And the human heart often seeks to soften or simply pass over these matters. In fact, the perception that these matters are considered to have less importance in the Canadian Reformed churches may have some truth to it. We need to ask ourselves how accurately and honest we are in pointing out sins, in practising mutual admonition and exhortation, and in holding each other to the faith. Let us not forget that the heart is deceitful above all things!

However, to assert that one type of preaching – the law – must necessarily **precede** the other, – the gospel is incorrect. The two aspects of the gospel, the promises and demands of the covenant, always go hand in hand. They must be maintained with equal urgency. And in maintaining both aspects, the superiority and over-riding predominance of the grace of God must also be maintained. Even with our failings and shortcomings, the LORD always returns to us in His grace and love! That knowledge has priority, and it is from this rich centre of the good news of Jesus Christ who fulfilled the law in our place that the catechism reaches back to the law as the vehicle exposing our sin and misery, and also reaches forward to that same law as the rule of thankfulness of the Christian life.


A door of hope

The points above are meant to serve as initial thoughts concerning the issues that are perceived to keep us apart. I must agree with Colleague Van Dam that these issues really should not keep us apart.³ Indeed, Rev. Schouls has recently noted that the Synod of the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken held in Zierikzee towards the end of last year declared that on the point of the appropriation of salvation there was no real difference with the Liberated churches. That was a laudable step, and I would regret it if we here in North America begin to erect walls as they are coming down in the Netherlands. Let the future bring better things!⁴ Another sign of hope! Perhaps we can return to the material of this study paper in another issue. And let the local churches keep up the prayers and the discussions with the one goal in mind – "that they may all be one!"

¹This was the view of the late Rev. G. Van Dooren, and in many respects I agree with his position. While holding to the method, Van Dooren always insisted on a living engagement with the text, and a living engagement with the person in the pew.

²See Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 31, q/a 84.

³See *Clarion* Vol 44, no. 18 (Sept. 8, 1995) 414

⁴In this regard, I think the Rev P. Van der Meyden has also done us a service in translating the study paper on the "Appropriation of Salvation in the Creeds" written by Rev. A Baars. This study paper is currently in discussion in contacts between the Liberated churches and the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken (Free Reformed Churches) in Holland. See *The Messenger*, November and December, 1995. 

By H.J.J. Feenstra

BE WISE WITH WISDOM

The style and nature of proverbs

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The mashal

I conclude this exploratory chapter with a short discussion of the *mashal* as a literary style figure. *Mashal* is the Hebrew word for *proverb*, but is not limited to short proverbs of two or three lines. A *mashal* may be:

- a saying, an adage. For example: *The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.*
- a poem which contains a message in the manner of wisdom. For example: the song of praise for the good wife; the satirical song for the King of Babel, and the song about the vineyard.
- a parable. For example: the parable that Nathan told to David. This genre includes the parables of the Lord Jesus in the New Testament, who also uses the *mashal* in the sermon on the mount and during other occasions, for example: *Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.*

Also 2 Peter 3:8 is a *mashal*, which is explained in the following verses (verse 9ff).

Parallelism

The *mashal* in Proverbs is most often a short, tersely formulated saying, often constructed according to the principles of parallelism, in other words made up of two statements which are parallel in meaning and therefore explain each other. Often the meaning of one of the statements of the proverb becomes clear by studying its parallel statement.

This parallelism has a number of variations.

- repetitive parallelism
*He who loves transgression loves strife;
he who makes his door high seeks destruction.*
- contrasting parallelism
*A cheerful heart is a good medicine,
but a downcast spirit dries up the bones.*
- supplemental parallelism
*Leave the presence of a fool,
for there you do not meet words of knowledge.*
- comparative parallelism
*Like a gold ring in a swine's snout
is a beautiful woman without discretion.*

The nature of Proverbs

Finally, some comments about the nature of the *mashal*. Proverbs 1 explains this already in the description as *a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles.*

- Proverb and Figure.* Proverbs speak in figures. *Like a gold ring in the swine's snout is a beautiful woman without discretion.* Proverbs make use of imagery, create the visual, lively, and concrete. Consider the song of the good wife. That is not a theoretical discourse. The writer does not say, "And further, the good wife must do her share in the production of cloth and clothing." No, the author puts it rather differently, *She puts her hands on the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle.* You can see those hands move; you see her spinning and weaving. Proverbs are those kinds of images taken from life; they often make use of comparisons with real situations. Reading proverbs is like looking at pictures. General truths and rules are taught on the basis of actual and practical situations.
- Words and Riddles of the Wise.* Proverbs can be quite puzzling; a *mashal* does not let itself be understood easily. Its message can be hidden quite deeply. Proverbs must be savoured; you must learn to conquer them slowly. First look at

What's inside?

This issue of *Clarion* has two submissions about the *Acts of Synods*. In the editorial, Dr. J. De Jong takes a look at the *Acts* of the last Synod of the Free Reformed Churches of North America while the Rev. W.W.J. VanOene brings to an end his comments about the *Acts* of our past Synod.

Dr. J. Boersma concludes his series on the charismatic movement. We trust that careful reading of these articles will have made you better able to see through this movement which teaches that tongues and prophecy are phenomena by which God still reveals Himself today.

In memory of the great event of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, we include some poetry by E. IJskes-Kooger, translated by Rev. Van Oene.

Dr. Van Dam, in a press review, writes about "the martyrs robed in white." We ought to bring the persecuted children of God to God in prayer often.

Earlier Dr. Van Dam had written about the plight of Christians in Sudan. He had urged *Clarion* readers to address the powers that be on it. Some students took up his challenge. Read on and find out the responses they got.

GvP

them, then walk around them for a while, studying them from all sides, and finally you will see through them. Proverbs should not be read from cover to cover in one sitting. It is better to conquer a few of the proverbs than to read many of them and to forget them immediately.

*Answer not a fool according to his folly,
lest you be like him yourself.*

*Answer a fool according to his folly,
lest he be wise in his own eyes.*

Should you or should you not answer a fool according to his folly? Take your time studying these proverbs. The parallel statements show the way. The meaning of these riddles is concealed, but they often have a double bottom which you may not notice straight away. David thought he understood Nathan, but he received the parable on his own plate. That is also the case with the parables of the Lord Jesus. Those parables are not simple stories for children. The rich young man would have thought for sure that he understood the parable of the treasure in the field and the precious pearl. But when he stood before the Lord Jesus, he did not follow the message of those parables.

- c. *Resistance and Irritation.* A puzzling *mashal* can challenge and even cause resistance because the proverb is an exaggeration. We might think it is formulated in a rather one-sided, oversimplified way. Proverbs 10 says, *The Lord does not let the righteous go hungry.* Were those seven thousand righteous people in the time of Elijah never hungry? How can Psalm 34 then say, *Many are the afflictions of the righteous?*

It is a characteristic of the proverbs that one side of the truth is highlighted seemingly denying that there is (can be) another side to this matter. Yet such an exaggeration is typical; it makes proverbs into proverbs: strong colours and strong language. The proverb would lose its strength and beauty if the other side of the matter and the exceptions to the rule were mentioned every time. In that case, proverbs would no longer be proverbs, they would lose their terseness and expressiveness. When you read, *The Lord does not let the righteous go hungry*, you will recognize this statement as a proverb, without discounting it as unrealistic. Find its parallel statement, and start puzzling. Speaking in proverbs is an art which places high demands on the art of listening.

Having learned this, let us study again the song about the good wife. That song gives you the impression that this woman is perfect in every thing. She is never tired or sick. In the morning she rises with a song of praise on her lips, and when she speaks she never produces senseless coffee chatter, but only genuine wisdom.

What is Proverbs 31 trying to say? Does not this chapter cause all housewives and mothers to feel guilty? It is clear, is it not, that not one woman can live up to the image portrayed in this song.

It is true, this song paints an ideal, but not with the intention to leave all women behind in a state of depression. This chapter calls for and points at a new world and a new life; it points to the restoration of all that has been broken; it points to Christ and His work of reconciliation.

Everyone who believes shares in this reconciliation and redemption, shares in the wisdom which saves.

From Scripture Proverbs 1:6, Proverbs 31:10 - 31
Proverbs 26:4 - 5, Matthew 13:44 - 46
Matthew 19:16 - 22, Proverbs 10:3
1 Kings 19:18, Psalm 34:20



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Prophecy Today?

Theological reflections on the charismatic movement⁷

By J. Boersma

Is prophecy something restricted to the early church or is it a phenomenon that we should still expect today? In the so-called “Toronto Blessing” people laugh, cry, fall to the ground, and manifest other forms of strange behaviour.¹ Connected to the “Toronto Blessing” is an appeal to prophecy. A recent article in *The Banner* reported the following: In the sermon, Pastor Mark Dupont of the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship “compared the Toronto Blessing, which he called ‘the laughing revival,’ to other revivals in history. ‘These are the end times. Prophetic revelation is coming forth,’ he said. ‘All over the world, something has begun to happen. God wants to reveal himself to us.’”² Noteworthy in this brief quotation from the sermon are the two references to “prophetic revelation.” How is one to evaluate such an appeal to prophecy and revelation?

“A prophet like you”

As I noted in the previous article, New Testament prophecy needs evaluation. The apostle Paul makes clear that as tongues need interpretation, so prophecy needs to be evaluated. It needs to be “distinguished” or “weighed.”³ These references give some indication that New Testament prophecy is similar in character to Old Testament prophecy. Just as the Corinthian prophets only saw through a mirror “in obscurity,” so God also spoke to the Old Testament prophets “in riddles” (1 Cor. 13:12; Num. 12:7). Only through Moses did God speak “face to face.”

This enigmatic method of revelation by means of prophets other than Moses had not been the Lord’s initial method of contact with His people. His self-revelation at Mount Sinai had been accompanied by awesome signs of his presence. The Lord even told Moses to warn the people to put limits around the mountain, so that they would not “see the Lord and many of them perish” (Ex. 19:21). The whole event had such a glorious character that the people themselves said to Moses: “Speak to us and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die” (Ex. 20:19).

When the people were on the verge of crossing the Jordan river to enter the promised land, Moses reminded them of these events: “The LORD spoke to you face to face out of the fire on the mountain. At that time I stood between the LORD and you to declare to you the word of the LORD, because you were afraid of the fire and did not go up to the mountain” (Deut. 5:4-5). Moses reminded the Israelites that it was at their own request that the Lord had placed a mediator between himself and the people (cf. Deut. 5:24-25). Initially, however, God had revealed himself to them “face to face.” It is only because the people could not handle the glory of the Lord himself that they had asked for Moses to function as a mediator. From now on, *he* was allowed to see the Lord “face to face,” while *they* would only have indirect contact with their God. The Lord approved of this suggestion by the people: Their suggestion was good (Deut. 5:28; 18:17).⁴ It was good that they were aware that they needed Moses as a prophet to stand in between the Lord and themselves.

In accordance with their request, the Lord made His promise to indeed raise up for them a prophet like Moses (Deut. 18:18). This prophecy did not directly refer to the coming Messiah. In first instance, it spoke of the prophets of the Old Testament dispensation. After all, the Lord immediately added a method of evaluating the prophecy: If the prophecy did not come true it was not really a revelation from God (Deut. 18:21-22). If a prophecy did come true, this in itself was not yet proof that the prophet spoke God’s very own words. Then there was a second evaluation: If the prophet incited to idolatry he was a false prophet (Deut. 13:1-5). Finally, even if it had become clear that a prophet did speak the word of the Lord, this did not mean the end of all discussion: The implications of the prophecy were not always immediately clear, not even to the prophets themselves (1 Pet. 1:10-11). After all, God always spoke to the prophets in visions and dreams, in riddles, not “face to face” as with

Moses (Num. 12:6-7). In fact, throughout the Old Testament, the prophecy of Deuteronomy 18 about a “prophet like you” was not completely fulfilled. In the last chapter of Deuteronomy it says that since his death, “no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the LORD sent him to do in Egypt – to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land” (34:10-11).

Ultimately, therefore, this prophecy of Deuteronomy 18 is only fulfilled in the great prophet and teacher, Jesus Christ. The righteous in Israel knew this. When they saw Jesus feeding five thousand people from five barley loaves and two fish they said, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world” (John 6:14). When Jesus said to them that he had living water for them to drink some of the people reacted by exclaiming, “Surely this man is the Prophet.” Others explained, “He is the Christ” (John 7:40-41). That is also why Jesus himself said to the Pharisees that, “If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me” (John 5:46). Moses *wrote* about Jesus, for he wrote about the *prophet* who would break five barley loaves and two fish to feed five thousand, of the prophet who would claim to be the living water.

This is also what Peter confessed after healing the crippled beggar in Acts 3: Repent, that God may send the Christ who has been appointed for you – even Jesus! Peter then continued: “For Moses said, ‘the Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you’” (3:19-20). Similarly Stephen, when he faced the Sanhedrin and confessed Jesus as his Saviour, said about Moses: “This is that Moses who told the Israelites, ‘God will send you a prophet like me from your own people’” (Acts 7:37).

New Testament prophets

This christological fulfilment of Deuteronomy 18 does not mean that prophecy has ceased with the coming of

Christ. I already noted the similarities between Numbers 12 and 1 Corinthians 13. Also the next chapter, 1 Corinthians 14, illustrates some remarkable similarities between Old Testament and New Testament prophecy. Both need to be weighed. The test of the (non-)fulfilment of the prophecy (Deut. 18:21-22) does not really come to the fore in the New Testament. Presumably, non-fulfilment of a prophecy would automatically mean the disqualification of a prophet and his prophecies, also without this being explicitly mentioned. It is clear, however, also in the New Testament, that a prophecy does not automatically have the last word. Both Paul and John call for discernment of prophecies. The criterion for establishing whether or not a revelation comes from God is fully in line with the Old Testament. There, the test was whether a prophet would incite to idolatry. In the New Testament, this same theocentric test receives a christological focus. In 1 Corinthians 12:3 Paul states that “no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, ‘Jesus be cursed,’ and no one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.” Similarly, John warns his readers: “Do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God” (1 John 4:1-3). This test is very similar to the one described in Deuteronomy 13, the only difference being the christological New Testament emphasis in Paul and John.⁵

Christians “test” spirits to see whether they are from God. Even when there is no reason for doubt about this, there is still a need to evaluate the prophecy. Just as in the Old Testament the prophets did not see all the implications of the revelation which they had received, so this is also the case in the New Testament. In fact, when Paul was on his way to Jerusalem on his third missionary journey, he was warned twice that he would be imprisoned in Jerusalem, first by disciples in Syria and then by the prophet Agabus (Acts 21:4,10-11). Despite the fact that these prophecies clearly came from the Spirit, Paul did not follow the advice which his Christian friends gave him. He continued on his way, and in Jerusalem the prophecies of his imprisonment came true. The reason why Paul did not follow up the advice based on prophecies from the Holy Spirit is that he was compelled, also by the Holy Spirit, to go to Jerusalem, and that prison and hardships were

something which the Holy Spirit warned him about in every city (Acts 20:22-23). Clearly then, Paul considers prophecy, even when it comes true and is inspired by the Holy Spirit, something which still needs to be evaluated.⁶ In this particular case, the evaluation meant that Paul did not go with the advice, even though it was based on true prophecy.⁷ Thus the apostle can even come to the statement that the spirits of prophets are *subject* to prophets (1 Cor. 14:32).⁸ The spirits of prophets are to be submitted to other prophets who evaluate the prophecy.⁹

In 1 Corinthians 12-14 Paul wants to put an end to the chaos in the matter of tongues-speaking. In the process, he also regulates prophesying. He comes with three regulations: only two or three prophets are allowed to prophesy on one occasion; they must do it in turn; and if, while the one is speaking somebody else receives a revelation from God, then the first person must be silent (1 Cor. 14:29-30). This makes it incontrovertible that prophecy is not something uncontrollable or ecstatic. It can be *controlled*. It is impossible to square these clear instructions of the apostle Paul with anything like a “Toronto Blessing.” Furthermore, in considering contemporary claims of prophetic revelation it is good to keep in mind that the *weighing*, the *discernment*, the evaluation of the prophecy was an integral part of the Corinthian worship services.

Conclusions

There are a number of conclusions that could be drawn from our study. I will restrict myself, however, to just a few as they pertain to the cessation or continuation of tongues and prophecy. First, Scripture clearly connects faith to the gift of the Holy Spirit, to Spirit baptism. Spirit baptism is not a second blessing that comes with the gifts of tongues and prophecy. A second blessing theology endangers the unity of the church. Second, the passage of 1 Corinthians 13:8-13 does not give a conclusive answer to the question regarding the cessation of these gifts. Reformed theology should not press this passage in trying to prove that tongues and prophecy have ceased with the closing of the canon. This interpretation is exegetically unwarranted and may give charismatic theologians reason not to take the Reformed position seriously. Third, whatever the exact nature of tongues may have been, it is clear that both they and prophecy fulfilled a revelatory function. This means that the closing of the canon made them obsolete. Finally, according to the book of Acts, tongues and prophecy function within a particular period of salvation

history. This further supports the thesis that these gifts came to an end with the apostolic period.

¹Cf. G.H. Visscher, “Toronto Blessing or Temples of the Holy Spirit?” in *Clarion* 44:11 (June 2, 1995) 253-56.

²Gayla Postma, “My Non-encounter with the Toronto Blessing,” in *The Banner*, April 10, 1995, p. 6.

³Paul uses the noun *diakrisis* (distinguishing) in 1 Cor. 12:10 and the verb *diakrinō* (distinguish, weigh) in 14:29.

⁴H. De Jong regards the Israelites’ request for a mediator as something negative, since it is a choice for indirect contact with God only (*Deuteronomium: De evangelische wet* [Kampen: Kok, 1987] 1.47-48, 11.15-16). There is nothing in the text, however, that suggests that the Lord does not really mean it when he says that the Israelites have spoken well.

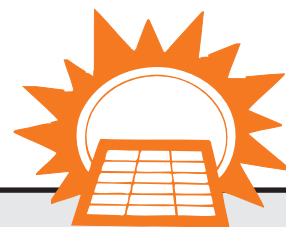
⁵Cf. the warnings against false prophets in Matt. 7:15; 24:11; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Pet. 2:1.

⁶J. Van Bruggen mentions several other examples of evaluation of prophecy (Acts 11:28-30; 13:2-3; 11:2-18; 16:9-10) in “Women in the Congregation: To Speak or Not to Speak?” *Diakonia* 6 (1992) 54.

⁷D.A. Carson, following Wayne Grudem, goes one step further. In their view, the “distinguishing” of prophecy means that a prophetic oracle could be mixed in character: Not all of it had divine revelatory status. Carson appeals to the prophecy of Agabus, which stipulates that the Jews would bind Paul and hand him over to the Romans (Acts 21:10-11). In the fulfilment of the prophecy, however, Paul is not bound by the Jews but by the Romans, while the Jews try to kill Paul with mob violence. Says Carson: “I can think of no reported Old Testament prophet whose prophecies are so wrong on the details” (*Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987], p. 98). I cannot find Carson convincing. In the fulfilment of Agabus’ prophecy, it is clearly the Jews who grab Paul (21:30), with the Roman soldiers stepping in and arresting him (21:33). This “transfer” from the Jews to the soldiers is clearly what Agabus had in mind. Cf. on this point Norris Wilson, “Prophecy Today,” in *Proceedings of the International Conference of Reformed Churches, September 1-9, 1993* (Neerlandia, AB: Inheritance, 1993), pp. 130-32.

⁸Paul uses here the verb *hypotassō*, the same word he uses in verse 34 for the submission of women.

⁹Gordon D. Fee understands this verse to mean that the inspired utterances of the prophets are subject to the speakers themselves. In other words, the speaker is in control of these revelations. Prophecy is not a form of ecstasy (*The First Epistle to the Corinthians* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987], p. 696). The open question with this exegesis is why Paul repeats the word “prophets” if it refers to the very same speakers in both cases. In saying, “the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets” the natural reading would be to understand the second occurrence of the word “prophets” to refer to different “prophets.”



By Mrs. R. Ravensbergen

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." Romans 15:13

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Another winter is behind us, and we are looking forward to a nice spring and a warm summer. No more frost and snow, the trees start budding and soon we can enjoy the flowers and the sun. Some of us are already making plans for the summer holidays. Yes, but . . .

Things do not always go the way we plan them. For our life is full of unpredictable things and unexpected changes, for the better or for the worse. Maybe you are young and healthy and you are making all kinds of exciting plans for the future. Then, suddenly, the doctor diagnoses you of having cancer. Or the person you love the most is taken away from here. Or due to an accident you have to face a permanent handicap: gone is your career. Or the changes go gradually; because you are aging you have to drop one thing after another until you get the feeling that there is not much left for you. Or . . . the list could go on. Do you see any of these things happen to you, or to someone in your family, friends, or church circle? If so, what are you going to do? How can you carry on as a happy Christian when it seems that there is nothing left to be happy about?

Our Lord Jesus Christ left His Father's House and He came down to earth. Why did He do that? Humiliation, pain, suffering loneliness and death were awaiting Him here. Those things did not come unexpectedly to Him, He knew it all. He knew that it was the will of His Father that He suffer and die, even be deserted by God. Yet He was obedient and went through it all the way. He cared while He was on earth for the sick and the handicapped. The Lord Jesus healed many of them, He even brought dead people to life. But He did not take all the suffering away. The people who were healed may have become sick again later. Lazarus and the son of the widow in Nain would have to die again. There were still many sick, lame and blind people left in the days when the Lord Jesus was on earth, even though He could have healed them all. Misery, suffering and grief is still here with us, and it will be there until the end of days. They are the consequences of the fall into sin, and we are daily confronted with those consequences. The Lord Jesus used those who were healed by Him as signs in order that those who saw them would be able to believe that He was the Son of God. They are written in God's Word so that we also will be able to believe in Him. Not only can we read about the *signs* and the *wonders*, but also about His *death and resurrection*, His *ascension* and the *outpouring of the Holy Spirit*. The story is only complete with that addition. Only then will we be able to understand it. With His suffering and death on the cross the Lord conquered Satan. Satan is the origin of suffering and pain. Because he has been conquered, his power only stretches as far and as long as the Lord still allows him to have power. It is all under God's control.

What comfort is that to us now when our life seems shattered as a result of a devastating development in our life? How can we carry on when there seems no hope left of ever functioning at a desired level again? Why do some of us have to suffer so much?

Let us remember what Jesus did for us. He gave up everything in obedience to His Father. He was without sin, for He was God, yet He became man and bore God's wrath for our sin. He lived on earth, He worked, He taught, He made clear to everyone who believed in Him that He was the Son of God. He wanted us all to know that there is hope for everyone who believes in Him. There is hope for the future, for this life here on earth is not the end of everything. We are sinful people who are unable to ever face God the Father. That is how corrupt we are. But He came and paved the way for us. All of us who believe that, can come to the Father. Our sins are washed away with the blood that Christ poured out for us on Golgotha. When we believe that we will have the comfort that the suffering here on earth will come to an end.

Does that help us now? Yes, it does. For Christ the Lord also sent us His Holy Spirit. The Spirit is here with us to help us when we try to accomplish the task that the Lord give us to do. The Spirit will guide us and work in us the desire to serve the Lord, to go to church, to read the Bible, to live in His ways, to praise Him, and so our faith will be strengthened. Our faith will be so strong that it will only become stronger yet as a result of the difficulties that we have to encounter. In faith we will be able to praise our God and so to witness to all those around us that we believe in the Lord, and that He is with us. All that is possible. Maybe there is not much sense in planning our future here anymore. But we can look forward to that everlasting future that our Saviour has prepared to us. It is like going on a sweepstake-holiday with all the expenses paid, almost too nice to be true. Except this time it is true. Nothing can interfere with it and best of all: it will never come to an end. If our Saviour, being without sin, could go through so much suffering to prepare that future for us, then we can suffer, in the strength of the Lord, also for a little while. Is it still difficult? Probably it is. Tears will still be shed, there will be pain and hardships. But always keep looking at the Lord. There will come an end to all the sadness when we may see His everlasting glory and be part of the life with Him that never ends!

*My soul, why are you sad and grieving,
Why so oppressed with anxious care?
Hope yet in God, His Word believing;
For, light and joy from Him receiving,
I'll praise His Name again and laud
My help and my God.*

Psalms 43:5

Birthdays in May:

4: Debbie Veenstra
RR 1, Sherkston, ON L0S 1R0

30: Bernie DeVos
"ANCHOR HOME," 361 30 Rd, RR 2, Beamsville,
ON L0R 1B0

Happy Birthday to both of you, and until next month,
Mrs. R. Ravensbergen
7462 Hwy. 20, RR 1, Smithville, ON L0R 2A0



Persecution Past and Present

Living comfortably in the Western world can make it difficult to imagine the very real persecution of Christians that has occurred in relatively recent history and still occurs. When considering the following news items, marvel at the faithfulness of God. Persecution tends to purify and strengthen the church rather than to destroy it. Let us not forget those who suffer for the faith.

Russia Opens the Books on Red Terror

The Presidential Commission on Rehabilitation of Victims of Political Repression issued a detailed report Nov. 27, 1995, focusing on the persecution of Christians during the Soviet period. According to the report, "many clergymen, monks, and nuns were brutally martyred by the Bolsheviks" in a campaign which began in spring 1918, following the 1917 Russian Revolution. "They were crucified on the Royal Doors (which in Orthodox churches separate the altar from the rest of the church), shot in the dungeons of the Cheka (the predecessors of the KGB), strangled with their vestments, drowned in ice-covered rivers and subject to torture." Archbishop Andronik of Perm was buried alive by the Cheka after appealing to his flock not to participate in the May Day parade which, in 1918, fell in Holy Week. A campaign to confiscate church valuables began in 1922 to break the backbone of the church.

Repression peaked in the late 1930s. In 1937, 136,900 Orthodox clergy were arrested and 85,300 of them shot. A year later, 28,300 were arrested, of whom 21,500 were shot. In 1939, of 1,500 clergy arrested, 900 were shot. By 1930, of 500 churches in Moscow, only 224 were still operating. Two years later only 87 remained. A new wave of persecution erupted under Nikita Khrushchev.

The report arrives at the same time the Communist Party has changed its style. Red banners bearing the face of Christ are now often prominent at Communist Party rallies. Gennady Zyuganov, the Communist leader, quotes Paul extensively on the campaign trail. On a recent visit to Kurtz, he declared party support for the Orthodox Church in four of five speeches. (*Christian Observer*)

Persecution and growth in Zaire

During the 1960s Zaire suffered eight years of violence and anarchy in which thousands of Christians, including missionaries, were martyred. Yet the persecution and pressure served to purify the believers who remain. There has been very strong growth in the church. From less than one percent of the population in 1990, Christians now account for 21 percent of the population. (*Christian Observer*)

Persecution and growth in China

Christians in China suffered the most widespread and harsh persecution during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). However, rather than eradicating the church, the fires of persecution purified, strengthened and expanded the church. Much of this growth has been in response to the illegal radio and literature evangelism from outside the country and through itinerant preachers and the illegal house church networks. (*Christian Observer*)

A new order came from the Chinese government January 14 repeating their demand that all places of worship in China be registered with the government. The order was publicized by the New China News Agency. State Councillor, Ismail Amat, said that unregistered groups were interfering with government, law, education and other social affairs. There must be a rule of law, Amat claimed.

Registration of some kind has been a goal of Chinese public policy since the 1950s. In January 1994, there was a renewed effort to get all unsanctioned groups to have their places of worship registered. According to Hong Kong's Chinese Church Research Centre, house churches that seek to register must meet certain conditions. Leaders fear these conditions will compromise their faith by giving ultimate authority to the state.

In Shanghai, there are several reports of increased police crackdowns on unregistered meeting points. Guests arriving at a restaurant for a Christian wedding were sent away. In November two Shanghai homes were raided by police, who videotaped all present and held the participants for one to five days. In another case, at least six homes were raided simultaneously in a well-orchestrated attack. The police interrogations of those

arrested were aimed particularly at literature distribution. One leader believed they were trying to find a local printing press that was printing Christian literature. Another reported that the pressure has caused an increase in meetings since larger groups could no longer meet. Since the raids began, there are thousands more groups meeting in Shanghai, that source said. (*REC News Exchange*)

Rapid growth in Cuban churches

Thousands of new attenders have caught Cuban churches unprepared. According to Fafael Cepeda of Cuba's Presbyterian Reformed Church, many who thought Cuba's revolution would fill all their needs are now turning to Christianity. Some of these are the "new faithful," old members who are returning after 30 years and are often professionals with a solid education. Others have had no previous contact with the churches (*REC News Exchange*).

Christians in Saudi Arabia

The Dutch Christian relief organization Dorcas has initiated a drive for more freedom for Christians in Saudi Arabia. This country is one of the most uncompromising Islamic nations in the world and the practice of any religion other than the Muslim one is strictly forbidden. According to Dorcas, Christians must meet secretly otherwise the secret police will break up the gatherings. Muslims who convert to Christianity usually become isolated from family and friends and Christians have the last chance for available employment. Furthermore Christians are not able to travel as freely in the country, pay extra taxes and are disadvantaged in courts of law. Christian literature is forbidden.

Because of Saudi Arabia's oil, Western countries are reluctant to say much about the oppression. But the plight of Christians could get worse for the crown prince Abdullah who is ready to take over from his ailing brother King Fahd is known to have strong conservative Islamic views.

The population of Saudi Arabia is 99% Islamic and the country has no written constitution and no guaranteed human rights. It is also one of the few countries in the world which has never signed any international human rights accord. (*Nederlands Dagblad*)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

Despite the editor's note in 45/3 to the effect that the discussion regarding Bible translations was considered closed, the subsequent edition of *Clarion* contained another letter to the editor regarding the subject. What is most disconcerting about this letter however is the fact that in order to apply some brakes to the "NIV locomotive" it resorts to a great amount of misinformation. It is disturbing that the editors of *Clarion* have published a letter which contains so many errors, as this only beclouds the issue. Having done so, I hereby ask you to reopen the matter just one more time in order to correct this misrepresentation of the facts.

Whatever the sources are that br. Rick J. Duker makes use of, it is apparent that they are in error in the following respects.

- (i) Although br. Duker suggests that the Vaticanus manuscript is under lock and key in the Vatican and that "no one can examine it," the fact is that this was only true up to the late 1800s; in 1889-90 the Vatican Library made the entire document available to all through a complete photographic facsimile, and a subsequent facsimile edition of the New Testament was made available in Milan in 1905 (B. M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 1973, 47). The manuscript is available today.
- (ii) Br. Duker attempts to discredit the Vaticanus manuscript by referring to the fact that it contained the apocrypha. By the same standard one would however also have to discredit the KJV which he esteems so highly, since it along with all the sixteenth century English translations also contained the Apocryphal books! If the Vaticanus manuscript is inferior because it contains the Apocrypha, one would have to maintain the same for the textual basis of the KJV which obviously also contained the apocryphal books! The fact is, as any introduction to the apocrypha will tell us, that the acceptance of the Apocrypha was not really a manuscript question but it was due to the fact that copyists of Jerome's fourth century Latin Vulgate ignored Jerome's warning that the apocrypha really

belonged in a separate category, with the result that the Council of Trent later declared it part of the Roman Catholic canon.

- (iii) It is furthermore erroneous to suggest that the Roman Catholic Church will never accept our Bibles because "they stand in the Reformed tradition;" the difference with respect to Rome's Bible has always had more to do with the fact that its versions were based heavily on the Latin Vulgate; in recent years however, Rome has been busy producing translations such as the *Jerusalem Bible* which though different in other respects have the same textual base as the modern translations we use (cf. the article on *Catholic Versions in The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, VI, 814f.).
- (iv) Br. Duker suggests that the NIV and other translations have created uncertainty by producing a translation that has a great deal of footnotes. One wonders here however what exactly constitutes "certainty." The simple fact is that at the time the KJV was produced the work on manuscripts was still in its infancy. As J.P. Lewis says: "the King James scholars could have known fewer than twenty-five late manuscripts of the New Testament and these were carelessly used. Today there are 5,358 known New Testament manuscripts and fragments" (*The English Bible from KJV to NIV: a History and Evaluation*, 1991, 42). Thus the certainty that br. Duker clings to may not be so certain after all. It is best therefore to consider the comment which came from our Australian brothers and was taken up in the *Report to Synod 1995* to the effect that "scholars from all camps agree that 95-97% of the text is established without doubt or debate" (p.5); furthermore, as the report argues, it is not wise for a church to accept or reject a translation on this basis (p.6).

The committee that reported to General Synod Abbotsford 1995 often stressed the need to stay away from "unfair accusations" and "exaggerated charges" (e.g., p.159) in the debate about translations. Although understandable, it is all the more regrettable when such methods are used when speaking about the Bible. Br. Duker and others who

wish to debate on these issues would do well to bear this in mind.

With Christian greetings,
G. H. Visscher

Dear Editor:

Re: Suffering in Sudan (vol. 44, No. 21; Oct 20, 1995)

Recently, some of the Grade 11 Bible students of Credo Christian High School in Langley, B.C. took up Dr. VanDam's challenge to write our Members of Parliament about the suffering of Christians in Sudan.

As in past years, Acts forms a large part of the Bible curriculum for these students. These year we concentrated on the theme, "The gospel of Jesus Christ progresses despite all opposition." We found this to be true in Acts – "You shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8) We traced the progress as Luke relates it to Theophilus and to us. We studied Revelation 12: "The Woman and the Dragon."

To add a more contemporary flavor to this theme, we read and discussed Dr. VanDam's editorial "Suffering in Sudan" as well as Christine Farenhorst's excellent article about the phenomenal growth of Christianity in Communist China, "I will build my church." (June, 1995. *Reformed Perspective*). The students quickly realized their own privileged status as citizens in a country where they are free to worship according to God's Word. A number of them felt compelled to heed Dr. Van Dam's advice. Several wrote to Prime Minister Chretien. Others wrote to various TV news programs. The politicians were the only ones to reply. We've enclosed a sample reply from the Prime Minister's office as well as one from the (then) Minister of Foreign Affairs. Perhaps our experience will stimulate other readers of *Clarion* to do the same. "We shall be His witnesses . . . to the ends of the earth."

On behalf of the Grade 11 Bible students of Credo Christian Highschool,

Mrs. Sarah Vandergugten

For further information on the plight of Sudanese Christians contact:

Frontline Fellowship
P.O. Box 74
Newlands, 7725 South Africa

Office of the
Prime Minister



Cabinet du
Premier ministre

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0A2

January 17, 1996

John Torenvliet and
Karen Moesker,
21846 - 52 Avenue,
Langley, British Columbia.
V3A 4R1

Dear Mr. Torenvliet and Ms. Moesker:

On behalf of the Right Honourable Jean Chrétien, I wish to acknowledge receipt of your correspondence of November 21 regarding your comments with respect to the Republic of the Sudan.

Thank you for writing the Prime Minister. You may be assured that your remarks have been carefully reviewed. A copy of your correspondence has been forwarded to the Honourable André Ouellet, Minister of Foreign Affairs. I am certain that the Minister will appreciate being made aware of your comments and will wish to give them every consideration.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "K. Peever".

Kimberley Peever
Special Assistant
Correspondence

Canada



JAN 24 1996

Ms. Sherry Driegen
Ms. Deanna Hellewell
Ms. Annette Hendriksen
5575 - 112 Street
Delta, British Columbia
V4K 3N3

Dear Ms. Driegen, Ms. Hellewell and Ms. Hendriksen,

The Prime Minister has forwarded me a copy of your letter regarding the situation in Sudan.

You may be assured that the Canadian government is following the situation very closely and is actively seeking to bring an end to the war in southern Sudan. However, the situation is complicated and goes beyond the issue of persecution of Christians. There are ethnic and cultural influences. As well, there are abuses by all parties to the conflict.

The Sudanese government and the predominantly Christian rebel factions have each been cited for abuses against non-combattant populations and for obstructing international humanitarian assistance. There are continued reports of indiscriminate bombing by government forces. As well, all sides have been cited for torture, summary executions and the placing of landmines.

Canada regularly speaks out at the United Nations General Assembly on the Sudanese human rights situation in general and has annually co-sponsored resolutions at the Commission on Human Rights sharply critical of Sudan. The Government of Canada also tries, at the same time, to maintain a constructive dialogue with the Sudanese authorities and with the rebel factions on questions of peace and security as well as human rights and good governance issues. During such discussions Canadian officials have raised general human rights issues and specific cases.

Canada has been seeking to promote a negotiated political settlement to the chronic civil war in the Sudan. We helped to found the "Friends of IGADD" group to provide a common focus for international (donor) support for the peace process launched by the Peace Commission of the Intergovernmental Authority on Drought and Development, a regional organization embracing Sudan and some neighbouring countries.

Because of the human rights situation, Canada's government-to-government aid to Sudan remains suspended. However, Sudan continues to be one of the largest recipients of Canadian humanitarian assistance in Africa. Since 1990, the Canadian International Development Agency has provided over \$100 million in emergency assistance and food aid, including \$6.5 million for 1995, through non-governmental organizations and UN agencies. Such funding supports efforts to distribute emergency humanitarian relief to needy groups in both government and rebel held areas.

Thank you again for writing on this issue.

Yours sincerely,

André Ouellet

Abbotsford's Acts

(Conclusion)

By W.W.J. VanOene

In the previous issue, Rev. VanOene dealt with what General Synod Abbotsford, 1995, did with private submissions from individual members, the Book of Praise, and the question of the sisters voting for office-bearers. Below you will find Rev. VanOene's reflections on the synod decisions on Bible Translation, Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and, what he calls, the "Denver-case."

Bible translation

Reading on in the Acts, we see Bible Translation come into view.

This is not the place to renew the debate about RSV or NIV or some other translation. May it suffice for the moment to express my agreement with what Dr. De Jong wrote about synod's decision to recommend the NIV for use in the churches.

Just after synod took that decision I received an issue of *New Horizons*, periodical of (in) the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, in which three ministers wrote an article amounting to "Why I No Longer Use the NIV." They were critical of this translation and two of them advocated switching to the NKJV.

I would not make this recommendation but promote continued use of the RSV which to me still has not been proved to be so bad that it has to be replaced. Its language may not be as "modern" or popular as that of the NIV, but it is dignified and has served us well for the years we have been using this translation.

Besides, the more "modern" and "popular" a translation is the sooner it will have to be replaced as it has become outdated, for the daily language changes at a rapid pace. Those of our readers who visit the Netherlands after an absence of some forty years notice such a difference in the language they remember that in this respect they may feel like strangers.

If the church tries to keep up with the language used all around us, a new "translation" will be needed every ten to twenty years. The cost in time, effort, and money will be tremendous.

At the same time the young people will never become familiar with the language to such an extent that also in old age they remember the passages they learned at home, in church, and at school.

As for the "argument" that "continued use of the RSV would lead to possible isolation of the Canadian Reformed churches," I ask: "So what?" And: "Isolation from whom?"

Korean sister churches do not use the RSV, neither do the ones in the Netherlands and in South Africa. The only ones might be those in Australia, but I cannot see how it would amount to isolation from the Australian sister churches if we continued to use the RSV and they were using the NASB or the NKJV.

Who else could be there, isolation from whom would have to be feared if we used a translation different from the one they are using? Are there not more points at which we find ourselves in isolation? Pray, what is wrong with that?

It is my impression that it is more and more forgotten among us that we are strangers and sojourners here on earth and that we are obligated to prove that we are not afraid to show that we are different, not for the sake of being different but for the sake of preserving that which we have received.

There is no need at all and it is even dangerous to try "keeping up with the Joneses."

Rules for ecclesiastical fellowship

In Art. 101,VII,B, we read ". . . the Church at London must prove that the current Rules are against Scripture, Confession, or the Church Order. London does not do this. Therefore Synod cannot deal with this."

We find approximately the same in VIII,B,1. "The appellants fail to prove that the new rules are against Scripture, the Confessions or the Church Order."

Sounds good, doesn't it?

No, it does not.

I am not speaking about the nature of the requests made to synod, nor about the question whether they were inadmissible on other grounds. I take issue with the reason why these submissions were declared inadmissible.

If this reasoning is correct, *any* proposal to change a decision of a previous synod can be wiped off the table. Then also "new grounds" cannot be a valid reason why a synod may take a matter to hand, unless these "new grounds" contain proof that the previous decision was against the Scriptures, the Confession, or the Church Order.

Here things were made too "heavy," as a church has the perfect right to come with proposals for change if it is of the opinion that the interest of the churches is served better by such changes, and not only in case it is convinced that existing rules are in conflict with God's Word, the Confession or the Church Order.

It is often thought among us that an appeal is allowed only in case the decision by which one complains to have been wronged conflicts with God's Word or with the Church Order. This is a misunderstanding.

Proven conflict with God's Word or with the Church Order gives one the right not to consider a decision by which he has been wronged settled and binding, but if one can prove that he has been wronged by a decision, he has the right to appeal to the broader assembly, also when that decision cannot be said to conflict with the Scriptures or the Church Order. In the latter case he has the right to appeal but *not* the right not to consider the decision in question settled and binding.

It is too bad that synod 1995 did not distinguish correctly in this respect.

Contact Orthodox Presbyterian Church

Arriving at the point of contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, we bear in mind that we are dealing only with the decisions of Synod 1995 and not with the whole question of our relation with the OPC. We'll consider various elements in those decisions and try to evaluate them.

In some submissions to synod the word "premature" was used. It was also proposed to rescind the 1977 decision in which the OPC was recognized as a true church. To me it seems that many of the controversies among us that came to the attention of Synod 1995 stem from that 1977 decision.

Gradually I have come to the conclusion that that 1977 decision was premature indeed. It was taken in answer to the question of the Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations of the OPC "whether the Canadian Reformed churches are prepared to say that the OPC shows the marks of the false church as given in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession."

With hindsight I say: Synod 1977 should have restricted itself to answering that question, and should have replied: "No, the Canadian Reformed churches are not prepared to say . . . etc." Much confusion would have been prevented thereby.

Instead, Synod 1977 made a positive statement, recognizing "the OPC as a true Church of our Lord Jesus Christ as confessed in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession."

This was more than synod was asked for, and confusion has reigned ever since.

Synod 1995 was asked to rescind that decision but denied the request. In its considerations it stated on this point: "Rescinding the decision of 1977 would in effect be the same as declaring the OPC false."

Is this correct? If I say that something is not white, do I then thereby declare that it is black? Or if I come to the conclusion that I was a little hasty when calling something white and therefore take that judgment back for the time being until I am more certain, does this then mean that I therefore conclude to the opposite or that anyone has the right to draw that conclusion?

"Not-false" does not necessarily mean "true," and "not-true" does not necessarily mean "false." One does not unavoidably fall into the trap of a

pluriformity-theory when making this statement.

Understand me well: I am not advocating the rescinding of "1977," merely discussing arguments used at synod 1995.

Two-track?

Another point was raised by a brother who wrote me the following:

I am bothered by an inner contradiction within the Acts. On page 71, 106 – the OPC decision – Synod said: 'The argument that recognizing a church as a true church implies having full ecclesiastical fellowship is confessionally warranted . . .' In other words (this is my paraphrase), to say: 'True Church but no Ecclesiastical Fellowship (EF) is *not* confessionally warranted.' In other words, to proceed on two tracks: 'True Church but no EF,' is unconfessional. But then, on p.81 (Article 115 – the Denver decision) this admitted unconfessional position is used to deny an appeal. What has been admitted to be unwarranted by the confession is used to perpetuate and justify saying: 'True Church but no EF.'

Here I see the same unwarranted drawing of conclusions that I pointed out with the point of rescinding "1977."

I do not think that even logically it is permitted to jump from "A+B is confessionally warranted" to "Having A but not B is therefore *not* confessionally warranted."

I must come to the defense of Synod 1995 in this respect.

Can there not be reasons why something that is confessionally warranted cannot be achieved as yet? One could differ about the question whether the reasons for having A but not B are sufficient or not, but this does not justify the conclusion in the above letter.

Synod 1995 came to the conclusion that full Ecclesiastical Fellowship cannot be established as yet, but charged the relevant committee to work towards it: remove the last obstacles to bringing A and B together.

In the meantime, A and B have not yet been brought together, although it is confessionally warranted to strive towards it. That's why it has to be tried to remove the impediments.

Given this situation, however, Synod 1995 was correct in considering that "in the interim, it is understandable that when requests for admission reach the Canadian Reformed church-



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Rev. D. de Jong

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CALLED to Burlington West, ON
and Fergus, ON

Rev. W.M. Wielenga
of Lynden, Washington, U.S.A.

es, these cannot be rejected simply by stating that the OPC has been declared a true church."

In this connection I must say something that has been bothering me in connection with the "Denver-case."

For many years I received and read *New Horizons*, mentioned before. I have, however, never read the accusation of the "breaking of the vows" when an OPC minister became Christian Reformed. That's all I want to say about this point.

Scanning the Acts further, we note the following among the Considerations: "The suggestion to have a committee investigate local practices is not acceptable. We judge each other not on the basis of local practices, but on the basis of our confessions and official documents."

This consideration would meet with our approval if it had concerned what

individual *members* do or do not do, for example: ministers. One should never judge a federation by the preaching of one or more ministers in its midst. It is a different matter, however, when nothing is done about it if ministers or whole congregations do not abide by the “official documents.”

There is more to this point than meets the eye.

In this connection we also refer to Consideration V.A.2: “Information available regarding the Lord’s Supper, indicates that there are different practices with regards to the supervision of guests at the Lord’s Table in the FRS compared to the OPC.” See also Consideration B.3. Here adherence to and maintaining of the “official documents” does put weight into the scales, and justly so.

We certainly have to judge one another by our “confessions and official documents,” but it definitely should also be investigated whether the “confessions and official documents” are being adhered to.

Synod realized this when in Consideration B.3. it did speak about the

“OPC living up to its standards.” This admittedly does not necessitate a contact committee going around and investigating local congregations, but it does mean that a simple “we judge each other by our official documents” won’t do.

We realize that the point of contact with the OPC is a difficult one, as we have struggled with it for many years. The chairman rightly stated “that in making this decision Synod has dealt with matters of great concern within the churches.”

Perhaps the end is in sight.

Conclusion

The end is in sight for our remarks anyway. There may be a reason in the future to come back to the Acts of Synod 1995, but it was not our intention to give an exhaustive evaluation.

I should like to make one more remark about the manner in which various matters were dealt with at Synod.


In “olden days” advisory committee reports were read in open session, so that all visitors knew exactly what the members of synod were talking about. It was even so that as many spare copies of these reports as were avail-

able were handed out to visitors on the condition that they would be returned at the end of the day’s sessions.

This was not done at this synod. Rev. G. van Popta had asked me to write a few articles for *Clarion* about the things going on at synod, so that our readers would be able to “live along” with the brothers.

Since it makes little sense to sit there as a visitor and to hear someone say: “Mr. Chairman, I should like to make a remark about Consideration III,A.2, second part” and not to know what it was all about, let alone to be able to write about it for the membership, I asked for copies of the advisory reports, informing the moderamen of the purpose for which I asked them, but was refused. A press release would be issued, I was told.

This was frustrating, to say the least.

I express the fervent wish that the next general synod will follow a different procedure, so that visitors to the sessions are not left in the dark, or at least in the twilight, but know precisely what the brothers are talking about. Then they also can pray more concretely. 



CORRECTION

A couple of annoying errors showed up in the year end report in the 1996 yearbook.

On page 154, top, I neglected to mention that the fourth student receiving his diploma was Mr. Hilco De Haan, who received the Diploma of Theological Studies (2 year program) specializing in missions.

On page 155, in the first full paragraph, third line from the bottom one reads: “the requirements of creation.” This should be: “the requirements of the church order.”

My apologies for these errors.

J. De Jong



Wachters bij het Graf*

Ik weet wel dat ze mij nog steeds bedreigen,
maar nu ik sterf komt niets er meer op aan.
Nu wil ik zeggen wat ik moest verzwijgen,
dan kan ik rustig tot mijn vaad'ren gaan.

Ik stond op wacht, met andere soldaten,
bij 't graf van Jezus, die gekruiste Jood.
Wij hielden 't graf voortdurend in de gaten,
al wist ik niet waarom, want Hij was dood.

Wel scheen't dat Hij gezegd had bij Zijn leven
dat Hij weer op zou staan vanuit het graf,
maar op z'n minst vond ik het overdreven
dat een Romein gehoor aan zoiets gaf.

Zo'n nacht duurt lang, ik stond my te vervelen,
en hoopte heim'lijk op een zwaardgevecht.
Er was een kans dat men het lijk zou stelen:
dit had the commandant althans gezegd.

Maar er gebeurde niets, tot het begon te dagen.
Nog weet ik niet wat er nu eerder was:
het vallen van de steen, of het gedragen
geluid van duizend voeten op het gras.

De grond bewoog, alsof de aarde zuchtte.
Een bliksemflits! Een donderslag weerklonk.
Ik zag nog dat de andere wachters vluchtten
maar ik keek naar de open grafspelonk.

Hij kwam, en lichtte also het ochtengloren
en als een bloem die juichend opengaat.
Hij was volmaakt, als uit Gods schoot geboren,
Zijn ogen blonken als de dageraad.

Toen ging ik heen, aar in de stad gekomen
geloofde men geen woord van mijn verhaal.
Men smaalde dat Zijn lijk was weggenomen
terwijl wij wachters sliepen, allemaal.

Men bood mij geld, als ik dit rond wou strooien;
dat ik gedroomd had ginder bij het graf.
Voor geld ging ik mijn eer te grabbel gooien,
maar van die Jezus kwam ik nooit meer af.

Ik weet het, het was laf dat geld te kiezen
En met een leugen 't leven door te gaan.
Nu echter heb ik niets meer te verliezen,
nu zeg ik het: Toch is Hij opgestaan!

E. Ijskes-Kooger
Uit: "Een fluit van riet"

Guard at the Grave

Although I know they still on me are spying,
It will no longer matter what I do.
I'll tell my secret, for I now am dying.
Then I in peace can to my fathers go.

With other soldiers I that night was standing
At Jesus' grave, the Jew they crucified.
Our constant watchfulness they were demanding.
I didn't know why: we all knew that He died.

It seems that He had said while He was living
That He would rise again from death and grave.
I thought that no one credence should be giving
To such a tale, at least no Roman brave.

A night is long: I stood there bored and sullen.
In secret I was hoping for a solid fight,
For yes, the corpse might secretly be stolen.
That is what the centurion said last night.

But nothing happened till the dawn was breaking.
I still don't know what first of all there was:
The groaning of the stone or what was making
The sound of countless feet upon the grass.

The ground moved, as if earth a sigh was heaving.
A lightning flash! A thunderclap was heard.
I still saw all the other watchmen fleeing,
But I, I at the open grave just stared.

He came, and shone as when the sun is shining,
And as a flower that opens up with glee.
He perfect was, as from God's bosom rising,
His eyes were sparkling, bright as dawn can be.

And then I fled; but when I, scared and shaken,
My story told, no one believed a word.
They sneered His corpse had secretly been taken
While we, the watchmen, slept as we were bored.

They offered money if I would be telling
That I'd been dreaming yonder at the grave.
For money I my honour then was selling.
But to be rid of Jesus . . . money never gave.

I know: I was a coward when agreeing
And with that lie to live on all my life.
But now I can't lose anything: I'm dying.
And now I say it: He indeed did rise!

*This poem I found in the *Mededelingsblad* of the Vrye Gereformeerde Kerk at Pretoria, S.A. Although the author presents some events that are the product of what we shall call "literary freedom" the poem as such impressed me quite favourably, and therefore I have tried to give an English rendition. No claim to perfection is made! VO



Press Release of the Classis Ontario North of March 8, 1996 in Burlington, Ontario

Opening

On behalf of the convening church of Toronto, br. H. Kampen called the meeting to order, read from Jeremiah 30:18 - 31:6, led in prayer and requested that we sing from Ps. 99:1, 6. After the delegates of the church at Ottawa reported that the credentials were in order, br. Kampen declared classis constituted and asked the appointed moderators to take their places with Rev. B. J. Berends as chairman, Rev. P. Aasman as clerk, and Rev. G.H. Visscher as vice-chairman.

Rev. B.J. Berends, in his opening remarks, spoke about the fact that Burlington West was disappointed with the decline of the call to cand. J. Plug and recently called Rev. W. M. Wielenga of Lynden as second minister, that Fergus received a decline from Rev. A. Veldman of Australia and is intending to call soon, and that Toronto was disappointed with the decline of the call to Rev. R. Aasman but has subsequently called the Rev. W. den Hollander of Orangeville. The chairman commends these churches and these ministers to the grace of the Lord. The agenda was adopted.

Reports

The following reports were received.

- a. *Church visitation* to the churches at Guelph and Toronto. Thankfulness was expressed for faithfulness noted.
- b. *Observer of Classis to the Presbytery of the Great Lakes and Western Canada of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (Free Church of Scotland)* held at Livonia, Michigan on January 20, 1996. Rev. W. den Hollander presented a written report on this matter. Some discussion followed and appreciation was expressed for the faithfulness noted in these churches.
- c. *Treasurer*. It was noted that the churches are not being assessed for classis expenses for the year 1996 since there are still ample funds. \$1.00 per communicant member is still needed however for the expenses of regional synods. The chairman expresses gratitude for the work of br. J. Poort.

Question Period ad Article 44 C.O.

The church at Burlington South receives advice with respect to two questions. Fergus requests and receives pulpit supply once per month.

Correspondence

- a. The church at *Orangeville* requests classis to agree to support for the

widow of its former minister. Classis agrees.

- b. *Fairmount Presbyterian Church of Sewickley, PA* (an Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church), with some questions regarding our former church in Sackville, N.S in connection with the possibility of planting a church in the Halifax area. Classis thanks Rev. Nederveen for the manner in which he provisionally responded to this matter and endorses his reply.

Appointments

- a. Convening church for next classis: Brampton.
- b. Officers: Rev. C. Bosch, chairman; Rev. B.J. Berends, clerk, and Rev. P. Aasman, vice-chairman.
- c. Date for next Classis: June 14, 1996 (alternate date: Sept. 20, 1996).

Closing

A question was raised regarding our involvement with the Free Church of Scotland. Censure was not necessary. The Acts were adopted and the Press Release was approved. The chairman requested that we sing Psalm 118: 1, 8, after which he led in prayer and closed classis.

For classis
G.H. Visscher, vice-chairman.

OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



Dear Busy Beavers,

I hope you enjoy the puzzles this time. Are you having nice weather? How are you doing in school? Write a letter some afternoon after school and tell me about it!

Quiz Time!

WHOSE HANDS?

(Clues at the end!)

1. In their hands he saw them holding palms before the throne of God.
2. He put his life in his hands and made a great salvation for Israel.
3. In their hands is mischief.
4. In his hands are the times of man.
5. In his hands he held blood money.
6. In their hands they held the fruit of the promised land before Israel had taken possession of it.
7. In his hands were the two tables of the covenant.
8. In her left hand are riches and honour.
9. In her hands she held a pound of very precious ointment.
10. In his hands he held a weapon with which he smote a Jewish officer.
11. In his hands Christ placed a morsel on the night of His arrest.
12. He took a basin in his hands and performed a humble service.

A NEW CHALLENGE!

Here are the instructions to a new puzzle.

If the word 'cap' is added in the right place to the groups ERNAUM, DEOLIS, PADO CIA the Proper names CAPERNAUM, DECAPOLIS, and CAPPADOCIA are made. If 'ban' is added to LA, AA and LEON the names LABAN, ABANA and LEBANON result. The puzzle below is to 'sort out' which one of the seven words given at the top of the groups is needed to complete each group as in the examples above— and of course to find the words themselves! Each three letter word is used only once and the answers are all Biblical proper names.

Ash, ron, man, ham, Gal, bed, Bar.

1. OAH, GETHSEE, HA, ROS
2. ILEE, GIL, ATIA, LIO
3. THOLOMEW, ABBAS, AIM, TIMAEUS
4. HEB, AA, CHICHLES, SHA
5. O, JOCHE, ANEGO, ZEEE
6. DOD, JO, VTI, MICHM
7. ABRA, SGAR, JOT, SMAH

You will find the answers at the end.

WILD ANIMALS

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

Find:	Elephant	Bear	Tiger	Wolf
	Fox	Deer	Camel	Monkey
	Parrot	Eagle	Crocodile	Hippo
	Buck	Emu	Rhea	Mongoose
	Lizard	Snake	Panda	Bat

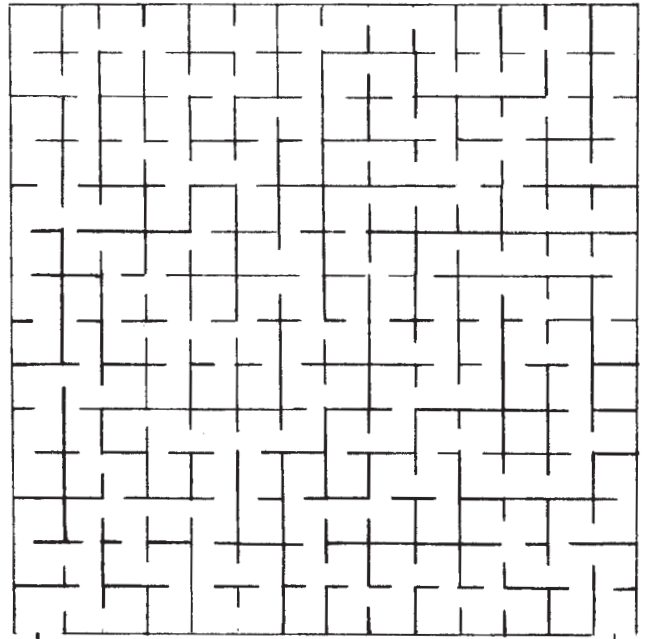
ATTENTION! PEN PAL NEEDED!

Kristina Fennema, age 11, would like to write with another Busy Beaver about her age. Her address is:

Kristina Fennema
 Box 20, Site 8, S.S. # 1
 Houston, BC
 V0J 2N0

MAZE

by Busy Beaver *Erin Kottelenberg*
 WORD SEARCH by Busy Beaver *Tamara VanLeeuwen*



START

FINISH



FROM THE MAILBOX

Hi, *Rebecca Bethlehem*. Your letter was interesting. Do you have to help out a lot at home since you are the oldest girl? What kind of place do you live on? Thanks for telling me about your family. Bye, Rebecca.

Hello, *Kristina Fennema*. I hope that most of your snow is gone by now! Do you have your horse by your house? It must be

fun to ride your own horse. Bye, Kristina.

Hi, *Arnold Kanis*. Is your skating rink gone yet? Did you get to use your sinterklas presents a lot this winter? Hope to hear from you soon, Arnold. Bye.

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Rebekah Barendregt*. I hope you like the puzzles and activities we do. Write again soon, Rebekah. Bye.

Hi, *Nadine Barendregt*. Is your brother sitting up yet? He probably likes it when you play with him! Maybe he's ticklish! It sounds like you had a fun birthday, too. Bye, Nadine.

Answers to Bible Puzzles
 Whose hand?

1. Rev. 7:9; 2. 1 Sam. 19:4,5; 3. Psalm 26:9,10; 4. Psalm 10. John 18:10,11; 11. John 13:26-30; 12. John 13:2-5; 7. Deuteronomy 9:15; 8. Proverbs 3:16; 9. John 12:1-3; 3:15; 5. Matthew 27:3-8; 6. Deuteronomy 1:22-25;

The New Puzzle (ham, Shammah (ham) ham, Shammah, Jotham, Shammah (ham) (bed); 6. Ashdod, Joash, Vashit, Michmash (ash); 7. Abrahah, Bartimaeus (bar); 4. Hebron, Aaron, Chronicles, Sharon (ron); 5. Obed, Jochebed, Abednego, Zebadee, Gallio (gall); 3. Bartholomew, Barabbas, Galilee, Gethsemane, Haman, Romans (man); 2. Galilee, 1. Manoah, Gethsemane, Haman, Romans (man); 2. Galilee, 1. Manoah, Gethsemane, Haman, Romans (man); 2. Galilee,

That's all for this time,

Love to you all, Aunt Betty