



Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

*Rejoice
in the
Lord
always;
again I
will say,
Rejoice.*

Philippians 4:4

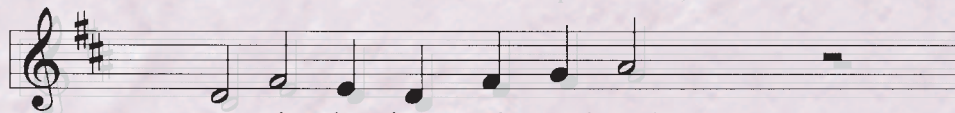
Psalm 150 : 2

Book of Praise

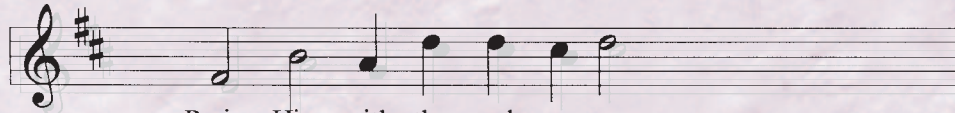
Geneva, 1562



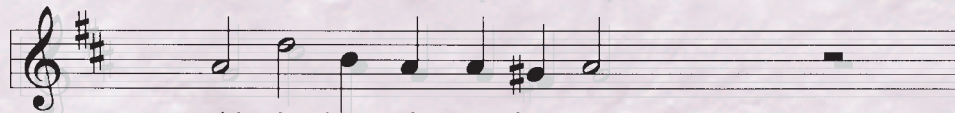
Praise Him with the trum- pet sound;



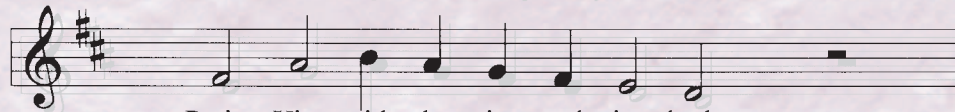
Let His glor- ious praise a- bound.



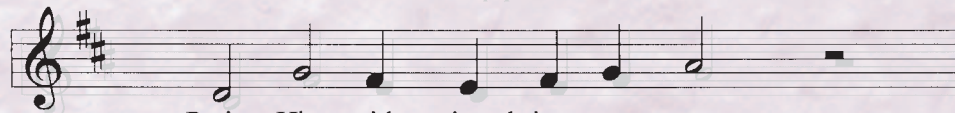
Praise Him with the psal- ter- y,



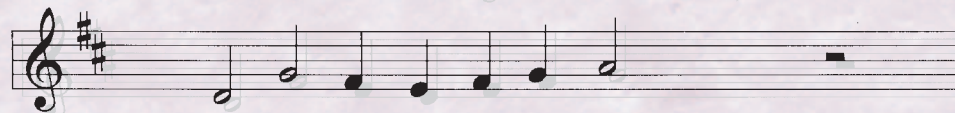
With the harp His ma- jes- ty;



Praise Him with the pipe and tim- brel.



Praise Him with stringed in- stru- ments,



With the flute His ex- cel- lence;



Praise Him with the sound- ing cym- bal.

Is a Church Federation Required?

In various public meetings over the last months, the question has again been raised: is a federation of churches necessary? This question has especially arisen from some among former Christian Reformed Churches. Efforts of Canadian Reformed Churches to work for federation with their Reformed brethren were not and are not always appreciated. From various speakers of the former CRC churches, we have heard strongly expressed the opinion that a federation of churches is an "extra" that belongs not to the "essence" but to the "well-being" of the church. What is important, it is said, is "spiritual unity." If we have spiritual unity, then let's be happy about that but let's not force this into the matrix of federative unity. Implicit in this view is also the thought that we ought to be able to exercise our spiritual unity regardless of whether or not we achieve that mere organizational condition of "federative unity."

Before delving into the actual matter of "federative unity," a few words might be said about the resistance to federative unity. It seems to this observer that in some cases those who resisted the drive to federative unity with the Canadian Reformed have thrown a red herring or two across the path of discussion. Many of those who defended the right of independence and attacked proponents of federative unity have now merrily joined in a new federation. (*The United Reformed Churches in North America*.) So the real question seems to have been not federation per se, but federation with the Canadian Reformed Churches. At least one writer from the OCRC admitted as much in a recent issue of *Christian Renewal*. We can appreciate his honesty in stating what is under the surface of much of the current discussion.

The distinction between "essence" and "well-being" also seems contrived. Since when are we happy with mere

"essence?" Do we not always pursue that which builds up Zion and causes her to flourish? If the (formerly) Independent brethren concede that a federation of churches is indeed conducive to the well-being of the churches, it follows that it must be pursued with energy and perseverance.

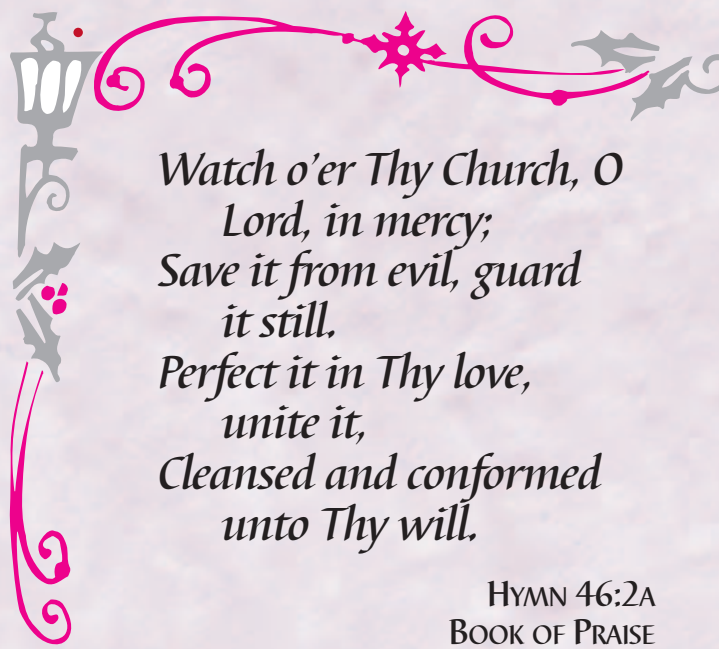
But on to the question at hand: is federation required? We believe the answer is yes. Several years ago, a meeting took place in Calgary, Alberta, at which speakers from both the Independent Churches and the Canadian Reformed Churches

addressed the thesis: "Scripture, Confession, History and the urgency of our own day require confessionally united churches to federate."

One of the speakers on that day was the late Rev. J.D. Wielenga, then Minister of the Word of the Can. Reformed Church at Coaldale.¹ After surveying especially the New Testament revelation about the oneness and the unity of the church of God, Rev. Wielenga went on to show how local churches are called to express and manifest their given unity. The churches must receive one another, shake the hand of communion, and "they must join hands to cooperate together (*and that is*

to federate) to help one another that all remain under the Word of Christ, that none slip from the one foundation, or disappear from the circle of lampstands, and support one another, for instance in financial needs, and in order to maintain the unity in doctrine and liturgy, all to preserve the unity of the one church of God, and to promote it." Rev. Wielenga went on to show that what applied to the local body, namely, that the hand cannot say to the foot, "I do not need you," also applies to the total body of Christ. Needed for federative unity is a self-denying and sacrificial love.

Rev. Wielenga then went on to deal with the objection often heard to federative unity. Repeatedly, we are told that there is not a trace of federation in the New Testament, with



*Watch o'er Thy Church, O
Lord, in mercy;
Save it from evil, guard
it still.
Perfect it in Thy love,
unite it,
Cleansed and conformed
unto Thy will.*

HYMN 46:2A
BOOK OF PRAISE

classes and synods etc. According to Wielenga, this reasoning is more biblicistic than biblical, ignoring the fact that the New Testament shows us the local churches in communion and cooperation in all kinds of matters. The obligation for federation is an obligation of love and that is a real obligation! In addition, as pointed out in the same speech, joining together in love as churches is not a matter of picking and choosing with which churches to have communion. We don't find in the New Testament a Gentile church next to a Peter-minded church and a Jewish circumcising church, with possible cross-denominational fellowships, shaking hands across the fence, but not working together in the same yard.

Keeping all this in mind, it is really quite sad to hear the above-mentioned writer in *Christian Renewal* stating quite openly that he and his church choose to federate only with those churches which will bring some benefit to themselves. It seems to us that this bald pragmatism is not the style of the church. Allow us to recommend the reading of the rich and challenging essay of Wielenga as an antidote.

Lest it be thought that Wielenga's approach is just a Canadian Reformed specialty, we would also like to refer to the speech of Dr. C. Venema held in 1992 at Redeemer College as part of a series of discussion about church unity. In answer to the question as to whether the former Christian Reformed Churches and the Canadian Reformed Churches have a responsibility to be united with each other, Dr. Venema responded as follows:

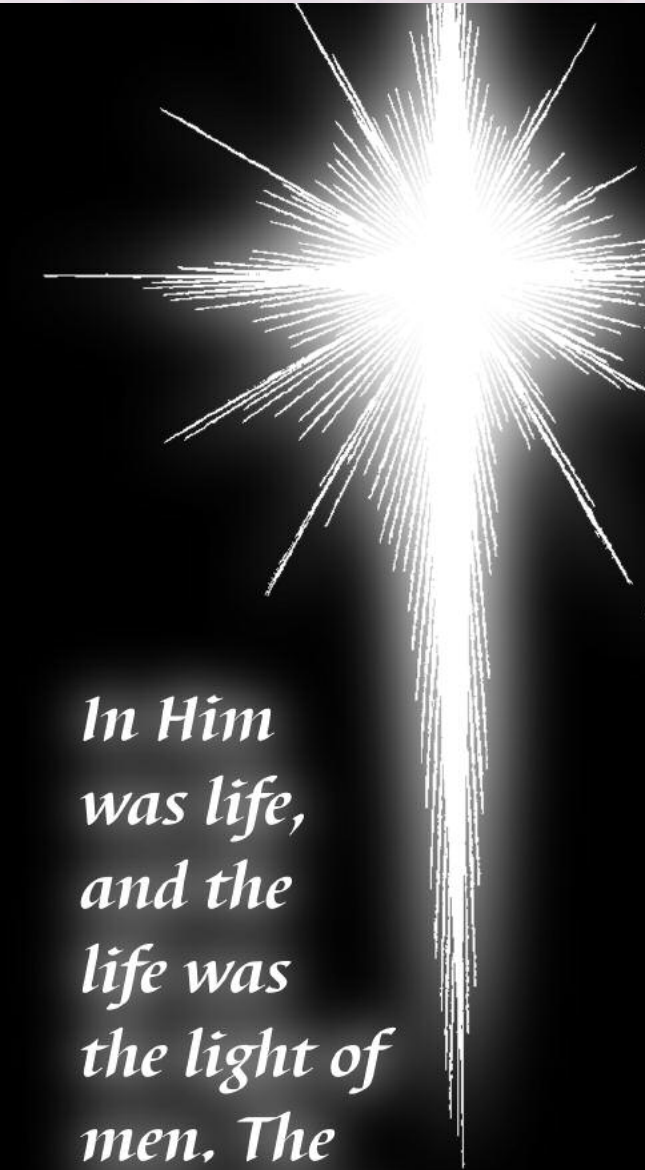
My answer to this question is a strong "Yes." I believe it is our duty before the Lord to express the "unity of faith" where it exists between our churches. Moreover, we must resolve, in obedience to the clear requirements of God's Word (John 17, Eph. 4), to give **concrete, visible** expression to this unity. To put it as specifically as possible: I am convinced that we are obligated to work toward a single federation of Reformed churches, united in confession and practice. *My thesis is that, if these churches are united in their submission to the Word of God, in their subscription to the Three Forms of Unity, and in their willingness to honour a church order adopted by common consent, then they should be united in a single federation of Reformed Churches.* Anything less than this would amount to sinful departure from the requirements of the Word of God and our confession of the "one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church."²

If we could all agree that a federation of Reformed churches is indeed the goal, much unnecessary posturing could be avoided. Then we could go on to the really important question: do we indeed recognize and trust and love each other as confessionally Reformed churches? If so, then let us move on quickly to visible church unity. If not, let's identify the areas of concern and talk about them openly at all levels.



¹J.D. Wielenga, "Federation of Confessionally Uniting Churches," *Clarion*, May 21st, 1993, Vol. 42, #10

²C. Venema, "What Should Be Done?," *The Challenge of Church Unity*, ed. C. VanDam (Winnipeg: Premier Publishing, 1993), p. 132.



*In Him
was life,
and the
life was
the light of
men. The
light shines
in the darkness,
and the darkness
has not
overcome it.*

John 1:4,5

What's inside?

A recent *Standard Bearer*, the official magazine of the Protestant Reformed Churches, *again* had some amazing articles about the contact between some of our early immigrants and their churches, and about Dr. K. Schilder and Rev. H. Hoeksema. Sadly, certain statements in some of these articles twist history and truth to the point where one is left wondering what the goal of the authors is. Once again, Dr. J. De Jong sets the record straight – not to beat the Canadian Reformed drum, but simply for the sake of truthfulness. As well, Mr. George Lodder – a brother who was there and writes from his personal experience with the Protestant Reformed Churches and not from the perspective of hearsay and rumor – tells us about the early history of the congregations in Hamilton and Georgetown. He writes about how the infamous Protestant Reformed “Declaration of Principles,” a document which would have bound the consciences of believers above the

Scriptures and the confessions to a particular theological view of the covenant, served as the catalyst to institute Canadian Reformed Churches.

In keeping with the themes of Christmas and New Year's, we provide several articles – from the Rev. J. Mulder, Rev. D. Moes, and Dr. N.H. Gootjes – for your enjoyment. Rev. W. den Hollander reviews the past year. As he takes us through the various events of 1996, he convinces us that we have much reason for thankfulness to our good God.

Last summer, Angelina Van Dyke went on quite a trip to the Orient. Angelina tells us about her journey.

You'll also find a number of reports and releases.

This issue brings us to the end of another volume of *Clarion*. We hope that you enjoyed this volume and that it also served to edify you. I wish all our readers a pleasant Christmas season and a blessed 1997 in the service of the LORD our God. As Jews of old were fond of saying: *Rise up like a lion for the service of the LORD.*

GvP



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What then shall we do!

Matthew 3:10-14

Why did Christ's coming into this world not bring about more change than it does?

Why is today the impact of His atoning work not greater than it is?

It cannot be denied that there are not too many anymore here in Canada who can claim ignorance of the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. Still it is also true that there are too many living today with lives unchanged by Christ Jesus, our Lord. There is a lot of commotion on and around December 25th. We commemorate the birth of the Saviour of the world. But what about the sovereign claims of this same Saviour today, in your home, your family, your job, your social life?

John the Baptist was the herald of Christ's coming. His ministry served to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore the core of his message was simple:

"Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight. . . ."

John knew about barriers and obstacles erected by individuals and nations between themselves and Christ's saving and renewing power. Those barriers should be broken down. The obstacles pushed away. How else can you expect Christ Jesus and His atoning work to have any impact upon your life?

But where do you start? John the Baptist did not leave his listeners in the dark. Responding to John's call to repentance, they asked him, "What then shall we do?"

Maybe they expected John to answer: start the same kind of life I live. Put on a garment of camel's hair, a leather girdle around your waist and go out and preach! Leave your job, try to make converts! But John did not say that at all. He left them where they were. On their job sites. In their homes. With their families. In their society. There they had to start. There they had

to practice that basic command, "Love God and your neighbour."

"He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise." Repentance is evident in simple deeds of love.

Tax collectors came to John. They were men who as agents of Caesar Augustus or king Herod collected custom duties. They were hated and despised, because mostly they took a lot more than they were entitled to, feeding their own pockets. They also came and asked John, "Teacher, what shall we do?"

Again John did not say, "Close your office, give up your job." But he does tell them to break with the sins of their profession. Resist the temptations you are confronted with in your daily work. And make there while you are performing the duties of your office a straight road for the Lord.

"Collect no more than is appointed you." Don't abuse your position to enrich yourself.

Soldiers also came. They often collaborated with the tax collectors to make some extra money. If people didn't want to pay the taxes the collectors demanded, soldiers were called in to force them to pay up. They listened to John the Baptist and they heard the call to prepare the way of the Lord. They asked, "And we, what shall we do?"

John again does not forbid them to be soldiers. He does not say, "Quit the army." No!

"Rob no one by violence or by false accusation, and be content with your wages."

In other words you should break with the sins of your profession. No terrorization to increase your wages. No false accusations to make some extra money. Be content with your pay.

Why does the coming of Christ Jesus into this world have so little effect upon the lives of so many? Some have said it: we have had ages of Christianity,

and not much has changed through all those years. How come?

Can it be blamed on Christ, His atoning work? Definitely not!

Christ's saving work is abundantly sufficient to wash away the sins of the whole world.

Can it be blamed on the men who were the messengers of the Good News of Christ?

They certainly were and are not perfect. Some of them had and have an accent. Worse, they sometimes stumbled and fell into sin. But that is not the reason that many people live lives without the joy of Christ and without hope in this world.

Some have said: the problem is with the structures of society. They have to be changed.

Others say: it's my family, my job, the opportunities I receive. If God had only given me a different life, a different family, another position, then I would have cleared up the barriers and loved and joyfully served Him from the heart.

We can learn here from this Scripture passage.

If we wonder about the question why the age long communication of Christ's coming did not make a greater impact, don't look to others. Let's look at ourselves!

What then shall we do?

The answer to that question depends of course on what we are doing now.

Is there perhaps in our life a specific barrier to which we hold on but which indeed hinders Christ Jesus to penetrate our heart and life with His grace? Perhaps we take a bit more than we are entitled to? Or in our selfishness we do a lot less than we in fact should to help others who are in need. Start to break down that barrier!

Some people think that they should not mix God with the rest of their lives. They may meet Him in church or in

The Mystery of the Virgin Birth

The defense of the early church

The miracle of the virgin birth is often embarrassing for Christians. How can we expect other people to believe this? At worst it causes sniggers: "Don't try that on me, I know what happened." At best it is rejected with a superior smile: "You did not believe that story about a woman who had given birth to 22 babies, although a picture was shown of the mother with her babies. Do not expect me to believe that Jesus was born from a virgin." How can we make people take the virgin birth seriously?

This is not a new problem, the early Christian church was already confronted with this rejection. It was tempted to come with explanations to make the virgin birth acceptable. One tentative line of defense was to refer to similar stories in classical literature. Great men were often portrayed as superhuman right from birth. To give just one example, it was said about the great philosopher Plato that he was born from the Greek god Apollo. Origen, who refers to this story, says that it is not improper to quote Greek stories when speaking to the Greek. But he hastens to add that those stories are in fact myths.¹

But in effect, such parallels can only weaken the gospel of Jesus' birth. The Jew Trypho actually used this to counter the Christian message. The Christians

Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion: He was manifested in the flesh....

1 TIMOTHY 3:16

should be ashamed for making up a story about Christ's birth so similar to Greek stories about their heroes.² Christians would implicitly admit that their Christ was no more than Greek heroes, and that the virgin birth was no more than groundless embellishment. Christian apologists of the virgin birth could not use this argument.

They did use another line of defense, however: parthenogenesis. Some animals can have young without male involvement. The early church apologist Lactantius was one who used this as a parallel: "But if it is known to all that certain animals are accustomed to conceive by the wind and the breeze, why should anyone think it wonderful when we say that a virgin was made fruitful by the Spirit of God, to whom whatever He may wish is easy?"³ Even though the examples Lactantius was probably thinking of, were wrong, the fact is now generally recognized that some plants and animals can propagate without fertilization. A recent issue of *National Geographic* carried an interesting article about a lizard where this phenomenon was observed.⁴ Can we make the virgin birth acceptable by showing that it is not as totally impossible as some would think?

This parallel, however, is not really helpful. In the first place, parthenogenesis only occurs among certain forms of life, among some plants and animals. It has not been observed in higher animals and definitely not among humans. Moreover, the virgin birth is not presented in Scripture as a biological triviality, but as an exceptional act of God through His Spirit.⁵ These attempts to

Meditation – continued

their private devotions, but there is a large area where, they think, they can live and work without even considering Him. But it is not true. The place to serve God is in the midst of this world. In your marriage, your family, your job. Martin Luther once said:

What you do in your house is worth

as much as if you did it in heaven for our Lord God. For what we do in our calling here on earth in accordance with His command, He counts as if it were done in heaven for Him.

If we would complain that we have gone through so many Christmas celebrations already, but that nothing much

has changed, let's not blame it on others, or on structures, or on missed opportunities. We should look up to God, our heavenly Father and then look into our own life. And what we have to do, we should do it now.

There might not be much time to lose.



make people receptive to the miracle of the virgin birth do not succeed.

The defense of Warfield

The great 19th Century apologist B.B. Warfield was confronted with the problem how to defend the virgin birth when he was invited by the editors of the *American Journal of Theology* to answer the question whether the doctrine of the supernatural birth of Jesus is essential to Christianity. He accepted the challenge but did not attempt to make the virgin birth generally acceptable. Rather, he set out to prove that the virgin birth is necessary within the religion described in the New Testament.⁶ Three arguments support his conviction that the supernatural character of the Christian religion requires a supernatural birth of the Christ.

First of all, the New Testament presents a supernatural religion. Jesus is supernatural, the winds and waves obeyed Him. He even broke free from the grave, ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God. It is impossible that Jesus, who did so many supernatural things, would have entered this world like every man. "His supernatural birth is given already . . . in His supernatural life and His supernatural work, and forms an indispensable element in the supernatural religion which He founded."⁷

Further, we have to consider who Jesus is. He is the only begotten Son of God who was at the bosom of the Father. How could He come into this world by earthly causes? If the Son of God comes into human existence He can only come creatively. The more people realize that He is the Son of God, the more they "instinctively feel that it is alone consonant with it that this Being should acknowledge none other father than that Father which is in heaven."⁸

There is even a third reason why the virgin birth is necessary: redemption. The doctrine of original sin implies that every natural member of Adam's race is under the curse of sin. The Son of God, therefore, had to come in such a way that He would be outside the sin in which the human race is involved. "And that is as much as to say that the redemption work of the Son of God depends upon His supernatural birth."⁹

Warfield presents an impressive case to prove that the virgin birth is the only and perfect way in which God's Son could become our Saviour. "The supernatural birth of Jesus is an implication of the Christian consciousness – that is, of course, of the supernaturalistic Christian consciousness." He even appeals to common understanding:

"And the Christian consciousness in this judgment receives the support of the universal human consciousness. Men have always and everywhere judged that a supernatural man, doing a supernatural work, must needs have sprung from a supernatural source."¹⁰

But the question cannot be suppressed whether this solution is not too glib. Is God's work of the virgin birth so obvious that outsiders can be convinced of the logic behind it?

The mystery

At this point, Paul's word of 1 Tim. 3:16 deserves our attention:

Great indeed is the mystery of our religion:

*God was manifested in the flesh.*¹¹

Paul refers here to the incarnation when God's Son appeared in the flesh among men. He mentions this as part of the "mystery of our religion."

Now a mystery is not the same as a secret. Something no one knows is a secret, but it is no longer a secret after it has become known. It is different with a mystery, however. Something that is known but not understood is a mystery. Paul uses the word mystery in that sense for the gospel he preaches, when he asks that it may be given to him boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel (Eph. 6:19). The gospel Paul makes known is still a mystery. He calls Christ the mystery of God, for in Christ are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge (Col. 2:2,3). It is a mystery for it is too deep for understanding.¹²

This meaning of "mystery" should be applied to 1 Tim. 3:16 where Paul mentions the incarnation of God's Son as a part of the "mystery of our religion." The way God's Son came into this world was not unknown to Timothy and his congregation, Paul had preached about it in the congregations and written about it in his epistles (Rom.1:3, Gal. 4:4). Yet, it is still a mystery, it is beyond our comprehension. We know that the virgin birth is a fact but we cannot fathom it or reason it out.

We can admire Warfield for defending the "unbelievable" fact of the virgin birth for the general theological world of his time. He did not back down or weaken this doctrine. We can also appreciate the points Warfield makes: Jesus' life and work are supernatural, Jesus is the Son of God, Jesus could not be subjected to original sin. We cannot, however, prove the intrinsic necessity of the virgin birth in this way. No man would have come up with the "solution" of the virgin birth. We cannot logically reason from our need for sal-

vation to the virgin birth as the perfect answer. Let alone that we can prove that the virgin birth is the only possible solution God could find to save us. Our logic cannot make the virgin birth reasonable or acceptable.

God's ways are higher than our ways and God's thoughts higher than our thoughts. We cannot convince anyone that the virgin birth fitted exactly God's salvation plan, for we cannot fathom the depths of that plan. God's thoughts are beyond us, and God's ways are higher than our ways. God's solution is more than we could ever think of. Even though revealed, the virgin birth is still a mystery.

But one thing we can say: the virgin birth fits with God. It reflects the vastness of His understanding, the unsearchableness of His ways and the greatness of His love. He who rejects this God cannot be brought to believe the mystery of the virgin birth. But he who believes God, sees God's wisdom reflected in the mystery of the virgin birth. That is the bottom line of our defense: Believing in God is all that is needed for believing the virgin birth.

¹Origen, *Contra Celsum*, I, 37 (SC 132; Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1967) 178ff.

²Justin, "Dialogue with Trypho" in E.J. Goodspeed, *Die ältesten Apologeten* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, repr. 1984) 174.

³Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes*, IV, XII, the translation is taken from A. Roberts, J. Donaldson, eds. *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.) vol. VII, 110. This phenomenon was attributed to horses, see a poem by Virgil, referred to by the editor of Lactantius, and vultures, see Tertullian *Adversus Valentianos*, 10 (SC. 280; Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1980, 103). The same argument is used by Origen, *Contra Celsum*, I, 37.

⁴See articles in Encyclopedia, e.g. the article of G. Barendrecht in *Winkler Prins Encyclopaedie* vol. 15 (6. ed.; Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1952) 187ff. *The National Geographic* article on parthenogenesis appeared in the September 1995 issue and discussed this phenomenon in a lizard.

⁵See e.g. J. Gresham Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (2. ed.; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985) 217.

⁶The article has been republished in *Christology and Criticism* (*The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, vol. 3; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981) 447-458.

⁷*Christology and Criticism*, 451.

⁸*Christology and Criticism*, 454.

⁹*Christology and Criticism*, 456.

¹⁰*Christology and Criticism*, 452.

¹¹The RSV and the NIV do not have the word "God" and translate the second sentence with: He was manifested in the flesh. The manuscript evidence is in favour of the text presented in the KJV: God was manifest in the flesh. For our purpose it does not make a real difference but the KJV is clearer.

¹²See for this sense of "mystery" also J. Calvin's commentary on 1 Tim. 3:9.



The God Who Makes a New Beginning

Some Reflections on Hannah's Song (1 Sam. 2:1-10)

I'm sure most of us will know people whose lives are just a mess. Often, they started out O.K. A good upbringing in a solid Christian home. A good education in a reliable Christian school. A good marriage to a loving wife or a caring husband. A good job with perspective for the future. A good church where the members were a hand and a foot to each other.

But then, things slowly but surely began to go wrong. Their membership of the church began to wane and slip. Their performance at work began to do the same. Their lives together as husband and wife began to become unloving and uncaring.

And so, the slide continued. From bad to worse. One couple ended up with a divorce. The other with a drinking problem. The third lost his job. And the fourth broke with their church.

If only they could make a new beginning! If only they could start their lives all over! If only they could enjoy the peace and contentment they once had savoured and enjoyed!

Our meditation also speaks about life being a mess. Yet, it also speaks about a new beginning. More precisely, it speaks about the *God who makes this new beginning*.

A new beginning in Hannah's life

Our meditation contains Hannah's song. Hannah's song which at the same time is Hannah's prayer. In this prayerful song, Hannah speaks about someone talking proudly, someone whose mouth speaks forth arrogance. She speaks about those who are strong and full and about one who has many sons.

This refers, of course, in the first place to Peninnah. She was the one who had many sons. She was the one who was strong and full of life. She



was the one whose mouth spoke with arrogance and who had talked so very proudly to Hannah.

This was a miserable situation in Hannah's life. Yet, this was a situation the LORD had put an end to! He had made a new beginning in Hannah's life. A new beginning in which He had put an end to Peninnah's arrogant talk. The LORD did not take the side of the strong and self-sufficient. He did not support the proud and arrogant. The LORD did not sustain the do-it-yourselfers. But He had humbled them. He had brought them low. He had broken the bows of the warriors. He had those armed with strength stumble. He had those who were full go hungry. And He had the one who had many sons pine away.

While the hungry hunger no more. While she who was barren had born seven children. The LORD raises up and makes alive. He sends wealth and exalts. He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap. He seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honour.

This is the type of God Hannah has! A God who breaks through all the thoughts and schemes of human planning and self-sufficiency. A God who humbles the proud and opposes the arrogant. A God who breaks the strong and has them stumble, *because He does not want His people to live by their own strength*. He does not want them to glory in their own might. He does not want them to live their lives in self-vindication, self-justification, and self-glorification. But He wants them to be humble. He wants them to trust. He wants them to know themselves to be small before Him, the LORD God Almighty.

That is what Hannah sings about. The God who had made a new beginning by humbling the proud and exalting the humble. And that applies, in the first place, to her own personal situation in the family of Elkanah. A situation where she was provoked and irritated and where life was being made a sheer hell for her by a fellow-sister of the church. Why, even by a fellow member of her own family by marriage.

A new beginning in the history of the church

Yet, this is not the only thing Hannah sings about. Hannah's song, Hannah's prayer is not just a hymn of praise and adoration to the God who had made a new beginning in her life. It is also a hymn of praise and adoration to the God who had done this before



in the history of His people. You see, Hannah is no individualist, but knows herself to be part of the communion of saints. She knows herself to be a member of the church of all ages which has a history that goes back to the very beginning of the origin of mankind.

How often had God not made a new beginning in the history of His church by humbling the proud and exalting the humble! Think of the proud and arrogant in the Garden of Eden. Think of how God had humbled Adam and Eve after their arrogant defiance of His holy will. Yet, think also of how God had exalted them by continuing His covenant with them and promising them a Saviour who would one day bruise the head of that arrogant devil. Think of how God had humbled the proud and arrogant with the waters of

the flood, but had exalted the humble by saving Noah and his family through the waters of the flood. Think of how God had humbled the proud and arrogant Pharaoh and all his host in the waters of the Red Sea, but had exalted His people Israel by leading them through these waters of the Red Sea.

Each of these times, we see the LORD God Almighty making a new beginning. A new beginning by humbling the proud and self-sufficient and exalting the humble and dependent. He did the same when He led His people into the land of Canaan. He humbled the Canaanites, but exalted His own people Israel.

Yet, what had happened to the Canaanites would also happen to His own people if they followed in the footsteps of the Canaanites. If they started to serve their gods and reject God's holy covenant. Then they, too, would be humbled and rejected. Then, they too, would be destroyed and brought low.

The song of Moses

Prophetically, Moses already saw that this would happen. And so, inspired by the Spirit of the living God, he composed a song that would be used to instruct the people of God about this (Deut. 32:1-43).

First, he sings about how the LORD led His people safely into the land of Canaan (vv. 1-14). Then he sings about how Israel grew fat and kicked. How she, filled with food, became heavy and sleek and abandoned the God who made her and rejected the Rock who was her Saviour (vv. 15-18). Then Moses sings about how the LORD would come with His punishment upon all this covenant apostasy and covenant unfaithfulness (vv. 19-25). Finally, he sings about a return to the LORD and the new beginning given by the LORD (vv. 26-43).

This is the situation at the end of the time of the judges. This is the situation surrounding the birth of Samuel. Hannah knows this. She knows how the people of God had grown fat and kicked, how they had abandoned the God who had made them. She knows how the LORD had come with His covenant wrath, with His threats and curses. Enemies had arisen against them. People who were not a people and nations who had no understanding. The land and the harvest had been devoured and the LORD's arrows were spent against them. Hannah is very acutely aware of all of this. *And she knows that it is a fulfilment of what Moses had already prophetically sung about.*

Yet, Hannah also knows more. She also knows about the promised deliverance. She also knows about the new beginning the LORD is able to make. Not only for herself, but also for her people. For the church of the living God.

That is what she is also singing about. *For her song is clearly patterned after the song of Moses.* A new beginning God had made for her, yes. But also a new beginning God would make for His people. The arrogant mouths would be stopped. The bows of the warriors would be broken. Those armed with strength would stumble. Those who oppose the LORD would be shattered. He would thunder against them from heaven. The enemies of God's people would be defeated. The adversaries of the church would be brought low. Also those Philistines who were oppressing the people of God from the outside as well as Hophni and Phinehas who were destroying the church from the inside out.

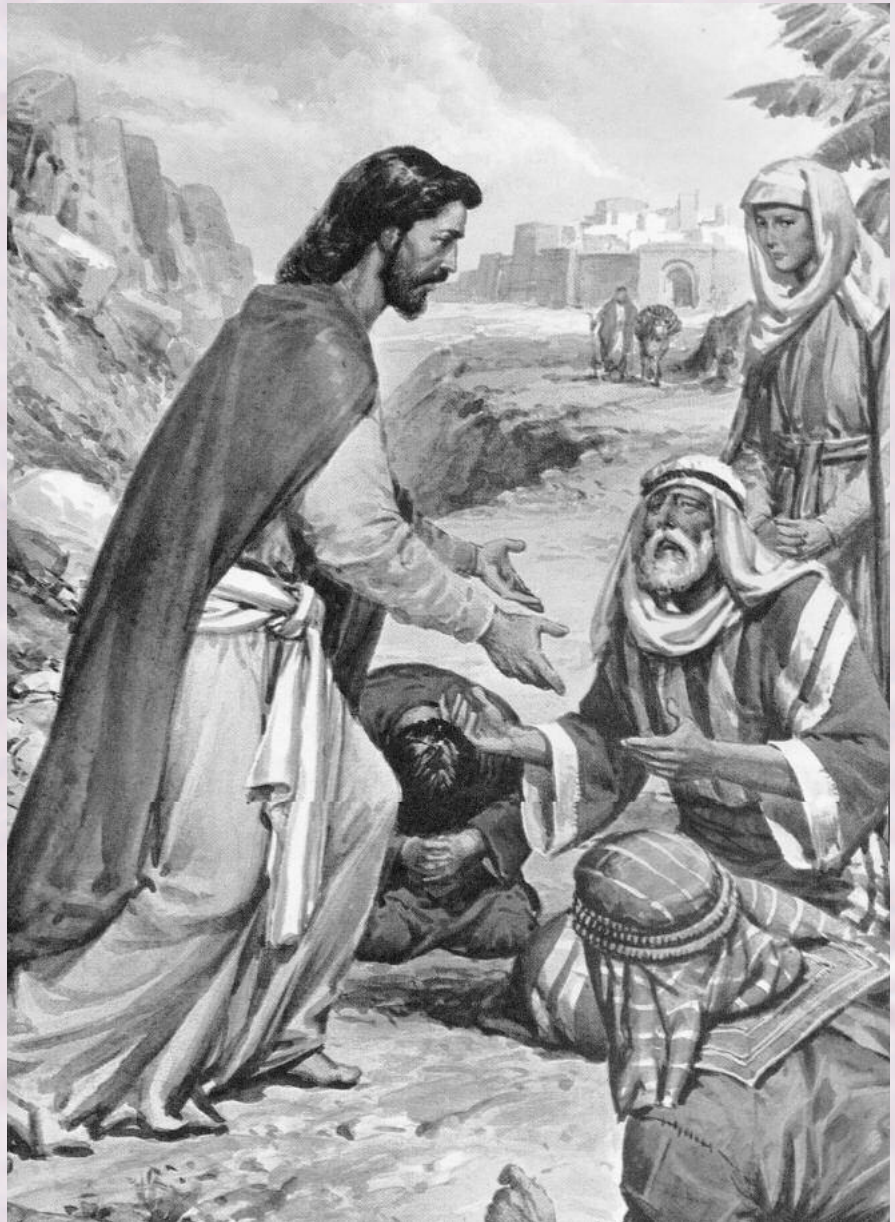
Hannah sees even more! She also prophetically looks ahead and sees a king. "He will give strength to His king and exalt the horn of His anointed" (1 Sam. 2:10). Not only *her* horn would be exalted. Not only did *she* receive strength. Also *God's king* would receive strength. Also *His* horn would be exalted.

Here we see Hannah prophetically anticipating the promised king. Jacob had already prophesied about a king. Balaam had done the same. While Moses had already laid down the law concerning a king in the book of Deuteronomy. Now Hannah, inspired by the Holy Spirit, *also* prophesies about a king.

This prophecy about a king was, of course, first fulfilled in king Saul. But even more in king David. The true theocratic king. The king after God's heart. The king who would judge the people in righteousness, the afflicted with justice. The king who would defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy. The king who would give room to those who were hemmed in and oppressed from all sides. Room to those who cannot help themselves and give them room to live and breathe again, (Psalm 72).

David's song

This theocratic king David, too, sings a song. As a matter of fact, this king David sings many songs. *But he also sings a song that is much like the one Hannah sang.* You will find it in 2 Samuel 22. You will also find most of it



in Psalm 18. This song summarizes much of what the LORD had done in between the time of Hannah's song and David's own song *as an accomplishment of what Hannah had sung about.* David, too, sings about the LORD being his Rock and Deliverer. He, too, sings about the horn of his salvation, the lordship of God over all of creation, His saving of the poor and oppressed, His strengthening of the faithful and the establishment of His anointed king.

You see, David, too, knew about the God who makes a new beginning! He, too, knew about *the style* of God's new beginning: the humbling of the proud and the exalting of the humble. How the proud Goliath had been brought low! How the arrogant Philistines had been brought low as well! How the

proud Saul had been humbled! How his boastful daughter Michal had been humbled as well! And how the vain and triumphant Absalom had been destroyed and brought to nought! *Yet, how through all of this the LORD had given strength to His king!* How the LORD had exalted the horn of His anointed! This is and remains the style of God's new beginning. The proud are humbled and the humble are exalted.

Mary's song

That is why it should not surprise us that we see this same style of God's new beginning with the mother of David's great Son, the virgin Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus Christ. Also she sings her song. Also she sings her magnificent, "My soul glorifies the Lord and

my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has been mindful of the humble state of His servant . . . He has performed mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones, but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things, but has sent the rich away empty" (Luke 1:46-56).

How the virgin Mary understood, just like Hannah understood, the style of God's new beginning! *For we clearly see that she patterns her song after that of Hannah's song.* The God Moses had sung about, the God Hannah had sung about, the God David had sung about, the God Mary sings about *is the same God.* The God who makes a new beginning. The God who reverses the roles of human expectations. The God who stands up and comes to the rescue of His people when they are stuck in the mud of their own sinful disobedience.

My, how God's people were stuck in the mud of their own sinful disobedience at the time of the Saviour's birth! How their lives were one big mess! Totally depraved. Totally helpless. Totally unable to save themselves. In total need of a total Saviour.

How the God who makes a new beginning understood this! How the God who makes a new beginning stood up and came to the rescue! How the God who makes a new beginning *made a new beginning!* *A holy conception and birth through the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary!*

A new beginning with the Lord Jesus Christ

How this Saviour who was sinlessly conceived and born, how this Saviour who grew up and became a man *also made a new beginning!* He lived the life we had to live. And He died the death we had to die. He humbled the proud and arrogant devil. And, in doing so, He reconciled us to the Father again.



A new beginning had been made! Satisfaction had been achieved once and for all. Righteousness had been obtained. Holiness had been accomplished. Something none of His predecessors had ever accomplished.

There is now a new beginning for all of God's chosen people. A new beginning that has to be accepted in a true and childlike faith.


This is the answer for all those whose lives are one big mess. One big deplorable mess because of their own sinful disobedience. If only you could start over! If only you could make a new beginning!

Well, the good news is, you *can* make a new beginning! You *can* start all over again! All you have to do is go to the Lord Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of all your sins. You do not have to be self-sufficient. You do not have to be self-reliant. You do not have to be a do-

it-yourselfer. The Lord Jesus Christ has done it all for you. *He* has made the new beginning. All you have to do is accept this new beginning in true faith.

And this counts not only for those whose lives are one big mess. *This also counts for all of God's people.* Also you and me. For every day, we transgress God's good and perfect commandments. Every day, we fall short of the mark of perfection. Every day, we all need to make a new beginning. A new beginning with our Lord Jesus Christ who made a new beginning for all of His people once and for all.

The day of judgment

Let us then do this. For there is so much at stake. Not only for our lives today. But also for our lives tomorrow. And for our lives in the life to come. For as our Lord Jesus Christ came into this world to make a new beginning for all of His people, *so He will one day come again to make another new beginning for all of His people.* And as the style of His first new beginning was one that reversed the orders and expectations of this world, *so the style of His second new beginning will also reverse the style and order of this world.* Also then, the proud will be humbled and the humble will be exalted. The proud and arrogant devil will be thrown into the lake of burning sulphur. The proud and arrogant beast and his false prophet will also be thrown into this lake. While outside the city of the new Jerusalem will be the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral and the like. All those who were proudly and arrogantly a law unto themselves and did not humbly want to submit to the good and wholesome law of God. Yet inside the city, inside the new Jerusalem, will be the humble and the meek. Inside the new Jerusalem will be all those who did not trust in their own strength and sufficiency, but in the strength and sufficiency of the Lord Jesus Christ. 

*No one knows the day or moment
When the Bridegroom shall appear.
Let us then be ever watchful;
May our lamps be bright and clear.*

*Maranatha! Come, Lord Jesus!
Thy great Day is drawing near.*

HYMN 50:7
BOOK OF PRAISE

THE TIMES

We are living in a fast-paced world. Since the end of World War II, developments have accelerated at an unprecedented rate, spurred on by rapid technological advancements. What were considered great inventions some decades ago have been eclipsed by mind-boggling improvements. It appears to be a "here today, gone tomorrow" world. Change and more change – a sea of change; what was, no longer is.

In such a world there is hardly a foothold. Bereft of absolutes, our society is adrift. Yesterday's accepted norms have been thrown overboard. Uncertainty reigns, and fatalism has set in: what can be done about it?

The church, we do well to recognize, is not left unaffected by this turmoil. We Christians are not immune to the changes taking place in our society; therefore we must discern what is important to hold on to and what is wrong to espouse. To comprehend our times, we must examine them in the light of the living and abiding Word of our Lord Jesus Christ and embrace its instruction and direction (Hebrews 6:17-20). That Word is our only anchor in the sea of change. The Thessalonians also found themselves in unsettling times. They were assured by the apostle Paul (2 Thessalonians 2:13-17) that there is hope and certainty in this world.

... because God chose you from the beginning to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. To this He called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by letter. Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

Let us, then, pray and work in calm assurance and hope, responding in faith to the call through the gospel.

Appreciation

Much is happening on the North American ecclesiastical scene, as well as in our own federation of churches. To keep you abreast of the issues, the editors of *Clarion* have served you with a varied menu of topics during the past year. That you grow spiritually motivates them to write. May also through their work your hearts be established in every good work and word. Thank you, Dr. J. De Jong, Prof. J. Geertsema, Rev. R. Schouten, Dr. C. Van Dam, and Rev. G. Ph. van Popta, for your contributions.

Many others have participated in filling the pages of *Clarion*, among them our regular columnists, Rev. C. VanSpronsen, Mrs. R. Ravensbergen, and Aunt Betty, and we thank you for your help.

To our subscribers, advertisers, and all who work behind the scenes, accept our gratitude for enabling us to bring the magazine to you.

Best Wishes

As the Christmas season draws attention to the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ in the midst of myriads of troubling personal and world events, let us rejoice in that one all-changing event so long ago. In sending His Son, God showed His love for all who are His. To the triune God be praise and glory now and forever.

May you experience His blessings during this season and throughout 1997.

W. Gortemaker

Year-End Review

1996

As we set out on a review of some of the regular and not so regular events which happened on the ecclesiastical scene during the year 1996, we must first observe God's faithfulness and steadfast love. The Head of the Church, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, was faithful to His promise, "And lo, I am with you always, till the close of the age." For His sake, our Triune God, also, was steadfast in His covenant love, as He promised, "I will be your God and you will be my people." As our God and Father He sustained His children under all circumstances, in joy and sorrow, in health and sickness, in prosperity and adversity; as God the Son, our Redeemer, He continued to gather, preserve, and defend His church for His work of salvation; as God the Holy Spirit, our Sanctifier, He worked on the holiness of His people through the proclamation of His Word, which He used for the foundation, regulation, and confirmation of our faith.

When we wish to review the affairs on the church scene, we should begin by observing the ongoing ministry of the Word. If we ask ourselves the question whether our Lord made progress during the year 1996, we must see first and foremost the main way of progress in the regular proclamation of the Word. For the advance of the Kingdom in this world and for the progress in the Lord's work of gathering His church in order to come to the fullness of the number of His elect, we must realize the significance of the weekly services in which the Holy Spirit works faith in the hearts of the hearers. Besides, through the study of God's Word in the congregations this work of the Spirit is confirmed and preserved, so that it may bear fruit in the lives of God's people. Also through the steady instruction at

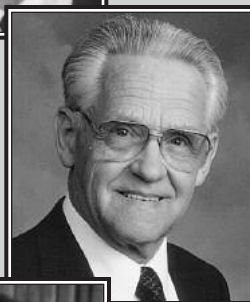
our Theological College, providing new labourers in the field from year to year, and through the work of missionaries and evangelization the progress of Christ's church-gathering work becomes evident. It is the intention of this review to oversee some of these activities, in order that our reflections may rebound to thanksgiving and praise!

Ministry of the gospel

In view of the above, it should not surprise us that we first reflect on the



Rev. J.D.
Wielenga



Rev. P.
Kingma



Rev. I.
Dombon

Servants of the Lord who have gone before us

matters pertaining to the progress in the ministry of the Word. As in previous years, the comings and goings of the servants, who are called to proclaim the Word in the midst of the congregations in their task of teaching and preaching, capture the attention of many a congregation. Perhaps for some years there may be rest and a time of unhindered or uninterrupted service; however, as soon as a call is extended the unrest begins. It is in this way that calls were extended to the Revs. Moesker and Kampen (by Lincoln), W.M. Wielenga (by Fergus and Burlington-West), De Gelder (by Coaldale), R. Aasman and Agema (by Orangeville), Stam (by Coaldale and Ancaster), P. Aasman (by Calgary). Then, in the event of a call accepted, as in the case of Rev. W. den Hollander (to Toronto) or Rev. P.K.A. de Boer (to the Free Reformed Church of Bedfordale), the newly vacant congregation sets out to inquire with the congregation for names of ministers deemed suitable for their particular congregation, followed by the work of Calling Committees investigating, proposing a candidate, and the council and congregation proceeding in the actual call of a "new" minister of the Word.

However, it is not only by way of this process of "calling" that congregations become vacant. The "calling" could come directly from the Lord as well! The latter happened in the church at Coaldale, whose beloved pastor and teacher, the Rev. J.D. Wielenga, at the age of 60 was relieved of his earthly ministry on January 29, 1996. Another faithful servant, whom the Lord "called" home during this passed year was the Rev. P. Kingma, at the age of 70; although no longer in active service, he, too, leaves an empty place behind in the congregation of Grand Rapids, where he served last. Also in the field

of Mission work we were confronted with such a sorrowful development, when the Lord took out of this life the first native minister among the churches in Irian Jaya, the Rev. I. Dombon, at the age of 38 years. In this context it may be mentioned as well, that the Rev. M. van Beveren (emeritus pastor of the church of Edmonton Providence) lost his beloved wife during this past year.

Besides the above mentioned ways of coming and going, it can happen as well that a minister in a particular and special place of service comes to the end of his task. The latter applies to the Rev. P.K. Meijer, missionary for the church at Surrey, who came to the end of his work in Brazil, and who was declared eligible for call in March of this past year. Also the Rev. R. Sietsma, missionary in Maceió, Brazil, for the church at Hamilton, upon his own request, was declared eligible for call, and subsequently received a call from Assen-Zuid for the mission in Curitiba, Brazil. In the same line, also the Rev. H. Versteeg is coming to this point, as the church of Toronto announced to the churches, seeing that he will become eligible for call in February 1997. Due to deteriorating eye-sight and decline in ability to perform in his service as missionary in Brazil for the church at Surrey, also the Rev. R.F. Boersema will most likely become emeritus as of July 1997. Our federation of churches has been occupied as well, during this past year, with the sad developments of a dismissal of one of its ministers (Rev. T. Hoogsteen from the church of Rockway), and of a withdrawal (Rev. M. Van Essen from the church of Ancaster).

No matter what the situation is like, each of the above circumstances bring

along their share of difficulties and uncertainties, or of sadness and sorrow, not only for the ministers involved but also for the congregations confronted with such developments. Highlights of joy and thanksgiving, therefore, are the moments when the churches are enriched with new ministers of the Word, as was the case with the eligibility for call of the candidates R.J. Eikelboom and J.P. Van Vliet (who accepted calls to Calgary and Lincoln, respectively, and were installed in these vacant churches!). It is in His Sovereign good pleasure that the Lord makes use of servants, and in His Providence He leads them in their consideration and decision-making of these calls as well. We may also see His care for the well-being of His congregations during times of uncertainty, upheaval, vacancies and the like. By the power of His Word and Holy Spirit He did sustain His servants and congregations alike.

Among the highlights of a different nature during this past year was the occasion at which the church of Smithers celebrated the 40th anniversary of their day of institution. The congregation of Carman has heard much during the last few years about plans to facilitate suitable living quarters for their elderly. These plans finally materialized and came "off the ground" in the building of a Seniors' Residence, nearing completion by now. However, it is not only at the occasion of such highlights but also during the regular progress of the work among the congregations that the ongoing faithfulness and steadfast love of our heavenly Father manifests itself. This may also be evident from a closer look at congregational activities during the past year!

Congregational life

Many of the activities pertaining to congregational life take place in the church buildings that belong to or are used by the congregations. Also during this past year building activities became a foremost focus in some of our churches. The churches of Chatsworth and Taber were activated by their building projects, which resulted in the establishment of beautiful new buildings. Thanks to a good cooperation between church and school, Chatsworth erected a multi-functional facility for both church and school! Also the churches of Burlington-West, Carman, Watford and Winnipeg have been looking at their building situation. No, they may not yet be in the process of building new premises; however, their present facilities necessitated urgent talks about their tight quarters. Burlington and Winnipeg continued looking into the possibility of splitting the congregation in order to establish new congregations. This development did not yet result in satisfactory solutions, regarding their building or otherwise.

Church buildings, however, are of primary importance, of course, for the weekly worship services. These services involve every member of the congregation, young and old, either in the way of supplying good nursery facilities or, more significantly, in the way the worship-services are conducted. Discussions concerning the liturgy of the weekly services, therefore, are an essential element in council and congregational meetings alike. Also during this past year, several congregations paid attention to matters such as saying their "responsive amen's," saying in unison "the doxology" at the end of the Lord's Supper celebration, reciting or possibly even singing the Nicene Creed, the vatum, etc. The church of Burlington-West made the switch from the A-liturgy to the B-liturgy, as a switch from good to better worship, meanwhile working on thoughts and ideas which could result in the "best" way of worshipping the Lord!

At the same time we can see the elders moving among the congregation in their yearly home visits, inquiring about the fruitful participation of each individual member in the Sunday services or otherwise. Faithful church attendance, too, receives ample attention in this respect, especially when there are situations in which a trend towards "once-ing" gives reason for grave concern. Yes, at times it appears necessary



New church building of the Taber, Alberta congregation

even to address the "apparel" of some members, when it can be observed that the "holy array" or "Sunday best" is neglected. Standards in this respect must be kept high, indeed, considering that the heart of our worship it is to enter upon the presence of our most Holy God, entering the holy sanctuary designated for worship to our highest Majesty and King! However, not only the elders but also the deacons play an important role in the conscious and voluntary activation of the congregation. Pursuing the members' awareness of the needs in the congregation, concerned with their conscious activity of giving with generosity, and having regard for the mutual calling of being a hand and a foot to one another, deacons in several congregations have decided to stimulate congregational participation by way of regular home visits as well!

Among the activities taking place in the churches' facilities, Catechism classes occupy a prominent place. They have become so common a feature of congregational life that we could easily take for granted that such classes are conducted quietly and fruitfully from week to week. Indeed, how important these weekly sessions for the instruction of the youth of the congregation are! They serve to call the covenant youth to faith and repentance, helping them to assume responsibility in their covenant membership! Especially in times of indifference, or during occasions of rowdiness and misbehaviour, it becomes important to reiterate the significance of a good cooperation between parents and instructor. In some congregations the ministers had to alert the parents to a lack in attitude and conduct in this regard. This is not to imply as if it is all

bad among the youth of the congregations. On the contrary, in many a congregation it may be observed with deep gratitude that the young people of the church take an active role in the congregational activities. In the church of Grand Valley the young people have taken care of the janitorial duties for many years; in the congregation of Coaldale, the young people show their care to the elderly by presenting them flowers; in other congregations the young people make it a custom to visit the elderly in groups of two or more. We may thankfully observe, indeed, that in most congregations the youth actively gets involved for the upbuilding and well-being of the other members!

Besides the regular activities, which have been conducted for decades already (such as the study societies for young and old, men and women, or mixed), we also observe an innovative approach to the phenomenon of communal Bible Study. In many a congregation study groups now come together on certain mornings or afternoons during the week. The church of Toronto has seen for some years now the active existence of a Men's Breakfast Bible Study. There are also more and more congregations where the study of God's Word is done in the company of "outsiders," in gatherings called Coffee-Break, Take-a-Break, or the like. Also the study societies for the younger members take on different activities, besides the study of God's Word: we see the students called "Cadets," (as in Burlington-West), and the society receive the name of Teen Club, while the activities reflect a rich and productive imagination of the leaders! Besides, for the integration of our younger handicapped brothers and sis-

ters Friendship Circles are developed in the Fraser Valley! All in all, we may observe with thankfulness that most if not all congregations enjoy a vibrant life filled with a multitude of activities and a variety of new developments! In these activities the fruits of the Spirit become evident, the communion with God and with the saints is experienced, and the purpose of the workings of faith and renewal are accomplished.

Theological College

Among the Canadian Reformed Churches the Theological College occupies a central and prominent position. The regular work at "our" College is carried upon the prayers of the congregations. "The professors" are the officials who receive special observation among any crowd or gathering at any church function. Any highlight during the school year of the College brings out people from far and near, eager to participate and to express this affection for College and professors alike. This was evident, for example, at the occasion of the 25th anniversary of our professor of Old Testament, Dr. C. Van Dam. In thankful celebration of his anniversary in the ministry and of their wedding anniversary, brother and sister Van Dam deserved the limelight! Both have been a great blessing in the life of our churches: our brother in the ministry of the Word and as highly competent instructor at our College, and our sister as his great support in these tasks as well as in her participation in such important functions as the Women's Savings Action, MERF, and other activities.

Speaking about anniversaries, in College circles two other occasions did not go by unnoticed (be it that among the churches they did not receive too much attention): also our former professor of Old Testament, Prof. Ohmann, commemorated his 40th anniversary in the ministry, while our former professor of Diaconiology, Dr. K. Deddens, celebrated 45 years of ministry in preaching and teaching. As churches we also owe these leaders our fond and grateful memories! In them, we also cherish a strong bond between Hamilton and Kampen! In this respect it is worthy of special mention that during this past year, from September to December, our Theological College has benefited from "Holland" also in the person of Drs. Hagens. While Dr. C. Van Dam made use of his well-deserved sabbatical (a highly worthy precedent for our Theological College), Drs. Hagens occupied the chair of Old Testament studies, and



The faculty of the Theological College, Hamilton, Ontario

from personal observations I may say that he did so in a very energetic and competent manner!

Also in the life of the College people come and people go, as became evident at the latest "College evening." Our sister E. Mulder vacated the chair of the Women's Savings Action. After many years of fruitful and effective, poetic and prosaic, leadership, she took leave of her senatorial position behind the scenes of the library of the College. Well, this library continued to receive the attention of our sisters in the way of a generous donation; it also was in focus very much for a special committee, preparing the expansion of the library and the organization of providing funds for this undertaking.

If anyone may have thought that our Theological College was one of those academic places avoiding the maelstrom of modern change, it would be good for such a one to surf "the web." Not only do we see many a congregation making use of the computer age, designing web pages, making use of freenets, e-mail, and the like, also our Theological College is kept abreast in such technological developments. Especially our modern-day students, global in their thinking as they are (and what would you expect, considering that they come from as far as Australia, China, or Timor), keep the College "plugged" to the world wide web: Candidate Plug ended up in the Netherlands, Candidate Poppe was ordained in the congregation of West-Albany on January 28, 1996! Also this past year's crop produced an Aussie for the church of Calgary, while the other candidate, br. Jason Van Vliet, left the College, having upgraded and updated the entire College population to the computer age!

Mission

The transition from the Theological College to the work of Mission is not too difficult. Already among our students at the Theological College there is a keen interest in the work of Mission. One of our students, br. Steven 't Hart, spent the summer months at the Mission field in Papua New Guinea. Being one of our Australian students, it should not surprise us that his special interest lies in that field. However, from our Australian contacts we understand that the work there has become stagnated due to several causes, so that the supporting churches had to come to the decision to scale down the work there. The Rev. Versteeg, in addition to one of his trips to Irian Jaya for the Mission



Special dedication evening for new church building in Barra Grande, Brazil



Fruit stand selling papayas and bananas along the road on the north coast near Sentani, Irian Jaya, Indonesia

work done by the church of Toronto and supporting churches, visited Papua New Guinea in order to serve our Australian brothers and sisters with expert advice. Evidently, the work there is in a transitional stage, which will require new plans and developments in the near future.

Transition and progress seem to be the words for most of the Mission projects among our churches. As was mentioned already, the Rev. Versteeg is in the process of bringing his work in Irian Jaya to a good and responsible conclusion. For that purpose he made several trips during this past year. Thus he was able to organize matters of a financial nature, finalize the contact with the government officials by way of a (successful) application of more visa for the ministers from the Netherlands who are to teach at the seminary (for the training of ministers, elders, deacons, church treasurers, etc.!), assist in the preparation of the institution of the church of Waena and the ordination of Rev. H. Korwa, and complete the writing of his book (and lecture series) on the Islam. How vulnerable and dependent the work of Mission is, we be-

came aware as well during this past year, suffering as we all did through the traumatic experience of the death of the Rev. Dombon and the fatal accident in which some of the MAF people were involved. For the Versteeg and Togeretz families these experiences have been of a very trying nature!! At the home front, meanwhile, the Mission Board in Toronto saw its motor of 38 years, br. John Boot, seek retirement from his fruitful service. Nonetheless, they are intensely investigating the choice of a new Mission field. A unique event in regard to the work in Irian Jaya taking place during this past year was the visit which the Revs. Rumi and Korop made to the Netherlands!

According to the assessment of the Rev. Venema, also the work at the Mission field of Surrey is in its last phase, becoming ready as they are to be self-sufficient and autonomous. The church of Surrey, together with the supporting churches, enjoyed a visit of the Venemas. They also received the final results of the work of the Rev. Meijer, who continued his work on translating reformed literature. After completing his work on the Three Forms of Unity, he translated

material on Job, Acts, and Thessalonians. Among the churches working in Brazil there is much discussion about the relationship between the Reformed churches of Brazil and the Presbyterian church of Brazil (IPB). The question about the need for a reformed witness in Brazil is an important one. The church of Hamilton, together with the supporting churches, had the opportunity to interact on this question and exchange thoughts and experiences concerning this matter with their missionary, Rev. J.G.R. Kroeze, and their Mission Aid worker, br. H. Plug, during their visit in September. This question, also, was discussed intensely by all the churches in Canada and the Netherlands participating in the work of Mission in Brazil, at a mini-conference in Hamilton at the end of November.

Evangelism

Also during this past year most, if not all, congregations have been actively involved in activities of outreach in one way or another. The Reformed Evangelism Taskforce continued to publish their periodicals for that purpose. Very instructional and upbuilding for that purpose is the inclusion of *Outreach* in *Clarion*. This bi-annual publication serves the purpose of equipping the saints for the work of evangelization. Especially in our time and age, such formal instruction and discussion is essential, so that believers may be prepared adequately for their approach of others with whom they want to share the riches of the gospel. Especially when some new forms of outreach persist and continue to prove successful, such as the Neighbourhood Bible Study (believers inviting three or four neighbours into their home for Bible Study), these members will need such thorough preparation. Also the members who maintain their contacts through correspondence courses like "A Gift from Heaven," or through the Caribbean Ministries, will need such aids for the formulation of answers which effectively convey the doctrine of salvation.

As far as the ongoing activities are concerned, it appears to be much appreciated to see our members involved in nursing homes or other institutions for the care of elderly and others. By way of meditations and singing, this form of outreach continues to be a blessing in many a locality. Also the Year Round Children's Bible School Program, as developed by congregations like Hamilton and Toronto, appear to be a blessing for those who remain

involved for an extended period of time. The Home Mission Committee of the church at Burlington South drew good crowds to their "Fellowship Supper/Sing Along In The Park." What a privilege it is indeed, that activities like these can be conducted in freedom. In that respect we must thankfully observe the peaceful conditions our churches enjoy compared to the believers in Zaire, China, Cuba, Egypt, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, and other Islamic countries! The church of Burlington South is also still pursuing a feasibility study of the project for urban ministry, initiated by the church at Hamilton (under the leadership of what now is the Rev. J.R. Van Vliet!). May the Lord continue to bless all these endeavours, as well as the every day opportunities in which the Lord provides occasion for witness and sharing in the riches we have in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

Other events

Of course, it is impossible to mention all matters and activities and events by means of which the Lord of the church is blessing us. The work of MERF, or of the CRWRF (and the involvement of groups of young people becoming actively involved in projects under their auspices), or of brother Baartse (and the Wycliffe Bible Translators), or of Mission in the Ukraine, or of Anchor (the urgent and important service for the benefit of our handicapped brothers and sisters, which depends so much on the support of the entire federation!) etc. etc. come to mind when reflecting on another year of service to the Lord! Also the schools and colleges could continue their im-

portant work for the furtherance of the Kingdom of Christ. It is with much gratitude that we can mention in this regard that the "Building in Faith Project," the plan for the expansion and renovation of Guido de Brès High School, is well on its way to becoming a great blessing for the education of our high school youth! All these projects and affairs also render us unique opportunities to show the riches of reformed stewardship, in which we may be assured of the Lord's blessing!

In this context of the great variety of events it should be mentioned in closing, that the year 1996 has seen a lot of activity in the field of pursuing ecclesiastical unity. In Chatham, Grand Rapids, and Langley the contacts with the Free Reformed churches proceeded. In Edmonton (and Classis AB/MB) as well as in Toronto (and Classis Ontario North), the sister church relationship with the Free Church of Scotland resulted in intensified interest, involvement and cooperation. Through Reformation Meetings and Unity Rallies in East and West, by means of papers and periodicals as well as through the speech of Dr. J. De Jong on his tour among the churches in the West, the matter of the unity of faith among reformed believers became a living reality among the churches! All this, and much more, may be and must be remembered as occasions for glory and praise to our faithful God and Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who by the Holy Spirit and Word have blessed us on our way throughout the Year of the Lord 1996!!



The new MERF Study Centre in Larnaca, Cyprus

Some Early History of the Hamilton and Georgetown Congregations

The Editorial by Dr. J. De Jong in vol. 45, no. 6, of Jan. 26/96 aroused our renewed interest in the early history of our churches. His article was focused on remarks made by Rev. B. Woudenberg and his accusation about the alleged interference of Prof. B. Holwerda during the early 1950's. We would like to draw attention to the situation at Hamilton during 1950.

We arrived in Hamilton from Exeter very early in June 1950. We moved into a part of an old farmhouse on Limeridge Road. The same house was also occupied by the Th. Hart family who lived beside and above us. At the back of the house lived a very kind Polish gentleman. He had a voice like a fog horn and showed a preference for fried onions. Since my wife was pregnant, these traits were not always appreciated. Gerry and Pauline DenBok, married for three weeks, and Jan and Thea Ton lived down the road.

With br. Ton, we discussed the possibility of becoming members of the Protestant Reformed Church (PRC) of Hamilton. While living near Exeter with the rest of the Lodder family, we had already received visits from the PRC "missionaries" and Rev. H. Veldman. During these visits, no apparent difficulties had been voiced.

"Declaration of Principles"

Br. Ton warned us that some changes could come about and therefore advised us to keep our attestations for a while, but to put in a request to join. His advice was followed and resulted in a series of visits by Rev. Veldman. He seemed to prefer visiting in the afternoon and only on a few occasions was I present at the tail end of the visit. One evening as we were out for a walk along Limeridge Road, br. Hart drove up and stopped along side of us. He



The home of Mr. and Mrs. Hart on Limeridge Road, Hamilton. This was the meeting place for church services. This picture was taken in 1951

was visibly upset and remarked that "troubles are on the way in the church." He declined to explain his remark and drove home. Later, we found out that he had just returned from the Synod 1950 of the PRC at which the proposal of the missionary committee had been tabled. Despite fierce opposition, this proposal had been accepted. Later, it became the infamous *Declaration of Principles*.

Since br. Hart had spoken and voted in direct opposition to Rev. Veldman, the trip home had not been very pleasant. My wife and I had discussed this matter frequently. Many of our brothers and sisters who had come from the same Federation in the Netherlands now belonged to the PRC and we wanted to join as well. We had also decided that we would push Rev. Veldman on his next visit to explain the reasons for delaying our membership. At his next visit, he indeed told my wife that all persons aspiring to membership would first have to

be instructed in the "Protestant Reformed Truth"(!) before they would be accepted as members. This information caused a lively discussion which was still going strong when I arrived home from work. Hat in hand, ready to leave, the Rev. invited us to the Lord's Supper the next Sunday.

I asked my wife whether she found out why we could not yet be members. After her explanation, we declined to take part in the celebration. We informed Rev. Veldman that just a few short years ago we had been freed from synodical dictates and oppression and felt it wrong to be bound again. Therefore, we stated that if the PRC could not receive us as members on the strength of our attestation, we would not become members. Rev. Veldman bristled, shook his head, and left.

When we were on our own, the whole discussion was reshaped. The Rev. Veldman had asked my wife, for instance, whether, once our child was born, she would call it a covenant child. My wife answered, "Yes, of course. That is the promise of the covenant." Then came another question: "If seven baptized children would be standing in front of us, would you call them all covenant children?" Again, my wife's answer was, "yes." Rev. Veldman then declared that if we would not change our way of thinking, our child would never be baptized in his church. Naturally, we felt very unhappy with the way things had developed.

Between services on Sundays, there were always lively discussions. On those occasions, we had a lot of support from the brothers J. Poortinga and Andries VanEs. Br. Poortinga had stayed in contact with liberated families which had come across on the same ship as he and who were now living a long way north of Hamilton. Word had come



In this house the Georgetown church was instituted: the D. DeWitt residence

via a letter that a certain Rev. Hettinga, from Harlingen, the Netherlands, would spend some time in Georgetown somewhere in between Hamilton and the north. In view of our problem, it was decided that we would try to get to Georgetown on August 13th.

A trip to Georgetown

Of the three families, only Andries VanEs had a car. This meant that only the two brothers as well as my wife and I could go. It was some trip! On one occasion, Poortinga and I had to get out and walk so that we could make a long hill. We did, however, find Georgetown and eventually also the Doede DeWitt residence. Brothers and sisters had come from Waldemar, Amaranth, East Garafraxa, Orangeville and Tottenham, and, of course, our group from Hamilton. Some came alone, oth-


ers with their families. In addition, present were the hosts, nine DeWitts.

After getting acquainted over coffee with each other and with the Rev. Hettinga, Rev. Hettinga spoke an edifying word. After a hearty lunch was served by sr. DeWitt, a meeting was held to discuss our future direction. Several families had tried to join the Christian Reformed Church and were welcomed, but could not discuss the problems of the Netherlands. In addition, we had our problems with the Protestant Reformed Church. It was proposed to institute there and then. As far as we can remember, seven of the ten family heads present voted in favour of institution and three against. An election was held and the brs. C. Walinga and P. Wildeboer became elders while br. D. VanLeeuwen was elected as deacon.

Because of the distance and lack of transportation, we could not get to-

gether very often. Most services in the Hamilton area were first held at the home of the Poortingas and later at the home of br. and sr. Freek (Fred) VanderVelde. Much of this information can be found in the first yearbook of our churches, printed in 1952, although not too many of these can be found today. We realize that this has a very personal touch, but it goes to show that all of us will have to make very important decisions at one time or another.

While we may count on the Majestic Power and Grace of our LORD, we have to prepare ourselves all through our lives for those decisions. What we have written also strongly supports what Dr. De Jong said about the *Declaration of Principles*. This declaration prevented us from becoming members of the Hamilton PRC and we are convinced that others had the same problem. Rev. Veldman did not believe in half-measures and went to work with a vengeance. We sincerely believe that his relentless attitude was used by the LORD as an instrument to bring the brothers and sisters together again in late 1950. This was the beginning of the Canadian Reformed Church. Too bad Rev. Veldman had no part of this. Eventually, he had to return to the U.S.A.

A note of interest: br. and sr. DeWitt are members in Guelph where br. DeWitt recently celebrated his 91st birthday. Br. J. Poortinga is a member of the American Ref. Church at Lynden, WA. Sr. Wildeboer is a member of the church at Grand Valley. Sr. VanEs belongs to the church at Lincoln. Besides ourselves, these are the only confessing members of that day (Aug. 13th, 1950) who are still alive today. Truly the LORD has done great things for us all. 

Mr. and Mrs. G. Lodder live in Guelph, Ontario.

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, to know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.

1 JOHN 5:20



A True Reformation?

The official publication of the Protestant Reformed Churches, *The Standard Bearer*, has published a special "Reformation Issue" dealing with what it terms "The Reformation of 1953." When one peruses this issue it soon becomes clear what according to these brothers the "reformation of 1953" was all about. It concerned the rejection of the so-called "conditional covenant theology" of the "Liberated."

For example Prof. David Engelsma writes:

In 1951-1953, the doctrine of a particular, unconditional covenant, with believers and their elect children became the *official* doctrine of the PRC.

There was continuing Reformation in the PRC.

1953 represented also the continuation of the great reformation of the 16th century.

The issue

These are bold statements indeed. However, when one seeks to ascertain what led to this "reformation," one can only be baffled by the apparent need of reformation as the brothers see it. In his article in the same issue, Prof. Decker suggests that the schism of 1953 was caused by the teaching of Dr. K. Schilder on the covenant. He then sets forth in summary Schilder's view of the covenant, which correctly summarizes Schilder's views – views which, as there presented, reflect the teachings of Scripture and the confessions. But Dekker says:

The PRC, following the leadership of Herman Hoeksema, reacted strongly to Schilder's covenant views. The view of Schilder regards the covenant as a means to an end, the end being salvation. The PRC regard the covenant as being the

highest end in itself. As to its idea, the covenant is the bond of friendship which God unilaterally established, maintains and realizes with His elect in Christ.

At this point one can only ask: does this difference of opinion qualify for instigating a church schism? Can a church schism based on this difference of opinion qualify as a reformation? And one in line with the "great reformation"? Or is this a case of promoting unnecessary schism?

For one thing, we can ask whether Schilder strictly saw the covenant as a means to an end. I would submit that this is a caricature of Schilder's views. For example, Dr. L. Doekes, summarizing Schilder's views on eschatology, says, "The supper of the marriage feast of the Lamb is the table of the first and last fellowship, and so the fulfilment of the entire idea of the covenant, the richest fulfilment of the covenant as the ground principle of all fellowship."¹ And later he quotes Schilder as saying: "The basic and initial language of the covenant is spoken everywhere, in heaven and hell. Only those who know God as their God will acknowledge His own as 'theirs'."² These brief summaries of Schilder's covenant perspective in themselves already make clear that one cannot force a false dilemma upon Schilder with regard to means and end of the covenant. He also saw the covenant as God's end in itself, that is, the *fulfilment* of the covenant concerned specifically the gathering of the elect as the new mankind in the new Jerusalem.

And Hoeksema? He speaks of the "historical realization of the covenant" and notes that in the beginning Adam did not possess the highest life of the covenant of God. The covenant had to go through a development and a histo-

ry.³ Here, too, we have a caricature, and a simplification of the real state of affairs.

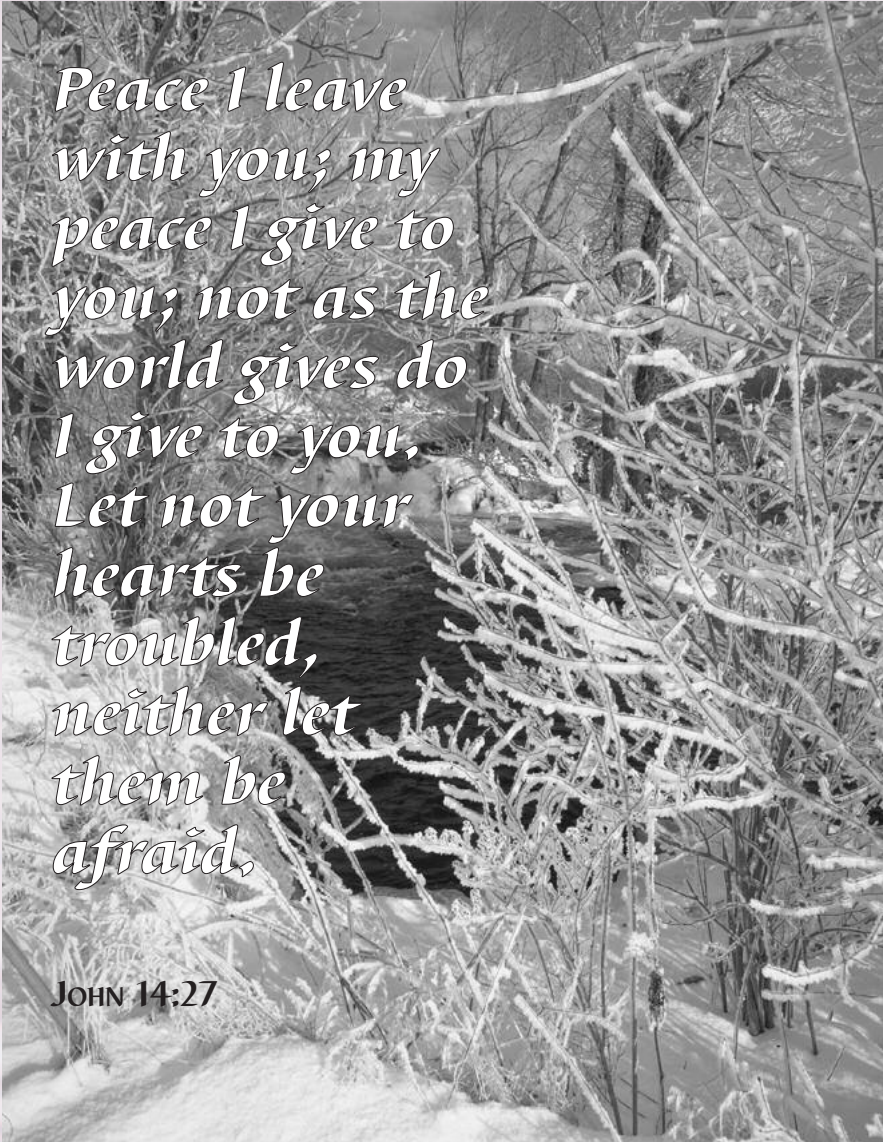
To be sure, I do not want to eliminate the distinct differences between Hoeksema and Schilder on the covenant. But do these differences imply that one (Schilder) is to be condemned? I fail to see why brothers who base their standpoint on the Three Forms of Unity cannot live together in one federation, bound by a common order. The issue is whether one party can make its view *binding* on others. That must not occur, and that is what did occur.

I can appreciate that one might disagree with Schilder's explanations re the covenant. I can also understand that some defend the view of the covenant essentially made with the elect. I think that view is incorrect, and cannot be justified on the basis of Scripture and our confessions. But would I demand that the brothers who hold such a view be put out of the church? Was Rev. De Wolf who preached the view of a covenant with conditions to be considered a *heretic* worthy of suspension and *deposition*?

I cannot but see this defense of the actions of 1950-1953 as the promotion of sectarianism, rather than the promotion of true reformation. Thereby I do not mean to sanction the decisions of the "De Wolf group" which for the most part returned to the fold of the CRC. Given the controversy of 1924, that action, too cannot be stamped as reformatory. But the real question is: was this a voluntary withdrawal, or was this group pressured out of the PRC?

Church polity

With regard to the church political side of the dispute, Rev. Gise Van Baren tells us that the issue concerned Article 31 C.O. The split with the "De Wolf group" concerned the way in which



*Peace I leave
with you; my
peace I give to
you; not as the
world gives do
I give to you.
Let not your
hearts be
troubled,
neither let
them be
afraid.*

JOHN 14:27

Article 31 had to be applied. In a manner of speaking, the “De Wolf group” is made out to be an “Article 31 church.” What was the difference in interpretation? Having drawn on the court records involved in the dispute, Rev Van Baren says:

The above quotes [the court disputes, JDJ] give an idea of the erroneous view presented concerning Article 31 of the Church Order. It appears, according to this presentation, that anyone may ignore the decisions of classis (or synod) if he proves to his own conscience that he is right and classis is wrong. The only thing a classis can do, if the matter is of sufficiently serious a nature, is to sever relationships with the congregation which refuses to follow its advice. The statements of Rev. B. Kok go a long way to explain what occurred both in Classis West and

some of the churches of Classis East. These would not be bound by Article 31 of the Church Order.

The Protestant Reformed Churches *do* maintain the authority of the local church and its consistory. These churches *do* make a distinction between “broader” (correct) and “higher” (wrong) bodies when speaking of Classis or Synod. These churches *have* insisted that only the consistory can suspend, depose, or otherwise discipline its officers or members. But surely they have not taught that Article 31 means one need merely to prove to *one’s own conscience* from Scripture and the Church Order that a decision of Classis or Synod is wrong in order then to ignore or violate that decision. Such action would result in anarchy in the churches (as was seen also in 1953). According to Article

31 of the Church Order, the decisions of the broader bodies are binding. Those who disagree with the decisions of the broader gatherings must prove from Scripture and the Church Order *to the satisfaction of those bodies* that the decision is wrong. If that is not thus proved, and if the church or individual refuses to abide by the decisions of the broader gatherings, they put themselves outside of the pale of the churches – and these gatherings must declare them to be out. If one can do as he pleases despite the decisions of the broader gathering, then protests, appeals, overtures would mean nothing anymore.

If our churches learned one important lesson in 1953, it was surely this: we must abide by the Order adopted by the churches and not have each do what is right “in his own eyes.” Decisions taken by the broader gatherings must be binding in the churches – or there would be anarchy and surely no denominational unity.

If we now examine this church political side of the question, then once again I must say: is not this whole so-called reformation based on false dilemmas? For Article 31 definitely speaks of a proof to one’s own conscience. Precisely one’s conscience is what cannot be bound above Scripture. However, Article 31 does not stop with one’s own conscience as if that is the last court of appeal. One must also bring his objection to the churches, to the brotherhood.

However, the final decision does not depend, as Rev. Van Baren seems to think, on the decision of the very bodies which made the decision one is appealing. This is another way of changing the *unless* of Article 31 to *until* as the synodicals read it in time of the Liberation. If one follows Rev. Van Baren’s rule, he is bound by a decision made by an assembly *until* he has proven to the assembly the error in the decision and the assembly concerned has actually accepted that proof. In the meantime, one is expected to submit, even if the decision contradicts Scripture and confession.

Conceivably one can have a situation in which “those bodies” never grant the legitimate appeal of a brother concerning one of their decisions, – an appeal properly based on Scripture and confession, and adequately showing from Scripture and confession that the decisions taken are in conflict with

the church's standards. What then? Is the decision still binding until the proof has been accepted?

The appealing brother (or sister) must bring his objections forward to the following major assembly, whether classis, regional synod or general synod. One who feels aggrieved in his conscience cannot simply act as a soloist. He must inform others, and call others to highlight the errors in the decisions taken. And we may believe that one who speaks the truth according to the word of God will always gain a hearing. There is no room in the church for the soloist. But one who stands on the firm foundation of God's word will not be a soloist either. He will always gain a hearing among the people of God. For the sheep know the voice of the good shepherd. And they will not follow the voice of a stranger.

The effects

When a purported reformation is based strictly on presumption and personal preference, it can easily be detected by the kinds of arguments that are used to endorse it. These too easily take on a personal tone. For example, Rev. B. Woudenberg writes concerning K Schilder's second planned trip to the U.S. in 1947:

... There was so much to be talked through.

But neither was that to come to pass. Schilder's trip was planned and its schedule set, when, in the summer of 1947, Hoeksema, always the picture of strength and health, was struck down by a massive stroke. It was too late for Schilder's trip to be cancelled. He came; but Hoeksema was not there to meet him or to engage in that theological dialogue they had planned. Instead, Schilder travelled among our small churches to lecture and preach, but without Hoeksema by his side to fill things out and bring them to the focus they ought to have had. That made all the difference.

The lectures and sermons Schilder gave were superb, everyone thought. Those who could understand the language came; and what he said was remembered and talked about for years. But that was not where the real action took place. It was after the public was

gone and Schilder retired to the living rooms and offices of the local manses, that the meaningful meetings took place. Almost invariably the discussion soon gravitated to the subject of the covenant. Schilder would explain how and why he was cast out; and then came the turn of the local pastor to try in his own words to set forth the problems we saw with the Liberated covenant view which Hoeksema had so often explained especially over against our view of common grace and the doctrine of predestination. But these men were no match for Schilder, overwhelmed by him as they were. And now the old openness was no longer there. Schilder remained calm and gracious as always; but with that a certain bitterness entered in. "I despise your view," he is known to have said, and vehemently objected to linking the covenant to election and reprobation, or to common grace. And so it went, from place to place, until the time of his visit was over and as many as were able came to Grand Rapids for a closing conference on precisely the subject of the covenant of grace.

But, should we judge K. Schilder by hearsay, or by what he has reported to have said in any given instance? A fine court it is that judges departed brothers on the basis of rumour and hearsay! Let us judge Schilder by his writings. In the brochure entitled *Extra-Scriptural Binding – A New Danger* he writes that one may have his particular views of the covenant, but these should not be made binding.⁴ The danger is that a church makes the one particular binding. And the latter is what the PRC did, making a turn to sectarianism.

As another example of ill effects here, let us consider what Rev. C. Hanko says about Hamilton:

In fact in Canada two churches were organized under pretense of agreeing with us doctrinally. I was personally told by more than one of the immigrants that the people in Hamilton had deliberately deceived us. When they felt strong enough numerically and financially to be on their own they left us and organized their own churches.

"Deliberately deceived." The question here is: who is deceiving whom? For reading the Schilder brochure mentioned above will make clear that he repeatedly advised immigrants from the Reformed Churches (Art. 31) to seek contact and fellowship with the PRC, since this church shared the same basis, the same confession and church order. It was only when the *Declaration of Principles* was adopted, that the churches were forced to go their own way.

Without any proof Hanko says that Hamilton "deliberately deceived us." No small words! Accusations like this are easy to make, especially when one feels qualified to provide not so much as a stitch of evidence.

Reformation? I do not think anyone will believe it. I hope the eyes of more and more people in the PRC will be opened.

I hope the brothers in the United Reformed Churches, and the brothers currently leaving the CRC will follow a better road; not one that promotes sectarianism and division, but one that promotes the unity of all true believers based on the Three Forms of Unity, and the Reformed church order. Only then can we hope for and expect better things!



¹See L. Doekes, "Van de Alpha tot de Omega" in J. Douma et. al. (eds), K. Schilder, *Aspecten van zijn werk* (Barneveld: De Vuurbaak, 1990) 142, (my translation).

²Ibid., 143

³See H. Hoeksema, *Believers and their Seed* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1971) 72, 76ff.

⁴The Dutch title is *Boven schriftuurlijke binding – een nieuw gevaar*. An English version of this brochure has recently been published by Inheritance Publications, see K. Schilder, *Extra-Scriptural Binding – A New Danger*. (Translated by T. Van Laar, Neerlandia/Pella: Inheritance Publications, 1996.) Schilder writes: "The point in question is only this: may you dare to break a church apart for a dogmatic formula which Hoeksema can attack, or one of Hoeksema which Schilder can attack, while both indeed subscribe in good conscience to the Three Forms of Unity," 154, [emphasis KS]. If we judge Schilder by this statement then the conclusion can only be that the schism of 1953 in the PRC was *not justified*.



"Declaring the Whole Counsel of God"

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December 1996

Dear Contributors,

At this time of the year we would like to take the opportunity to wish all of you a blessed Christmas and New Year! May the LORD grant you His grace and guidance as you seek to love and serve Him in 1997.

We also wish to thank you from the heart for your donations received during 1996!

We are encouraged by your continued prayers for and regular support of our work to spread the Good News of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Middle East. We thank the LORD for your partnership in this spiritual battle. You should also know that we are thankful for the steady growth of spiritual fruit.

From the reports we receive from Cyprus it appears that the response to the Arabic radio broadcasts is growing as listeners young and old, male and female, respond showing serious interest in the teachings of the Holy Scripture. Each month a number of these listeners express their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Recently MERF has also started broadcasting Bible messages from a new radio station in South Africa which will bring the Word more clearly to southern parts of the Arabic speaking world. The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword . . . and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart (Hebrews 4:12). We pray that the LORD will prepare the hearts of many to hear the Gospel and believe in the only Saviour.

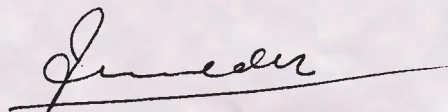
Rev. Victor Atallah, the General Director of MERF in Cyprus, also wrote us that the two-week study terms continue on a regular basis. During those terms Arab evangelists, elders, teachers and others receive further training in the reformed faith at MERF's Evangelical Study Centre in Larnaca, Cyprus. In the past ministers such as Rev. R. Sikkema, Rev. Cl. Stam (Canada), Prof. M. Vander Hart (USA), Dr. P. VanGurp, Rev. D. DeJong (Holland), Prof. D. MacKay (Ireland), Rev. W. Huizinga (Australia) have given guest lectures. More recently, Dr. B. Wingard from Kenya taught ten men from Egypt and the Sudan on the Holy Spirit, His person and work. Rev. A. DeBoer (Holland) gave eleven sessions on the Ten Commandments, pointing out their relevance for the people of God today. The students follow the lessons and return to their churches and communities better equipped to bring the Gospel to their own people.

All those involved in the work of MERF in Cyprus are very excited about the new building which is being constructed. It offers much needed space and houses an attractive chapel and a more spacious study center. MERF will be able to host larger groups for study and there will now also be room for a research library.

Thank you again for your fine contribution to the work of spreading the Word of God in the Middle East. We hope that we may count on your support also in 1997.

May the LORD richly bless you and those who are yours.

With warm Christian greetings,
For MERF-Canada,



(Rev.) J. Mulder, chairman



(Mrs.) J. Van Dam, secretary



China and Mongolia Prayer, Mission and Witness

This summer I had the opportunity to go on an Open Doors mission tour to China and Mongolia with eighteen others. Our purpose was to see something of the world, witness, make Christian contacts, and deliver Chinese Bibles along the way (some 1500). We landed in Beijing from Vancouver airport, and then flew to Ulaan Baatar, Mongolia. After a pleasant stay in this non-communist country, we flew over the Gobi Desert into Huhehot, a city in Inner Mongolia, in northern China. This was the toughest part of our trip because we had to make brand-new contacts, and nearly fell into trouble when someone from our group began preaching in Mandarin on the city square. The last four days we spent in Beijing, sightseeing and delivering our last load of Bibles.



Great Wall

*below –
(broken
section) most
of the wall is
crumbling*



To glimpse the varied flavour of this trip, walk with me through Beijing airport, imagining that homing in on the nearest washroom facility is your first immediate goal: "Passport," a communist officer intones. Put yourself in the place of someone who is being pressured to eat a roasted cicada, or to down a glass of Mongolian "arhi" (a 40% alcoholic drink made from distilled mares milk, with a taste like turpentine) in one swig. Now worship in a Mongolian Christian church with an interpreter speaking on behalf of a Christian East Indian missionary to Buddhists in Tibet. Come and stop by a roadside shop to buy food for a trip to the country, and find that the proprietors are Christians! Hang on for dear life in a Chinese taxi, as four of you secretly try to make contact with a Christian English teacher. Wind your way through narrow Beijing back streets with a load of Bibles in your bag, and meet up with a Chinese pastor who had been imprisoned for twenty-one years for his faith.

This and much more happened during our trip, but the best I can do is to inform you about the spiritual climate, growth and persecution of the suffering church in China and Mongolia so that we can better respond to their needs with prayers and support.



Left to right: Aunt Mabel 89, missionary to Tibet, Pastor Allan – 21 years in prison for his faith, his wife Alice in a Beijing restaurant

Mongolia

The Christian church in Mongolia was almost nonexistent until the Russians left in 1990. James Gilmore, a Scottish missionary (1878-1898), had written off Mongolia as an impossible place to evangelize. No missionary had ever come to Mongolia, and Bud-

dism was the national religion. These realities would explain the natural resistance Mongolians have towards the gospel. Add to this the Russian occupation after WWII, with the communist and Darwinian ideologies taught in the schools, and you have the makings of a Godless culture. However, in 1972, John Gibbens came to Mongolia as a cultural studies student. After going through a London seminary, John felt his calling was to go to Mongolia to preach the gospel where it had not been heard before (Romans 15:20). Trained by Wycliffe Bible Translators, John began to translate the New Testament into Mongolian, and then asked a gifted Mongolian student at the university to put the exact translation into good style. In 1987, this student eventually became his wife, Altan, after a time in prison and a long period of trials and persecution.

In 1990 John and Altan publicly instituted Christ's church in Ulaan Baatar. This church is now self-sufficient and run by Mongolians. When we attended it on Sunday, we were impressed with how well we were fed from the Word of God (we had an interpreter). And yet, John and Altan painted a bleak picture and seemed discouraged and in need of Christian fellowship and support. Mongolia has a high attrition rate for missionaries because of its harsh climate, isolation, difficult language, crime, and water, heating and electrical shortages. They also spoke about bickering between several Christian groups. They are still working on a translation of the

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL DENOUNCES RELIGIOUS REPRESSION IN CHINA

A clear shift in China's tolerance of religion has taken place in the last two years. This was the conclusion of Amnesty International's (AI) report on China released in mid-July. The London-based human rights organization noted the shift came from a new focus on "national unity and patriotism."

Reacting to religious revival, the government has ordered its officials to "bring religion vigorously in line with socialist society." In practice this has meant forcing registration on all groups. For Christians, this has meant penalties for those who refuse to join the government-recognized church organizations.

AI noted the case of two Roman Catholic priests who were arrested during an annual Catholic pilgrimage in May. Some 5,000 troops prevented the pilgrimage from taking place. Both priests are still detained.

Government officials damaged or destroyed five unregistered churches in Wenzhou, a prominent city on the East coast, according to a report in Compass Direct. Wenzhou had been known for its previous tolerance. It had allowed several large "house church" buildings. Two of the destroyed churches had memberships of over 1,000.

Compass Direct also reported that a well-known house church leader in Beijing had also closed his church. Alan Yuan told his church in August that they would no longer meet. Yuan spent 20 years in prison for his faith and was well-known outside of China. Billy Graham visited Yuan when he was in China. Yuan reported that official of the Religious Affairs Bureau had twice asked him to stop meeting and merge with a local church. Yuan, now in his eighties, decided to stop meeting. (Compass Direct/REC News Exchange)

Old Testament, and since the Bible Society started in 1991, 45,000 copies of the NT have been distributed across the country. We prayed for John and Altan's continuing work, and encouraged them to persevere. May God bless these faithful servants, and give them His peace and rest through the fellowship of the saints in Mongolia and abroad. We can continue to pray for them, for the fledgling Mongolian church, and also that the hearts of Mongolians will be prepared to receive the gospel. Amen!

China

Napoleon once said that if China were to awake, the whole earth would shake. He probably meant this in a militaristic sense, but one thing is sure, China is awakening to the gospel. In spite of persecution, house churches are growing in number. Just this summer, hundreds of house churches were closed in northern China, which made it difficult for us to deliver Bibles to the Christian contacts we made in Huhehot. They were lying low at the time, and didn't need their visibility raised by contacting North Americans.

We were very conspicuous in Huhehot and northern China, because very few North American tourists go there. When we got off our small plane at the airport, the construction workers stopped digging with their shovels and stared at us as if we were from a different planet. This fact made us easily identifiable to the official networking of the city. When we took some risks later that night by handing out a few tracts, marveling at Ralph's ability to preach in Mandarin, and generally being noisy tourists on the public square, we were marked as propagandists by the communist intelligence. We were spared detainment and direct questioning, but instead were hauled off to the country side, north of the Yinshan Mountains to the southern

edge of the Gobi Desert, to camp in Mongolian yurts. We were displeased because we had camped in yurts already, and had hoped to persuade our tour guide to change the itinerary so that we could find other contacts in the city. The camp was crowded, hot and noisy, with atrocious bathroom facilities, and unappetizing food and water. To make matters even more

ian herdsmen?! Ralph's Mandarin turned out to be indispensable in this incident, and they were able to pray and sing together. They left the few Bibles they had brought along with this family, where they will be distributed where needed. Imagine the surprise when they met us at the scheduled cultural show for that evening! God had shown us again that He makes possible what we think is impossible when we obediently step out in faith.

When we came back to Huhehot, we attended a Bible study in a Three-Self Church (self-propagating, self-governing, self-supporting), which is government sponsored and run. This means that all pastors and teachers are appointed by the government, evangelism and teaching religion to children is forbidden, and preaching on topics such as tithing (might affect the economy), healing, Sunday as the day of rest (Chinese work seven days a week), and the second coming of Christ (might undermine people's commitment to the communist regime) are strictly prohibited. When we were in this church, a government informant was sitting across from us, overlooking everything with eyes of suspicion. When someone registers in this church (they have to register so that the government can easily trace them if they step out of line), they are given Bibles. Undoubtedly there are true Christians in these churches, but the restrictions on their practical faith life inevitably

leads them to risk attending a house church. It is somewhat ironic that the Chinese government views Christianity as a political threat to communism, when capitalism and black-marketing have become such a part of people's lives in China, that the exit to Chairman Mao's tomb is lined with private vending shops. This is the atmosphere of real persecution, and we need to pray that these strongholds of evil will be removed from oppressing the Christian church in China.

When we came back to Beijing, we did a lot of sightseeing, including Tian-

So many books, so little time Amos 8:11

By Michael Card

This song was written in Beijing during a Bible smuggling trip with members of the Bible League. It is dedicated to all the courageous men and women, the teachers and pastors, who labour for the kingdom in China.

There is a hunger, a longing for bread
And so comes the call for the poor to be fed
More hungry by far are a billion and more
Who wait for the Bread of the Word of the Lord

Chorus

So many books, so little time
So many hunger, so many blind
Starving for words, they must wait in the night
To open a Bible and move towards the Light

There'll come a time, the prophets would say
When the joy of mankind will be withered away (Joel 1:12)
A want not for water, but a hunger for more
A famine for hearing the Word of the Lord (Amos 8:11)

Chorus

The Word won't go out
Except it return
Full, overflowing (Isaiah 55:11)
And so we must learn

Chorus

The Ancient Faith @ 1992 Birdwing Music (a div. of The Sparrow Corp.) and BMG Song, Inc. (ASCAP)

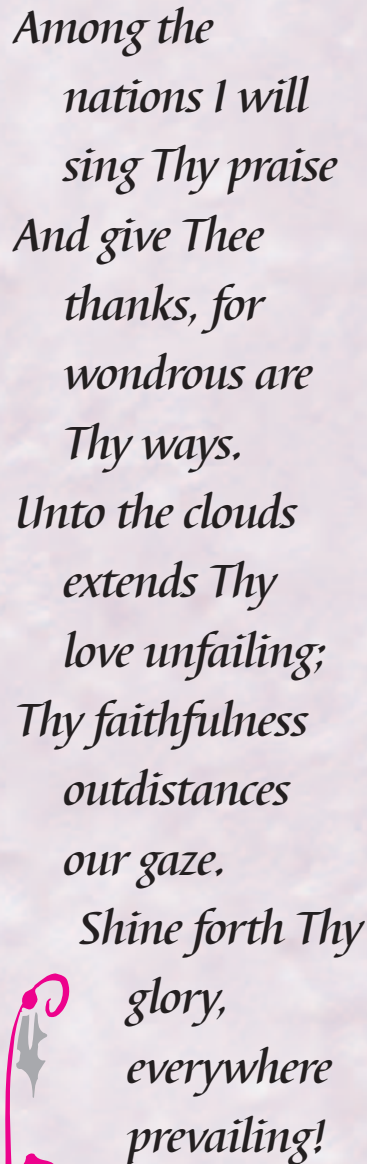
stifling, our inflexible tour guide made sure he regulated our every waking hour. We thought he must have gotten direct orders from communist headquarters to keep us busy and out of "trouble." We all felt like we were in a hopeless situation to do any witnessing or Bible distribution. However, God did not think so.

After supper, Paul Estabrooks and Paul Johnson, our leaders, slipped out for a walk with several others from our group of nineteen, and brought along some Bibles. Who would have guessed that they would run into some Christ-

neman Square, The Temple of Heaven, The Forbidden City, The Great Wall, and The Summer Palace. Our tour guide, Peter, spoke English very well, was excited and enthusiastic, and was flexible with his itinerary. The tourist agency he works for is run by a Christian couple whom we met later. Peter has been acquainted with the gospel message for a while, but is still thinking about it. Open Doors groups have had the pleasure of touring with Peter several times before. He is very open-minded for a Chinese person, but when he showed us the Hong-Kong count-down clock beside Tianneman Square (which means "heavenly peace"), he verbalized his support for the Chinese take-over. The next acquisition on the Chinese agenda, if everything in Hong-Kong goes well, would be Taiwan, and then Mongolia. At the Temple of Heaven I learned from Peter that before the emperors observed Buddhism, an earlier nature religion took hold, in which the emperor would perform annual harvest rituals during the winter solstice at this temple. Older people in China are influenced by Taoism, China's domestic religion, Buddhism and Islam; but the younger generation has no god but themselves and money.

Again it struck me how similar this attitude is to Western culture. Asians often remark how North Americans love their space and their possessions, and this is true. When I saw how crowded the cities were in China, and that their average standard of living is far below our standard of poverty, I had to question whether or not my Christianity was stuck to a comfortable middle classdom. Hopefully, we do not portray that becoming a Christian will lead to a life of ease and luxury. Would I be willing to give up everything for Christ if the crunch of persecution came?

Walk with me through narrow dirt streets in the night, with the stench of a community latrine in your nostrils. Now and then our flash light reveals men, women and children in their doorways, curious about why we tourists are in their part of town. Actually, Beijing is like this everywhere off the main roads; packed-in, crowded communities where everyone lives on top of each other in one-room houses. Actually, the place we are going tonight has two rooms – quite a luxury. On Sundays this house overflows with a hundred plus Christians, to come and hear Pastor Allan preach the Word. Pastor Allan and his wife Alice greet us at the door, the post of which is decorated with two red crosses. We un-



*Among the
nations I will
sing Thy praise
And give Thee
thanks, for
wondrous are
Thy ways.
Unto the clouds
extends Thy
love unfailing;
Thy faithfulness
outdistances
our gaze.
Shine forth Thy
glory,
everywhere
prevailing!*

PSALM 57:5
BOOK OF PRAISE

load all our Bibles for him and sit down in their main room. We had met previously for dinner in a Beijing restaurant, so we are acquainted with each other. Quite a few people know this man, including Billy Graham and George Bush, who came to visit once. This man isn't a celebrity, but he is one of God's heroes. In the 60's and 70's, he was imprisoned for twenty-one years for his faith, and firmly upholds that Christ is the head of his church, and no government can dictate over and above this. His wife Alice spent these years raising six children, and making a living by dragging heavy stones for construction on her back. They are one of the most reliable contacts in China, and know exactly where there is a need for Bibles. The government is not blind to Pastor Allan's influence and activities, and one day, when the political climate is ripe, they will get rid of him. We hope and pray that Pastor Allan and his wife may be blessed with a natural death, and may continue their work without hindrance. It is Pastor Allan's prayer that many young pastors will be raised up by the calling of the Holy Spirit to bring about a great harvest in China.

I thoroughly enjoyed this trip, and I learned a lot about the suffering church in China. Even though everyone in our group was over forty and fifty, I still had great fun. It was like having a bus full of uncles and aunts looking out for you (and pestering you). One of the stipulations before going on this trip was to be in excellent physical condition, because of the hectic travel schedule. I never knew that sixty and seventy-year-old people had that sort of energy! Our closeness as a group was strengthened through daily morning devotions and singing, so that we could focus collectively on praying for and encouraging believers we would come in contact with, and also in reaching those who had never before heard of Christ. I can say for sure that God answered our prayers time and time again, in ways we would have never thought. I would recommend this sort of trip for anyone, provided that you like adventure and the unexpected, and can supply or collect adequate finances for it, because it is on a volunteer basis. One thing everyone said to me was that it was smart to do this while I was still young. In many ways this is true, because the best time to form a world view is when you are still young. 

How to make a budget for church and other charitable organizations

This is a slightly modified translated summary of an article Prof. Douma wrote in the Dutch daily newspaper *Nederlands Dagblad*. It is written to be a guideline for people in church concerning their budget and what they should give to the church and other (Christian) organizations. Prof. Douma writes about four groups of organizations that deserve our attention and money.

Four groups of organizations

1. First of all, our own church, deaconry, school (Note: donations, not tuition!!), and the Theological College. This group deserves our special attention and is also the group that should receive the biggest part of our donations.
2. Group two consists of more public Christian organizations such as CRWRF, Anchor Home, Bethesda, Pro Life, Christian Blind International, World Home Bible League, etc. Most of these organizations give Christian help to people without having a direct bond with a specific church.
3. The third group concerns public and not necessarily Christian organizations such as the Red Cross, the MS Society of Canada, the Cancer Society, etc.
4. Group four consists of more spontaneous fund raisers brought to our attention, for instance, via the T.V., radio, or the newspaper. These fund raisers are organized to give immediate help to people in need, due to floods, earthquakes, famine and other calamities.

After informing us about these four groups of organizations, Prof. Douma suggests that we should give 10% of our net income to these four groups. He realizes that there are people who cannot afford this, but he is also convinced

that others easily can. Because it is hard for most people to find out what amount of money they should give to the church and other charitable organizations, Prof. Douma gives some suggestions on how to make a budget.

Suggestions

1. At the end of a year, the best thing to do is plan a family meeting and make a budget for the coming year. When we are talking about a budget for a family with teenage children, it is a good thing that these children are also involved. It is good to train your children in proper budgeting at an early age. Furthermore, our giving should not be done in a haphazard, impulsive way, but should be a matter of careful planning and good stewardship.
2. Try to calculate how much income you can expect for the coming year and how much is left after paying taxes. (Don't forget that donations to the church and other charitable organizations are tax-deductible.) What is left after paying taxes is your net income. Deduct 10% of what is left.

CHURCH NEWS



NEW TELEPHONE NUMBER:

Rev. C. Stam

Study: (905) 578-2549

Fax: (905) 578-2692

DECLINED TO ORANGEVILLE, ON

Rev. D.G.J. Agema

OF ATTERCLIFFE, ON

3. After you have done this, calculate how much money you need for your fixed costs, such as, housing, food, school (tuition and related costs), clothes, etc. Don't include this amount in the money you are planning to give to the church and other charitable organizations.
4. Once you have done this, see if the money which is left over (your net income minus 10% for church and charitable organizations minus your fixed costs) is enough for things like a holiday, savings, and other things that belong to the average household. Whoever has enough money left for these extra expenses, can *raise* the 10% for church and charitable organizations. Those who do not have enough left can *reduce* the 10% with a clear conscience. Keep in mind that we should not give reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves the cheerful giver (2 Cor. 9:7). Furthermore, keep in mind that whatever total amount we give should be a *sacrifice*. This applies to the two very small copper coins of the widow as well as the \$100,000.00 of the millionaire (Luke 21:1-4). With a *sacrifice*, Dr. Douma means that other pleasant things could have been bought with our financial gift, but we decide not to do this. For it really is more blessed to give than to receive.
5. Finally, you decide how much of the 10% (or some other percentage you have arrived at) you should give to each of the four groups mentioned at the beginning of this article. Keep in mind, of course, that the first two groups need more attention and money than the last two groups.



(Translation done by Tanneke Bosman)

Visitors at the Lord's Table

Preaching the Word of God as summarized by the Heidelberg Catechism once again brought our attention to the three Lord's Days on the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. In light of recent discussions in contact with other Reformed and Presbyterian churches, I could not but further reflect on a variety of questions pertaining to guests at the Lord's Table. Who should be invited to the Table? How do our practices compare with those of others? Is it possible that more than one practice may be acceptable in the light of Scripture? I think it may be beneficial in all our discussions to have an honest look at ourselves. Perhaps we even need to be critical of some long-established practices. Much caution is needed in our evaluation of different practices. If we have criticism, we shall have to support this with scriptural grounds.

Church Order

Do not get me wrong. I have nothing against Article 61 of the Church Order (CO) in which we agree that *the consistory shall admit to the Lord's Supper only those who have made public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life* and that *members of sister-Churches shall be admitted on the ground of a good attestation concerning their doctrine and conduct*. Elders have supervision also over the table and Article 61 is one way and a good way to enable them to exercise this supervision. While Article 61 expresses our general, agreed-upon practice within the federation, this method is not necessarily the only mode of exercising supervision over the Table. A review of our practice is always possible. We are also to keep in mind that the Church Order regulates life *within* the federation without addressing all other possible situations. We ought to be careful

not to institutionalize our way of deciding admission to the Table. If we do, we may find ourselves in situations which seem contrary to the intent of the Lord's commandment.

Allow me to illustrate this danger by considering several scenarios of guests at the Lord's Table, either Can. Reformed guests in other churches or members of other Reformed or Presbyterian churches being guests in one of our congregations. Before doing so, allow me to make a few general comments about the relationship between the Word and the sacraments, since this also has impact on some of the following reflections.

Word and sacrament

We have always strongly stressed the unity of Word and Sacrament. The sacraments also teach, preach and declare. We confess that *they were instituted by God so that by their use He might the more fully declare and seal to us the promise of the gospel* and that both the Word and the sacraments are intended to focus our faith on the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross (Heid. Catechism, Lord's Day 25). The sacraments are therefore an integral part of the worship service. They address all who attend and participate in the worship service. God speaks to us in the spoken Word as well as in the visible signs and seals of the sacraments. The one is not holier than the other. Even though Paul speaks about self-examination in the context of celebrating the Holy Supper (1 Cor. 11:28), this does not mean that self-examination would be less necessary before entering any worship service. Attending any worship service is treading on holy ground. Worship brings one into the presence of the Lord.

Visiting within the federation

Time and again, we have opportunities to visit other churches within the federation. When this is planned in advance, it is a simple procedure to request a travel attestation from your local church. Such an attestation testifies that you are a member in good standing and are admitted to the sacraments. The method of the travel attestation is by far the simplest way for the consistory of the church you are visiting to receive you as a visiting guest. This method, therefore, has much to recommend it.

However, there are situations during holidays or brief, unplanned visits and so forth, when you may discover that the church you are visiting is celebrating the Holy Supper that Sunday. What to do? In some places, consistories are strict about the need to have a written travel attestation.

In situations as these, some visitors will voluntarily refrain from attending, either because they have no travel attestation with them or because they consider that they will celebrate only in their own congregation. While such an attitude may be appreciated by some consistories, we question whether it is correct. Do I participate in the whole service but when it comes to the Holy Supper become an observer? Is it not the Lord's Table? Does He not invite, yes, command "me and all believers" (Lord's Day 28) to eat, to drink and to be assured by Him not only through the proclamation of the Word but also at the Table of the Lord? Am I not one with the other members of the body of Christ who do go to the Table? Is that not the reason why I worship in that particular place and not somewhere else?

"Yes, but the elders, as the Lord's servants, have oversight and the duty to keep the Table pure," I hear someone say. But surely there are more ways to



exercise oversight than only by a written travel attestation. For example, the visitor can give his own testimony before the elders, confirmed by local members who know him or her. In this day of hi-tech communications, there are other options: one phone call or fax the night before to an office-bearer of the home congregation of the visitor. In most instances, the visitors are known either to some of the elders or other members of the congregation. It does not seem right only because of the lack of a written travel attestation to remain in the pew while you are entitled to and invited by Christ to sit at His Table.

Visiting outside the federation

Travel or business can sometimes take us to places where there are no churches of our federation. In that case, a person would search for a church with whom we either have ecclesiastical fellowship or other forms of contact. Let's suppose that while you are looking over the order of the service you notice that the Lord's Supper is to be celebrated. When the moment comes, the minister extends an invitation to visitors who share the reformed faith to participate at the Table. Along with the invitation, there is also a verbal warning to those who would participate insincerely.

What are you to do? Of course, this is a matter of one's own conscience but nevertheless it is good to reflect upon this together. On what grounds would you decline this invitation? Clearly, you are not violating any of their rules since they invite you. They also celebrate the Holy Supper in obedience to the Lord. It is part of their worship service in which you participate and the Holy Supper was also instituted for you. You would not violate any of our own rules regarding admission to the Holy Supper since the Church Order does not regulate life in other churches but only within the federation.

The practice of such a church may be different than ours, "less strict" shall we say, but is it therefore unscriptural? We are indeed accustomed to closer involvement of the elders. All the same, we also extend a verbal warning to all who would participate, since we realize that there are real limitations to supervision when it comes to the doctrine and godly life of each member. The verbal warning reads: *We admonish all those who know themselves to be guilty of the following offensive sins to abstain from the table of the Lord (Form for the*

To write a verse or two is all the praise

That I can raise;
Mend my estate in any ways
Thou shalt have more.

I go to church; help me to wings,
and I
will thither flie;
Or, it I mount unto the skie,
I will do more.

Man is all weaknesse: there is no
such thing,
As Prince or King:
His arm is short; yet with a sling
He may do more.

A herb distilled, and drunk, may
dwell next door,
On the same floor,
To a brave soul: Exalt the poore,
They can do more.

O, raise me then! poore bees,
that work all day,
Sting my delay,
who have a work, as well as they,
And much, much more.

GEORGE HERBERT

Celebration of the Lord's Supper, "Invitation and Admonition").

The difference in practice is therefore one of degree. You may find the invitation in another church too open, but would that be a reason for you as visitor not to attend? After all, the communion at the Table is in the first place a communion with the Lord. If you can, in all sincerity, worship the Lord with a certain church, can you not sit at the same Table with them as a visiting guest? Of course that does not mean

that we have to make their "house rules" our own, but it does mean a recognition that different practices can develop from applying God's Word in our own different historical situations.

Visitors from outside the federation

Now suppose the reverse of the above scenario happens. A visitor is in our midst from one of the above mentioned churches and desires to participate at the Holy Supper. It does not happen very often but in our increasing contacts and search for unity this may happen more frequently than was the case in the past. Our present practice is unique in Reformed and Presbyterian circles. Some will reason that Art. 61 of the Church Order rules out admitting such visitors because it does not speak about them. However, that approach does not seem convincing since the Church Order does not deal with exceptions, but regulates life within the federation and how we honour each other within those parameters. The question about visitors from outside the federation is simply beyond the scope of the Church Order. Since we have not made joint agreements about this matter, it remains a matter for the local Consistory to decide. Perhaps this then ought to be stated clearly in Art. 61 to clear up some of the confusion.

It would then be good if a Consistory has an established protocol and a set of basic questions to ascertain whether the visitor indeed professes the reformed faith and leads a godly life. If this can be confirmed by one or more of the members of the congregation so much the better. In this manner we would maintain the supervision exercised by the Consistory over the Table, while at the same time recognizing the responsibility of the general office of all believers. Let us not go the road of "open communion" but neither the one of "closed communion." "Restricted communion" in the above sense would also remove unnecessary obstacles in our discussions with others who share the reformed faith. In this way, we may already today have at the Lord's Table a foretaste of the marriage feast to come – together with all those for whom Jesus Christ shed His blood!



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

The 35th Annual League Day

of the Canadian Reformed Women's Societies in Ontario held on October 9, 1996

The 1996 League Day, our 35th, hosted by the Smithville Women's Societies, was held on an overcast, drizzly day. However as the hall of Place Polonaise in Grimsby slowly filled to capacity, the mood was anything but somber. Chatter and laughter filled the room as 345 women and several gentlemen gathered and finally at 10 a.m. settled down to enjoy a day of study and fellowship.

The day began with a rousing psalm of praise to our heavenly Father. The President of the League, Ryma VanRaalte then started with a word of thankful prayer and Scripture was opened to Titus 2: 11-14. She spoke warm words of welcome to all present. In her opening words she mentioned how wonderful it was to be gathered together to study God's Word, and announced that the theme for the day was "*Sowing in Season*." After several announcements and roll call, we then sang the uplifting words of three verses of our League Song "Sing God's Glory." Scripture was once again opened and Romans 12 was read.

Let us do good to all men . . .

The speaker for the morning session, Mrs. Janet Schutten, was then introduced. The topic title was "*Let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith*." Galatians 6:10b. Mrs. Schutten began by asking, "How can we improve our love and compassion for our brothers and sisters?" Study of God's Word is imperative to understanding what God requires of us in this demand. Scripture can teach us how to improve our care for each other. We must see the love and care of one another as a command of God. We must emulate Christ, who served His heavenly Father first, His neighbour next and Himself last. His



League President Ryma VanRaalte and morning essayist Janet Schutten



love was completely and absolutely self-sacrificing. It may be difficult for some to be outgoing and serving, however that is something at which we must all improve. In order to help one another we must first know one another. It is very difficult to offer help in time of need if one has never even spoken to the fellow believer who is in need. We all should be willing to assist the consistory with their heavy workload by doing as many works of mercy as possible. Our days are filled to capacity with our families, our interests and our friends, and that is good, however we should be familiar with the needs in the congregation as well. Therefore one visit a month to a lonely brother or sister, or to a handicapped member, or to one who is single or grieving should not be too much to expect. In a group we could improve fellowship in the congregation by organizing social evenings, or sports events. There must be real continuing effort within the communion of saints. If a member is going astray, we must speak with them. It is sometimes very difficult to know what to say in various sensitive situations, however, we may also pray for God to put the words into our mouth, as Moses did before appearing before Pharaoh. We must never simply ignore the situation, or avoid someone because we feel inadequate. Even a card or a brief word with someone is showing compassion. We must show true compassion, by following Christ's perfect example. We must always ask for the Lord's help for our shortcomings in these matters. We can improve our love and care in three ways, by visiting and speaking to one another, by Bible study to understand what is required of us and by humble prayer for the Lord's blessing in all that we do.



▲ Rev. de Gelder with Mrs. VanRaalte, and Mrs. Van Woudenberg at the piano



Enjoying study and fellowship



After Mrs. Schutten was thanked, opportunity was given for the occupants of each table to have a group discussion and to formulate a question they would like to have answered. Many questions were submitted and duly answered.

Collection was held for the Mission among the Natives in Smithers. After singing a psalm, Mrs. Tina Ravensbergen led in the prayer for the mealtime and we all enjoyed a delicious lunch and an hour of fellowship.

The afternoon session was called to order by 1:30 p.m. Mrs. Ravensbergen closed the meal with the reading of Scripture and a prayer of thanks for blessings received. Our national anthem, O Canada, was heartily sung. The hosting societies then tested our knowledge of children's literature by acting out a number of titles of well-known books.

We then sang Psalm 25: 2, 5, and 7 in preparation for the afternoon speech. Scripture was opened and the President read Mark 9: 33-50. Rev. de Gelder was introduced.

Preservatives required

The topic on which Rev. de Gelder spoke was entitled, "Preservatives Required." He began by saying that in preparation for this topic, he went through his wife's kitchen cupboards to have a look at all the food products to ascertain which preservatives they contained. He found vitamins, acids, artificial colours and flavours and various chemicals added to preserve the food product. We may prefer foods to which no chemicals have been added and it is generally known that these are healthier for us in the long run. However preservatives are necessary in many cases and we cannot do entirely without them. In the old days, large vats

of food were preserved for the winter for families by adding huge amounts of salt. Fish would be salted to keep for several days until the boats could reach harbour and the fish sold. Salt prevented decay for a little while. We use salt for flavouring, however, in ancient times, salt was very precious. It was one of the few means of preservation. Salt was also used as a form of currency. This leads us to understand why Scripture speaks of salt as such a precious commodity. Salt is the symbol of lasting value, of strong friendship, of mutual promises and trust, hence the expression, ". . . to share or eat salt together." This is the terminology of the covenant. The covenant of salt is unbreakable. However the Old Testament and the New Testament speak differently of this covenant of salt.

The Old Testament speaks of occasions where real salt was used in a symbolic way. There were two symbolic

meanings for salt, namely, disaster or healing. The symbol of salt as disaster, destruction, barrenness or punishment is used throughout the Old Testament. However, salt can also be viewed as beneficial and healing. Salt was used in worship, and symbolized the faith, love and true dedication of the people of Israel toward God. Salt was used extensively in the temple worship. The covenant of salt was often referred to, and underlined the responsibility of God's people to live up to the covenantal obligations. It also underlined that God would never forsake His promises. This relationship is not subject to destruction or decay.

In the New Testament, salt is only mentioned figuratively. In each instance, Christ is speaking with His disciples. They are instructed to "have salt" and "to be salt." Salt in these instances represent faith, love for the Lord, and dedication to serve God through Jesus Christ. Salt preserves against the decay of this world, and prolongs one's life. As salt, we must work on godliness and holiness in our lives, remain truly dedicated to God's service.

This dedication is manifested also in the mutual care and compassion for our fellow believers. Being salt preserves the communion of saints and keeps us wholesome. It is a mandate for each of us, given by Christ, accompanied with great responsibility. The faithful church of Christ is appointed by Him to be the preservative of the world. By being that preservative, the church also proves itself faithful. You must be noticeable, as you bring His Word and wisdom to those you meet in this life. The congregation must be noticeable within the community, not just for the regular well-attended services, but for the compassionate service within the community. For this special position comes with a serious warning: If salt loses its flavour, it is good for nothing but to be thrown away. If we as church of Jesus Christ are unnoticeable in the world, the Lord will take away our special position as His people. Should we notice that we are losing our saltiness, we must then train ourselves in godliness and dedication to our Lord and our neighbour. We must give the study of God's Word an important place in our lives.

Are we known for being reliable, trustworthy and are we highly regarded? Do we dare to be salt in our contacts with others? We must not engage in worldly pursuits, or adapt to this world. We must manifest the love of Christ wherever we can.

Rev. de Gelder was thanked and discussion groups became busy. Once again many questions were submitted and answered by the speaker.

The President Mrs. VanRaalte thanked Rev. de Gelder for an enlightening and strengthening session. The hosting societies were thanked for an excellent day. The 1997 League Day will be held, D.V., in Toronto.

After wishing everyone a safe journey home, Mrs. VanRaalte requested to sing Psalm 150: 1, 2, 3 and Rev. de Gelder led in thanksgiving and prayer.

After the official closing, many ladies still lingered to enjoy fellowship and refreshments. It was a truly up-building day for all, one that will live in our memories as we strive in the Lord's strength to put into practice all that we heard.



Watford

*Fun for everyone
at the church picnic,
July 13, 1996*



Guido de Brès Christian High School Commencement '96

Hearts swelled with pride as the seventy-six graduates of the Class of '96 came forward to receive their diplomas. Teachers were beaming, parents were eagerly snapping photos for lifelong memories, and friends looked on with admiration. On October 18, 1996, the nineteenth annual Commencement ceremonies for Guido de Brès Christian High were held in the Bethel Tabernacle in Hamilton. Once again, the auditorium was filled to capacity as family, friends, and well-wishers were in attendance to witness this happy occasion.

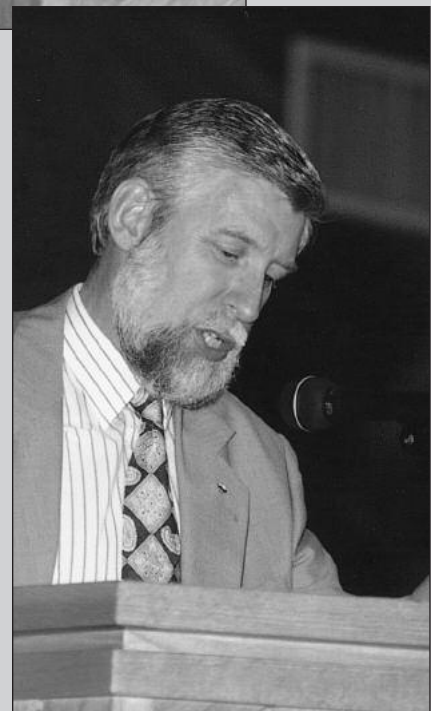
The evening's festivities began with a delicious meal and fine company as the graduands became re-acquainted with each other after a long summer. Despite a soggy atmosphere outdoors, inside the colourfully decorated Guido gymnasium there were light spirits and excited voices warmly exchanging memories and sharing laughter together. Perhaps board members and staff mused that this would be the last graduation dinner in the "old" gym since the new one is slated to be opened early in 1997. Towards the end of the dinner hour, the staff of Guido presented their impressions of the graduating class by way of a rousing song, highlighting the various "characters" of the class of 1996. Their efforts were received by the students with wry grins and appreciative applause.

The highlight of the evening, the formal commencement exercises, began at 8 p.m. sharp. The audience and graduands were welcomed by the Board Chairman, Mr. J.H. Vanderhoeven, who opened the evening with Scripture reading and prayer. The Principal, Mr. J.G. VanDooren, also addressed the graduands, calling attention to the unique character of this group. The Principal thanked the Class of '96 for "leaving a legacy of leadership" for those students who follow them. He exhorted them with the truth of the words of Isaiah 40:31, "... those who hope in the LORD ... will soar on wings like eagles."

The formal address to the graduating class was given by Rev. J. de Gelder, pastor of the Canadian Reformed Church at Smithville. Rev. de Gelder began by asking the graduands, "How salty are you?" After receiving a chorus of chuckles and titters as a response, Rev. de Gelder went on to explain that the graduands must be prepared to meet the challenges of the "world out there" beyond Guido. Often one's expectations of this world fall short of reality and the results can be very disturbing for the (young) Christian. Do we flee from the world then, shy away and stick to our own kind? Rev. de Gelder's answer to this question was unequivocally, NO! We must be a "salt" in the world, he exhorted his listeners. We must have "salt" in ourselves, tending to our own faith.



The Principal has words of praise for the graduating class



*Rev. de Gelder:
"How salty are you?"*

ONTARIO SECONDARY SCHOOL DIPLOMAS

Edward Baartman	Matt Sandink
Amanda Bartels	Lisha Scholtens
Ben Bartels	John Scholtens
Helena Beijes	Debbie Schoon
Jessica Beintema	James Schulenberg
Jackie Blokker	Jane Schulenberg
Robert Boersema	Rodney Schutten
Ryan Boersema	Andrew Sieders
David Bos	Eleanor Smouter
Alicia Bosscher	Heather Spithoff
Tim Bowes	Kerri-Ann Spoelstra
Joni Buikema	Linda Stam
Julie Buitenhuis	Karen Stegenga
Derek DeJonge	Helen Tenhage
Neil DeVries	Jeremy Terpstra
Cameron Ellens	Nick Torenvliet
Frank Elzinga	Carolyn VanAndel
Michelle Gelderman	Shane VanBrederode
Eric Hart	William VanDam
Hannah Helder	Daniel VanDelden
Laura Helder	Ken VanderBoom
Francine Homan	Adrian VanderLaan
Angela Hulleman	Julie VanderVeen
Kristen Jagt	Christina VanderVelde
Nicole Jairam	Tasha VanderWoude
Richard Jans	Derek VanDooren
Tim Kieft	Jody VanDooren
Beth Kingma	Michelle VanHof
Tanya Ludwig	Carmen VanHuisstede
Jeremy Muis	Andrea VanMeeteren
Ingrid Mulder	Jennifer VanPykeren
Alisha Nienhuis	Alison VanStraten
Debbie Oostdyk	Ben VanVeen
Lisa Oosterhoff	Andrew VanWoudenberg
Brenda Oosterveld	Aron Witten
Matthew Poort	Dirk Woudenberg
Christopher Ravensbergen	Simon Wray
Eric Ravensbergen	Nadia Zietsma

We must also add a different "flavour" to the world beyond Guido by working with that faith. Do not be afraid to be different. Let them "taste" who you are and do not hide the "flavour" of your faith. Besides these words of advice, Rev. de Gelder also admitted that often this is a dangerous and somewhat more risky approach. However, he reminded the graduates of the promise of our God concerning perseverance. In John 15:4 Christ assures us that if we remain in Him, He will remain in us. We can be "salty" only through our Lord and Saviour!

With these words of encouragement, the graduands advanced toward the podium one by one to receive the documented proof of all their hard work at Guido de Brès. The distribution of diplomas to the seventy-six graduands went fairly smoothly until the Vice-Principal came to the H's in the alphabet. A warm embrace for his own daughter after she received her diploma left Dr. Helder fumbling over the next name on the list, an occurrence that he says has never happened before in all his years of performing this duty. The audience generously forgave him after having witnessed such a display of paternal pride!

At this point in the evening the graduating class took the opportunity to address the audience in song. The Gradu-

ates' Choir performed a stirring benediction entitled, "May the Lord be Near to Guide You." In addition, Tim Kieft and Nadia Zietsma lifted their voices to sing a duet for their fellow graduates. After the distribution of many awards to various talented recipients, the valedictorian, Matt Poort, took his opportunity to reminisce on behalf of the Class of '96. Matt recalled the difficult lessons which were learned as well as the more humorous points of learning such as the fact that, no, slaves never did pick cotton *candy*. Matt also noted the presence of a special guest who, at the expense of his former fellow students, was flown in from Edmonton to celebrate this important event. It was apparent that the en-

AWARDS

The George DeBoer Memorial Scholarship

Cameron Ellens

The Harry Aasman Memorial Scholarship

Linda Stam

The Guido de Brès Alumni Scholarships

Tim Bowes
Francine Homan
Matt Poort
James Schulenberg
Jody VanDooren

The Premier Agendas Ltd. Scholarships

Robert Boersema
Hannah Helder
Lisha Scholtens
Michelle VanHof

The Week of the Child Award

Alison VanStraten

The Redeemer College Merit Scholarship The Redeemer Foundation Leadership Scholarship

Hannah Helder

The Edward M. Stam Memorial Scholarship

Eric Hart

The Guido de Brès Participation Awards

Julie Buitenhuis
Derek DeJonge
Hannah Helder
Sandy Hoeksema
Tim Kieft
Matt Poort
Lisha Scholtens
Michelle VanHof
Alison VanStraten
Simon Wray
Nadia Zietsma

The Dr. F.G. Oosterhoff Student-of-the-Year Award

Nadia Zietsma

The Governor-General's Bronze Medal

Cameron Ellens

tire class was delighted to have René Snip among them, as was Mr. Snip himself.

But now the helium has long since fled from the festive balloons and the streamers have dropped to the gym floor. The leftover programs have been collected, the corsages tossed, and the beautiful gowns and dapper suits have been re-hung in closets. A new stage in life has begun for the Class of 1996. However, the memories made and the lessons learned at Guido de Brès Christian High School will be carried with them as they move forward and "soar as on eagles' wings."



Graduates Nadia Zietsma and Tim Kieft, accompanied by former Guido student Nick Torenvliet, sing a duet



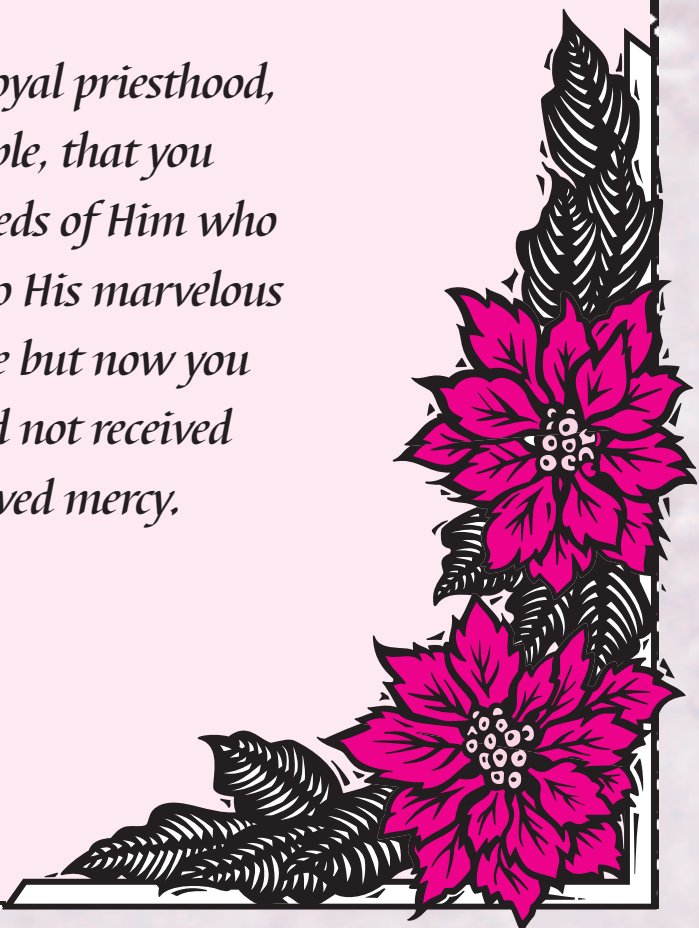
Matt Poort speaking as valedictorian on behalf of the class of '96



Eric Hart receives his award for technical proficiency

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.

1 PETER 2:9, 10





Classis Contracta Alberta/ Manitoba November 20, 1996, Taber

The church at Taber, convening church for the next Classis Alberta/Manitoba, convened a classis *contracta* at the request of the church at Carman for the purpose of approving the release of the Rev. P.K.A. de Boer from service at the church at Carman and to relieve him of his duties within the classical resort. Present at this contracted classis were delegates of the church at Coaldale (the elders K. Leffers and I. Veurink) and of the church at Taber (Elder W. Veenstra and the Rev. G.Ph. van Popta). Credentials were found to be in good order. Elder Veurink served as chairman while Rev. van Popta served as clerk.

After classis was constituted, the agenda was adopted. Three things were dealt with.

1. After reading and finding in order the documents relating to the request of Carman to release Rev. de Boer, classis granted the request. A Classical Certificate of Release was approved by classis and signed by the executive. Therewith Rev. de Boer was honourably released.
2. At the request of the church at Carman, the Rev. K. Jonker of Winnipeg was appointed as counsellor (*ad Article 45, C.O.*) for this church.
3. The church at Winnipeg was appointed to represent classis at the farewell of the Rev. de Boer.

After Question Period passed without questions, and the chairman concluded that no member had done anything worthy of censure, the Acts were adopted and the clerk was instructed to take care of a Press Release. The chairman then thanked the brothers for their cooperation, ended with prayer, and closed the meeting.

On behalf of Classis *Contracta*,
November 20, 1996,
G.Ph. van Popta, clerk e.t.

Classis Ontario-South, Nov. 6, 1996

Opening

On behalf of the convening church at Rockway, br. C. Oosterhoff called the meeting to order and requested that we sing Psalm 27:1,2. He then read 1 Thess. 4:13-5:11 and lead in prayer. He welcomed all present especially Candidate J. VanVliet, the deputies of

Regional Synod East (Rev. P. Feenstra, Rev. G. Nederveen) and the students of grades seven and eight from the John Calvin School.

Credentials and constitution

The credentials were examined and found to be in good order. It is noted that the churches at Rockway and Grand Rapids have instructions. Rev. K.A. Kok is the only delegate representing the church at Blue Bell. Classis was constituted. The appointed officers were: Rev. J. VanWoudenberg (chairman), Rev. J. Ludwig (vice-chairman) and Rev. C. Stam (clerk). The chairman mentioned the following items of memorabilia: Rev. C. Stam declined the calls from the churches at Coaldale and Ancaster; Rev. D. Agema received a call from the church at Orangeville; words of encouragement were extended to the vacant churches (Rockway, Ancaster). The convening church was thanked for its preparatory work.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted after some additions.

Peremptory examination of Candidate J. VanVliet

The presented documents were found to be in good order. Br. J. VanVliet, called by the church at Lincoln, delivered his sermon proposal based on 1 Thess. 5:8-10. In closed session the sermon proposal was discussed and evaluated. There was no objection to the continuation of the examination. In open session br. J. VanVliet was informed of this decision, and the rest of the examination took its course, with Rev. D. Agema examining in Old Testament, Rev. B. Hofford in New Testament, Rev. C. Stam in doctrine and creeds. After lunch Rev. K. Kok examined br. J. VanVliet in church history, Rev. J. VanWoudenberg in knowledge of Holy Scripture, Rev. G. Wieske in diaconiology, and Rev. J. Ludwig in ethics and church polity. In closed session classis evaluated the examination. Classis decided that there were no objections to admitting candidate J. VanVliet into the ministry of the Word in the Can/Am. Reformed Churches. The deputies of Regional Synod East concurred with this joyful decision.

In open session br. J. VanVliet was informed of and congratulated with this decision. He signed the Form of

Subscription, after which we sang Psalm 27:6 and Rev. B. Hofford led in a prayer of thanksgiving.

Approbation of the call

Classis decided to approbate the call of br. J. VanVliet by the church at Lincoln.

Preparatory examination: Br. T. Lodder

All the proper documents for the preparatory examination of br. T. Lodder were presented. Br. T. Lodder delivered his sermon proposal on Hosea 2:14,15. In closed session classis discussed and evaluated it. Classis decided that on the basis of this sermon proposal the examination of br. T. Lodder could not continue. This decision was conveyed to him by the executive.

Question Period ad Art. 44

After supper question period ad Art. 44 was held. The chairman asked the three necessary questions. All the churches via their representatives answered the first two in the affirmative, and two churches (Grand Rapids, Rockway) made use of the third question. Advice was given and gratefully received.

Appeals

In closed session classis dealt with an appeal.

Proposals

A proposal from br. Wilco DeHaan from the church at Rockway was declared inadmissible.

Appointments

For the next classis, the following appointments were made: Smithville – convening church; officers: Rev. G. Wieske as chairman, Rev. J. VanWoudenberg as clerk, Rev. C. Stam as vice-chairman; date – March 5, 1997; place – Ancaster. The church at Smithville is appointed to represent classis at the ordination of br. J. VanVliet, D.V., on November 24, 1996.

Personal question period

Some of the brothers made use of the opportunity to ask personal questions.

Closing

Censure ad Art. 34 was not necessary.

The Acts were adopted and the Press Release was approved.

The chairman requested the brothers to sing Hymn 49:1,2. Rev. C. Stam closed in prayer. Classis was closed.

For Classis Ontario-South
Vice-chairman, e.t.
J. Ludwig

Regional Synod East, November 13, 1996, held in the Ancaster Canadian Reformed Church

1. On behalf of the convening church at Ancaster the meeting was called to order by br. W. Smouter. He requested to sing Psalm 135:1,2,9,10 and read Psalm 135. In prayer a blessing was asked over the work of Regional Synod. The chairman welcomed the delegates.
2. The credentials were examined by the brs. W. Smouter and J. Koster and were found to be in good order. Regional Synod East 1996 was then declared to be constituted.
3. The following officers were chosen: as chairman: Rev. Cl. Stam, as vice-chairman: Rev. J. de Gelder, and as clerk; Rev. W. den Hollander.
4. The chairman thanked the church at Ancaster for the preparatory work done, as well as br. Smouter for the opening of Regional Synod.
5. After a short break the agenda was adopted after the addition of one more appeal. Four committees were appointed to prepare proposals to enable synod to deal with the various appeals.
6. Synod was then adjourned for committee work during the morning, and part of the afternoon.
7. At 4:15 p.m. synod was reopened by the chairman. Roll call was held, which showed that all brothers were present.
8. In closed session synod dealt with one appeal.
9. After supper the chairman reopened the meeting. After roll call was held, synod entered into closed session again, during which synod dealt with five more appeals.
10. In open session Regional Synod dealt with an appeal of br. W. DeHaan from the church at Watford. Br. DeHaan appeals a decision of Classis Ontario-South regarding the wording of the Press Release of Classis Ontario-South of August 23/24 and Oct. 11, 1995 in the matter of the dismissal of Rev. Hoogsteen. Regional Synod observed with regret that this part of the Press Re-

lease was unnecessarily detailed, since the matter was dealt with in closed session.

11. The deputies ad Art. 48 C.O. for Classis Ontario-North reported that they were not called to act in this capacity.

The deputies ad Art. 48 C.O. for Classis Ontario-South reported that at two occasions their assistance was requested by Classis Ontario-South.

12. Synod thankfully received the financial report of the treasurer of Regional Synod, covering the period of November 1, 1995 – October 31, 1996. It was decided to keep the assessment for 1997 at \$1.00 per communicant member.

Rev. P.G. Feenstra and Rev. Cl. Stam requested not to be reappointed as deputies ad Art. 48 C.O.

13. Synod received with thankfulness the report of the church of Brampton with regard to the inspection of the archives of Regional Synod, maintained by the church at Toronto. It was reported that the documentation of Regional Synod 1995 were found to be in good order.
14. Regional Synod made the following appointments:
 - Deputies Art. 48 C.O.:
for Classis Ontario-North: Revs. D.G.J. Agema and J. DeGelder, (alternate Rev. G. Wieske)
For Classis Ontario-South: Revs. W. den Hollander and G. Nederveen, (alternate Rev. G.H. Visscher)
 - Treasurer: Br. D. VanAmerongen, Grimsby.
 - Church to audit the books of the treasurer: The church at Lincoln.
 - Church to maintain the archives: The church at Toronto.
 - Church to inspect the archives: The church at Brampton.
 - Convening church for the next Regional Synod East: The church at Brampton; date: November 12, 1997.
15. The personal question period was briefly made use of.
16. The chairman noted with thankfulness that censure ad Art. 34 C.O. was not necessary.

17. The Acts were read and adopted, and the Press Release was read and approved for publication.

18. The chairman requested the brothers to sing Psalm 131:1,2,3, and led in closing prayer. Then Regional Synod East 1996, was closed.

J. de Gelder, vice-chairman
of Regional Synod East 1996

Board of Governors of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches

Subject: Meeting of the Board of Governors held on September 5, 1996

Opening

The Meeting is opened by the Chairman, Dr. J. Visscher with the reading of Revelation 5 and prayer. All present are welcomed. It is noted that this will be the last meeting for Prof. J. Geertsema as Principal and thankfulness is expressed to him for his service as Principal of the College for the previous 3 years. Dr. N.H. Gootjes is welcomed as the Principal designate who is to assume his duties as Principal effective September 7, 1996.

Roll Call

All Board Members are present, together with Prof. J. Geertsema and Dr. N.H. Gootjes.

Election of officers

The following governors are re-appointed as officers of the Board:

Chairman:	Dr. J. Visscher
Vice-Chairman:	Karl J. Veldkamp
Secretary:	Rev. D.G. Agema
Treasurer:	Harry Sloots

Minutes

The minutes of the Board meeting held on September 7, 1995 are approved.

Report of the Executive

The Executive reports on their activities for the last year. The Secretary provides a summary of the correspondence received and sent for the previous school year.

Report of the Academic Committee

The committee reports on their annual meeting held on September 4, 1996. The matter of the request of

Korea Theological Seminary Pusan for the exchange of professors has their attention. There will be further discussion of the matter when Dr. Gootjes and Rev. VanSpronsen attend the 1997 ICRC in Korea. The Board adopts the recommendation of the Academic Committee to grant tenure to Prof. J. De Jong and Prof. Dr. N.H. Gootjes. This recommendation of the Board will be made to the General Synod to be convened in Fergus, Ontario, D.V. 1998.

Report of the Finance and Property Committee

The committee presents their fourteenth annual report, advising the Board that the regular matters of the College continue unabated. It is noted again with thankfulness that the Lord continues to bless the College abundantly and that the support of the churches continues faithfully. The budget for the fiscal period June 1, 1996 through and including May 31, 1997, is presented and approved. The Board also approves the change of the fiscal year from a May 31 year-end to a December 31 year-end.

The budget is prorated for the stub fiscal year June 1, 1996 through and including December 31, 1996. The draft financial statements are presented and discussed. Although the Board approves the financial statements in principle, due to the need to clarify some aspects of the draft statements, the Board delegates to the Finance and Property Committee the finalization of same. Mrs. Aafke Spithof, C.A. is reappointed as auditor of the College.

Report of the Convocation Committee

The report of the Convocation Committee is received. Details relating to the format of convocation are finalized.

Reports

The reports of the Senate, Visits to the Lectures, the Principal, visits to the churches in British Columbia, the Librarian, and the Registrar are received with gratitude. The College will have three new students for its Freshmen year entering the Master of Divinity Program and one student for the Diploma of The-

ological Studies. Upon the recommendation of the Senate, Margaret Vanderveelde is appointed by the Board as Librarian on a permanent basis.

Visitors Schedule 1996-97

It is agreed that Rev. W. den Hollander and Rev. P.G. Feenstra will visit the lectures in the Fall of 1996 and Rev. R. Aasman and Rev. C. VanSpronsen in the Winter of 1997.

Report of the Ad Hoc Committee regarding Practical Training at the College

Recommendations with regard to practical training at the College are presented. In particular a program leading to a Certificate of Pastoral Proficiency is described and discussed in detail. The committee members receive the input of the Governors. Further refinement and development of the proposal will be required. Further proposals and reporting by the committee will be provided.

Report of the Building Expansion Committee

The report of the building expansion committee is received for discussion. The report is received and approved in principle. The committee is directed by the Board to continue in their efforts, in particular to develop a specific plan to fund the expansion (without affecting the assessments to the churches) and finalize all details so that a final report can be delivered by the Board to the General Synod scheduled for the Spring of 1998.

International Study Assistance Fund


The matter of funding students wishing to attend the College, particularly those from developing or less fortunate nations has the attention of the Board. A number of students (many from Africa) who wish to pursue theological training in the Reformed tradition have made serious inquiries to the College. Various proposals are considered. It is decided that a committee consisting of Dr. J. Visscher, Rev. C. VanSpronsen and K.J. Veldkamp would be constituted to consider alternatives and give guidance to the Board.

Press Release

The Press Release is read and approved.

Closing

The meeting is closed in the usual Christian manner.

K.J. Veldkamp 



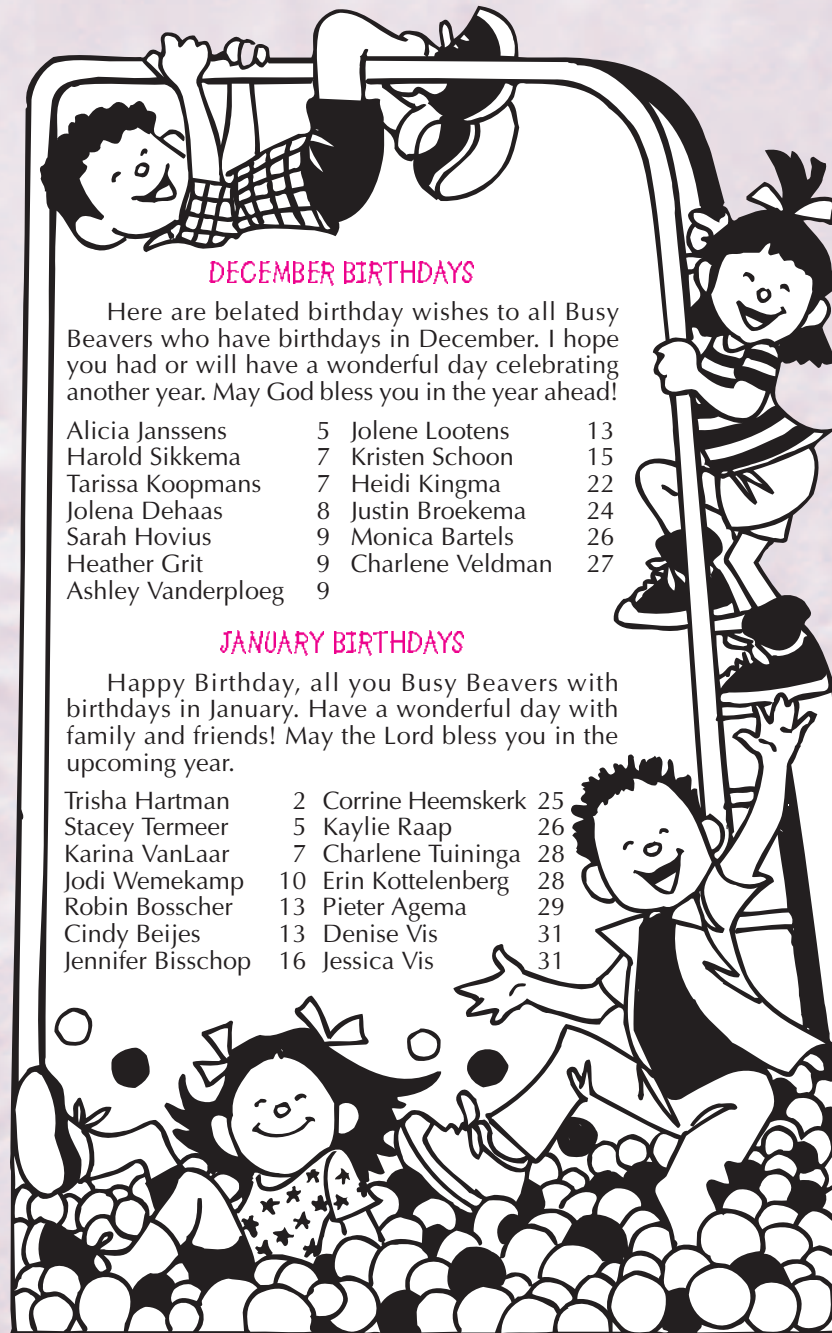


Would God have said that?

I asked a Busy Beaver
 "What's the best part of Christmas for
 you?"
 She said, "The gifts."
 OKa-a-a-y.
 She was honest.
 Good.
 Hm . . . m . . . Gifts.
 I thought about that.
 Presents ARE a big part of Christmas.
 I like getting them.

I like giving them. (Especially GAG
 gifts!)
 I laugh when I get a surprise.
 I cry when someone knows EXACTLY
 what I wanted.
 I get a tear in my eyes when
 someone REALLY likes my
 present.
 Because I love that person.
 My present says that.
 And then it hit me.
 That's what Christmas is all about!

A Gift given out of love!
 Because God loves His children.
 He sent us His own dear Son,
 born in a stable, long ago.
 What a Gift to this world!
 No wonder we sing so much at
 Christmas!
 No wonder we give presents!
 Thank you, Father in heaven,
 for Your Great Gift of our Saviour.
 Thank you for your love.
 You are an awesome God!



DECEMBER BIRTHDAYS

Here are belated birthday wishes to all Busy Beavers who have birthdays in December. I hope you had or will have a wonderful day celebrating another year. May God bless you in the year ahead!

Alicia Janssens	5	Jolene Lootens	13
Harold Sikkema	7	Kristen Schoon	15
Tarissa Koopmans	7	Heidi Kingma	22
Jolena Dehaas	8	Justin Broekema	24
Sarah Hovius	9	Monica Bartels	26
Heather Grit	9	Charlene Veldman	27
Ashley Vanderploeg	9		

JANUARY BIRTHDAYS

Happy Birthday, all you Busy Beavers with birthdays in January. Have a wonderful day with family and friends! May the Lord bless you in the upcoming year.

Trisha Hartman	2	Corrine Heemskerk	25
Stacey Termeer	5	Kaylie Raap	26
Karina VanLaar	7	Charlene Tuininga	28
Jodi Wemekamp	10	Erin Kottelenberg	28
Robin Bosscher	13	Pieter Agema	29
Cindy Beijes	13	Denise Vis	31
Jennifer Bisschop	16	Jessica Vis	31

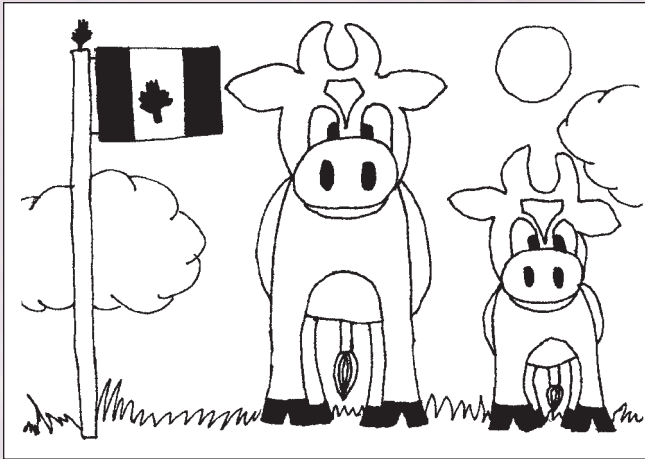
MOTHERS

What was the name of the mother of each of the following?

1. Jesus _____
2. Isaac _____
3. Solomon _____
4. Esau _____
5. Samuel _____
6. John Mark _____
7. Benjamin _____
8. Moses _____
9. Timothy _____
10. Uzziah _____
11. Obed _____
12. Cain _____
13. Tubalcain _____
14. John the Baptist _____
15. Hezekiah _____
16. Joab _____
17. Mahlon _____
18. Absalom _____
19. Reuben _____
20. Ahaziah _____

COWS

by Busy Beaver Eritia Smit



CHRISTMAS WORD SEARCH

by Busy Beaver Jason Vanderhorst

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

Find these words:

Decorations	Special	Star	Manger
Tree	Wreath	Wisemen	Celebration
Jesus	Birth	Shepherds	Feast
Joseph	Mary	Inn	Presents
God	Lord	Visit	Pregnant
Church	Joy	Baby	



BOOKS TO "RE-WRITE"

Each of the following is a "jumbled" book of the Bible.
 Can you "re-write" them in the proper order?

- | | |
|---------------|----------------|
| 1. SAOM | 11. HAMWETT |
| 2. USTTI | 12. HOPNELIM |
| 3. KUEL | 13. SAEHOH |
| 4. ZAER | 14. HAAIIS |
| 5. GAAHIG | 15. NESSIGE |
| 6. MARSON | 16. SINAIPPLHI |
| 7. KKKAHUB | 17. SHERWEB |
| 8. MYIHOTT | 18. HUIJASO |
| 9. ISAAAGNTL | 19. NOTAILVEER |
| 10. TUVSLIEIC | 20. MANUH |

(Answers at end of column)



CHRISTMAS MATCHING PUZZLE

The Birth of Jesus

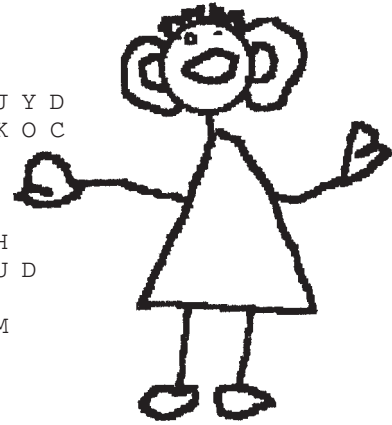
Match the people with the statement concerning them.

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| 1. Caesar Augustus,
Luke 2:1 | a. went to see Jesus, then
told others about Him. |
| 2. Joseph, Luke 2:4 | b. announced Jesus' birth to
shepherds. |
| 3. Mary, Luke 2:5 | c. issued a decree. |
| 4. Angel,
Luke 2:8-11 | d. went with her husband to
Bethlehem. |
| 5. Shepherds,
Luke 2:17 | e. went to Bethlehem to be
taxed. |
| 6. Those who heard,
Luke 2:18 | f. wondered at what they
were told. |
| 7. Herod,
Matthew 2:7-8 | g. said "glory to God in the
highest." |
| 8. Heavenly host,
Luke 2:13-14 | h. presented gifts of gold,
frankincense and myrrh. |
| 9. Wise men,
Matt. 2:11 | i. warned the wise men of
Herod's evil plan. |
| 10. God, Matthew 2:12 | j. pretended to want to
worship Jesus. |

WINTER FUN

by Busy Beaver *Crystal Slaa*

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



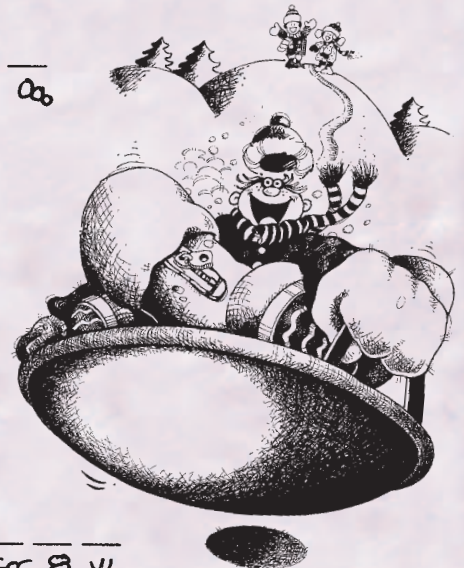
Find these words! Sled Hills Tobogganing School Games Snow
 Snowpants Coat Mitten Hat Boots Playing

CHRISTMAS CODE

by Busy Beaver *Marja Vandekamp*

A Δ	E O	I ∞	M ⊗	Q ↓	U ∞	Y ÷
B ☼	F ♥	J ■	N 8	R *	V ↑	Z ⊙
C ★	G #	K ☺	O +	S ψ	W /	
D ■	H ◇	L ↑	P @	T £	X \	

Δ 8 ■ ψ ◇ O Y ◇ Δ ↑ ↑ ☼ * ∞ 8 #
 ♥ + * £ ◇ Δ ψ + 8 Δ 8 ■ £ ◇ + ∞
 ψ ◇ Δ ↑ £ ★ Δ ↑ ↑ ◇ ∞ ψ
 8 Δ ⊗ O ■ O ψ ∞ ψ; ♥ + *
 ◇ O ψ ◇ Δ ↑ ↑ ψ Δ ↑ O ◇ ∞ ψ
 ⊙ O + ⊙ ↑ O ♥ * + ⊗ £ ◇ O ∞ * ψ ∞ 8 ψ





FROM THE MAILBOX

Hello, *Marja Vandekamp*. Here is my letter to you! Did you see your puzzle? You sent it too late for last Christmas, so I saved it for this year. What kind of dogs are your puppies? I hope you had a fun birthday, too. By now you are probably enjoying winter activities like skating and sledding, right? I hope you have a fun Christmas vacation. Bye, *Marja*. Hi, *Eritia Smit*. It sounds like you aren't

having any trouble keeping busy. I hope your rabbits are doing fine. Are the does good mothers? What will you feed your goat when the snow covers the grass? Where do you work for the farmer who has pigs? Hope to hear from you soon, *Eritia*.

Hello, *Crystal Slaa*. Thank you for the winter puzzle. Are you having fun in the snow already? I hope you have a very fun Christmas vacation with your family. Bye, *Crystal*.

Hi, *Becca Brasz*. How are your kittens doing? They grow really fast, don't they? Are you going to keep them on your farm? Where does your friend, *Amanda*, live? Bye, *Becca*.

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Levi Bergsma*. I hope you will have fun being a Busy Beaver. Send me your birthday, and address, so I can send you a membership card, and put your name on the birthday list. Can you tell me what kind of farm you live on? I hope your house is fixed up soon. It sure can be messy while it's being fixed, isn't it? Have a wonderful Christmas vacation, *Levi*. Bye!

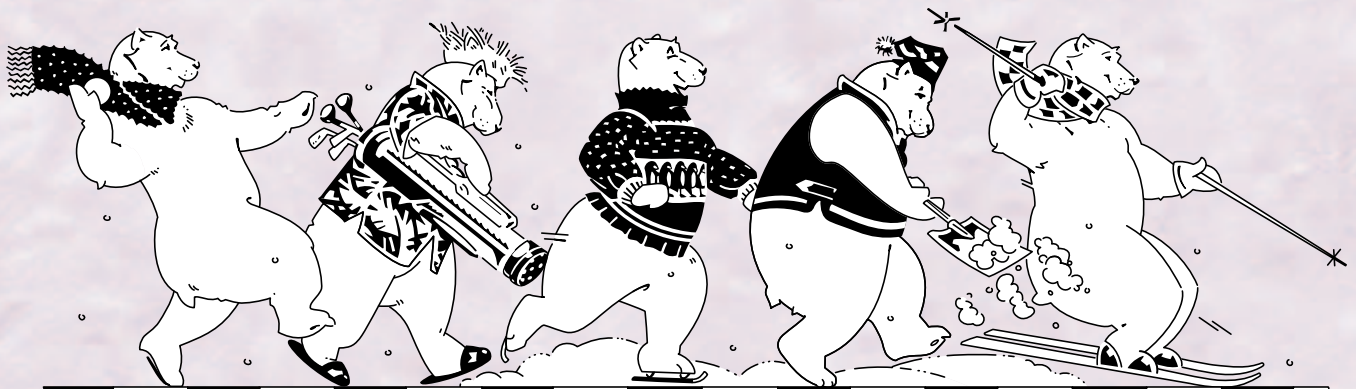
Hello, *Melanie Bysterveld*. How did your team do at the volleyball tournament? How do you like going to high school? I hope you enjoy your Christmas holidays. Thanks for sending in your puzzle. Bye, *Melanie*.

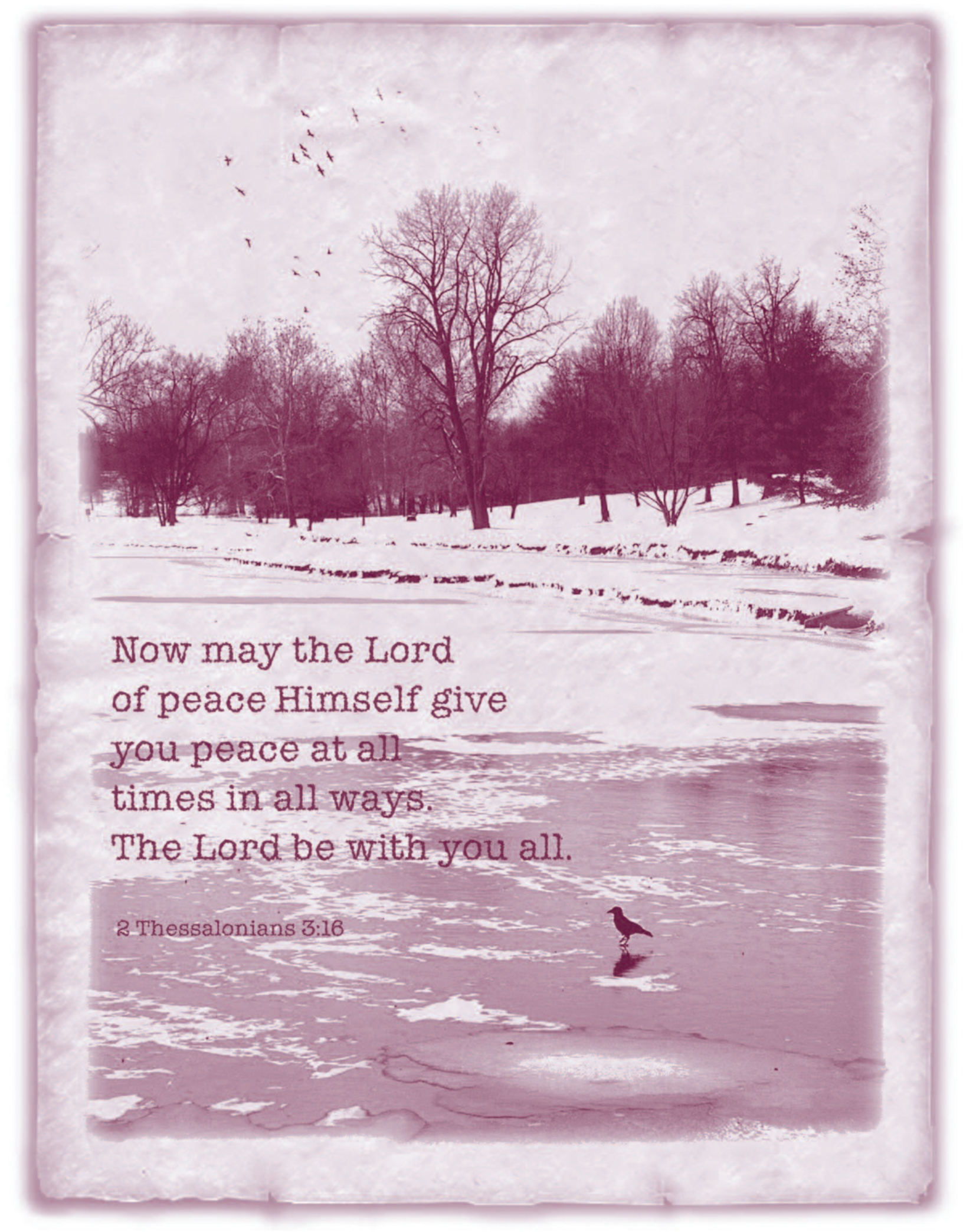
Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, *Angela Brasz*. Do you look after your birds by yourself? What have you decided to do with your candy house? In summer, do you help out with the orchard? It must be very busy with so many kinds of fruit! I hope you like fruit! I hope you enjoy being a Busy Beaver, *Angela*. Bye.



Answers to Books to "Re-Write"!

- | | | | |
|-----------|---------------|--------------|-----------------|
| 1. Amos | 6. Romans | 11. Matthew | 16. Philippians |
| 2. Titus | 7. Habakkuk | 12. Philemon | 17. Hebrews |
| 3. Luke | 8. Timothy | 13. Hosea | 18. Joshua |
| 4. Ezra | 9. Galatians | 14. Isaiah | 19. Revelation |
| 5. Haggai | 10. Leviticus | 15. Genesis | 20. Nahum |





Now may the Lord
of peace Himself give
you peace at all
times in all ways.
The Lord be with you all.

2 Thessalonians 3:16



*Season's
Greetings*

from all of us at

**PREMIER
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