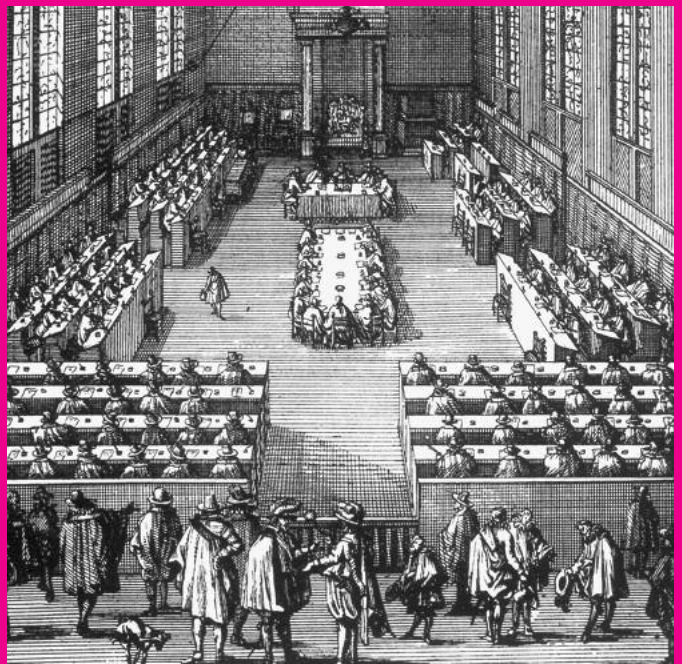


Clarion

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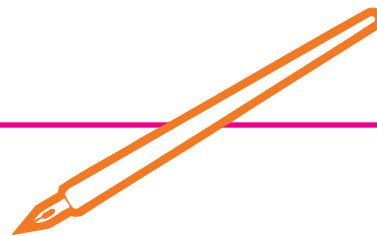


*Synod Dordrecht 1618-1619
On Unity Discussions*

Numbers

10:1-10

By J. De Jong



Another Small Step

For three days in June, Rev W. den Hollander and I were privileged to be guests and fraternal observers at the third synod of the United Reformed Churches of North America held in Hudsonville, Michigan. Rev. den Hollander will be providing a report of this synod in *Clarion*. The meeting was marked by a strong sense of unity and resoluteness with regard to the new federation that has been formed.

Ecumenical relations

With regard to the relations with our churches, the synod agreed to enter into Corresponding Relations with our churches, according to the guidelines that were adopted at the previous synod (1997). This means that from the side of the URCNA the discussions between the two federations are currently in the exploratory stage. However, the report of the Ecumenical Relations Committee has already made clear that there are no essential doctrinal differences between the two federations. The work of the Ecumenical Relations committee was approved by Synod, and therefore the two section (east) committees will continue to meet according to the adopted schedule. As a Committee, we hope to make recommendations concerning the progress of these talks to our forthcoming synod of 2001 in Neerlandia.

We speak of a small step forward. It is a step *forward*, since any doctrinal concerns that may have formed an obstacle to unity have been clearly and officially moved out of the way. Yet it remains a *small* step, and we should realize that we need to cover quite some ground as yet. We need to be thinking in terms of a *merger* of two federations, not one federation being annexed by another. That means that each federation will be bringing in integral elements of its heritage and tradition, and be willing to subject these to the test of Scripture and confession. The specific concerns of our forthcoming meetings will focus on the church order, liturgy, the song book and theological education. If these talks proceed well, our Committee for Ecclesiastical Unity will be recommending to move forward in this relationship.

Local talks

We would hope that on the local level, churches that have been engaged in various discussions will continue to hold meetings through which we can continue to get to know one another. However, it seems wiser to avoid situations in which some churches who feel they are farther along in their discussions begin to engage in fraternal activities on

their own, as for example, pulpit exchanges and table fellowship. This is a stage in the discussions to which we ought to move *together*, as one united family of churches.

Other churches

As noted in Rev. den Hollander's report, we were also able to spend time with fraternal observers of other churches. We met with delegates from the Reformed Presbyterian Church, the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, and in the continental Reformed family, delegates were present from the Free Reformed Churches, the Protestant Reformed Churches and the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches. We were also able to interact with the delegates from our sister churches in the Netherlands.

Our discussions with these delegates served to remind us that we have the calling to reach out to those we meet who want to serve the Lord according to his word.

The churches in the tradition of the Scottish Reformation have their own distinct histories, and that may prevent us from attaining a full sister church relationship with them. But that does not mean that forms of recognition and support could not be established with churches seeking to be faithful to God's Word, so that we can open avenues of further discussion on matters of mutual concern.

... we have the calling to reach out to those we meet who want to serve the Lord according to his word.

Lines of history

As an overall personal impression, at the synod I was struck by the many points of contact with our own history on a new continent. Many of the members of the URCNA were formerly part of the "De Wolf" churches in the early 1950s. This group broke from the mainstream of the Protestant Reformed Churches on the issue of the Declaration of Principles, retaining a broader view of the covenant and the well-meant offer of the gospel. Our contact with this group ended in 1962, after they decided to revert back to the Christian Reformed Church.¹ In a sense, what then was dropped has now been picked up again under new circumstances. Yet, then too, our delegates were eager to continue the contact for the sake of the unity of the Church of Christ!² We can only do our best for lasting unity by continuing to work in the line of previous generations. May the Lord continue to bless our efforts!

¹See Acta Generale Synode Hamilton, 1962, Article 29, p. 11

²See Acta Synode Homewood-Carman, 1958, Article 290, pp. 71-74.



Morning Hymn

The dawn is sprinkling in the east
 Its golden shower, as day flows in;
 Fast mount the pointed shafts of light, —
 Farewell to darkness and to sin!

Away, ye midnight phantoms all!
 Away, despondence and despair!
 Whatever guilt the night has brought,
 Now let it vanish into air.

So, Lord, when the last morning breaks
 Which shrouds in darkness earth and skies,
 May it on us, low bending here,
 Arrayed in joyful light arise!

To God the Father glory be,
 And to his sole-begotten Son;
 the same, O holy Ghost! to thee,
 While everlasting ages run.

Ambrosian Hymn. Translated by Edward Caswall

What's inside?

For the past while, church unity committees of the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA) and the Canadian Reformed Churches have been meeting in Hamilton to discuss what we, as federations of Reformed churches, have in common. The committees prepared papers on history, the doctrine of the church, and the doctrine of the covenant to guide their discussions. With profound thankfulness to the Lord, we can observe that the brothers have made some strong headway and have arrived at points of agreement on these three topics. We are very happy to publish the papers that form the background for the discussions and agreement. You will find them in this and the next issue of *Clarion*. Today you will find the history. More discussion papers are scheduled for the future — on church order, theological training, liturgy, etc. We plan to publish these papers as well.

Recently, Dr. J. De Jong and the Rev. W. den Hollander visited the third synod of the URCNA. In these pages you will find a report on the synod and the speech Dr. De Jong delivered there. He also offers a few reflections on the synod and our contact with the URCNA in the editorial.

Rev. P. Aasman supplies the meditation and Rev. J. DeGelder a Hiliter. With that we wish you happy reading. And have a nice summer!

GvP



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By P. Aasman

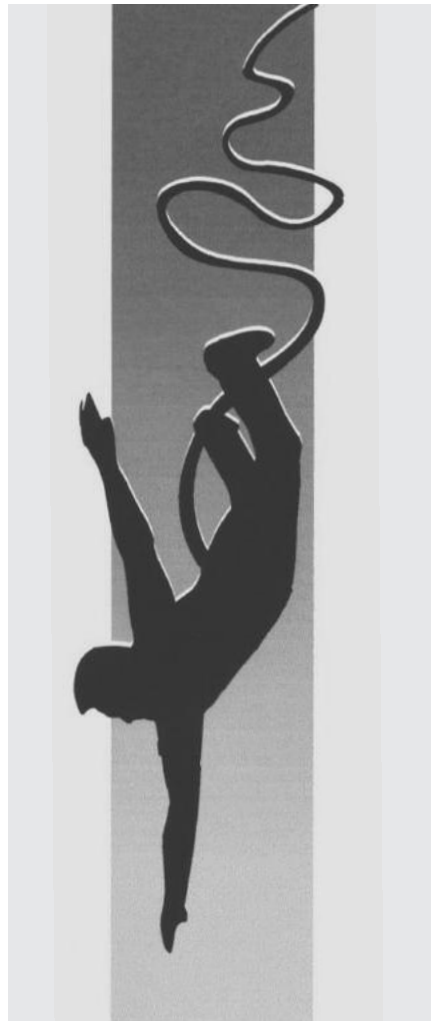
Death Defying Christianity

I die every day. I mean the brothers! 1 Corinthians 15:31

This man is not enjoying himself. He is sailing through the air and the canyon floor is rushing toward him. Most people enjoy this part, even though it seems so dangerous. But this time, the bungee cord will not save him. In his eagerness to sail through the air he forgot to attach the bungee to his harness. This man is not smart; he jumped too soon. He is not having much fun. Soon he will die, and that will be the end.

You might not think that there are many people in the world who are that foolish, but there are. You would think that a mistake like this would call for an inquest to prevent that such a thing should happen again, but nothing seems to help. Many people are jumping without the cord attached. They are dying by the thousands and it often seems that nobody is doing anything to stop the carnage. That is to say, there are many, many Christians who deny the resurrection. One Reformed church synod had decided that any of eighteen different interpretations of the resurrection could be taught among the churches. The literal interpretation of the resurrection has been lost in a sea of liberalism.

To be a Christian and yet to deny the resurrection is like jumping off a bridge over a dry canyon without a bungee cord attached to the harness. To become a Christian is a deadly prospect. Paul once said, "It seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena." In another place, Paul says, "I die every day – I mean that brothers!" The hazards into which his Christian profession put him are mind-boggling. In another letter he describes some of these ordeals: five times he was stripped and flogged by the Jews (40 lashes less one), three times he was beaten with rods by the Romans, once he was stoned and left for dead, three times he was shipwrecked. His Christian profession



brought Paul into so much danger. But he was not alone. The letter to the Hebrews describes the danger which believers in all times and all places experience. The author of his letter then exhorts us all to persevere in the face of such danger. We read there the ominous warning, "In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood."

To be a Christian means to be marked out for death's special attention. You will suffer simply because you are a Christian. You will struggle against

sin and all its temptations, and if you persevere, then it is very likely that one day you will have to choose either to die in Christ or live without Him. There are thousands of Christians today who are being forced to make exactly that choice. There is every reason to expect that same prospect in our democratic countries over the next generation. The power of death will always try to break our reliance on Jesus Christ.

But what does it matter? Jesus Christ has risen from the dead! And in Christ, all will be made alive, all who have believed in Him. We defy death. We sing our triumph over it. To become a Christian is to do something death-defying. It is exhilarating. It is even more exciting to be a Christian than to jump off a bridge into a dry canyon with only a bungee cord to save you. To be a Christian means that death is so close, but it just can't touch you.

Some people have given up this joy – they have given up hope in the resurrection. People suffering trial often protest against heaven as though there were no future hope. Many people smell the stench of death's foul breath, and forget the sweetness of Christ's great victory! And so they give up hope in the resurrection of the body. That's incredible! How can you be a Christian and not hold fast to the resurrection of the body? To be a Christian is to defy death! To give up the resurrection the way so many Christians are doing today is as crazy as jumping off a bridge without attaching the bungee cord first.

A Christian is someone who, like a bungee-jumper, defies death. The resurrection will pull us up, just before death can claim the victory. This confession will protect us when we jump. So hold fast to it! Don't doubt it in the face of trouble! That would take all the joy out of being a Christian.

Rev. Paul Aasman is the pastor of the Canadian Reformed Church of Grand Valley Ontario.



An Abstract of the History of the United Reformed Churches in North America¹

Synodically appointed committees from the United Reformed Churches and the Canadian Reformed Churches have been quietly meeting, discussing and pursuing fraternal dialogue with a view towards establishing federative unity. In this and the next two issues of Clarion, some of the fruits of their labours are being made available for a wider audience. Each topic has two papers coming from the two committees. The first papers are on the history of the church. Subsequent issues of Clarion will feature papers on the doctrine of the church, on the covenant, and the church order. The series will be concluded with a summation of points of agreement.

We are pleased to be able to make these papers available and so involve the members of the churches in the process of thinking along with our deputies. May the Lord bless this work and may we find each other as church federations to the praise of the Head of the Church. – Editor

Introduction

The Church's one foundation is Jesus
Christ her Lord,
She is His new creation by water
and the Word.
From heaven He came and sought
her to be His holy Bride,
With His own blood He bought her,
and for her life He died.

With these moving and descriptive words Samuel Stone pictured in 1866 how "the Son of God out of the whole human race, from the beginning of the world to its end, gathers, defends, and preserves for Himself by His Spirit and Word in the unity of true faith, a Church chosen to everlasting life," LD 21, Answ. 54. At the same time Stone knew that persecutions and perils would follow the Bride of Christ throughout all the centuries. Thus he taught the Church also to sing:

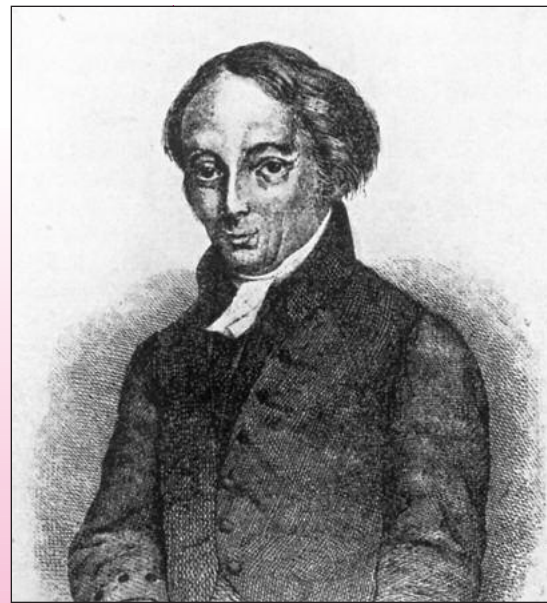
Though with a scornful wonder,
men see her sore oppressed,
By schisms rent asunder, by heresies
distressed,
Yet saints their watch are keeping,
their cry goes up, "How long?"
And soon the night of weeping shall
be the morn of song.

Origin and roots of the United Reformed Churches

Stone's nineteenth century witnessed not only the defeat of Napoleon, but also the rise of romanticism leading to rationalism and liberalism. Jean Jacques Rousseau is known as the apostle of romanticism, while F. Schleiermacher worked out some of romanticism's implications. He reinterpreted the Christian faith by taking his starting point in man's feelings. The result was that "the antithesis between Christianity as the only true religion and all others as false was wiped out. . . . There was no room left for Christ as the only Saviour from sin," writes D.H. Kromminga.²

The political and ecclesiastical changes in the Netherlands as a result of these European developments were not long in coming. The exiled prince William of Orange returned and was crowned King William I, constitutional monarch of the united Dutch provinces. The experiences of his exile motivated him to reorganize the Dutch Reformed Churches, placing them firmly under the control of the state. P.Y. De Jong summarizes the events. "All ecclesiastical power was shifted from the congregations to a series of boards, at first appointed by the king and thereafter largely self-perpetuating. Final decisions were in the hands of a national board, still called a "synod" which met annually and had the right to impose its regulations on every pastor, consistory, and congregation."³

These draconian changes in the life of the Dutch Reformed Churches were initiated in 1816 by means of a law called *Het Algemeen Reglement* or the General Regulations. A.M. Lindeboom



Rev. Hendrik
de Cock



Church at
Ulrum

observes that “the Church Order of Dort was put aside and replaced by a new church order. . . . The confession was declared non-operative.”⁴ The lamentable deformation was aptly described by L. Praamsma, “1816 means the reversal of 1618.”⁵

We adduce this historical background material in the Netherlands at some length to highlight its significance to the United Reformed Churches in North America of the last decade of the 20th century. Our ecclesiastical origin and spiritual roots are traced in God’s gracious providence to the reformation of 1834, when a small struggling congregation braved the forces of unbelief to return to the Word of God and the Reformed Confessions. The enemy of Christ’s Bride uses different armament in his spiritual warfare to destroy the Church in our century, but the resultant liberalism and secularism will and has produced apathy, ignorance, and disregard for God’s Word and the confessions in several Reformed Churches, including the Christian Reformed Church, from which the URC seceded. Martin Luther’s words apply to all centuries.

And though this world with devils filled should threaten to undo us,

We will not fear, for God has willed
His truth to triumph through us.
The prince of darkness grim, we
tremble not for him;
His rage we can endure, for lo his
doom is sure,
One little Word shall fell him.

It was on the evening of October 13, 1834 that the consistory of the Reformed Church of Ulrum in the province of Groningen, led by their pastor Hendrik De Cock, drafted and signed a statement which they entitled an “Act of Secession and Return.” The next evening 130 believers, not all members, representing most of the congregation of 247 souls signed the document.⁶ All present heard and read the words, “. . . having for a long time taken notice of the corruption in the Netherlands Reformed Church, both in the mutilation or the denial of the doctrine of our fathers based on God’s Word, in the degeneration of the holy sacraments . . . and in the almost complete neglect of ecclesiastical discipline, all of which according to our Reformed confession article 29 are marks of the true church . . . taking all this together it is now more than clear that the Netherlands Reformed Church is not the true but the false church.”⁷

Henry Beets’ explanation of De Cock’s pathway to the secession sounds familiar to many United Reformed church members, since almost all sought to bring about change within the denomination. “De Cock’s original purpose was to *re-form* the old Church of his fathers, which he loved heartily, and to restore and maintain her *purity* of doctrine and life. . . . He expressed it more than once: ‘We have not seceded from the true Reformed Church, nor from the true Reformed; we separate only from the synodical Church until it returns to the way of the fathers which it has forsaken, and to the most holy faith which it has denied.’”⁸

The return to the faith and practice of the fathers clearly appears in the Act of Secession and Return. “. . . testifying herewith that in all things we bind ourselves to God’s holy Word and our venerable forms of unity . . . arrange our public worship according to the revered ecclesiastical liturgy, and with regard to our ecclesiastical ministry and government bind ourselves for the present to the Church Order drawn up by the aforementioned Synod of Dort.”⁹

The minutes of the Ulrum consistory contain this simple yet memorable record, “Tuesday evening, the 14th of October, after we knelt and in prayer looked up to the LORD, we have separated ourselves from the false church, and in the authority of the LORD have assumed the office of all believers, which He, the LORD Almighty, the Eternal and Triune God, will establish. With psalm singing and prayer the solemn assembly was concluded.”¹⁰

The opposition and persecution of the government and other churches was not long in coming. H. Berkhof, belonging to the old State Church, later wrote, “For the courage of faith of De Cock and many of his followers we can only have respect. And of the liberal self-satisfaction and intolerance of the church authorities we can only be ashamed, not to speak about the attitude of the government.”¹¹

After many difficulties, divisions, and disasters, the growing churches of the Secession were finally able to start their Theological School in Kampen in 1854. But before then, already in 1847, the flow of their ministers and members to America had begun. It is to these hardy, enterprising immigrants from the seceded churches that the Christian Reformed Church owes its beginning in 1857, when after first affiliating with the Reformed Church in America, four

small churches in the woods of Western Michigan formed the beginning what in the leading of the King of the Church became a strong defender of the Reformed faith.

The Christian Reformed Church in North America

"The most significant event in the life of the Christian Reformed Church was its secession from the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church in America [later renamed the Reformed Church in America] in 1857." With these words H. Zwaanstra begins his doctoral dissertation, *Reformed Thought and Experience in a New World*. The book's sub-title is "A Study of the Christian Reformed Church and its American Environment 1890 -1918," a time period when profound events took place in the Netherlands which had an immense impact on the Christian Reformed Church.

The members of the Secession churches who formed the CRC shared the pious and stubborn character of those who led the 1834 event. A number of them had previously worshipped in conventicles. Many of them read the books of "the ancient writers" such as Wilhelmus a Brakel whose widely known work *Redelijke Godsdienst* was brought to the new land, and who had also been influenced by the "Second Reformation" of the 17th century. In 1989 C. Trimp set out to examine preaching in the Reformed churches, including the impact of the "Second Reformation" which produced an emphasis on piety in the sermons often called "experiential preaching." Trimp observes that the "Second Reformation" was reacting to sterile preaching, and "... was influenced by English and Scottish puritanism. We should realize that this reactionary movement was the preferred choice for the situation of those days."¹²

It is fair to say that piety in life characterized many early immigrants. J. Kromminga writes of them in this way.



Pastor's house in Ulrum

"The people that formed that church were humble, but stubborn defenders of the Reformed doctrine and polity. They were also in varying degrees conscious of a warm personal relation to their Lord and Saviour. It was no race of intellectual giants which founded the church in the wilderness. The members of the church were the common people."¹³

With the rapid growth of the small denomination after its first quarter of a century in the new land, educational institutions began, churches were built, and magazines flourished. Clearly the Lord was blessing the Christian Reformed Church. W. Groen wrote in "The Banner" of September 13, 1935, "The golden era of our denominational history was undoubtedly the period between 1900 and 1915." The author also makes an assessment of that era. "There were two definite doctrinal tendencies, both of which had been carried over from the old country. The one followed the traditional views of the Secession Church of the Netherlands, and the other favoured the things championed by Dr. A. Kuyper in the Netherlands. The issues were sharply drawn and each tendency expressed itself in a monthly periodical."¹⁴

Kuyper's views were vigorously debated in the CRC. In his detailed study Zwaanstra demonstrates how Kuyper's doctrine of the Church in particular caused great division. F.M. Ten Hoor was a prominent professor opposing Kuyper's teaching of church as organism and the church as institute. Ten Hoor maintained that "either the church as organism was essentially church as well as the church institute, and the

name 'Calvinism' should not be associated with it and its activities; or else what Kuyper called the church as organism was not essentially church, and therefore the name 'church' should not applied to it."¹⁵ Ten Hoor came to the conclusion that the Secession of 1834 and the *Doleantie* of 1886 proceeded from fundamentally different conceptions of the essence of the church.

R.B. Kuiper was a leading figure in the Christian Reformed Church for a long time. He attempted to set forth what it was that constituted the essence of being Reformed. He wrote, "The Calvinist gets both his doctrine of particular grace and his doctrine of the covenant from the Word of God. And, difficult, at some points impossible, though he may find it to square the two with each other before the bar of human reason, he accepts both unreservedly for the simple reason that both are taught unmistakably in the Word of God"¹⁶

The problems in the Union churches of the Netherlands (GKN) reached a measure of resolution with the decisions made by the Synod of Utrecht in 1905. These decisions were taken over by the CRC in 1908 as the "Conclusions of Utrecht," and set aside again in 1968. T. Plantinga evaluates the matters in this way. "The doctrinal controversy that sprang up around Schilder had a good deal to do with these conclusions: what happened was that one element within them was brought to undue prominence, while other elements were disregarded."¹⁷

Out of the dynamics surrounding the Conclusions of Utrecht as well as

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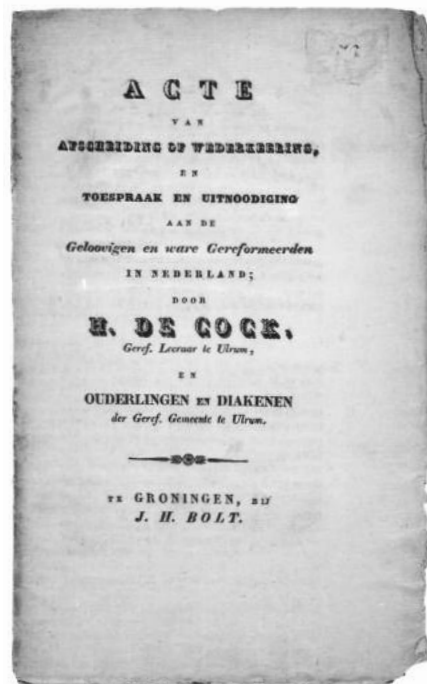
Kuyper's teaching of *Gemeene Gratie*, or common grace, came the first major secession from the Christian Reformed Church. Kuyper distinguished between "particular" and "common" grace, the latter being that grace "by which God, maintaining the life of the world, relaxes the curse which rests upon it, arrests its process of corruption, and thus allows the untrammelled development of our life in which to glorify Himself as Creator."¹⁸

The Synod of the CRC in 1924 adopted the three points of common grace, namely that God shows a certain favour or grace to all His creatures, that there is a restraining of sin by God, and that the unregenerate people are able to do civic good in God's sight. Synod also urged those who held opposing views to refrain from advocating them. They did not. H. Hoeksema was a key figure in this secession that resulted in the formation of the Protestant Reformed Churches. A decade later Hoeksema produced a book itemizing the events of 1924. In it he notes that the CRC Synod recorded about those who were later deposed, "They are Reformed in respect to the fundamental truths as formulated in the confessions."¹⁹

The hierarchical tendencies of the classes were clearly noticeable in these happenings. Classis Grand Rapids East declared Hoeksema "guilty of insubordination to the church authorities and 'by his own action, for the time being, suspended from office.' His consistory was declared guilty of the same offense and of having broken ecclesiastical relationship with the Christian Reformed Church." About a month later Hoeksema was deposed for "open rebellion against the classis, ignoring Art. 31 of the Church Order, and schismatic actions, as named in Art. 80, Church Order." At about the same time Classis Grand Rapids West deposed two ministers, H. Danhof and G. Ophoff and their consistories "on the grounds of insubordination to ecclesiastical authority and public schism."²⁰

During the ensuing decades the CRC continued and deepened the fraternal and ecclesiastical relations with the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (GKN). Many of the immigrants to the USA and Canada who had been part of the *Doleantie* of 1886 and the Union of 1892 joined the CRC, the vast majority of the denomination, however, hailed from and retained the characteristics of the 1834 Secession. These factors may have contributed to the CRC response to the Secession of 1944 in the

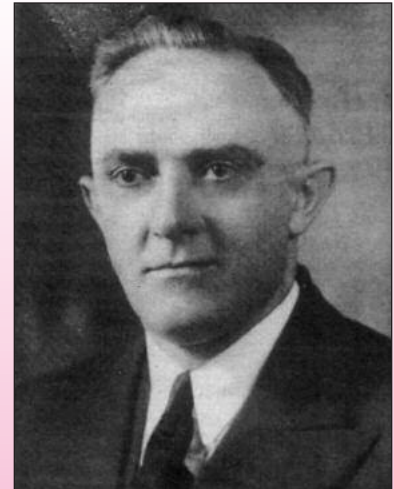
GKN commonly called the Liberation. In an appendix T. Plantinga observes, "Virtually no official attention was ever devoted to the question: what are we to make of the deposition of Schilder and the division that came about in the Reformed churches of the Netherlands in 1944?"²¹ A committee of Synod decided the CRC had no official relations with the Liberated churches, and therefore could not honour their request to be present at their first Synod of 1946. Regretfully the CRC Synod approved their action, and instead the churches continued the relationship with the GKN, which eventually produced negative results.



Acts of Secession and Return

The Secessions of the 1990s

Deviations from historical Reformed emphases in doctrine and in practice were beginning to surface in what had been a faithful and true Church. Two tendencies can be discerned in the Christian Reformed Church during the decades beginning with the 1960s. The first is an increasing trend toward centralization and accompanying hierarchy. This development may be attributed to the rapidly growing number of agencies with large budgets and professional personnel, and to the adoption of the new Church Order in 1965 which proved to allow and even encourage hierarchical potential, as greater authority came to be vested



Rev. R.B. Kuiper

in the broader assemblies than in the local consistory. A consequence of this development has been an increasing disregard for the Church Order, and an unconstrained individualism of the members, with an almost libertarian attitude concerning local church practices bordering on independentism.

The second tendency in the CRC has been the growth of doctrinal indifference accompanied by or resulting from a more liberal interpretation of the Scriptures. One observable consequence has been the emphasis on human dignity at the expense of divine sovereignty. The changes were becoming noticeable in the preaching as well as in the liturgies of some churches. One of the results was that in addition to the denominational Calvin Theological Seminary, a new small seminary was founded in Iowa, the Mid America Reformed Seminary. Graduates of MARS focused on textual preaching, with a renewed emphasis on the Reformed Confessions. Yet catechism books and Sunday School materials used in the churches began to stress the human experience and God's love rather than God's sovereign covenantal demands and human submission in obedience. Doctrinal sermons became more infrequent in many churches, and the Heidelberg Catechism was no longer used in proclamation in a majority of the congregations, a published survey showed. The result was growing doctrinal ignorance, a benign disregard or a limited acceptance of evolution, and women office bearers.

It was clear to many members that increasingly the Christian Reformed Church was in danger of disregarding the marks of the true church as confessed



Dr. Abraham Kuyper

in Article 29 of the Belgic Confession. By the time the 1980s started, conservative members were beginning to produce organizations, reading materials, and to have meetings challenging and condemning the decisions of Synod as well as the direction of the denomination. The Consistorial Conferences, held for a decade, were followed by an Alliance of Reformed Churches uniting the more conservative churches of the CRC. In 1980 a small secession took place among the Canadian churches, as the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches were organized. It was evident that the Christian Reformed Church was showing signs of becoming unfaithful to the Word of God as summarized in the historical confessions, and that in keeping with Article 28 of the Belgic Confession the time had come to separate from that church.

The consequence was that most churches of the Alliance of Reformed Churches and others formed a new federation. Firmly resolving to be faithful to God's Word and the Reformed confessions, the United Reformed Churches in North America began with 36 congregations joining initially. Most churches published a statement of Secession and Return, but the conviction of all was that the CRC was unfaithful and showing signs of being or becoming a false church, in spite of God's many blessings. A return to the mother church was impossible until true repentance and change took place.

The first Synod of the URC was held in Lynwood in 1996 where the name was chosen, the Three Forms of Unity agreed upon, and a Church Order as

an adaptation of Dort was adopted. Also decided was to adopt the Liturgical Forms and the Formula of Subscription of the 1976 Psalter Hymnal. The second Synod took place in St. Catharines in 1997. The Church Order was cast in its current form.

The Charter Member Issue of the Directory of the United Reformed Churches of 1998 shows that 14,973 souls make up the federation, with 82 ministers serving the 65 congregations located within 6 classes. Statistics indicate that at the publication of the Directory 27 churches were situated in Canada, with the remainder in the United States.

For the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity of the URCNA, Rev. R. Stienstra, minister of Grace Reformed Church (URCNA), Dunnville, Ontario

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Upon ordination of office bearers, a new Canadian Reformed Church came into existence in Carman, Manitoba on July 4, 1999. Rev. Moesker led the worship service after which letters from other churches and ministers were read. Representatives of local governments addressed the congregation(s) as well. For the time being the original congregation is known as Carman East and the new one as Carman West. The church building is shared at this time with East services at 9 a.m. and 1 p.m. and West services at 11 a.m. and 3 p.m.

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¹This paper has been prepared by The Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity, United Reformed Churches in North America.

²*A History of the Christian Church*, p. 272.

³*The Reformation of 1834*, p. 14.

⁴*Om de Grondslagen van het Christendom*, p. 25, translation provided.

⁵*Het Dwaze Gods*, p. 17, translation provided.

⁶Dr. Beets records that only 49 members signed, *De Chr. Geref. Kerk in Noord Amerika*, p. 28.

⁷*The Reformation of 1834*, p. 26.

⁸*The Christian Reformed Church*, p. 32.

⁹*The Reformation of 1834*, p. 27.

¹⁰*Het Dwaze Gods*, p. 63, translation provided.

¹¹*Geschiedenis der Kerk*, p. 289, translation provided.

¹²"A Resounding Gospel: Preaching and our Experience of Faith," p. 7, *Diakonia*, Vol. 12, No. 1.

¹³*In the Mirror, an Appraisal of the Christian Reformed Church*, p. 15.

¹⁴*The Christian Reformed Church*, p. 86.

¹⁵*Reformed Thought and Experience in a New World*, p. 80.

¹⁶*To Be or Not to Be Reformed*, p. 65.

¹⁷*Seeking Our Brothers in the Light: A Plea for Reformed Ecumenicity*, p. 27.

¹⁸*The Christian Reformed Church*, p. 108.

¹⁹*The Protestant Reformed Churches in America*, p. 73.

²⁰*The Christian Reformed Church*, p. 108, 109.

²¹*Schilder's Struggle for the Unity of the Church*, p. 410.

The Canadian Reformed Churches – A Brief History¹

Historical Background in the History of the Churches in the Netherlands

In order to establish some kind of a starting-point, the Union of 1892 would be an important moment to consider. The churches of the 1st Secession (1834) and of the 2nd Secession (1886) found each other in this Union of 1892. United they continued under the name “The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands” (RCN). The Holy Scriptures, as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity, were their basis; the Church Order of Dort (1618-1619) was their Order of Cooperation.

In view of later developments it is important to note that a group of 1st Secession churches did not join the Union: the Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerken (Free Reformed Churches). They first wanted to deal with the views of Dr. A. Kuyper on the covenant and the church. He held to the idea of the pluriformity of the church: i.e. the church has more forms, shown in the existence of churches which live separately and hold to a greater or lesser purity of the truth yet not the full truth. Hence, at first Kuyper did not want to use the confessional language of “true and false church” (BC, Art. 29), for example, in the case of the Nederlands Hervormde Kerk. The people of the 1st Secession had declared that this church showed the marks of a false church by persecuting the faithful believers. It was one of the main reasons for their secession. Kuyper and others led in the 2nd Secession only because the church had become a State church with a State government. Kuyper’s view on the covenant differed from the confessions as well, he admitted, namely in that he advocated a covenant with the elect only. It is regrettable that these churches did not join the Union. They should have joined, considering the basis adopted for the Union, and considering the fact that the churches of the Union did not accept Kuyper’s views.



Main building of the Theological University of the Reformed Churches (Liberated) in Kampen, the Netherlands.



Historic gate from 1665 which leads to the library buildings of the Theological University in Kampen.

The influence of Dr. A. Kuyper was not limited to his views. In 1880 he also established the Free University. At this University Kuyper wanted to establish his Calvinistic world view, “Reformed principles” in all departments of scientific pursuit. At the same time he used this institute of higher learning also to spread his views concerning the church and covenant. It had a department of Theology, which was recognized as institution for the training of the ministry beside the official Theological College for that purpose in Kampen (founded in 1854). Thus two “trends of thinking” developed, more or less identified as 1st and 2nd Secession thinking. The first or A-trend held to the confessional understanding of the true and false church (BC, Art. 29), rejecting the pluriformity of the church and the idea of the visible and invisible church. It also maintained that the covenant was established with the be-

lievers and their seed (leaving room for non-elect as members in the covenant as well). The second or B-trend followed Kuyper’s views on church and covenant. These two trends became apparent in the local churches’ preference in the choice of ministers, as well as in the magazines circulating in the homes of the members (*De Heraut* of Kuyper, *De Wachter* of the A-trend, *De Reformatie* of the new generation in the 1920s). At the General Synod 1905 a so-called Pacification Formula was adopted, stating that the children of believing parents were to be treated as born again until the opposite would become evident. (Note: this statement still partially maintained the view of presumptive regeneration!) This statement was advisory in character and was not binding.

Later developments showed changes in regard to the way church polity was applied. In the case of Dr.



A. Janse

J.G. Geelkerken, who denied the speaking of the serpent in Genesis 3 and who spoke of a symbolic account in Genesis, the authority of the Word was at stake. The Synod of Assen 1926 rejected his teaching. This same synod, however, also made a decision which was contrary to the Reformed church polity. It deposed the elders and deacons who cooperated or acquiesced in the decision of Geelkerken's consistory to maintain him in his office. It instructed the elders who agreed with Synod's decision to form a consistory by election of elders. Synod, thus, acted as a super-consistory, even deposing Dr. Geelkerken of his office. Also this changed church polity became an issue in 1942-1944.

During the 1920s a movement was under way of "younger scholars" (called "movement of the younger"), who took a critical look at the ideas of Kuyper. Among them were people like K. Schilder, M.B. Van 't Veer, S.G. de Graaf, C. Veenhof, A. Janse, and others (also older leaders like Prof. Dr. S. Greydanus). One of their points of discussion was again Kuyper's thoughts on the Covenant of Grace. In his view God established this covenant with the elect in Christ from eternity. Since the elect cannot be determined, the church presumes that all the children of believers have a seed of regeneration in their hearts and baptizes them on the ground of presumptive regeneration. If these children are shown to be unbelievers later on, this baptism was invalid. In line with this view, Kuyper believed an invisible church consisting of all the elect who have been, are, and shall be born. Members of the invisible church are the real covenant people. They are found in all instituted churches which are visible and form to-

gether the church which is only known to God. The criticism voiced against these views maintained the Scriptural confession of the Covenant of Grace as established with the believers and their seed (including people like Cain, Ishmael, Esau, covenant children who later rejected the promises of the covenant). They all received God's promises, sealed in the Old Testament by circumcision and in the New Testament by baptism. Baptism, then, is not a sign and seal of what the Holy Spirit has or is working in the hearts but of God's promises in his Word. Covenant children are called and obliged to accept these promises. These promises, however, should not be confused with the fulfilment of what is promised. Only those who believe them share in them and keep the covenant demands as well. Preaching should hold up these promises and demands! They must be proclaimed with the command to repent and believe! Also God's covenant blessings and curses must be proclaimed.

In line with this covenant concept these "younger scholars" emphasized the history of redemption in which the Son of God gathers a church by his Word and Spirit, in the unity of the true faith. As in the Old Testament, the church still is a covenant assembly and congregation of believers among whom there are hypocrites, who are *in* the church but not *of* the church. They are members of the covenant who received the promises but who do not share in their fulfilment as long as they persist in their unbelief. Israel was God's covenant people in Egypt. They were all redeemed from bondage but did not all enter the promised land. Many died in unbelief in the desert. They were the church in the desert (Acts 7:38). The heart of many, however, turned back to Egypt (v. 39). This proves sufficiently that it is not all Israel that is called Israel, even though they all were covenant and church people!

The church is a gathering, which is a continuous action of Christ in history. This church has officebearers, proclaims the Word, administers the Sacraments and exercises discipline. These characteristics are so inherent with the Scriptural teaching concerning the church that it rules out an invisible church as in Kuyper's view. Those who criticized Kuyper and his followers rejected a "theory" about the church and returned to what the normative Word revealed about the church, and to its summary in the confessions.

At the General Synod 1936 the controversy about these differing views became an object of fierce debates. It led to the appointment of a committee which had to examine the differences in doctrine. The synod decided to do this, even though the churches did not ask for it. Here again the phenomenon of hierarchy reared its head. Even when the war broke out the pleas from among the churches to delay discussions on these differences fell on deaf ears, and Synod again decided to pursue this examination. The Synod of 1939 (Sneek) perpetuated itself until 1943 (Utrecht), and continued to deal with matters which the churches did not place on its table. On June 8th, 1942, Synod pronounced a decision about these differences in doctrine. It declared Kuyper's teachings about the covenant and church to be the only acceptable (scriptural) view. It was a decision made without the authority and initiative of the churches, and even without the will of the churches! The situation which existed since 1905 was changed to a situation in which everyone was forced to teach this unscriptural view as being the only correct one. Objections brought in against this decision (to the same Synod still, namely in 1943!) were swept aside. Newly ordained ministers had to declare that they agreed with the decisions of Synod. Also a "Clarification of Sentiments," reiterating the Scriptural explanation of these points of doctrine was ignored! Finally, faithful ministers, elders, professors were suspended . . . by Synod! The persecution which occurred in the 16th and 19th century repeated itself! This led to another Reformation, to the "Act of Liberation and Return," on August 11th, 1944, in The Hague.

Immigration and affiliation

When Dutch immigrants from the RCN(Lib) came to Canada, they did not desire to set up a new church, but sought to join an existing one. Many joined the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), for that had always been their North American sister church. After it became clear from CRC synodical decisions that the CRC chose the side of the RCN(Syn) and considered the RCN(Lib) a new church and not a legitimate continuation of the Reformed Churches, many Liberated people who had joined the CRC left and the first Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) were established in the 1950s. Already at the first broader assembly, "Classis Canada," the



Dr. K. Schilder

decision was made that some time in the future the CanRC should direct a serious exhortation to the CRC, calling it back from the path it had chosen to walk with the synodically bound Dutch churches. This decision was fulfilled by the third General Synod of the CanRC, Hamilton 1962.

In the appeal, which was sent to Synod 1963 of the CRC (with copies going to all the consistories), this history to the institution of the CanRC was reviewed, while a strong warning went out in regard to influences from the synodical sister churches in the Netherlands upon proposed changes to a revised Church Order, together with a plea that the unity may be restored. Although initially good progress could be observed in the talks between the committees established by the CanRC and the CRC, the dialogue came to a grinding halt in 1969 when the CRC General Synod urged the CanRC to consider establishing correspondence with the RCN(Syn) "in light of the changed attitude of these churches towards the RCN(Lib)." Then in 1974 General Synod Toronto of the CanRC decided to send a Christian appeal to the Christian Reformed community, calling the CRC back from the unreformed way in which it was moving. This appeal, however, remained unheeded.

It took almost two decades (till the establishment of an Alliance of Reformed Churches), before new attempts could be made to seek unity with members and local churches (belonging to the Alliance) who wanted to remain faithful to the Scriptures and the Reformed Confessions. These contacts have been blessed, especially since the secession of these Alliance churches and the establishing of a federation of

United Reformed Churches in North America.

Among the early immigrants in the 1950s others had joined the Protestant Reformed Church and new congregations were established in Hamilton and Chatham, Ontario, but here too they ran into great difficulties when the Protestant Reformed Church adopted a Declaration of Principles (in 1950) which these new immigrants could not in good conscience accept. This was because the Declaration contained the same Kuyperian idea of the covenant with the elect which was rejected in 1943-44! When appeals against this Declaration were unsuccessful, Canadian Reformed congregations were established in Chatham and the Hamilton areas.

The Federation of Canadian Reformed Churches

As far as the ecclesiastical history of the Canadian Reformed Churches is concerned, we can note that on November 14, 1950, the first "Classis Canada" was held and on November 4, 1954, the first Synod in Homewood/Carman, Manitoba. At this Synod the Church Order of Dort was adopted, and the first decisions were made to come to a common *Book of Praise*, a Theological training, and a common Bible Translation (KJV). A sister church relationship was established with churches in the Netherlands, South-Africa, Australia, Indonesia, and Brazil. Since that first synod ecclesiastical assemblies such as Classes were held in East and West. The more churches were instituted and ministers arrived to serve these churches, the more a federation took shape which could function according to the order of cooperation set out in the Church Order of Dort. In 1958 the next General Synod was held and the churches assisted each other in resolving difficulties. The churches continued to organize a church life according to the Reformed principles underlying this Church Order.

Redemptive-historical Preaching

At the heart of the life of the churches, however, is the proclamation of the gospel. Central in the preaching is the covenant relationship between the LORD and his people. Especially as the gain of the history leading up to the Liberation of 1944, the preaching which the churches pursued and promoted may be characterized as redemptive-historical. In it the history of redemption, the history of God's revelation, the his-

tory of the church comes to God's covenant people in this time in order to show the faithfulness of the LORD to his covenant promises. These promises were fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom all God's promises are "Yes" and "Amen." The gospel of salvation is proclaimed with the command of repentance and belief! By faith, the LORD makes known his covenant to his children, granting them to live in intimacy with the LORD. Through the working of the Holy Spirit, the life of the believers is sanctified unto a new obedience according to God's covenant demands.

By the ministry of the Word, God places his people before Himself, strengthening them in their faith, enriching them in their life with Him in his faithfulness to his promises, motivating them in their responsibility and calling to live in faith, hope, and love before Him. In this way the LORD restores the relationship and responsibilities as laid down in his creation of man to his honour and glory. That's how the preaching displayed the way the covenant functions: it is one-sided in its origin but two-sided in its existence. The salvation of God's covenant people lies in the functioning of this covenant relationship. Thus the preaching helps the believers to grow and increase in the LORD.

In a redemptive-historical approach the Scripture accounts are proclaimed so that the congregation may know the LORD as the Deliverer of his covenant people, on whom He works for the strengthening, refining, of their faith. God's covenant people learn to deal with their guilt, with the temptations in their life, with the LORD's way for their life. Then in Christ they find the comfort of salvation from sin and death and the renewal of their life by the power of his Holy Spirit! The children of the LORD learn to live with the promises of the LORD! These promises the LORD still fulfils in the life of the believer; these promises also are the basis for the believer's trust and confidence with regard to the future of God's Kingdom and work. In this context the preaching may assure the children of the covenant of the certain fulfilment of the promises signified and sealed by Holy Baptism as well. Hence, a preaching which so approaches the congregation as the covenant people of the LORD does not need to fear the danger of covenant-automatism.

Also in the exposition of the doctrine of salvation, as this is done in the afternoon-service, this life in the covenant

with the LORD is expounded. In the Heidelberg Catechism we confess the only comfort in life and death for those who know their sins and misery, seek their salvation outside of themselves in Jesus Christ, and live in thankfulness for their deliverance in Christ. Throughout, the doctrine of justification by faith alone in all the promises of the gospel is paired with a walk in covenant holiness and obedience in Christ. Therefore, also in the Catechism preaching it is this covenantal walk in communion with God which is proclaimed. It pursues the renewal of the whole man, who finds his life in Christ, embraces Him and all his benefits, and so has communion with God through Him! Hence in the believers' songs of praise, derived from the book of Psalms expressing the covenantal faithfulness of the LORD, and in their prayers of faith they express their daily intimacy with God for their walk and talk.

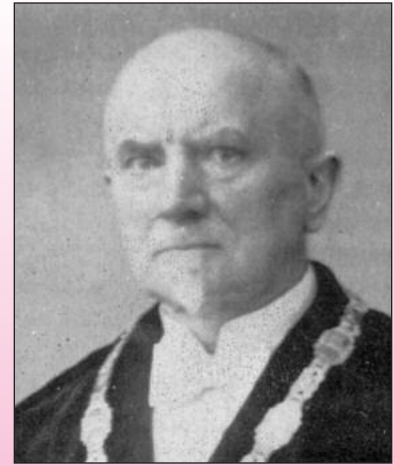
It is this proclamation of the gospel which the Canadian Reformed Churches still wish to preserve. In the weekly preaching the message of the gospel is passed on. Also the needs of the congregation are placed in the light of God's way in the covenant of grace with his people. With the rich promises of the gospel the congregation may be comforted and encouraged. The congregation is addressed by the LORD, her covenant God, in his claim on their hearts and life and in his demands for their walk of life. In that message of salvation He is coming to his people from

week to week to deliver them from sin and to redeem his people by his grace in Jesus Christ!

Training for the Ministry of the Word

Since the first Synod of the CanRC the training for the ministry was a matter on the agenda of each following Synod. Right from the beginning, two leading principles were that the training for the ministry should be provided by the churches of the Lord Jesus Christ and that the future ministers of the Word should receive a good academic training. Only those persons were to be admitted to the ecclesiastical examinations who held a Bachelor of Divinity degree. The Synod of Hamilton, 1962, decided to set up a provisional training. A number of ministers were appointed to teach, while they continued to serve their congregations. Synod also set as an admission requirement the Bachelor of Arts degree or its equivalent. It was also decided to set up a library for the benefit of teachers and students.

On Wednesday, November 20, 1968, the Synod of Orangeville decided to establish a full-fledged Theological College of the CanRC and to appoint three full-time professors and two lecturers. On Wednesday, September 10, 1969, this College was officially opened at Hamilton, Ontario. At the present the faculty is made up of four full-time professors. The training at the Theological College is based on the Holy Scriptures, as confessed in the



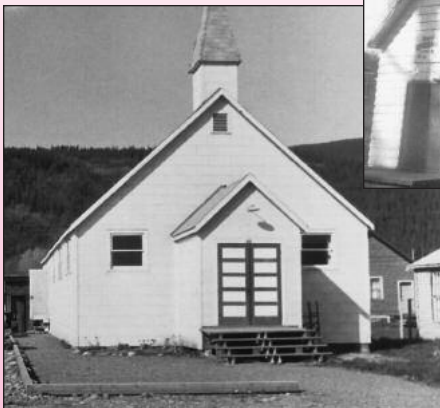
Dr. S. Greijdenus

Three Forms of Unity. It stands in the tradition of men like Calvin, Guido de Bres, Ursinus, Olevianus, Hendrik de Cock, Herman Bavinck, A. Kuyper, S. Greijdenus, and K. Schilder. The College, as servant of the churches, considers itself called to explore scientifically the riches given by God in the Reformation of the church to the best of its ability, in order that these riches may be a blessing for the life of the church in this twentieth century. It also desires to withstand all the assaults against Holy Scripture, which are prevalent in our time. The instruction at the College stresses above all the preparation of the students for their practical service as Ministers of the Word. The churches are convinced that this preparation should aim at the highest possible academic standards.

Publications

In order to develop the common bond of faith and promote the unity among the federation of churches, a first issue of a common magazine was published on June 1952, *Canadian Reformed Magazine*, which became *Clarion* in 1973. This magazine is published by Premier Printing Ltd., at Winnipeg, Manitoba. Study materials are published by the Inter-League Publication Board, a publishing association established in London, Ontario, for the societies in the CanRC as well as for family studies and for personal studies. The *Mission News* is a publication published by Premier Printing, containing reports from missionaries and Mission Boards established in the course of the years by the churches (and supporting churches) of Surrey, British Columbia; Toronto, Ontario and Hamilton, Ontario, while the church of Smithers, British Columbia, is

Church at Houston



Church at Smithers

involved in a home mission project among the First Nations people living in the area. Other prominent magazines in the CanRC are: *Reformed Perspective*, a magazine for the Christian family (since 1980); *Horizons*, a magazine for the women's societies; *In Holy Array*, a magazine for the Young Peoples' Societies; *Diaconia*, a quarterly for office-bearers; *Evangel*, a magazine issued four times a year by the "Reformed Evangelism Taskforce" formed in the Fraser Valley, BC., and distributed by local congregations in hospitals, offices, waiting rooms, etc.

Mission

As a result of ongoing discussions about the church's task in foreign mission, the church of Toronto became the first "sending church" on January 16, 1958. On May 18, 1960, the Rev. H. Knigge was ordained as missionary for the work in Dutch New Guinea (now Irian Jaya). He worked there for 15 years as Toronto's missionary. In 1977 the Rev. H. Versteeg took over the work, especially in Manggelum, Irian Jaya. He worked there for twenty years. In 1998 Toronto, supported by the churches in Classis Ontario-North, sent out the Rev. S. 't Hart to Papua New Guinea, for mission work in Port Moresby and Ekor.

Meanwhile, the church of Surrey had become a sending church, supported by the churches in British Columbia, Alberta, and Manitoba. In 1970, they sent out the Rev. C. Van Spronsen to work as a missionary in Brazil. The Rev. Van Spronsen returned from the mission field in Brazil in 1978. His work was continued and expanded by several missionaries: Rev. R.F. Boersema (1977-1997), Rev. P.K. Meijer (1978-1996), and Rev. E. Venema (1993-present). Rev. Van Spronsen followed up a call extended to him by the church at Smithers, British Columbia. After working there in the regular ministry for five years, he became a home missionary for the native people in 1983 (till 1987). From October 1987 till August 1992 the Rev. M.K. Marren continued this work. Since that time mission workers maintained the project among the Indians.

In 1978 the church of Hamilton, Ontario, became sending church, supported by the churches in Classis Ontario-South. They sent out the Rev. J.G.R. Kroeze in 1988, also to work as a missionary in Brazil. After having worked there for 10 years, he will be returning to the regular ministry in



The General Synod of Homewood-Carman – 1954



The General Synod of Homewood-Carman – 1958

1999, and will be succeeded by the Rev. A. De Graaf.

Education


Another development went underway in the field of education, resulting in the opening of the first Canadian Reformed School, the William of Orange School at New Westminster, British Columbia, on Sept. 7, 1955. In the course of the years parents in most, if not all, congregations established school societies with the objective of providing Reformed education for their children. In line with the redemptive historical preaching heard in the proclamation of the gospel on Sunday, a covenantal education was promoted which pursued among the covenant youth of the church the promises and demands belonging to the covenant relationship which the LORD established with them as children of believing parents. Pursuing the unity of life in the covenant with the LORD, schools were established in which such education was maintained in unity and harmony with the instruction at home and in the church. Where possible, such as in places like Hamilton, Smithers, Fergus, Langley, Edmonton, Grand Rapids, Winnipeg, and Carman, also high schools came into existence, at which

the required academic instruction was based on the same basis of the Holy Scriptures and the Three Forms of Unity. In order to supply the required staff for (especially the elementary) schools, a Reformed Teachers' College has been in operation since 1981.

Finally

According to the Yearbook of the Churches, the Canadian and American Reformed Churches had a membership of 14,722 at the end of 1997 (of which 7,801 were communicant members), spread over 48 congregations, divided into 5 Classes, with 46 active ministers and missionaries, 10 retired ministers, and 4 full-time professors at the Theological College.

For the Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity of the Canadian Reformed Churches, Rev. W. den Hollander, minister of Bethel Canadian Reformed Church, Toronto, Ontario.

¹Paper submitted for the discussion between members of the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity of the United Reformed Churches of North America (UR-CNA) and members of the Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC). 

Third Synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America

Hudsonville, Michigan: June 15-17, 1999

Opening

On Tuesday, June 15, 1999, at 1:30 p.m., the chairman of the calling church, the Cornerstone United Reformed Church of Hudsonville, opened the third Synod of the federation of United Reformed Churches in North America in a Christian manner. A roll call of the delegates was held and the credentials reported on. All delegates assented to the Form of Subscription, after which Synod was constituted.

All delegates, fraternal delegates, observers, visitors, and guests were welcomed. Upon their request to be admitted to the federation, 10 churches had joined through their respective Classes. Synod could give ratification for membership to these churches. Delegates of these churches as well assented to the Form of Subscription. An election of officers took place, resulting in br. Chuck Dijkstra, chairman, Rev. A. Besteman, vice-chairman, while the stated clerk, Rev. Jerome Julien, complemented the moderamen. A time-schedule was adopted, together with a schedule of advisory committees appointed to serve Synod with pre-advice regarding the matters on the Agenda.

Agenda

In his report to Synod, the Stated Clerk spoke about the duties he fulfilled since the previous synod. Besides handling correspondence, carrying out many administrative activities, and coordinating the preparation of this General Synod, the Rev. Julien represented the federation at the Assemblies of the OPC. He informed Synod of developments in the federation concerning local congregations, new ministers received by way of a *colloquium doctum*, others received by ordination, candidates who received license to exhort in the churches. From the correspondence it appeared that the Independent Presbyterian Church of Mexico approved establishing fraternal relations with the federation of the URCNA. Classis Western Canada informed Synod 1999 that

they entered into official ecumenical relations with the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches. Before adjourning this first session, Synod finally received a Financial Report submitted by the churches appointed as Treasurers for Canada and the U.S. During the remainder of the afternoon the advisory committees met in their designated rooms. The undersigned, delegates on behalf of the Canadian Reformed Churches, joined the committee which dealt with the Report from the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity. In this advisory-committee meeting we received the privilege of the floor, which gave us ample opportunity to speak about the progress in the contacts with our churches.

Fraternal delegates

On Wednesday Synod gave opportunity to fraternal delegates to address the meeting. On behalf of the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church the Rev. Ray B. Lanning spoke, Dr. J. DeJong for the Canadian Reformed Churches (for the text of this address, see elsewhere in this issue), Rev. Claude DePrine for the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches, Rev. Alan D. Strange for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Rev. R. VanOverloop for the Protestant Reformed Churches, Rev. M. Koerner for the Reformed Church in the US, Rev. Barry York of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, and Rev. Henk Van Veen for the Gereformeerde Kerken (Vrijgemaakt) in the Netherlands. During the lunch break the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity of the URCNA organized a meeting with all fraternal delegates and observers present. The respective representatives shared with the attendants the latest developments and progress in the area of contacts with other federations. At this meeting as well we had opportunity to discuss the Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity of the URCNA, stressing particularly the seriousness of the objective of this process, namely the intent of full in-

tegration and complete union as expressed in the guidelines for the third phase: Church Union!

Matters before Synod

In its plenary sessions on Wednesday and Thursday, Synod started out by dealing with the overtures on more practical matters such as a Health Insurance Plan and a Voluntary Retirement Pension Plan for pastors, the churches' charitable status, tax exemptions, and Federative Structure (i.e. questions regarding incorporation). Synod discussed the question, first of all, whether some of these matters were not the responsibility of each local church rather than for the federation. Synod shied away from appointing committees for all sorts of purposes, but did see the need for assistance and cooperation. Hence Synod "requested" certain local churches to assist the churches in the federation to investigate the feasibility of a Health Insurance Plan and a Retirement Pension Plan. In view of the confusion among the churches regarding the matter of charitable status, however, Synod appointed an ad-hoc committee to examine the rules of Revenue Canada, while the Stated Clerk was instructed to apply for "Recognition of Exemption" on behalf of the churches in the U.S. An Ad-hoc Committee for Federative Structure appointed by the previous Synod, assisted by a lawyer, ushered Synod through the discussion on incorporation and its purposes. The recommendations of this committee were adopted and a Board of Directors for Canada and the U.S., respectively, appointed.

Synod not only received fraternal delegates and listened to their addresses, its delegates also spoke extensively on matters regarding inter-church relations. Classis Western Canada submitted two overtures to Synod pertaining to the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches. They proposed officially to invite the federation of OCRC's to unite with the URCNA in federative union, and to do so on the basis of the URCNA

Church Order. Should the Synod of the OCRC federation decide to accept this invitation, they proposed to receive them immediately into the federation, without conducting a *colloquium doctum* for their ministers. Synod adopted these proposals and the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity was to prepare this Church Union. In accordance with article 36 of the C.O. of the URCNA, however, Synod decided that this invitation first be submitted to all the churches in the federation for ratification, requiring a 2/3 majority for implementation. This invitation, then, is to be sent to each OCRC consistory with a request that, should they favour such union, they forward it for consideration to their next Classis and Synod. In October 1999 the Synod of the OCRCs will be convened in Cambridge, Ontario.

The Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity served Synod 1999 with an extensive report on its activities. At Synod 1997 the Committee received the mandate to pursue ecumenical relations with twelve selected Reformed and Presbyterian federations of churches. In its actual pursuit the most intense contacts took place with their counterparts of the Canadian Reformed Churches and of the Free Reformed Churches, while one meeting was held with the Contact Committee of the Protestant Reformed Churches. In the case of the RCUS, OPC, and PCA, the contact entailed a presence at their respective assemblies, combined with discussions during such visits. In the case of other federations the contact was mostly by correspondence. The Committee recommended that Synod appoint a separate committee for contact with churches abroad. As part of its mandate the Committee drafted a "Mandate" for itself and "Guidelines for Ecumenicity and Church Unity."

Synod's advisory committee studied and discussed the Committee's recommendations carefully. Synod was advised to adopt all these recommendations. With a few amendments the "Mandate" and "Guidelines" were adopted. In the discussion on the floor the matter of continuity in the contacts developed so far received much emphasis. As a result Synod re-elected (except for replacing elder B. Bruining with elder Chuck Dijkstra) and appointed the brothers who have been so diligently involved in this work during their first term (yet Synod decided that there should be a maximum of two terms only in such a committee). Upon the recommendation to appoint a committee for contact with churches abroad, Synod ap-

pointed Dr. M. Horton, Rev. J. Gangar, Rev. D. Royall, and Rev. R. Sikkema as members of this committee (who have to work with the same guidelines). Synod also decided officially to enter into "Corresponding Relations" with the Canadian and American Reformed Churches and with the FRCs, while it reaffirmed last synod's decision to continue being in "Corresponding Relations" with the OPC.

An interesting discussion developed in regard to the recommendation "to approve the work of the committee." This discussion did not focus so much on the work done in the contact with the CanRCs, as was anticipated in light of their extensive report and "Points of Agreement." Rather, the main focus was on the report of a meeting held with the Protestant Reformed Committee for Contact with Other Churches, on April 26, 1999. According to some of the delegates too many concessions were made regarding the PR positions on "Common Grace" and on the "General Offer of the Gospel." The Committee, however, stressed that in its discussions it is just at the beginning of the process toward church unity, pursuing ecumenical relations, forging an initial perspective on the position of this federation. A motion just "to receive" the report of the committee was defeated. Synod decided "to approve the work of the committee for ecumenical relations without adopting every formulation in its dialogue." Upon arriving at this gratifying decision, the chairman expressed the significance of this moment and requested the meeting to sing from the Psalter the song on Psalm 133.

As far as other matters of ecumenicity and church unity are concerned, Classis Southwest US overtured Synod "to instruct its Committee for Ecumenicity and Church Unity to extend an invitation to other faithful Reformed Churches to begin with them serious discussions with a goal of joining each body into a General Synod (or Assembly) of a single new denomination, each body constituting a particular Synod." Although some delegates suggested at least to investigate the feasibility of this overture, most speakers rejected the idea of an "umbrella synod." Perhaps the ICRC (International Conference of Reformed Churches) could be overtured to establish a North American Chapter for the pursuit of these ideas, or NAPARC (North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council) could be used to facilitate a discussion on this matter, yet the reality of the division among federations and the issues which separate them are such that such a pursuit is beyond the focus of the ecumenicity committee.

As one of the members of the Committee put it succinctly, "It's the Committee's work to pursue uniformity, while the overture tries to accommodate pluriformity." Synod did, however, recommend sending an observer to the next NAPARC meeting, while the new committee for contact with churches abroad should send a representative of the federation to the next meeting of the ICRC.

Other business

On its "Agenda" Synod had other important matters, such as an overture to appoint a committee to articulate a Biblical and Reformed philosophy for missions. This study should include an articulation of the proper relationship between "Word" and "deed" in the mission of the churches; as well, an articulation of a proper Biblical balance between the responsibility of the "autonomous" local church for the carrying out of missions, on the one hand, and a federational responsibility toward cooperation, coordination and mutual encouragement on the other. Synod also was requested to appoint a study committee to investigate the opportunity for missions in Mexico. This study needs to include attention for the question with which Mexican Federation to cooperate, and whether it is feasible to cooperate with other northern North American federations in identifying specific geographic locations for division of labours. Synod indeed complied with these requests and appointed committees with these mandates.

Synod 1997 had appointed a Psalter Hymnal Committee with the mandate "to explore what is required to produce, reproduce, or obtain a Psalter Hymnal." This committee reported on its findings. Their report included a recommendation to appoint a committee to begin the work of producing, for publication, a new URCNA Psalter Hymnal. Meanwhile, however, they recommend, Synod should approve a republication of the 1976 edition of the CRC Psalter Hymnal. In regard to these recommendations, Synod decided to reappoint the Psalter Hymnal Committee (expanded), with as mandate to recommend what songs should be included and what other materials (liturgical forms, Creeds, Confessions, Prayers, etc.). An amendment to its mandate was adopted, recommending that the Committee would consult with similar committees in federations with whom the URCNA has established an ecumenical relationship. Synod also accepted the recommendation to reprint a generic version of the Psalter Hymnal (from

which references to the CRC are to be dropped), which should be used in the meantime. Synod did not accede to the request to appoint a study committee to propose a set of unified liturgical forms. Besides, the request to draft a formulary for the exclusion of members by baptism did not receive sufficient support. Synod decided to continue the (adjusted) use of the Form for Excommunication for that purpose.

Finally, Synod's direction was requested for the adoption of Baptismal Certificates, a Ministerial Identification Card, Classical Diplomas, etc. It was requested to endorse an organization called Reformed Youth Services, producing study material for URCNA

churches. Synod, however, did not want to get into the business of "endorsed causes" again, leaving it up to the individual churches to investigate these materials. After it dealt with some minor issues and clarifications requested by the Stated Clerk, Synod came to a close on Thursday evening. Seeing how many of the matters discussed and decided upon at this Synod still reflected the process of establishing itself as a federation of churches, Synod decided to have its next Synod convened again in two, instead of three, years, namely in the year 2001 (in Escondido, California).

The experiences of the undersigned, fraternal delegates at this Synod, were very positive. Throughout the discus-

sions a strong desire prevailed to deal with all matters in accordance with the Scriptures and the Church Order. Delegates appeared keenly aware of the causes and pitfalls behind developments in the CRC, so that a better way of dealing with all matters was followed. The spirit at the meeting was one expressing the unity in the bond of peace! In his prayer of praise and thanksgiving, the Rev. Ray Sikkema submitted the work of Synod 1999 for a rich blessing to the Head of the Church, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Respectfully submitted by
Dr. J. DeJong (speaker) and
Rev. W. den Hollander (reporter). 

Fraternal Greetings¹

Esteemed brothers and fellow workers!

It's an honour and a pleasure to be in your midst once again at this your third general synod to represent together with my fellow delegate Rev. W. den Hollander the Canadian and American Reformed Churches and to pass on to you our greetings and best wishes on their behalf. Like the neighbour or close friend down the road, we have followed your development from the formation of your federation to this very day, and have witnessed the increased growth and consolidation of your fellowship. We are thankful that you are striving to maintain the true doctrine of the Word of God, the riches of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the bond of peace.

I stand here as a member of the Committee for Ecclesiastical Unity of the Canadian Reformed Churches, and from the perspective of that position I only underscore that this is what we are about. We seek to be confessional churches, faithful to the Reformed standards we have inherited from our forebears. But we also feel called to pursue a true and integral unity with all those who want to live in fellowship with the same gospel we confess, according to the same order that God has allowed us to maintain through the generations, as embodied in the church order of Dort, 1618-1619. We believe that continued reformation means not only going forward according to God's norms, but also continually returning to our birthright and heritage as God in his mercy has allowed us to share it.

We are then eager to pursue integral church unity. It all goes back to our perspective, as voiced in my remarks at your 1996 synod, that our day and age is not really helped with the formation of an ever greater number of Reformed denominations. We need to work for one strong and united Reformed church comprising all those who truly want to maintain the doctrinal standards of our heritage along with its accompanying order.


We believe you're the closest to us with regard to these primary and essential goals. We have spent many hours working with the eastern section of your Ecumenical Relations committee, and from our side I can report that our sentiment is that these meetings proceeded very well and went a long way in helping to understand each other and in forming a clearer picture of each other's doctrinal perspectives and concerns. Some proposals with regard to the progress of church union have come out of these meetings and your Ecumenical Relations Committee will introduce those proposals to you. We hope that you can give your committee the support that is needed to keep these talks moving in a positive direction.

We have agreed to work along with the Guidelines adopted for ecumenical relations by the URCNA, but only with what we see as a necessary qualification, and that is that we can enter Phase 2 of the guidelines only after both parties have agreed upon an established time frame to full and integrated union. We can agree with the sentiment expressed by your fraternal delegate at our

recent synod held in Fergus (1998) that "mutual recognition of each other as true and faithful churches of the Lord needs to take place on the road to full ecclesiastical unity between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the United Reformed Churches," that is "during the process rather than at its conclusion." Yet when it comes to the specific application of this recognition in pulpit exchanges or table fellowship, our conviction has been that we are ready to do this only if and when a specific time frame towards full and integrated union has been adopted by both parties at their broadest assemblies and supported by their respective churches.

We're also here to answer any questions you may have about us and to share with you concerning the important work of the gathering of Christ's church! We are confident that true believers will not simply splinter and live in separate communions, but wherever possible will gather together as one body with the strength He supplies. The church is one! Jesus calls us to be one! He prayed that we all be one! We do hope and pray that this spirit of ecumenicity in its biblical sense may fill your hearts as you carry on your church business at this meeting, also as you deal with your relations with other churches. May God guide you with his Spirit in all your deliberations!

(Dr.) J. De Jong

¹Text of the fraternal greetings passed on to the Synod of the United Reformed Churches of North America held in Hudsonville, MI, June 15 to 17, 1999. Slightly revised. 

THE HI-LITER

News from Here and There

By J. de Gelder

Toronto

In the beginning of May I read a piece in the Toronto bulletin which was perhaps not strictly ecclesiastical, but very worthwhile to take note of. We don't always appreciate the difficulties that some of us are facing, when they stand up for their Christian faith and values in challenging circumstances. Here it is:

NURSES EXEMPTED FROM TERMINATIONS (ABORTIONS):

A six-year battle ended this week for myself and seven other nurses from Markham Stouffville Hospital. In 1993 the hospital instituted a new policy that would allow for second trimester terminations where the child was deemed "incompatible with life." Ten nurses could not comply due to religious beliefs. Shortly thereafter, all ten were constructively dismissed from their positions within the Maternal/Child program (this included Labour and Delivery, Paediatrics, Obstetrics and Special Care (Nursery)).

In 1994 after a long and intensive research into our viable options, we found that very few organizations were willing to help us fight this cause. The end result was a formal filing with the Ontario Human Rights Commission. Five arduous years followed, which included spiritual battles and many ups and downs. The end result was a confirmation this week, that our mediated settlement will now be approved and implemented. The policy that we drafted was accepted with no exclusions. This will allow all nurses at the hospital to be exempted from any form of termination wherein the mother's life was not in danger. A copy of this policy will be posted on the back bulletin board since it is part of the public records from the OHRC.

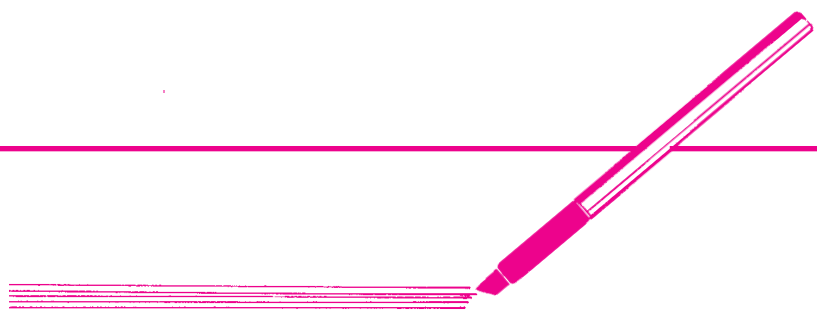
It is important for Christians to be more informed about procedures that are taking place presently in our hospitals. When a couple is expecting, they are sometimes misinformed by an unbelieving physician as to what their options are in cases of "incompatibility with life" or when a woman exhibits symptoms of bleeding or leakage of membranes. Presently there are hospitals performing terminations for genetic defects. We all need to be aware of the similarities between these cases and what occurred during Hitler's reign.

Personally I wish to thank all that have prayed so fervently for this issue over the past years, and also for the words of encouragement that so many of you expressed. God has indeed blessed the fruits of our labour.

Joanne VanHalteren

In another issue of this bulletin Rev. den Hollander gave an update on his contacts with the Rev. Kovacs of the Hungarian Reformed Church of Richmond Hill.

In the past months they have pursued the organization of their congregation. Last year they seceded from the Presbyterian Church of Canada (with which they were affiliated in a Hungarian congregation). Their house-congregation has grown thanks to other members seced-



ing from this modernist congregation. They now have established their own congregation and adopted the Heidelberg Catechism and the Second Helvetic Confession (a beautiful confession, faithfully summarizing the doctrine of the Scriptures!). Rev. Kovacs has been studying our *Book of Praise*, with special interest for the Canons of Dort, the Church Order, and the English version of the Psalms (the Reformed Church in Hungary also uses the Genevan Tunes!). Although their services are still conducted in the Hungarian language, they are discussing a switch to the use of English in the worship-service.

The Second Helvetic Confession was written by the well known Swiss reformer Heinrich Bullinger. Bullinger was Zwingli's successor in Zurich, but in the middle of the 16th century, after correspondence and discussion with John Calvin, he accepted the Reformed view of the sacraments. In 1566 his confession was adopted by the Reformed Churches in Switzerland. It was adopted as an official confessional standard, together with the Heidelberg Catechism, by the Reformed Churches in Hungary at the Synod of Debreczin in 1567. During the first half of the 20th century there were extensive contacts between the Hungarian Reformed Church and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.

Chatham

Liturgical matters are always good for interesting discussions. This is no wonder, for every week again we come together to worship the Holy and Almighty God, so liturgy and worship are things we are all involved in. It is a good thing that we help each other to be aware of what is going on in the worship service, so that we know why we do what we are doing.

In the Chatham bulletin Rev. Versteeg dealt with a question about raising one or two hands in the salutation at the beginning of the service.

The question is actually quite quickly answered when one considers what takes place. With the Votum we confess that "our help is in the Name of the LORD the Maker of heaven and earth." Then the LORD comes to us and says, "you do then not need to be afraid. When you come and confess your help to be in My Name, I give you My peace." God says in one of the salutations "Grace and peace to you from God, the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ." It can be seen as the greeting the Lord Jesus gave to His disciples upon meeting with them in the closed room. Even though they were startled, He gives them His peace. Or the angel Gabriel, who told Mary not to be afraid, "I bring you glad tidings." How does one greet another? With one hand, not so? Therefore, the raising of one hand would appear to be more appropriate. The Benediction in the end of the service is different. That is not a greeting but a blessing laid on the congregation. A blessing is normally laid on with two hands, although it can also be done with one hand as at the time of ordination.

Some may remember what I wrote a few issues ago about the Lord's Supper celebration, and later on a "letter to the editor" responding to my comments. In the meantime the discussion continues, of course, and in the Chatham bulletin we read:

After a lengthy discussion, the council decided to change from the use of the communal cup to individual cups at the Lord's Supper beginning September 1999. The basic reason why this change was made was to uphold the command to "love our neighbour as ourselves" as some brothers and sisters, in their mind for hygienic reasons, are greatly distressed in drinking from a communal cup giving them difficulty in celebrating.

Albany

We turn to Australia, and we learn that another aspect of the Holy Supper had the attention of the consistory of the church in Albany.

Consistory has decided there is merit in considering the needs of those members who are for one reason or another unable to consume alcohol at the Lord's Supper celebration.

Whilst Consistory acknowledges there could be quite a number of members who simply do not normally consume alcohol and perhaps do not even like the taste of it, there is concern for those members who have real difficulty in consuming alcohol and for a well considered reason therefore cannot drink it, even at the Lord's Supper celebration.

In light of the discussions on this subject that have taken place in various church magazines in the past, consistory could see no obstacles to provide non-alcoholic wine at the table.

It has therefore been determined the above mentioned members need to be provided for with non-alcoholic wine so that there may be for them also an "active" participation instead of pretending to take a sip or as in some cases passing the cup on.

Whilst Consistory expects only a few members to make use of this facility it is necessary that those members who cannot drink alcohol at the table advise their respective ward elder so that the minister and the table wardens can make the necessary arrangements.

It is proposed the second table only will serve non-alcoholic wine. Those members who have nominated non-alcoholic wine will need to be seated at the right hand

side of the minister. This means that, for the second table, opportunity will be given for those members who have nominated non-alcoholic wine, to rise and walk to the table first before the other members are invited to take their place at the table.

In order for this to take place smoothly and orderly it is essential you advise your ward elder as soon as possible.

Brothers and sisters let us be thankful for the opportunity to accommodate the various needs that exist looking not only to our own needs, but also the needs of others, Phil 2:4.

The problem as such is serious enough. Many consistories or councils are confronted with this question about wine or non-alcoholic wine (would that be the same as grape juice?) at the Lord's Supper. However – I am not sure whether I would like this solution to the problem.

West Kelmscott

Vacant churches seem to have their problems with the second part of Art. 52 of the Church Order. The church of West Kelmscott is one of these, and we read:

The chairman advises that sequential catechism preaching is not always possible with visiting ministers, and may at times be out of order.

I am sorry, but I have never believed that this is necessary. Sequential catechism preaching is not the responsibility of visiting ministers, but of the consistory. Article 52 says that "the consistory shall ensure. . . ." When a candidate or a student with preaching consent is leading the worship service, it may be difficult, but a consistory should insist – not request – that visiting *ministers* respect the local catechism preaching schedule. Visiting ministers who have been preaching for several years have no excuse for failing to respect this schedule.

One more observation. One of my esteemed colleagues wrote:

We welcome all our guests and visitors in our midst. Please make use of the host families, if you wish to enjoy some hospitality.

What is this? Make sure you catch the host family, or you won't find any hospitality in our congregation. . . ? I hope not! 

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Genevan tunes are European

I would like to respond to Dr. J. De Jong's comments in Reader's Forum of May 28, 1999. In discussing the beauty of our Reformed Psalter, he points out that its "chief mark is a visible and conscious alignment with the early church. Indeed, one might argue that in our adopted psalm melodies we have *links* even to the church of the Old Testament and its songs of worship." (emphases mine, PS) Does the brother really want us to believe that our Genevan tunes have a distinct "eastern flavour?" I am not an ethnomusicologist, but I think most of us will agree that music from the Middle East does not even come close to what we hear in our worship services. To claim a living kinship,

therefore, is no more than the musical equivalent to the depiction of Jesus as a blond and blue-eyed Jew in early children's Bibles.

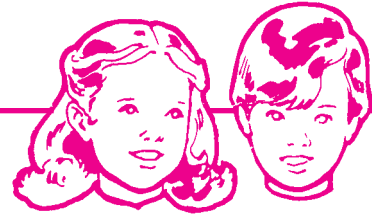
If anything, our music is European. Lyres, cymbals, trumpets of rams' horns, and the like, are nowhere to be found in our accompaniment. But then, is not the point of all of this our shared faith? Not the musical style but the timeless covenantal relationship with the God of the Universe is what aligns us with the church of all ages and places. Missionaries need to realize that, among other things, they are to assist indigenous people in developing worship music that fits their own culture – ethnic hymns that help them express their faith more meaningfully. That's why our people in Indonesia or Brazil, for ex-

ample, are not only trying to teach Genevan tunes to their flocks, because they realize that style and substance are two different things. And that is also why brother De Jong's children prefer to sing the psalms "at a brisk tempo," reflecting the culture and musical tastes of the late 20th century. Idolizing the Genevan tunes or our translation of the Gereformeerde Vrijgemaakte Psalter is wrong and fails to recognize the continuing work of the Holy Spirit. By all means, let us add cautiously but copiously to our psalms and hymns, in praise of our Triune God. Let us allow for musical renewal (organ, drums, and guitars?) to take place so that we can sing to the Lord an old and a new song, and taste that He is good!

Pim Schon, Langley, BC 

OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



Dear Busy Beavers

Holidays are nearly here again. Have you got some plans for all those weeks that you don't have to go to school? Are you going away, either on a holiday, or are you off to visit some family or friends, or are you just staying at home, helping Mom with the housework and Dad with the outside work? Whatever it is that you are doing, make sure you enjoy yourself. But don't do anything that you are not allowed from your parents. Always ask Dad or Mom if you are allowed to do whatever it is you're planning on doing.

May God be with you during your holidays.

Lots of love
Aunt Betty

PENPALS WANTED

Rebekah Barendregt
B0x 47, Grp 4, RR 1
Anola, MB
ROE 0A0

Lorelle Barendregt
Box 47, Grp 4, RR 1
Anola, MB
ROE 0A0

Rebekah is 10 years old. She enjoys reading and doing crafts. Lorelle is 14 years old. She likes to go reading, puzzling, writing, coloring, swimming, biking, enjoys gardening, arts and crafts and playing outside.

PLANTS

By Busy Beaver Lorelle Barendregt

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

FIND: Corn Bean Carrots Peas Celery Chives Lettuce Potato Radishes Tomato

DECIPHER THE WORDS

By Busy Beaver Amanda Vanderhoeven

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

U N S C R A M B L E T H E W O R D S
B C V B O A X J C U O P E J F

UNSCRAMBLE THE WORDS

By Busy Beaver Jessica Bethlehem

1. KWOR _____
2. WROC _____
3. EEPJ _____
4. DEFE _____
5. ELAF _____
6. CKLCO _____
7. RADH _____
8. TSIH _____
9. KOTO _____
10. TAYNGINH _____



FROM THE MAIL BOX

Thank you, Lorelle Barendregt for your letter and puzzle. I'm glad you enjoy living in your new house. It must be great to have so many rooms and so much area around the house to play. And you will be having lots of fresh vegetables over the summer, won't you. Write again, won't you, Lorelle.

Thanks also to Nadine Barendregt. You really are lucky to have three penpals. That should keep you busy during the summer holidays – writing to your penpals. How is your exchange student from Spain enjoying living at your place? I hope he or she teaches you lots of Spanish words. Wouldn't that be fun? Bye for now.

Thank you for your letter, Rebekah Barendregt. You really do enjoy doing lots of things, don't you, Rebekah. Make sure you tell me if you get a penpal, won't you. Bye. 