



*Declare His
glory among the
nations.*

PSALM 96:3A

Clarion
THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

YEAR-END
ISSUE 1995



The Editorial Staff of Clarion wishes the readers a blessed New Year in dependence on our majestic Lord.

We were happy to share the glorious Gospel message via this magazine.

May God continue to grant us His blessings.

Prof. Rev. J. Geertsema, editor-in-chief
Rev. R.A. Schouten, language editor
Rev. G.Ph. van Popta, managing editor
Dr. J. De Jong, co-editor
Dr. C. Van Dam, co-editor

"THE WORLD PASSES AWAY AND ITS LUSTS, BUT . . ."

For many people, this time of the year can be a most dreary and glum one. The ever shorter days and the coming to an end of yet another calendar year seem to accentuate the transitoriness and the gloom of life on earth. There are not a few who seek to drown their melancholy in parties and drink. Even the unbeliever knows that there is nothing lasting here in this world. The years come and go and so do the generations of human beings who inhabit this world.

Yet this is precisely a time of the year when Christians can rejoice in the Gospel and get a renewed sense of privilege and purpose. For indeed, it is true, as the apostle John wrote in 1 John 2:17, this world and its lusts is in the very process of passing away, *but* the one who does the will of God lives forever!

Why does the apostle stress these things? John is in the process of warning his readers that they are not to love the world or anything in the world. He makes clear what he means by "world" when he writes of "the lust of the flesh, the lust of his eyes and the pride of life." These things we are not to love (1 John 2:16). The reason we are not to love them is compelling. These things are not from the Father but from the world (1 John 2:16). The point is that one cannot have it both ways; namely, to love the world *and* to love the Father.

Scripture is clear: "if anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in him" (1 John 5:15).

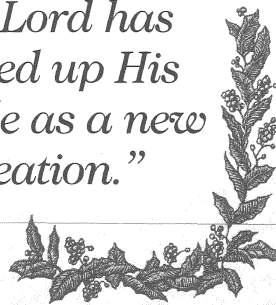
How do we show the love for the Father? By doing His will. By doing what He desires of us. As the Lord Jesus said, "If you love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Such a person does not pass away. "The world and its desires pass away, but the one who does the will of God lives forever!" (1 John 2:17).

As we finish one year and enter a new one, we do well to ponder these truths and renew our commitment to live according to God's expectations for our life. Several points come to mind. The world today is as seductively attractive to the sinful flesh as ever and we must be on our guard constantly. God's Word warns us about "the lust of the flesh." Unbridled sensual satisfaction, that is, lust, is big nowadays. As far as the world is concerned it is quite alright and normal to be driven by lust. The advertising world plugs

into this mindset with a vengeance. But, we are not to love the world and the lust of the flesh. If we do, the love of the Father is not there!

The same can be said of the lust of the eyes, that is the desire to get whatever we see and like. It is materialism, the covetous urge to buy whatever we want. Such an attitude too is almost all-pervasive in our western culture, but it is not godly. It leaves no room for the love of God and His priorities for our earthly goods!

"In a very real way the new creation has already come, for the Lord has raised up His people as a new creation."



The apostle also mentions "the pride of life" (1 John 2:16). By this he means the empty boasting of man and what he has and can all do. This is egoism and the inflating of our own importance. This danger too is very much with us today and it too is a manifestation of the world of sin and corruption.


All these things we are not to love. They are of the world that passes away, yes that is in the process of going now already. The tense used in the original language stresses that, as did also the apostle Paul when he wrote that "the world in its present form is passing away" (1 Corinthians 7:31). What does that mean? It signifies that the darkness of this present age is on the way out and the true light is already shining (1 John 2:8). Now is the last hour (1 John 2:18). We live in the last days, the final

period of time in the history of redemption before the return of our victorious Lord! He is en route. He is coming. At his return, the passing of the old creation will be complete, and the new creation will come in full perfection!

In a very real way the new creation has already come, for the Lord has raised up His people as a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17)! The victory has been won over the evil of this world (Colossians 2:15)! By His spirit He enables His own to do His will. While those who embrace worldliness begin in this life the eternal death of separation from God, those who do the will of the Father begin the eternal life of holy communion with Him (cf. John 11:25-26). The present world may indeed pass away and it does, but those who do the will of God abide and live forever! They will inherit this world, renewed, where all will be directed to the God of glory! This new world will not pass away, but endure (cf. Hebrews 12:26-29).

As we leave one year and enter a new one, let us remember the victory of our Saviour. Also 1996 is a year of our LORD, Annus Domini. Our task is clear. We may and we must identify with our triumphant Lord and be separate from the world of sin and filth. In an unholy world, we are to be holy to God and do His will! That must be at the basis of everything we do in 1996. As a year ends and by God's grace a new one starts, let us, young and old, recognize the very real danger and threat from secularization and worldliness. All this does not bypass us! But, we are not those who have no hope or no defence! We have a living Saviour who

gives true joy in its fullness! Let us recommit ourselves to this Lord and pray for empowerment by His word and Spirit. We are in the world, but not of the world! Let us re-examine our life, lifestyle, and priorities and recommit ourselves and our families to love the Lord and do His will. May it never be said that our faith is only some theological truths and not "flesh and blood." Rather may the truth we love and confess show itself in a walk of life that is close to the Lord.

Such a life testifies of the victory of our Saviour over the world of lust and sin. Yes, He has triumphed! This world *is* passing away and He *is* coming with haste! Maranatha! 



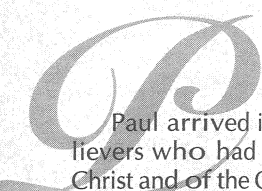
MEDITATION

By G. Ph. van Popta

Read Acts 19:1-10

"... all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord. . . ."

PAUL'S WORK IN EPHEBUS

 Paul arrived in Ephesus. There he met some twelve believers who had very limited knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and of the Gospel. They had not heard of the Holy Spirit. They had only been baptized into the baptism of John the Baptist. Paul instructed them further and baptized them into the Name of the Lord Jesus. When he laid his hands upon them the Holy Spirit filled them. These twelve believers formed the core of the church in Ephesus.

There was a Jewish synagogue in Ephesus. For three months Paul attended it and spoke with the Jews about the kingdom of God. However, many of the Jews began to speak evil of the Way.

The early Christians called the Christian faith "the Way." What a fitting name. Jesus Christ is the only Way to the Father. Through faith in Him the way is opened. At first Paul persecuted those who belonged to the Way (Acts 9:2). Now he spoke boldly and urged people to accept the Way.

Since some in the synagogue began to malign publicly the Way, Paul withdrew from the Jewish congregation. He took those who believed with him and began to teach daily in the hall of Tyrannus. We do not know anything about Tyrannus except that he had a lecture hall in Ephesus. Most likely he was a teacher of philosophy who taught in this lecture theatre. Tyrannus means Tyrant. This could have been a nickname given to him by his students. We can all think of at least one teacher or professor for whom this nickname would be appropriate.

Some of the Greek manuscripts add that Paul taught there from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. Tyrannus would have used it


himself in the early hours before the heat of the day and again in the evening. He made it available to Paul between 11 and 4.

For two years Paul taught daily in this building. The Lord used Paul mightily. All the residents of Asia (i.e., modern day Turkey), both Jews and Greeks, heard the Word of the Lord. Men were taught and trained there. From Ephesus they went throughout the province of Asia spreading the Gospel and establishing churches.

There was much resistance to the Gospel in Ephesus. Evil spirits were rampant (vv. 11-16). There were many who practised magic (vv. 18-20). The temple of Artemis was in Ephesus. The United Brotherhood of Silversmiths whose main source of income came from making silver shrines of Artemis rose up against the Way when they saw their livelihood in danger. Not only did the Jews of Ephesus oppose the Way. The heathen did as well.

But the Word of the Lord could not be stopped. The Gospel confronted everyone. The Word of the Lord prevailed mightily (v. 20). People turned away from magic and idol worship to the true service of the only true God. They became people of the Way.

For decades after Paul laboured there, Ephesus remained a centre for evangelistic activity. The gospel of Jesus Christ continued to radiate from Ephesus.

Do you see what the Lord can do with a small group of believers which meets in rented facilities at unfavourable hours? 



What's Inside

You are holding in your hands the special Year End issue of *Clarion*. A lot of work went into this issue. We sincerely hope you enjoy it.

Rev. J. Vanwoudenberg of Watford has provided the feature Christmas article. He deals with the theme of "Immanuel" and exhorts the reader to show true Christmas spirit – lasting adoration of Immanuel, firm trust and enduring hope.

Dr. N.H. Gootjes writes about the miracle of the virgin birth of our Lord and directs our attention to the Saviour born of the virgin.

Our year end reviewer is, this year for the first time, the Rev. W. den Hollander of Orangeville.

Rev. den Hollander and Rev. R. Aasman of Edmonton report on some exciting happenings at and around the recent meeting of the Alliance of Reformed Churches.

Prof. J. Geertsema responds to Dr. J. de Jong's recent editorial about the General Synod decision on Bible translations.

Dr. J. Boersma of Aldergrove does a book study on G.D. Fee's commentary on 1 Corinthians. This serves somewhat as an introduction to a temporary rubric we will begin in the first issue of next year in which Dr. Boersma will write about the charismatic movement in the light of Scripture.

Around this time of the year, we tend to reflect upon the fleeting character of life. The years fly by. We are speeding toward the end of a millennium. In the lead editorial, Dr. Van Dam exhorts the reader not to love the world which is passing away but to be ready for the return of our Lord.

GvP



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THE SIGN OF IMMANUEL:

as deep as sheol and as high as heaven

(Isaiah 7:10-17)¹

It's time to get into the "Christmas spirit." Such a statement usually means that it is time for all people, regardless of background, religion, political affiliation, or whatever, to be nice to everyone else and to show this by giving presents, hosting parties, etc. For members of Christ, however, the "Christmas spirit" should not be so superficial – something that fades away come boxing day or come January. Rather, the true Christmas spirit is a spirit of humble adoration, appreciation, and acceptance of the ways of the LORD – ways that are higher than man's ways – ways that are higher than the highest heavens and deeper than the deepest seas.

To see this, let us turn to one of the most famous Christmas texts, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and His name shall be called 'Emmanuel' (which means, God with us)." Let us look at this text especially in its original context of Isaiah 7.

The "Immanuel prophecy" came in a time of bitter crisis, turmoil, and conflict for Judah. The very survival of the nation of Judah appeared to be at risk. 2 Chron. 28 recounts what happened during this time: because of the evil deeds of king Ahaz, God first sent Rezin the king of Syria, and then Pekah the king of Israel (both nations to the north of Judah) against Ahaz. Both campaigns had devastating results for Judah: Pekah's army slew 120,000 men of valour in one day, killing even Ahaz' own son, the commander of the palace, and the second in command (v. 7).²

From a human perspective, Israel and Syria had good reason to attack Judah. Both of these nations had just recently felt the oppression of the mighty Assyrian empire. In 738 BC, Tilgathpileser, king of Assyria withdrew temporarily from these regions to fight on other fronts. This gave time for Israel and

Syria to form a league in anticipation of the return of Assyria – a league referred to in Is. 7:2.³ In all likelihood, Israel and Syria wanted to force Judah to join in their league of resistance against Assyria. So far, in spite of all their successful campaigns against Judah, Judah stubbornly failed to join this league: that made Israel and Syria angry.⁴

The Immanuel prophecy comes near the end of this conflict between Judah and her northern neighbours.⁵ Ahaz, however, does not know that this conflict is nearly over. Tidings had reached the ears of Ahaz that Israel and Syria were in league together and they had decided to set up "the son of Tabeal as king in the midst of" Judah (v. 6). Having tired of trying to force the Davidic kings on their side, Israel and Syria planned to set up their own puppet king in Jerusalem. Thus, Ahaz faces a second attack by Israel and Syria, and humanly speaking it is no wonder that "his heart and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind;" Israel and Syria had just recently won decisive victories against Judah; Judah was now much weaker than before, having lost over 120,000 men of valour, and now she was faced with a united offensive! The very future of the house of David appeared to be severely threatened.⁶ Will God's promise to David in 2 Sam. 7:16 hold? – the promise which said, "And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established for ever." Will the son of Tabeal indeed replace the son of David?

Precisely at this time, while Ahaz is pondering what to do,⁷ God commands Isaiah to bring a message to Ahaz for the house of David. "Take heed, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two

smouldering stumps of firebrands, at the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria and the son of Remaliah." Isaiah ends this message with a word of warning in verse 9, "If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established." After these words, there follows an ominous silence. It appears that Ahaz just listened, but said nothing: we don't read of any response of joy to these good tidings.

God then speaks again and pleads with Ahaz in verse 10, "Ask a sign of the LORD *your* God . . ." – the faithful God of the covenant who upholds His promises! Do you have trouble believing this incredible message of deliverance, Ahaz? Well then, ask for a sign – for any sign: "let it be deep as Sheol or high as heaven." I will perform it so that you can see that what I say is true."⁸

Finally Ahaz speaks, "I will not ask, and I will not put the LORD to the test." This pious sounding response does not impress the LORD at all, for it amounts to nothing more than an insult.⁹ Ahaz does not want a sign: he has already made up his mind what he will do – and any sign could only discredit his decision. Ahaz would rather follow his own practical reason than walk in dependence upon God. Ahaz will go to Assyria for help.¹⁰

With this response of Ahaz, we see the words of Isaiah 6:9 coming true, "Hear and hear, but do not understand; see and see, but do not perceive." Those who harden in sin will not believe without seeing – and even when signs are offered they refuse to see. The terrible thing is that this is happening in the house of David! The theocratic king who is supposed to lead God's people in the ways of the LORD, and out of whom is supposed to come the Redeemer, the everlasting King – he is the one hardening in sin! Indeed, the whole house of David had hardened in sin – to the point

that the Word of God now turns against them for their destruction.

Isaiah then responds with devastating words, "Hear then, O house of David, Is it too little for you to weary men, that you weary my God also?"¹¹ God, as it were, is fed up with the house of David! Notice also how previously Isaiah pleaded, "ask a sign of the LORD your God," but now asks, "why do 'you weary my God also?'" Because of his rejection of the LORD, God's Word now drives Ahaz away from the Gospel: God is no longer the God of Ahaz! Ahaz is now in the same position as Saul after he rejected the word of Samuel.¹² God will tear the kingdom away from him and from his house. The Davidic dynasty will come to an end (see also below).

Ahaz wants no sign – but God gives him a sign anyway, a sign as deep as Sheol and as high as heaven. Isaiah continues in verse 14, "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign. 'Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name, 'Immanuel.''" With this text we come to one of the most famous Christmas texts, as quoted in Mt. 1:23. But note that it is given as a sign in the context of judgment on the house of David.

This "Immanuel sign" is an issue of much dispute among explainers. The central question is this: does this sign apply only to the birth of Christ? Many indeed think so. However we should first of all realize that verse 14 is not the full sign. Isaiah continues in verses 15-16, "[Immanuel] shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land before whose two kings you are in dread will be deserted." Isaiah prophesies that before Immanuel grows up, the land of Pekah and Rezin will be deserted.¹³ Thus, if this child was not born in the days of Ahaz, the whole credibility of Isaiah would be called into question. The Immanuel prophecy has to have an initial fulfilment in the days of Isaiah already.

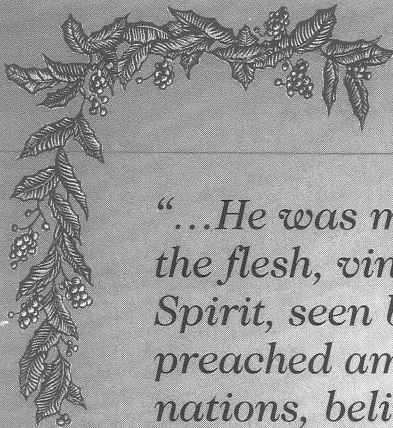
The text simply speaks of a "young woman,"¹⁴ a girl of marriageable age. She was likely a particularly young woman¹⁵ close to marriage, with whom Ahaz would have been familiar. For the rest, the text does not give more detail. Ahaz could know that as surely as this woman became pregnant and gave birth to a son whom she would call "Immanuel," so surely God would not permit Israel and Syria to over-

throw Judah and the house of David. As a matter of fact, before the child matured, the land of these two kings would be deserted. As such, the sign was good news for the house of David – good news which came to fulfillment very quickly after Isaiah's prophecy.¹⁶

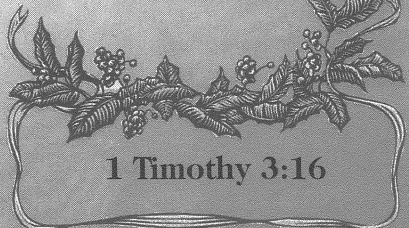
However, that still is not the complete sign. Isaiah continues speaking about Immanuel in verse 15, "He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good." In other words, when Immanuel matures, he will live in an area devastated by warfare: Judah will have been defeated by the king of Assyria.¹⁷ Not only would the sign signify the destruction of Israel and Syria, but also of Judah and the house of David! Because of Ahaz's rebellion the sign now comes with a devastating message – a message that will just as surely come to pass as the birth of Immanuel, and as the defeat of Rezin and Pekah. In the words of verse 17, "The LORD will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father's house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah." The day that Ephraim departed from Judah – that happened in the days of Rehoboam. In that time, the house of David suffered a severe blow: the son of David could only rule over two tribes, whereas David and Solomon ruled over all 12 tribes of Israel. Now, says Isaiah, the house of David will suffer further dev-

astation – and Immanuel is a sure sign that this devastation is coming! This devastation will come by the hand of the king of Assyria.¹⁸ God, the great King, makes a mockery out of Ahaz: Ahaz and the house of David have made up their mind to go to Assyria for help. They are unwilling even to see a sign from God that will help them to change their mind. God, then, will use the very king of Assyria to punish the house of David – and that will all happen before Immanuel grows up.¹⁹

Thus, to the house of David hardened in rebellion, the sign of Immanuel becomes a sign of devastation. As such, however, the sign of Immanuel also becomes a hard sign for the faithful remnant in Judah! After all, this sign spelled the ruin of that royal house that was to produce the Saviour! Imagine the questions of the faithful remnant when the throne of David was deserted! How they must have sung Psalm 89:18 and 20 (in the words of our *Book of Praise*), "Thou hast, O LORD, removed the sceptre from His hand, Cast to the ground his throne, him from Thy presence banned." "O LORD our God, where is thy steadfast love of old, The oath to David sworn with promises untold?" How was the promised redeemer to come now? How was the house of David to produce a royal son? David no longer even had a throne! That's the devastation that the child "Immanuel" pointed to!



"...He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory."



1 Timothy 3:16

Yet, to the faithful remnant, the sign of Immanuel was also a sign of hope. Isaiah says, "Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son. . . ." This woman is simply a young woman or virgin. No mention is made of her father or of her husband that would give her rank: the text simply emphasizes the youthful woman and her little boy – two apparently unimportant and weak members of society. The woman would call her son "Immanuel" which means, "God with us." She would do this even in a time when outwardly the opposite appeared to be the case, when it appeared that Judah and Jerusalem would be completely destroyed by Pekah and Rezin. Thus, the woman is obviously a God-fearing and faithful woman – one who stands in stark contrast to the faithlessness of the wicked Ahaz and the hardened house of David.

"He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good." Yes, by the time the child grows up he will be eating desert food – Judah will be devastated. Yet, in contrast to many, the child Immanuel will survive the devastation! God will preserve His faithful remnant and will still be with them – Immanuel! Immanuel is not only a sign of devastation, but also a sign that God's promises will come to pass! Assyria (and later Babylon) would remove David's sons from the throne, but they would not be able to thwart the royal promises made to David: the promised Redeemer from the house of David would still somehow come!

To the faithful in those days who saw the overthrow of the throne of David, this must have been hard to believe. How could this destroyed house of David produce the great king? Yet, the faithful remnant could behold the sign of Immanuel in the days of Isaiah – "God with us" – even in spite of the rebellion and destruction of the house of David.

Today we know, and may even celebrate how God fulfilled this promise to His faithful remnant. Matthew in a few words records the birth of Jesus Christ from the virgin Mary through the Holy Spirit, and then adds, "All this took place to fulfill what the LORD had spoken by the prophet: 'Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Immanuel' (which means, God with us)."

At Christmas we may rejoice in the fulfillment of the Immanuel sign. God preserved His faithful remnant and brought the redeemer in a most mirac-



ulous way. The virgin Mary conceived and bore a son. No man was involved, not even the house of David. God produced the great king who would deliver His people from the greatest enemy of all, the devil, – and David could only adopt Him as His Son via the humble Joseph who himself was not a king. This king is "Immanuel" – God with us in the full sense of the Word. With the birth of Jesus Christ, God Himself came to dwell among His people. He is the "Amen" of all the promises of God to His people (2 Cor. 1:20).

Ahaz refused to ask for a sign, but God provided a sign anyway – a sign that is deeper than Sheol and higher than the highest heaven – the sign of Immanuel – the sign of the virgin birth.

We usually associate the "Immanuel sign" with the joy of Christmas, but to the house of David hardened in rebellion, the Immanuel sign was a sign of devastation. Such is also the case for the sign of Immanuel today – the sign fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The true joy of the Immanuel sign, the true joy of Christmas is not a general thing. Many today celebrate Christmas, but not the birth of the Christ of Scripture. Rather, they mock at the sign of Immanuel, at the virgin birth: they simply regard it as a nice fairy tale – and refuse to see the truth of it in spite of the clear Word of God. Neither do they rely on that Word of God for their joy and strength, but seek their joy and future elsewhere – just as king Ahaz did. To such who

harden in unbelief, Immanuel and the virgin birth and indeed Christmas is only a sure sign of devastation and destruction. Just as surely as Christmas came, so surely they will be destroyed.

Yet, we may indeed associate the Immanuel sign with the true joy of Christmas when we accept this sign in faith – when we see it as a sign "as deep as Sheol or high as heaven." In this sign and in the fulfillment of it, we see the great faithfulness of our God. God will accomplish His promises to His faithful people. To us the future of God's kingdom and our share in it may often seem so hopeless, but let us behold the virgin birth! Humanly speaking there was no way for the Saviour to come. David's kingship had been overthrown. Aside from that, how could corrupt man ever produce a perfect mediator? God's ways, however, are higher than our ways – He sent His own Son by means of the virgin Mary! Who else would have thought or accomplished something like that?

The true Christmas spirit is a spirit that beholds the sign of Immanuel, and then puts complete trust in the mighty ways of the LORD. That's the Christmas spirit – the spirit that humbly views the sign of Immanuel with adoration – the spirit of calm and firm confidence in our mighty covenant God. That's the spirit that will lead to deep and profound joy – joy in knowing that God will preserve His faithful remnant – a joy that will not disappear when the

Christmas season is over – a joy that will not disappear even in the midst of sorrow and pain and disappointment – a joy that is steadfast and sure because it comes from God alone.

Let us behold the sign of Immanuel – a sign as deep as sheol and as high as heaven.

¹Some sources, other than language sources, used in the preparation of this meditation are:

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²When Pekah returned to Samaria with all the captives of Judah, he obeyed a prophet of the LORD and let them return to Judah (2 Chron. 28:8–15). That, however, did not spell the end of Israel’s oppression of Judah.

³This league most likely included the Philistines and the Edomites as well, for when Israel and Syria came against Judah again, we read in 2 Chron. 28:17, “For the Edomites had again invaded and defeated Judah, and carried away captives.” Then follows verse 18, “And the Philistines had made raids on the cities in the Shephelah and the Negeb of Judah, and had taken Bethshemesh, Aijalon, Gederath, Soco with its villages, Timnah with its villages, and Gimzo with its villages; and they settled there.”

⁴In Is. 7:4, Isaiah speaks of the “fierce anger of Rezin and Syria and the son of Remaliah” (who is Pekah).

⁵In Is. 7:4 Isaiah calls Pekah and Rezin “two smouldering stumps of firebrands:” the fire is not just starting, but is on the verge of extinction.

⁶This aspect is highlighted in Is. 7: both verses 2 and 13 mention not just “Ahaz,” but the “house of David.”

⁷Isaiah meets Ahaz at the “end of the conduit of the upper pool on the highway to the

fuller’s field” (Is. 7:3). Ahaz evidently came here in order to inspect the condition of Jerusalem’s water supply – something vital to the survival of a city under siege.

⁸Here we see the great long-suffering of our God. Ahaz by this time had been king for quite a while: his wicked policies were known. He stubbornly walked in the ways of the kings of Israel. He even made molten images for the Baals. He even offered his sons up as a burnt offering to the gods (2 Chron. 28:1–4). And yet God pleads with this son of David! What patience our God has!

⁹Ahaz, in his answer, even alludes to Deut. 6:16: there Moses warned Israel in the desert, “You shall not put the LORD your God to the test, as you tested Him at Massah.” At Massah or Meribah Israel murmured against the LORD when there was no water saying, “Is the LORD among us or not?” (Ex. 17:7). Such “putting the LORD to the test” was a matter of distrust. Via Isaiah, however, God graciously offers Ahaz a sign to help him believe: to accept such an offer would not amount to “testing the LORD,” but to a humble acceptance of God’s aid. Ahaz, under a cloak of piety, twists Scripture in order to defend his insult against God.

¹⁰Cf. 2 Chron. 28:16.

¹¹In Is. 1:14 God complained, “Your new moons and you appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them.” Now God complains of being weary with the house of David.

¹²At that time Saul cried to Samuel in 1 Sam. 15:30, “return with me, that I may worship the LORD, your God” – not my God, but your God.

¹³One who knows how to “refuse the evil and choose the good” refers to one who has come to the age of moral discernment – one who has come to maturity. Compare, for instance, with Deut. 1:39, where Moses speaks of the “little ones” and the “children” – “who this day have no knowledge of good or evil. . . .”

¹⁴Some explainers suggest that the child would be a child of Isaiah. However, Isaiah already had children, and his wife could not be called a virgin when Isaiah spoke these words. Others suggest that the woman is “Abi,” the mother of Hezekiah. However, this solution also has its problems. According to 2 Chron. 29:1 Hezekiah was 25 years old when he began to reign and Ahaz only reigned 16 years. Thus by the time of our text, Hezekiah was already born. Besides that, Scripture never calls Hezekiah “Immanuel.”


¹⁵The original has “the” young woman.

¹⁶The sign of the woman and the child Immanuel proved true: in 2 Kings 16:9 we read that “the king of Assyria marched up against Damascus, and took it, carrying its people captive to Kir, and he killed Rezin.” Then in verse 29 of the same chapter we read, “In the days of Pekah, king of Israel, Tiglath-

pileser king of Assyria came and captured Ijon, Abolbethmaacah, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali; and he carried the people captive to Assyria.” Israel and Syria lost Rezin and Pekah within three years of our text. Twelve to thirteen years later, before the child Immanuel would have come to maturity, Samaria was completely destroyed and the people were taken into captivity.

¹⁷To understand what the phrase, “He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good” means, we have to look ahead to some verses further on. In verse 17 God tells Ahaz that He will send the king of Assyria against Judah. The rest of the chapter, then, speaks of the horrors of that day when Assyria comes against Judah. “In that day the LORD will whistle for the fly which is at the sources of the streams of Egypt, and for the bee which is in the land of Assyria” (v. 18). “In that day the Lord will shave with a razor which is hired beyond the River – with the king of Assyria – the head and the hair of the feet, and it will sweep away the beard also” (v. 20). Then comes verses 21–22, “In that day a man will keep alive a young cow and two sheep; and because of the abundance of milk which they give, he will eat curds; for every one that is left in the land will eat curds and honey.” “Curds and honey are the food of desert dwellers – and that will be the food of Immanuel when he grows up. By the time the child grows up, he will live in “that day” mentioned in verses 18, 20, 21, and 23 – that is the day when the king of Assyria will come into the land of Judah.

¹⁸Isaiah makes this point very dramatically in verse 17, “The LORD will bring upon you and upon your people and upon your father’s house such days as have not come since the day that Ephraim departed from Judah – the king of Assyria” – the very king on whom Ahaz was relying for deliverance from Pekah and Rezin.

¹⁹In due time, the devastating message of the Immanuel sign proved true: In 2 Chron. 28:20 we read, “So Tilgath-pileser king of Assyria came against him, and afflicted him instead of strengthening him. For Ahaz took from the house of the LORD and the house of the king and of the princes, and gave tribute to the king of Assyria; but it did not help him.” By the time Immanuel grew up, Hezekiah would have replaced his father. In his days Sannacherib, king of Assyria, took every fortified city in Judah – only Jerusalem remained (2 Kings 18:13). Indeed, what a blow to the house of David! Because Hezekiah was godly, the LORD granted years of respite, but Babylon would finish off what Assyria began: with the fall of Zedekiah, David’s throne was gone! 

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE VIRGIN BIRTH

The absence of the virgin birth

The virgin birth is a great miracle. It is questionable whether we can speak of lesser and greater in connection with miracles. Is the healing of Malchus' ear less of a miracle than the stilling of the storm? We do not know what powers would be needed to reattach a severed ear. Neither do we know how the Lord Jesus was able to command the wind and the sea so that they were quiet in an instant. Since we do not know what is involved in performing miracles, we cannot really compare them to determine which would be the greatest. Therefore, we cannot really say about the virgin birth that it is the greatest miracle, for how can we fathom one, let alone compare several?

We can say, however, that among all God's miracles the virgin birth is the greatest miracle as far as importance is concerned. The healing of Malchus' ear prevented an ugly scar and saved Malchus from a loss of hearing. The stilling of the storm saved disciples from a situation that looked life threatening. Both miracles show something of the character of Jesus' saving work. But the virgin birth marks the way in which our Saviour came into this world. Our salvation is dependent on this miracle.

It is, therefore, surprising that the story of the virgin birth is only told in two gospels, Matthew and Luke. The other two gospels, Mark and John, do not mention it. Neither do Acts or any of the New Testament epistles pay specific attention to it. There are only two clear witnesses, recorded by Matthew and Luke.

Is it a serious matter that the virgin birth is not mentioned explicitly in the other gospels or in the rest of the New Testament? Calvin does not seem to think so. In his commentary on the gospels he simply combines the

gospels. First he deals with Luke's record of the virgin birth, then with Matthew's. When he weaves Mark's beginning into the life story of Christ he seems not to be aware of a serious omission in this gospel.¹

Our age has said farewell to this innocence. R. Bultmann quite rudely calls the virgin birth a legend which sprang up in Hellenistic Christianity. This legend was unknown to Paul. Mark and John have a different view on the origin of Jesus than do the other evangelists.² Behind the approach of Bultmann and others is the denial that the New Testament, as the Word of God, is a unity. They see it as a collection of books in which different authors present their views concerning Jesus. None of these views have been revealed; instead, they are all the result of human contemplation on the story of Jesus. We have a fundamental disagreement with this approach. Both Luke and Matthew present their record as a statement of fact, not as the interpretation of Hellenistic Christians.

It will not do for us, however, to simply go back to Calvin and accept without question the fact that the virgin birth is only referred to in two of the four gospels. Once raised, the problem why this miracle is not mentioned by other authors must be addressed. If their silence does not imply that they were ignorant or possibly even rejected this, then why did they not refer to it?³

Mark and John

It is not really surprising that Mark does not speak of the virgin birth, for he does not say anything at all about Jesus' life before John the Baptist pointed Him out to the people. It was obviously Mark's intention to describe Jesus' life from the moment He came forward to begin his public ministry. This would agree with the early tradition that

Mark recorded the apostle Peter's witness concerning Jesus Christ.⁴ The virgin birth does not belong to the events Peter had first hand knowledge of.

For understanding John's gospel, the purpose as it is described in the end must be considered:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name (20:30, 31; see also 21:24, 25).

In accordance with this purpose, John introduces Jesus as the Son of God (1:1-18) and continues to speak about the things he and the other eye-witnesses had heard and seen of Jesus Christ. Moreover, his gospel gives the impression that John consciously tries to avoid duplicating what has already been said in other gospels. Within his own purpose John had no reason to speak of the virgin birth.

When considering the gospels of Mark and John, we should not overlook the fact that they do not contradict the virgin birth. These gospels do not speak of a human father of Jesus.⁵ In fact, what they say is quite consistent with the virgin birth. Mark introduces Jesus as the Son of God (1:1) and John records that Jesus taught that God is His Father (ch. 5). Both gospels indicate that Jesus is more than an extraordinary man.

The silence of Paul

It will surprise no one that no indication of the virgin birth can be found in the epistles of James, Jude, John and Peter. Not only are these epistles very brief, they do not really deal with Jesus Christ's earthly life. Neither could a reference to the virgin birth be expected

in Hebrews and Revelation, because of their particular goal.

The situation is rather different for Paul, however. Thirteen of his epistles are still extant, and among these are quite substantial writings. Could we not expect Paul to deal with the virgin birth, or at least to refer to it? Some have found an indication of the virgin birth in Gal. 4:4:

When the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law. . . .

However, it is difficult to see how this text could be used in this discussion. Paul does not say more than that Jesus Christ was born of a woman. He did not even state that the woman was a virgin. Neither does this text give any indication whether he thought that Jesus had a human father. His statement neither denies nor affirms the virgin birth. The only thing Paul wanted to stress is that Christ, by being born from a woman, was born under the law. For this reason, Jesus could redeem sinners who are born under the law.⁶

The question remains why Paul did not write about the virgin birth. Two general answers have been given. The first points to the fact that Paul focused on the saving work of Jesus Christ. In connection with Christ's salvation work Paul needed to emphasize the importance of Christ's death and resurrection. The period of Christ's public ministry is hardly mentioned, even though it must have been known to Paul.⁷

The second answer reminds us that Paul mentions facts from Christ's life only when there is a specific occasion to speak of these. The institution of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11) would never have been mentioned if this sacrament had not been abused in Corinth. And had Paul not been forced to mention witnesses of Christ's resurrection (1 Cor. 15), would we have concluded that Paul did not know of the resurrection? Paul says here that facts such as the resurrection belonged to the "first things" he taught to the churches. Gresham Machen, the able defender of the virgin birth, even turns Paul's silence to his advantage. The fact that the virgin birth is not mentioned in his letters could mean that this was so universally accepted within the churches that no defense was needed.⁸

These are valid observations, and yet they do not satisfy. It is true that Paul's epistles hardly quote any words spoken by Jesus during His earthly ministry and they do not describe the things He did during His three years of public

ministry. The virgin birth, however, cannot be equated with Christ's works or words, for it indicates His origin. When Paul pays special attention to the end of Christ's earthly life, why could he not give equal attention to the beginning of Christ's life? His coming into the world was crucial in His salvation work. Actually, Paul does speak on several occasions about His coming into the world, for example, in Rom. 1:3 and Gal. 4:4. Yet, not even once does he mention the virgin birth. Christ's birth, surely, deserved the attention of the congregations as much as His death.

The place of the virgin birth

This brings us back to the gospels. Can we possibly find in the records of the virgin birth the reason why Paul saw no reason to mention it? We need another look at the gospel of Luke. The announcement of the virgin birth begins with the angel saying to Mary: "You will conceive in your womb and bear a son." Three statements are added, one of which is that Mary's Son will be called the Son of the Most High.

Mary does not respond to much of what the angel says. Instead, she comes back to the first words of the angel. She asks how in her present situation she can conceive a son? The angel answers that no man will be involved. He says

The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the holy child to be born will be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35)

Mark the word "therefore." How can this child of Mary truly be called the Son of God? Because no man was involved in his conception but God brought Him to life through His Holy Spirit.

The virgin birth, then, is not the main issue but only the means. It is the miraculous way in which God brought His Son into this world. The virgin birth is a great miracle but, like all God's miracles, it does not want to draw attention to itself. It is similar to the healing of Malchus' ear or the stilling of the storm. These events do not focus on the healing or the quieting work but on what Christ achieved by means of his miraculous power. He healed even his enemy and righted an injustice. He is able to protect his disciples from the greatest dangers. In the same manner, the virgin birth is subservient to the astonishing result that the Son of God becomes a man.

Now we can understand why there was no need for Paul to mention the virgin birth. For all its miraculous character, far surpassing everything we think is

possible, the virgin birth is in the final analysis merely God's way of bringing his Son into the world. It is the means for the central fact of God's salvation work – bringing his Son into the world for our salvation. And Paul certainly emphasizes the coming of God's Son.

The absence of the virgin birth in Paul's epistles should not lead us to consider this a legend made up by Hellenistic believers. It has to be maintained as a fact, but in its subordinate place. Paul's silence is a reminder for us not to focus on the virgin Mary but on the Son of God who, by way of his birth from the virgin, became our Saviour.



¹Calvin's remark when he first introduces Mark's record may serve as a proof that he did not see any problem in Mark's not having the birth story: "Though what we have hitherto taken out of Matthew and Luke is a part of the Gospel, yet it is not without reason that Mark makes the beginning of the Gospel to be the preaching of John the Baptist" *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists* (repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984) vol. 1, 1873. Calvin is not an exception. J.A. Bengel, an important exegete of the 18th Century, notes on Mark 1:1: "The specific goal of this evangelist is, as he himself professes it in the title, to describe the beginning, history, reasons, progress and end of the gospel about Jesus Christ the Son of God," see *Gnomon Novi Testamenti* (8. ed. P. Steudel; Stuttgartiae: Steinkopf, 1891) 173.

²R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951) vol. 1, 131; the same opinion can be found in W.G. Kümmel, *Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973) 124 (on Luke and Matthew); 165 (on Paul) and 271 (John). Their view has exercised influence in several directions. It underlies J.N.D. Kelly's explanation of this section of the Creed, *Early Christian Creeds* (3. ed.; New York: Longman, 1983) 11f. and the denial by H. Berkhof in his *Christian Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 292f.

³There is no reason to deal specifically with the book of Acts. This is the sequel to the gospel of Luke (see Acts 1:1) and it records later history. The occasional speeches summarized in this book are not intended to be complete.

⁴This information of Papias has been preserved by Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical Histories* III, XXXIX, 15.

⁵We need not deal with John 6:41: "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know." This statement was made by opposing Jews who obviously did not know of the virgin birth. John records their statement without indicating his own views. See also D. Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1981) 370.

⁶See e.g. the commentary of H. Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Church of Galatia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953) 155f.

⁷Y. Feenstra, *Geboren uit de maagd* (Kampen: Kok, 1959) 15.

⁸J. Gresham Machen, *The Virgin Birth of Christ* (2. ed.; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985) 262ff.



IS CREATION THE SAME AS PROVIDENCE? (PART 3)

J.H. Stek on providence

In the two previous article, it was shown that the distinction between creation and providence is present in the confessions and is expounded by theological studies. After all this, it is a surprise to see a theologian, J. Stek, question the distinction. He knows that he goes against a long and strong tradition. He even acknowledges that the distinction can be found in Scripture. He points to Hebr. 1:2 and 3.¹

It is a fact that this text makes a distinction between creation and providence. Speaking about the importance of God's Son, this text says first that He is involved in the work of creation ("a Son . . . through whom also God created the world," v. 2), then, that He is involved in providence ("upholding the universe by his word of power," v. 3).² This is not the only text where the creation and providence occur together as two different actions of God. To give an example from the Old Testament, we may note the prayer of Ezra: "Thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and thou preservest all of them."³ It would seem that the question has been decided before we began. Scripture clearly teaches the distinction between creation and providence.

Why, then, does Dr. Stek question whether the Bible keeps creation and providence distinct? He has two reasons. The first reason is that the term "to create" is not limited to the work of creation. The second, more important reason is the story of creation in Gen. 1. Let us have a closer look at these two reasons.

We have already come across the opinion that the word "to create" is used for more than the creation of things at the beginning of the world. Let us look at some examples. Ps. 104:30 says about the creatures:

When Thou sendest forth Thy spirit, they are created; and Thou renewest the face of the ground.

We may think, too, of the well-known text from Ecclesiastes (12:1):

Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth. . . .

In texts like these the words "to create" cannot mean the creation of Genesis 1.⁴

What does it mean when the Bible says that God "creates" something? The verb is used when God brings about something new. A very clear example is found in Is. 48, verse 7:

They are created now, not long ago; before today you have never heard of them

lest you should say: "Behold, I knew them."⁵

The characteristic of newness is also apparent in the examples given above. Ps. 104:29 says that the creatures die and return to dust when God takes away their breath. Through God's Spirit, however, they are created; the creatures reappear on earth.⁶ When Ecclesiastes speaks about the "Creator" of men, the writer means God as the one who makes man.⁷ The word does not speak of the first creation, but of the making of every individual man. Even then it refers to something new that then appears on earth.

The extent of the newness of what God creates depends on the context. In the context of Gen. 1, which begins with the earth as being without form and void, the obvious meaning of "to create" is making something absolutely new. The use of the verb in Gen. 1 supports the view that there is a distinction between creation and providence.⁸

Stek's view on Gen. 1

The second, and more important point for Stek's questioning of the distinction between creation and providence is Gen. 1. He thinks that the distinction between creation and providence is questionable because of Gen. 1. The chapter repeatedly uses the expression: "Let there be. . . ." This command cannot be limited to

origin. There is not an additional decree: "Let the created be preserved." In other words, the expression, "let there be," must combine creation and providence.⁹

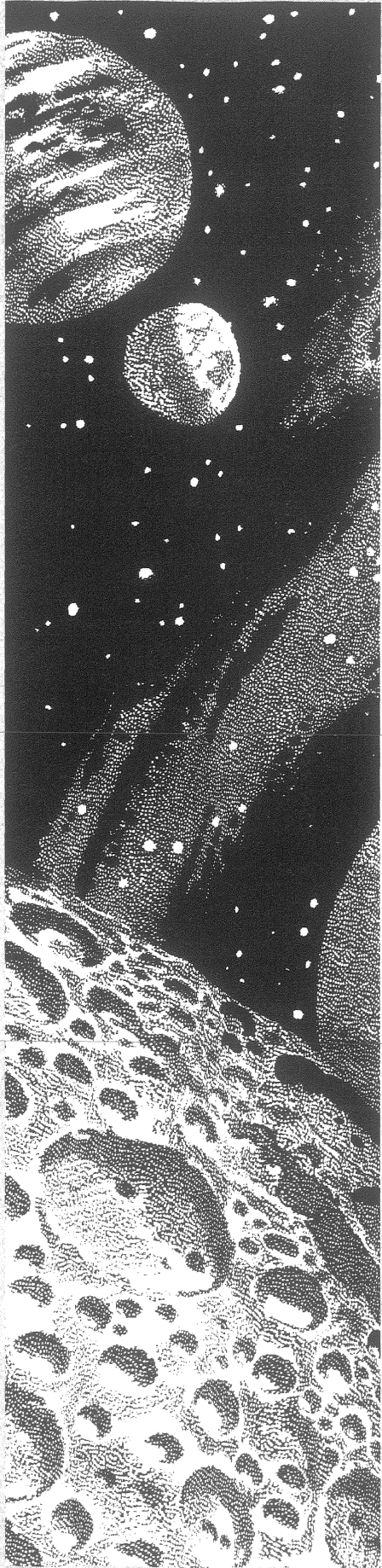
Think of the first command: "Let there be light," Gen. 1:3. This decree originates, preserves and governs light. The decree of God is enduring in its effects. Or think of the word: "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear," v. 9. This command is not limited to the coming into existence. By this decree the seas are even now kept in place.¹⁰ Thus, Stek's main argument is that God's commandments to the earth in the beginning prove that creation is not different from providence.

In answer to this it could be questioned first of all whether the command: "Let there be . . ." combines creation and preservation. The chapter gives a different impression. The fulfilment of God's commandment, "Let there be light" is indicated with the same verb: "And there was light." This clearly refers to creation. The light that was not, is now shining.¹¹ That the light was created to stay is obvious, but need not be expressed explicitly.

Creation and providence in Gen. 1

More important is that creation is mentioned separately in this chapter. Look at the creation of the second day. First there is the command: "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters," v. 7. The bible continues with: "And God made the firmament. . . ." The expression "God made" refers to creation as distinct from providence.

Or consider the fourth day. Here creation and providence are even distinguished explicitly. God first gave the command: "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years," v. 14. This is followed by a



separate mention of creation: "And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; He made the stars also," v. 17. After that God assigns places to these creatures: "And God set them in the firmament of the heavens to give light upon the earth . . .," v. 17. Their task of providing light for the earth belongs to God's government, as a part of God's providence.

Things are different with respect to the animals, but here, as well, a distinction is made between creation and providence. God gives the command: "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the firmament of the heavens," v. 20. When God executes his own decree the Bible first says: "So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves. . . ." This refers to the beginning, to creation. In verse 22, however, we read: "And God blessed them, saying, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.'" This is part of providence. The continuation of the animals is ensured, not by giving eternal life to the animals but by propagation. A careful reading of the whole chapter reveals that the distinction between creation and providence is present in Gen. 1.

Stek's reason for equating creation and providence

More needs to be said, however. The question cannot be suppressed why it is so important for Stek to state that the distinction between creation and providence is not indicated in Gen. 1? Since he recognizes the fact that the distinction occurs in the Bible, why does he insist that it is absent in Gen. 1? The reason is that it is important for Stek to see creation and providence as basically the same. If there is no difference between God's action of creation and God's action of providence, then creation takes place according to the same mechanics that are at work in providence.

This is, indeed, the view of Stek. He says that the creation decrees had been at work for billions of years before the universe had the form which the writer of Genesis perceived.¹² This immensely long period is needed to make room for a very slow and gradual development that took place under God's creation decrees. In other words, creation is not distinct from providence, but God created the world by means of the processes of providence.¹³ This must be the reason why the distinction between creation and providence has to disappear.

Creation and providence cannot be equated

This view of creation is contrary to Scripture. Scripture shows in three different ways that a clear distinction exists between the processes of beginning and continuation. First of all, this distinction is very clear in the description of the third, fifth and sixth day. God speaks to the earth that it bring forth vegetation. Out of the earth something new is formed – plants. These plants, however, yield seed, and the fruit trees bear fruit in which is their seed. All seeds are "according to their own kind." When the seeds are sown new plants of the same kind will grow up. No longer will the earth bring forth plants. Instead, the plants will be self-propagating.¹⁴ The continuation of the plants differs from the way in which they came into existence.

The same can be observed on the fifth day. The waters bring forth the fish, and at God's word birds fly in the heavens. Here we notice creation – God made new kinds of beings. From then on, however, the processes of providence will take over: "And God blessed them, saying: 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth'" (v. 22). Under God's blessing fish and birds will multiply themselves.

This is even clearer in the creation of man. Gen. 2 gives more information about man's creation. God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. He also made Eve from a rib of Adam, Gen. 2:7, 22. That was the extraordinary beginning of mankind. God also indicated, however, that the rule for the continuation of mankind would be different: "And God blessed them, and God said to them: 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it. . . .'" (Gen. 1:28). God did not continue forming men from the dust. Instead, the human race would be built from children formed in the womb (Ps. 139). Creation differs from providence.

In the second place, the story of creation in Gen. 1 indicates in yet another way the difference between creation and providence. This chapter begins with the creation of heaven and earth, Gen. 1:1. Every new creation begins with: "And God said. . . ." In some cases the making is included, in other instances the making is mentioned separately.¹⁵ However, Gen. 2 explicitly states that this work came to an end: "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them" (Gen. 2:1). On the seventh day God had

finished His work which He had done. The seventh day receives a special place "because on it God rested from all His work which He had done in creation."¹⁶

Gen. 2:1 indicates that the period of creating ended with the sixth day, and that it was followed by a period which was different in character. Gen. 1, therefore, not only says that God's making of His creatures is different from God's preserving them, but this chapter also says that the first part of God's work was finished in six days. This part is called: "the work which God had done in creation." God's creative activity during the six days is different in character from what He still does.

In the third place, the Scriptures confirm that God's work of creation is different from what followed. We can think of several indications:

- Scripture repeats the teaching that God ended His creation work on the sixth day (Gen. 2:1) in Ex. 20:11 and 31:17.

- Scripture teaches that God's creation work belongs to the beginning of the world. Ps. 102:25 says: "Of old Thou didst lay the foundation of the earth" (see also Mark 10:6; Heb. 1:10, Mt. 19:4,8; 24:21; 2 Pet. 3:4).¹⁷

- Scripture emphasizes the extraordinary character of the work of creation. Ps. 33:6 says: "The heavens were made by the word of the Lord." Rom. 4:17 says: "God calls into existence the things that do not exist. Heb. 11:3 says: "The world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made of the things which do not appear." God created by speaking.

Conclusion

It can be readily admitted that God's work of providence did not begin after the six days. God upholds everything. Without Him nothing can exist. "In Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). This work of upholding and governing all things began right after each thing was created. We can agree with everyone who wants to emphasize that creation cannot be separated from providence.

We have to maintain at the same time, however, that the work of creation differs from the work of government. This distinction, confessed in our Reformed Confessions, is clearly taught in Scripture. The distinction between creation and providence is part of our faith and, as such, it must be maintained.

However, this distinction is not important merely for a correct view of the origin of the world. It is also very relevant in the lives of the believers. It is

important to maintain that God's creation work at the beginning is different from His every day work of upholding the created world. The doctrine of creation shows us that God not only works with what is there, but even made what was not there. The doctrine of creation emphasizes that God has done more than the usual and unusual things we experience in this world today. God is not bound to what is there. He can make gnats from the dust of the earth (Ex. 8:16) and children of Abraham from stones (Luke 3:8). We should never limit God to the possibilities of this world. Recognition of the distinction between creation and providence doubles our praise for God's work in the past and increases our trust in God for today.

It is also the basis of our hope for the future. God does not just guide the processes present in the world, in the end He will make all things new. There will be a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21:1). The God who can create, can also re-create the world. That is why we can believe in hope against hope (Rom. 4:18), and be assured of things hoped for, but not seen (Heb. 11:1). Since God is the God of creation our hope for the new creation is well founded.

¹J.H. Stek, "What Says the Scripture," 244: "... these theologians seem unaware that their sharp distinction between creation and preservation, however conceptually neat and theologically useful, might be a distinction they were sometimes reading back into the Bible. It can hardly be doubted that the distinction itself is present in Scripture (cf. Heb. 1:2-3). . . ."

²The difference between creation and providence is not only expressed in the different verbs, but also in the different tenses of the verbs. 'Created' is in the aorist indicative, indicating an action in the past; 'upholding' is a present participle, indicating continuation. See on this text e.g. Ph. E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 39 and 45. ³Other examples are Ps. 65:5 and 6; Ps. 104:5-9 and 10ff; Job 38:4-11 and 12ff; Acts. 14:15 and 16f.

⁴See the full list in Stek, "What Says the Scripture" 246: "Ps. 104:30 (God's "creation" of each new generation of living things), Ps. 102:18 (the "creation" of each new generation of worshipers), Eccl. 12:1 (God's "creation" of each individual; cf. Job 10:8-12; 31:15; 33:4; 40:15; Ps. 139:13-15; Prov. 22:2; Is. 43:7; Mal. 2:10), Is. 43:1 (God's "creation" of Israel; cf. v. 15; 27:11; 44:2,24) and Is. 54:16 (God's "creation" of the smith and the destroyer)."

⁵See e.g. the article on *bara'* by Th. E. McComisky, in R. Laird Harris, ed. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980) 127.

⁶It is not immediately clear what creatures are meant here. According to J. Ridderbos there are two possibilities. V. 30 speaks either about the renewal of plant life in spring,

or about new generations of men and animals that replace the generations that succumb; see J. Ridderbos, *De Psalmen* vol. 2 (COT; Kampen, Kok, 1958) 493.

⁷A very uncommon word is used, see on the word, F. Delitsch, *Commentary on the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes* (tr. M.G. Easton; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968) 403. The word has, according to Delitsch, the same meaning as the word "Maker" in Job 35:10; Is. 54:5; Ps. 149:2.

⁸That "to create" is not exclusively used for the first creation has been noted before, see e.g. H. Bavinck, *Gereformeerde dogmatiek*, vol. 2, 565 and G.C. Berkouwer, *The Providence of God*, 65. This has never led to the conclusion that creation and providence cannot be kept apart. The word "to create" is not to be confused with the concept of creation. ⁹See J. Stek, "What Says the Scripture?," 246.

¹⁰J. Stek, "What Says the Scripture?," 247.

¹¹The commandment is expressed as a jussive of the verb "to be": there must be. "And there was" is the imperfect of the same verb. Gispén notes that God's commandment is executed punctually, see W.H. Gispén, *Genesis* (COT; Kampen: Kok, 1974) vol. 1, 48.

¹²J. Stek, "What Says the Scripture?," 249: "That the Creator's creation decrees had been at work for billions of years (as humans count time) before the physical universe had attained the form he perceived and become the arena of human history as he knew it was not known by (or made known to) the writer of this creation narrative. Nor was that his concern (or the concern of the Spirit that "moved" him). Cosmological and geological "history" in the modern scientific sense were not in his purview. . . ."

¹³Stek does not make it clear whether this process still continues. One sentence seems to indicate that it does, when Stek speaks of "a world that every day, in all its order, vitality, and progressive unfolding, incarnates God's creation words issued 'in the beginning'," "What Says the Scripture?," 249.

¹⁴J. Stek explains the words "Let the land produce vegetation" as follows: "These forms of the creation word for living things are rather a reflex of the common observation that plants and trees spring from the ground and that since at death animals and man return to the dust, they must have come from the dust," "What Says the Scripture?," 248, footnote 73. This explanation does injustice to the text. In the first place, it is overlooked that the words "let the land produce" are followed by a reference to the seed, showing that there is a difference between the first growth, without seed, and all following growth, from seed. More importantly, he attributes a word of God to the common observation of man. Together with creation as extraordinary work of God, revelation as extraordinary communication from God, is not taken into consideration.

¹⁵The realization of God's plans is sometimes described as: "God made" (Gen. 1:7,16,25), in other cases as: "God created" (Gen. 1:21, 17f.).

¹⁶W.H. Gispén says that the verb, translated as "to rest from" is used in Hebrew for "to stop with," see his *Genesis* (COT; Kampen: Kok, 1974, 85f).

¹⁷See G.C. Berkouwer, *The Providence of God*, 66 who also refers to the expression "from the beginning of creation" in Mark 10:6; Heb. 1:10; 2 Pet. 3:4; Mt. 19:4,8.

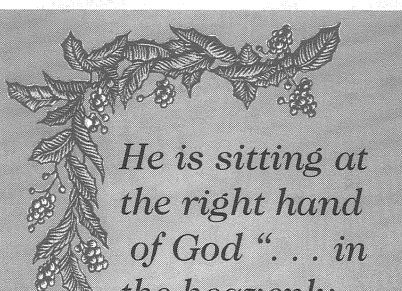
YEAR END REVIEW 1995

The year 1995 is coming to its completion. Again, it was a Year of the Lord. He continued His work in order to bring it to its consummation. All authority in heaven and on earth belongs to Him, the Head of the Church, our Lord Jesus Christ. He is sitting at the right hand of God "... in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and He has put all things under His feet and has made Him the head over all things *for the church*, which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all." (Eph. 1:21-23)

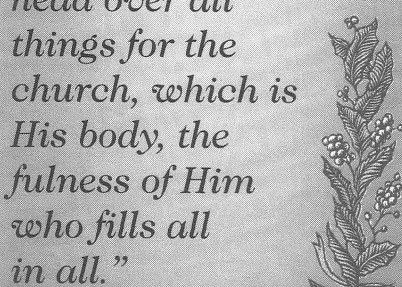
The Year End gives good opportunity to review many important aspects of life: political, economic, cultural, and social reviews abound. For those who live their life in this world in the light of the gospel of salvation in Jesus Christ, however, Christ's church gathering work forms the parameters for all the events. In the framework of His perspectives and progress with His Catholic Church we may also place our own humble and simple lives. The way He is going with our life of thankfulness to Him, with our service in this world and in His local congregations, and in the advancement of His kingdom through the great variety of activities in which we are involved, it all obtains eternal significance as He pursues it in the execution of His plan and purpose from eternity!

Ministry of the Gospel

First and foremost among the ways in which the glory of Christ, our Head, manifests itself, is by the outpouring of His Holy Spirit. By His Holy Spirit and Word, He governs His Church, He pours out heavenly gifts upon us, His members, and He defends and preserves us against all enemies. Also during the year



He is sitting at the right hand of God "... in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come; and He has put all things under His feet and has made Him the head over all things for the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all."



Eph. 1:21-23

1995 He continued gathering His Church by His Spirit and Word, in the unity of the true faith, a church chosen to everlasting life. This faith He works by the preaching of the gospel and strengthens by the use of the sacraments. Hence the maintenance of the ministry of the Gospel and the promotion of it, has priority in our thankful review of His blessed dominion during the year 1995.

No wonder the work of calling ministers of the Word to fill existing vacancies among our churches receives ongoing attention among the membership. Of these vacant churches, the church at Abbotsford, at Aldergrove, at Edmonton Immanuel, and at Smithers saw the vacancy filled. In the case of Aldergrove, their new pastor and teacher, Dr. J. Boersma, received his first charge. However, with the Rev. R.A. Schouten's move to Abbotsford, the Rev. G.A. Snip's move to Edmonton, and the Rev. J. Huijgen's move to Smithers, their respective former congregations (viz. at Calgary, Lincoln, and Fergus) were faced with a vacancy. Among them, the church at Calgary already extended a call to the Rev. J. Moesker, the church of Lincoln to the Rev. W. den Hollander and Cand. J. Plug, and the church of Fergus to the Rev. D.G.J. Agema, who could not see their way clear for the acceptance of these calls. Meanwhile, also the Church at Toronto is pursuing its work of calling a minister, having received declines from the Rev. Cl. Stam and Dr. J. Visscher. In view of the great increase in numbers and pastoral work among the congregation of Burlington-West, they extended a call to Cand. J. Plug as well, whose way, however, led to the church of Lutten, the Netherlands instead. Evidently, this movement of ministers will continue, as will the agony for ministers who are put in the position of considering such calls. Considering that the

writing of this review (in the beginning of November) needs to be at the editor's on time, it will not be complete, yet it is sufficient in its observation of ongoing activity for the ministry of the Word in the various congregations. In the consideration of the calls, too, the prayers of ministers and members alike express our dependence upon the Head of the church, Who directs His servants and their work.

In His sovereign good pleasure, the Lord worked out His plan and wisdom by using such servants as He called to be His instruments. At some point, however, their ministry comes to an end. This happened for the Rev. G. Van Dooren on September 5th, when his Master called him home. Till the very last Lord's day of his life the Lord enabled him to proclaim the glad tidings of salvation! Then He promoted him to glory! Throughout the federation of churches and beyond gratitude and commemoration were expressed for the blessings the Lord gave His churches through his ministry. With his passing away the circle of pioneer ministers (and their spouses) in our federation became smaller again; this could be observed in the passing away of Sr. Stel as well. Meanwhile, among the retired ministers, the Rev. P. Kingma continues struggling with ill health, even though he remains sustained and comforted in that struggle by the faithfulness of his heavenly Father.

Congregational life

Although physical buildings for the weekly gatherings of the congregations may not be of primary importance, yet for the continuity of His work and for the faithful calling to a specific address of His church, the Lord does bless us in the way of facilities too. Many a congregation needs to pay attention, time, and money to one building project for this purpose or another. The church at Ancaster could occupy its beautiful new premises at Shaver Road. Also the church of Calgary made a move to better (and much cheaper) facilities, accommodating their Tyndale school as well! In Barrhead, too, the Lord gave room for further growth, after they purchased on excellent terms an existing church building in town. In Rockway, Watford, Aldergrove, and Taber, building committees (and fund raising committees) are working hard to erect a building of their own as soon as feasible on the properties they acquired for that purpose. Church growth and the membership of quite a number of elderly in



Dr. C. Van Dam, Dr. J. De Jong, Prof. J. Geertsema, Dr. N.H. Gootjes of the Theological College, Hamilton, ON.

Brampton, keeps the attention of Council and congregation focused on the expansion of their building as well. All in all, projects of this nature bring the congregation together, hopefully, in order to facilitate a good environment for the weekly worship of the Lord and the mutual edification of His people.

The actual worship services remain the centre of congregational life as it transpires in these buildings. In the church of Hamilton, the liturgy in these services received renewed attention. New features were discussed and implemented, among which the responsive use of the Amen by the whole congregation seeks to promote greater congregational involvement as well as the revival of liturgical practices in Bible times. Perhaps more for practical than for principle reasons, the church at Burlington-West is presently celebrating the Lord's Supper in two consecutive services in the afternoon. The church at Winnipeg, too, continues to discuss the possibilities for congregational worship and the limitations of their present facilities. Seeing that in this broken world quite a number of members could be prevented from attending the services, it may be counted among the blessings of the Lord in our present day technical advancement that these worship services can be taped for video presentation in the homes and rooms of such members. Thus, in several ways the ministry of the Gospel and the worship of God's people remains the living heart of the life in the congregations.

How vibrant and vital this life may be depends a lot on the active participation of the individual members. The mutual upbuilding by way of combined

efforts of Scripture study and of being hands and feet to one another gives evidence of the life giving work of the Holy Spirit in the midst of the congregations. It is, therefore, gratifying to see the regular activities of study societies and of the various committees continue throughout the federation. Among them, special attention may be given to those activities which enhance the life of our challenged brothers and sisters. In this respect we must mention gratefully the continued blessings received through such organizations as Anchor Home, while also the "Rays of Sunshine" from our sr. Ravensbergen in *Clarion* merit thankful reception by all sick, handicapped, elderly, and other members alike! Help, however, is not always needed for long-term illnesses, so that such auxiliary activities as "Helping Hands," established in the church of Toronto, may also serve as an excellent example for general imitation. For the benefit of the wider federation of churches, the "Home Registry Project" at Cloverdale certainly is filling a serious need as well. The same may be said, though, for other ways in which churches and members work together for the general well-being of the churches of Christ in our country. It is a good thing, therefore, that young people's study-weekends and rallies, get-togethers of existing and newly established Student Fellowships, League Days, Office Bearers' conferences, ministers' workshops could proceed as usual. In order to facilitate such activities, promote them, and equip the general membership for their involvement, we certainly may not take the continued services of ILPB, *Clarion*, *Perspective*, *In Holy Array*,

Horizon, Diaconia, Reformed Music Journal, for granted either! Where we may see a changing of the guard in the editorial committees of such publications, we thankfully observe the Lord's faithfulness and steadfast love in providing new talents in every generation, in supplying fellow servants again and again who are ready and willing to employ their gifts for the upbuilding of the communion of saints near and far!

Of course, much more could be mentioned concerning the activities which could proceed unhindered under the blessed government of our Lord during this past year. It is, therefore, also a good thing when local churches celebrate anniversaries of their congregations, that they come together to reminisce about this. Well, the church of Burlington-East received that opportunity at its 40th anniversary, while the church of Lincoln did the same after 25 years of blessed existence. It is only by the grace of God and through the constant involvement of our Head, the Lord Jesus Christ, that in such a celebration the many blessings can be enumerated for congregational thanksgiving and praise!

Theological College

Essential for the continuity in the ministry of the Gospel and indispensable for the preservation of the faithful preaching in the churches, is the well-being of the Theological College. Deeply rooted in the hearts of our reformed community, therefore, is the love for "Hamilton," where we may "entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" the proclamation of the gospel of grace in Christ Jesus! We must be grateful sincerely, indeed, that the work of our professors at the Theological College could continue regularly and unhindered. So often we hear people mention it with heartfelt gratitude that "the young men 'produced' by our College turn out to be excellent in their preaching, teaching and ministry!" For the maintenance of this thankful affection for this central institution among our churches, it was an important exercise of public relations when the principal, our Prof. J. Geertsema, toured Alberta and Manitoba, conducting "College Evenings," delivering speeches, leading workshops, etc. The same bond of love became evident as well when word went around that its former professor of Diaconiology, Dr. K. Deddens, suffered a stroke while visiting his children in B.C. We may thankfully note that the Lord has granted him

some recuperation, and that this process of restoration is continuing.

As far as the "output" of the College is concerned, we could witness the graduation of four students during this past year. While one of them ended up in a teaching position in Carman, and the first time graduate with a *Diploma of Theological Studies* took up a position in the Mission among the Natives in Smithers, B.C., the two students going into the ministry saw their calling in congregations overseas: Cand. J. Plug in Lutten, the Netherlands, and Cand. J. Poppe in West-Albany, Australia. Thus in these students leaving our College we see the increasing international significance of our Theological training! Not only in them, but also in the admittance of student Frank Dong from Northern China (sponsored by the deputies for the ministry in Australia!) this international element persists. Grateful mention, therefore, must be made of the generous financial support of the Australian sisters churches as well. Finally, the churches may enjoy the progress of studies in the edifying word spoken by three of our fourth year students. The practical training of the students at our College receives the special attention of the Board of Governors presently as well. May the prayers for "our" College be multiplied, as they seek to implore the Lord of the Church for His blessing on its labours with a view to the progress of the ministry of the Word in this world!

Mission

Although sometimes the question is raised whether there will be places for the students at our College at which to proclaim God's Word, due consideration of the needs at the various mission fields shows that there already the work abounds and the places appear time and again! During this past year the Rev. P.K. Meyer left for the Netherlands after having served as a missionary in Brazil for 17 years. Also from the mission field in Irian Jaya, the missionary for Toronto, the Rev. H. Versteeg, after 18 years of faithful and fruitful service, repatriated to Canada. Meanwhile the churches in Canada and the Netherlands were informed that the Rev. R. Sietsma is available for call (due to health concerns and family circumstances).

In spite of many hardships and difficulties, however, the mission work by our churches was blessed by the Lord during this past year again. From the reports of our missionaries we learn that they hold the treasure of the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ "in earthen vessels." (2 Cor. 4:6, 7) This apostolic truth appears not only in the ongoing struggles with his sight of the Rev. R. Boersema, but also the Rev. J.G.R. Kroeze and E. Venema shared with us their physical and mental struggles due to a different climate and culture, while the same weakness occurred in the ups and downs of the Rev. Rumi or in the struggles with home-sickness and



Rev. C. Van Spronsen and br. J. Kuik in front of the nursery in São José.

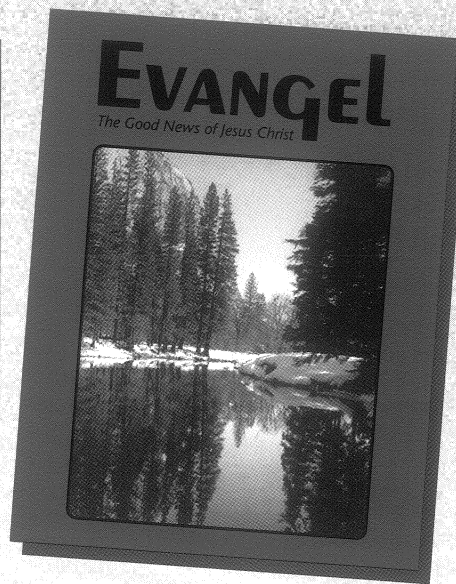
high demands of the Togeretz-team as well!

Nevertheless, their reports continuously inform us about the smaller and greater victories of the Lord. They may relate to us time and again a growing interest and response to the proclamation of the Gospel. In foreign mission as well as on the home front, this element was at the heart of all mission reports. In the Mission among the natives in Smithers and Fort Babine, the work was blessed under the competent leadership of the mission worker br. D. Boersema, which was continued after July 1st by br. Hilco de Haan. Also through the good cooperation between the missionaries and their auxiliary helpers, the work progressed well during 1995. In view of the latter, we may thankfully note that also the H. Plug family has settled in Brazil as Mission Aid workers in Maceio, and that the J. Kuik jr. family can observe how much of a difference their work may make in a country where medical care takes place quite often at appallingly low levels! Yes, in this respect, too, we may learn from Jake's report that in matters of mission and mission aid, we must learn to think in terms of generations (both in workers and recipients!), in terms of decades! Is it not indeed so, that in this way the catholicity of the church and the steadfast love and faithfulness of our covenant LORD, together with His long-suffering and forbearance, become rich sources of amazement and adoration for the greatness of our God and Saviour!! His faithfulness is firm, His covenant changes never!

Evangelism

It is in line with this observation of faithfulness that it merits to consider the work of Evangelism committees, of publications such as *Evangel*, of radio broadcast, etc. As we started this review with a reference to God's execution of His plan and purpose from eternity, it has pleased our God in His sovereign counsel to implement this plan in the way of the preaching of the Gospel in the mission field, calling those who are far off by way of personal witness, outreach, evangelization, Bible distribution, and other means. What an incentive this revelation gives to the activities of Evangelism! Hence, we may thankfully share in a review and survey of these activities as well.

One of the more common and established forms of outreach, the local V.B.S. has become a well-known fea-



ture of this work. Also during this past year that work could develop and proceed. Efforts to come to a more unified approach among our churches developed in Ontario by means of sharing programs, organizing evaluation evenings in Burlington-East for those involved in this V.B.S. work, and otherwise.

Meanwhile the creativity of the workers in this home mission seems to be abounding! Several congregations are engaged in Christmas caroling. The church of Cloverdale is one of the churches participating in the Reformed Christian Ministries' evangelization by means of correspondence courses. The church of Winnipeg has developed a project of "Welcome Wishing:" they visit new-comers on the block and share with them information about the congregation; thus, they extend to them an invitation to the congregation and accompany this invitation with a flower. In Langley a Youth Drop-in Centre came in operation, seeking to bring street young people in that area together. In Toronto a Saturday Morning Bible School is in operation, which serves also as follow-up program for Summer V.B.S. The church of Hamilton is still studying the possibility of a home missionary for the Hamilton area, while they are considering to organize gatherings for Arabic-speaking people in their area. In Burlington-East members of all three Burlington congregations participated in a Summer Outreach Program in a local park, where they conducted a "Singing in the Park." Besides, we should mention as well the Areopagus Project at the campus of the University of Alberta, in which students reach out

to fellow students with Bibles, reformed literature, and the like.

The fruit of all these labours certainly depends on the working of the Holy Spirit, yet the joy of being instrumental in His work and the knowledge that our Father's providential ways are miraculous and the awareness of Christ's ongoing church gathering work make this work a blessing for recipients and participants alike. Especially when we may see this work continue in a global context, and include in our scope the work of the Middle East Reformed Fellowship, of the Can. Ref. World Relief Fund, or the work of people such as br. James Baartse for the Wycliffe Bible Translators, then we know ourselves privileged as we could become involved in one way or another in this evidence of Christ's glorious progress of the Gospel! Add to this the revelation that the Lord loves a cheerful giver for this work and eagerly awaits our prayers for these purposes, then we can thank our Triune God for allowing us to work for the glory of His Name during 1995! Considering also the persecutions which children of God living in China, Sudan, Iran, and Iraq encounter, let us make the most of our freedom, continuing to pray for these persecuted believers as well.

Other events

Among the great variety of ecclesiastical events and meetings, the General Synod always plays a major role in the life of the federation of churches. During 1995 a General Synod was held in Abbotsford, B.C. Already during the months prior to this General Synod the churches become active in preparing contributions for the discussion of the current issues. The Councils in the churches study the reports of the various committees and deputies in our federation. Others concern themselves with appeals or otherwise in preparation to such a major assembly. One of the "weightier" reports serving the churches and General Synod this time, was the report of the Committee for Bible Translations. Seeing that a review of this event is found in the official press release by General Synod's executives, we do not need to mention all its important issues and decisions.

However, when we consider in this review all the activities of the local churches, we may certainly mention the numerous contacts made with Independent and Orthodox Reformed churches, as also with Free Reformed churches. In view of these contacts, several churches were seeking advice

*Delegates to
General Synod,
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from their Classes in order that they would proceed in these contacts with serious regards for the federation. In this context also the contact between the church of Ottawa and the Église Réformée de Québec (a federation of 6 French Reformed churches since 1988) merits special notice! Since the legwork done by Ottawa was adopted by Classis Ontario North and recommended to General Synod, a committee was established to further this contact in order to come to ecclesiastical fellowship in the future, the Lord willing!

A review of this nature would not be complete without mentioning God's rich blessings in the field of education. As instruments used by the parents for a combined and unified approach to the covenantal education of their children, the schools granted to us by the Lord have proven their blessed value for many years already. This past year, the William of Orange School in Surrey, B.C., could even celebrate its 40th anniversary! However, also the teachers the Lord has granted over the years, who have been such a blessing in this work, could celebrate an anniversary: in Fergus, the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the C.R.T.A. took place during the C.R.T.A. convention held there. Very appropriately for this occasion, they had as theme for this convention the call to "Shout for joy!" Its program for inspiration to joyful teaching included the surprise visit of one of the pioneers for Reformed education in

Canada, br. Ewoud Gosker, of Meppel, the Netherlands.

Meanwhile, the instruction at our schools could continue in peace and quiet, and the Lord in His grace provided teachers as well. In spite of sometimes heavy financial burdens, the moneys for the maintenance and expansion of school buildings were provided by the Lord! This held true for the major fund-raising project organized for the expansion of Guido de Brès High School; it also facilitated the opening of a new elementary school in Attercliffe, Ontario! Our Covenant Can. Ref. Teachers' College also became involved in such fund-raising activities, viz. its highly necessary expansion project. The Teachers' College has been a

rich source for the ongoing supply of teachers; also in 1995 its graduating class added even 10 new teachers to the corps of educators for our reformed elementary and secondary schools! In an effort to maintain the high standards of reformed education, as well as to match the requirements in public school teachers' training, the Board of the Teachers' College changed its three years program into a two year program, which will require two years of university credits as prerequisite for admission. The one year program remains as it is. Under the blessing of the Lord we may hope and pray to receive Government recognition in some or all provinces, so that the steady flow of teachers, trained for covenantal education according to the Scriptures, may continue and increase.

Reviewing for one article such a large amount of activities, events, endeavours, and developments, the experience is overwhelming as we observe all the blessings of the Lord! We should realize also, that these blessings are poured out **by grace** alone! Only **by faith** are we able to comprehend that our heavenly God and Father works these blessings in a service in His Kingdom. Through a walk in the covenant with Him, **according to the Scriptures** only, **Christ alone** made all this progress possible. All glory, thanks, and honour in the Canadian **Reformed** churches, therefore, should be to our Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit!



The church at Assen-Zuid, the Netherlands has extended a call to the

Rev. R. Sietsma

of Maceió (Hamilton) for the mission work in Curitiba. Rev. Sietsma has accepted this call.

FROM THE PUBLISHER

THE CONFESSION OF OUR HOPE

A How quickly the year draws to an end! At least, that's my perception, although perhaps much different from that of the younger generation. But a year, and the duration of it, is a year. At year's end we are moved to reflect on what has passed. Our inclination is to dwell negatively on world and church events. And, indeed, much of what goes on is wearisome. Yet, there is hope! Hope from the Faithful One. There is something beautiful about celebrating in remembrance, at the end of the year, the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ so long ago. A booster! A booster for His children to carry on unwaveringly, to lift drooping hands and weak knees, to make straight paths for one's feet, also for the year ahead. I wish to leave with you, for reflection, this Scripture passage:

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. Hebrews 10:23-25.

Encouragement

Stirring up one another to love and good works is the aim of the editors of *Clarion* as well. It is their hope that they have been able to do so in their writings. We thank Dr. J. De Jong, Prof. J. Geertsema, Rev. R. Schouten, Dr. C. Van Dam, and Rev. G.Ph. van Popta for their commitment and diligence in filling the pages of *Clarion*. Our gratitude goes to all contributors to the magazine. There has been no lack of copy. We encourage you all to continue sending in the fruits of your pen or keyboard in the year 1996 as well. Thank you, readers, for continuing your subscription, and for letting us know your thoughts in various ways. We are encouraged, and thankful to the Lord, to be able to maintain our readership and even grow slightly from year to year.

Administration

Most of the copy is now being submitted electronically, assisting us greatly in the production of *Clarion*. If possible, submit your contribution via modem or on a disk along with a printout.

The family announcement pages will undergo a transformation as per January 1. We will condense these announcements and yet keep them clearly distinguishable for keepsake purposes.

The advertising rate will increase to \$7.50 per column inch. Because of the smaller format for family announcements, the above-mentioned increase will not result in higher prices per submission.

The *Clarion* subscription rate will remain the same for Canadian subscribers. For both U.S. and International subscribers we need to make some catch-up provisions in the rates, since we do not enjoy special mailing privileges.

Greetings

This issue attests to the bond of families and of the Family of brothers and sisters in the Lord. I join them in wishing you a blessed Christmas and New Year.

W. Gortemaker

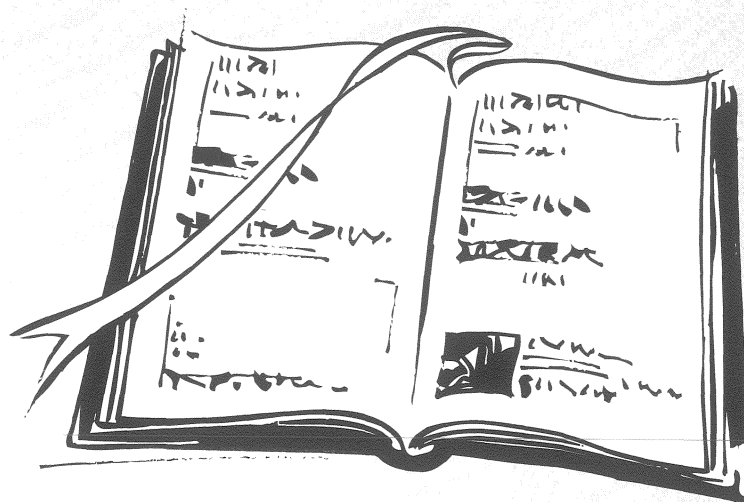
A FEW ADDITIONAL REMARKS ON THE NIV

I "Complete freedom"

In the previous issue of *Clarion*, Dr. J. De Jong makes a few remarks about the decision of Synod Abbotsford 1995 regarding the new Bible translation. The first remark deals with the second recommendation of the synod: to "leave it in the freedom of the churches if they feel compelled to use another translation." Dr. De Jong writes that in this second recommendation "the Synod has opened the door to complete freedom with regard to which translation a church may wish to use." The formulation of this second recommendation is very unfortunate. Taken by itself (*Acts*, p. 37), it gives ground for Dr. De Jong's conclusion of "complete freedom." However, the decision of the Synod of Smithville 1980 still stands.

This Synod decided "to recommend to the churches to use this translation [=RSV, J.G.] in the worship services and for catechism instruction in order to come to uniformity of practice" (*Acts*, Art. 111, C, 2a; p. 79). This synod added these words: "To leave it in the freedom of the Churches to use the K.J.V. and the N.A.S.B., if the acceptance of the Revised Standard Version meets with insurmountable objections" (*Acts*, Art. 111, C, 3).

Since this decision of "Smithville" is not rescinded by any later synod, also not by the Synod of Abbotsford, Abbotsford's second recommendation must be read in combination with the third recommendation of the Synod of Smithville. Thus, the words "another translation" are restricted to the R.S.V, the K.J.V., and the N.A.S.B. In this way, both the restriction and the freedom expressed by Synod Smithville are maintained.



II A negative judgment regarding the RSV

Synod Abbotsford stated (Consideration D; p. 37) that it "cannot continue to recommend the use of the RSV. . . ." Dr. De Jong is "surprised that the synod adopted the view of the Canadian study committee so easily and so uncritically." For "this approach incorporates . . . a methodological fallacy." The ground is that "each translation should be judged in the way it presents itself," including the NIV, and that, therefore, the concern of "the influence of liberal scholarship on the translation" of the RSV should not be brought forward in an examination of the NIV. Dr. De Jong's aim is to defend a continued use of the RSV. He writes that, in spite of the liberal influence, "on the whole the RSV has been a translation which has been accepted and used with benefit. . . ."

One can differ in opinion about what is justified in the method of judging a new Bible translation. Of course, first of all "each translation should be judged in the way it presents itself." In my opinion, however, this does not make it unjustified to investigate whether (grave) objections regarding a

previous translation (in this case, the RSV) still count or fall away with respect to new translations (in this case, the NASB, the NKJV, and the NIV).

The fact remains that the Report of the Bible Translation Committee to the Synod of Abbotsford has clearly shown in Appendix 5 (pages 107-126) that most cases of objections against wrong translations in the RSV as consequence of the influence of liberal scholarship fall away with the NASB, the NKJV, and the NIV.

III Judging the NIV

Dr. De Jong's next argument for abiding by the RSV is a matter of judging the NIV "in the way it presents itself." He quotes a paragraph from the preface of the NIV. When Dr. De Jong discusses the expressions in this quotation, he says that here a "new principle of translation is introduced which . . . threatens our understanding of the way in which the Scripture ought to be understood and transmitted." For "with the notions of 'thoughts' and 'meanings' as mentioned above, we are entering into a rather uncertain world. There is an implicit step back from the text to the *thought* of the text." Dr. De Jong

believes "that the principles used to translate the Scriptures are questionable, to say the least," and that "a move to the NIV is not a move for the better but for the worse." Dr. De Jong adds, "the Bible should not be transferred to our thought patterns and syntax, but our thought patterns and syntax should be molded to those patterns which we find in the Bible!"

Dr. De Jong's statements are quite strong and might give the impression that the decision of Synod Abbotsford took God's Word away from the churches. However, he does not see the matter so seriously, since he wrote that he will not appeal because "a poor decision is not necessarily a wrong decision."

Now, it is true that the emphasis in the NIV's method of translating is less on the words and the exact grammatical form of the text of Scripture than was the case with the KJV. The NIV's emphasis is indeed more on the meaning of what is expressed by the words. I, too, prefer the older method. The new method leads more easily to a translation that is too free. However, (1) we are not dealing here with an absolute difference in method but with a difference in gradation, and (2) we have to ask whether the practical result is a generally inaccurate, and therefore, unacceptable translation.

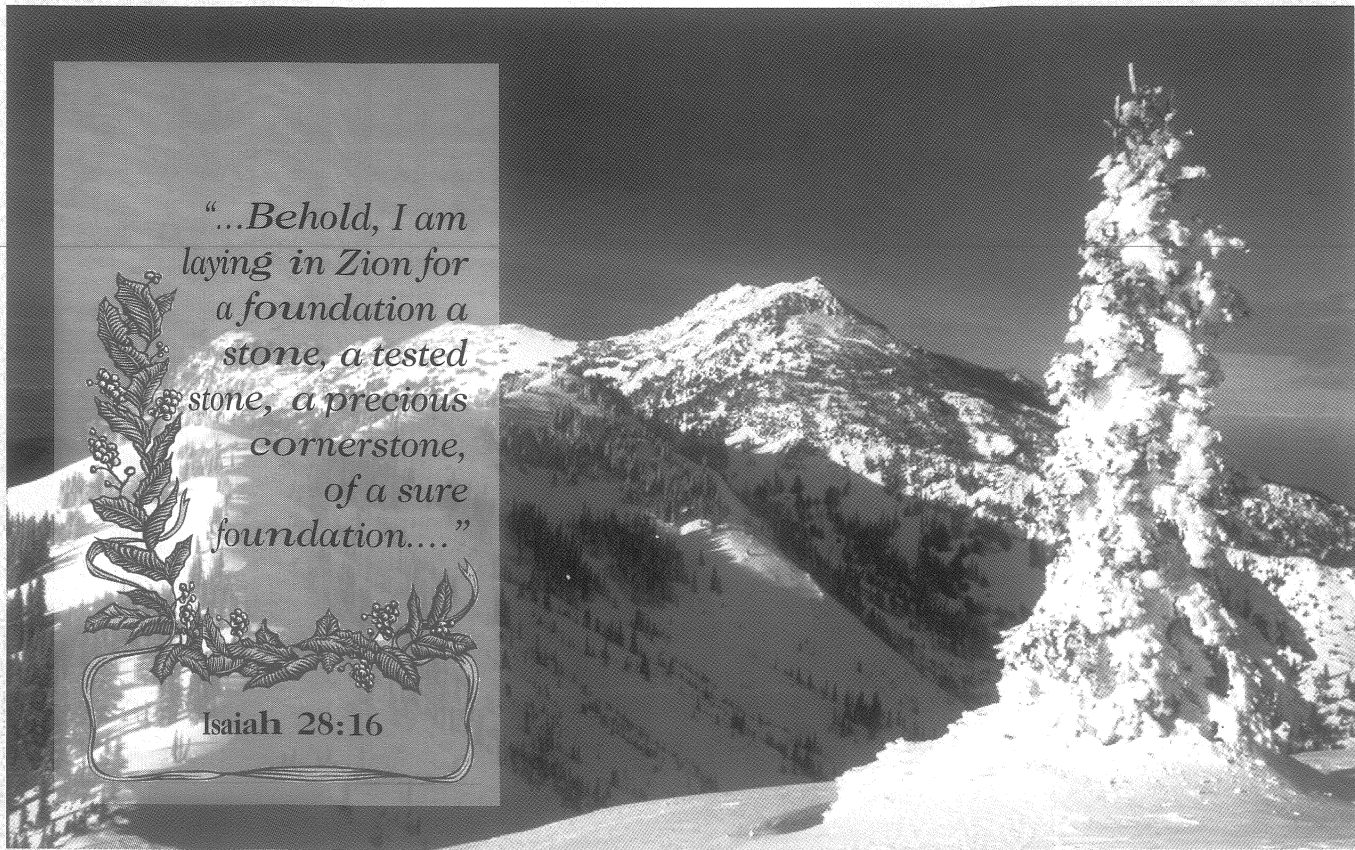
With respect to the latter question, the conclusion, also of Dr. De Jong, is obviously that this freer translation is still sufficiently accurate. No translation is totally accurate. Not even the KJV, is a consistent word (for word) translation. A completely word-translation would make the Scriptures impossible to understand. In Dr. J. Van Bruggen's *The Future of the Bible* (Nashville: Nelson, 1978, p.17-18) we find the opinion that "perhaps the most significant difference between the RSV and its predecessors is its abandonment of word-for-word translation. The RSV is translated much more freely. . . ."

Moreover, words are symbols or vehicles conveying thoughts. A speaker or writer expresses his thoughts through the words he uses. The NIV translators wanted to be accurate. They have "weighed the significance of the *lexical* and *grammatical* details." This means that they did pay attention to the (lexical) meaning of the words and the (grammatical) constructions. Personally, I started with a negative approach to the NIV, very much on the basis of what Dr. De Jong said about the difference in method of translation. But the specific study within the committee changed my judgment from a "no" to an "acceptable."

Dr. De Jong says, "the Bible should not be transferred to *our* thought patterns and syntax, but our thought patterns and syntax should be molded to those patterns which we find in the Bible!" Who can disagree here? Dr. De Jong refers to the contents of our thinking. What do we think about God, about the world, about life on earth? Is our thinking in accordance with the thinking (the patterns) of God's Word? Do we see things as God reveals to us that He sees them? Is our thinking the biblical thinking? The NIV preface does not speak of the contents of our thinking but of the formal, structural language patterns. We can learn to think biblically with the NIV certainly no less than with the more liberal RSV.

Holding on to the RSV

Personally, I have no objection to holding on to the RSV for the time being. However, the Synod of Lincoln 1992 decided that the churches should not go this route. The Synod of Abbotsford maintained the 1992 decision by its decision. If this decision is rescinded, many churches will not agree and we will cause quite a storm. It seems better to me, for the sake of uniformity in the churches, that we accept or acquiesce in the decision of Abbotsford. ❧



"...Behold, I am
laying in Zion for
a foundation a
stone, a tested
stone, a precious
cornerstone,
of a sure
foundation...."

Isaiah 28:16

FEE ON CORINTHIANS¹

The Corinthians thought that they had truly reached a "spiritual" level. They had arrived, so to speak. And, indeed, in a real sense they had. The apostle Paul starts off by commending the Corinthians that in Christ Jesus they had been enriched in every way, in all their speaking and in all their knowledge, not lacking any spiritual gifts (1:5,7). Nevertheless, the Corinthians' spirituality was a faulty one. This was so in at least three respects. First, they thought that their present state was their final state. This resulted, for example, in a denial of the resurrection of the body (ch. 15). Second, they were of the opinion that their "spiritual" existence meant that it no longer mattered what they did in the body. The result was that Paul had to do battle with the notion that incest was alright, that prostitution did not matter and that it was fine to deny one's spouse sexual intercourse. After all, these things did not truly touch on one's "spiritual" life. Third, the apostle is forced to attack the Corinthians' pride and arrogance. Instead of bowing in adoration and thankfulness for the many spiritual gifts which the Spirit had given to the church, they had begun to boast of them. In the process they criticized the apostle Paul who, in their eyes, could not match the spirituality of the Corinthian elite.

The result is Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians, which must have caused him much pain in writing. On one occasion he sharply chides his readers with scarcely veiled sarcasm: 'Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have become kings — and that without us' (4:8)! On another occasion he writes quite differently: he passionately appeals to them as to "my dear brothers" (15:58). Both ways of writing must have hurt the apostle. Whether he would express his indignation or affirm his love

for them, either way their violation of his love would have cut him to the heart. What is more — and what emotionally must have been the most difficult for the apostle — was the fact that here he had to do not just with some friends who had hurt him or who had put his authority aside. This was "the church of God in Corinth" (1:2). The church of God is teeming with immorality, with neglect of the poor at the table of the Lord, with boasting over spiritual gifts, and even with heresy. A very painful affair, indeed!

The Corinthians' theological stand on their "spirituality" is directly related to their moral laxity. Seeing they think that they have already become rich — even leaving the apostle Paul behind in their pursuit of spiritual matters — they no longer need to worry about mundane

affairs, such as food, marriage and sexuality. Clearly then, the Corinthians closely intertwine theology and ethics. For the apostle Paul this is no different. While some of his other letters are more or less sharply divided between sections on "theology" and "ethics," the former usually preceding the latter, this epistle to the Corinthians is structured differently. Throughout the letter, ethical and theological issues are intertwined. Ethics is never something of a few simple rules. It is always based on careful theological analysis.

Prostitution

I will take just one example, the issue of prostitution (6:12-20). Here the apostle urges the Corinthians not to go to prostitutes but instead to "honor God with your body" (v. 21). Of course,

*"I am the way, the truth,
the life.*

*There is not anyone
Who shall to God the
Father come
Except by Me, the Son."*

Hymn 30:5
BOOK OF PRAISE

it would have been easy for Paul to simply refer to the seventh commandment or to other Old Testament prohibitions, or even to words of the Lord Jesus himself. What he does, however, is something quite different. He refers to the resurrection of the body. He says: "God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also." This is a most remarkable statement. You should stay away from the red light districts because of the resurrection of the body. That is an entirely new perspective, certainly for the Corinthians. They did not even accept the resurrection of the body. The apostle sets them straight, both in their theology and in their ethics. First of all, there is a resurrection of the body. As he will elaborate later on, Christ's bodily resurrection and that of the believers belong together: they are part of one and the same harvest (15:20). Since Christ's resurrection is a fact, the Corinthians may know that theirs is sure to follow. The resurrection of the body makes prostitution a moral impossibility: if one does not honour God in the body, one cannot expect to share in the resurrection of the body of Christ.

Paul's second argument against prostitution is based on union with Christ (vv. 15-17). Faith unites believers to Christ. Since they are already united to Christ they can no longer be united to a prostitute. Spiritual union with Christ excludes physical union with a prostitute. One cannot experience "spiritual intercourse" with Christ and "physical intercourse" with a prostitute at the same time. In the third place, the body is not something indifferent. With this Paul touches the heart of the theological argument. The body is not "just" the body. For Paul the body is as much a temple of the Holy Spirit as the church itself. Moreover, this temple is "real estate" which has been "bought at a price" (v. 21). Christ has died to obtain this property. This piece of material property is the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. You just don't vandalize somebody else's expensive property!

This one example from chapter 6 makes clear how closely theological and ethical matters are connected for the apostle Paul. It makes clear how, also in moral issues, he harps at the faulty spirituality of the Corinthians. Sexual ethics teaches about the resurrection of the body. It teaches about union with Christ. It teaches about the indwelling of the Spirit. It teaches about the atonement. Also the other way around: the resurrection, union with

Christ, the indwelling of the Spirit, Christ's purchase of His people all have a say in one's approach to sexual ethics.

Mostly to the point

A study of 1 Corinthians makes one look at these questions. It forces one to deal also with other aspects of Pauline thought. There are probably few areas of doctrine which the apostle does not touch upon in this letter: the trinity, the Lord's Supper, the resurrection, baptism, the relation between church and state (the judicial system), the role of women in the church, prophecy and speaking in tongues, they all have a place in this first letter of Paul to the Corinthians. Gordon Fee's commentary can be a real asset as one struggles to come to grasp with some of these issues. Fee is Professor of New Testament at Regent College in Vancouver, BC. His analysis of the problem in Corinth is mostly to the point. He rightly identifies the Corinthians' wrong-headed spirituality as the main problem which Paul is addressing. This means that regardless of certain questions which one may have – and which the present reviewer does have – about this commentary, the thrust of the argument throughout the commentary is dependable. This is important, considering the implications which this letter has for the church today. As Fee puts it: "The cosmopolitan character of the city and church, the strident individualism that emerges in so many of their behavioral aberrations, the arrogance that attends their understanding of spirituality, the accommodation of the Gospel to the surrounding culture in so many ways – these and many other features of the Corinthian church are but mirrors held up before the church of today" (20).

This review of Fee's commentary can only highlight some of the aspects, in the hope that they will inspire others to delve into the rich mines of this work. One such aspect is the constant careful analysis of the structure of the various parts of this letter. Time and again, the author points out how a particular section or subsection of the letter is set up. Throughout his book he illustrates Paul's predilection for a chiasmic (A-B-A) structure. If one takes the time and effort to go through this carefully, there is the certain reward of a better insight into the letter. It also makes one appreciate Paul's often careful way of coming to the issues that he really wants to deal with.

By way of example I may point to chapters 12-14, dealing with speaking in tongues. Among the Corinthians there was such an interest in this particular gift of the Spirit that they had narrowed their focus on this gift alone, to the detriment of the orderly character of the worship service and the standing of those who did not have this particular gift. First, in chapter 12, Paul carefully describes the origin of gifts and the fact that the triune God who dispenses these gifts does not just give *one* gift, but gives a great variety of gifts (section A). The next chapter, on love, explains the manner in which these gifts must function: not in an individualistic, boastful manner – as was only too common in Corinth – but in the way of love (section B). After this "theological interlude," as Fee calls it, Paul then comes in chapter 14 very specifically to the issue at hand: the wrong use of tongues-speaking in the congregation (section A).²

As noted already, the Corinthians rejected the resurrection of the body. In today's theological climate, in which the resurrection of Jesus Christ himself is denied by various theologians it is good to see how Fee deals with this in his commentary. He does not try to prove Christ's resurrection. Instead, he points out very nicely that those who deny the objective reality of Christ's resurrection go much farther than even the Corinthian critics. They at least accepted Christ's resurrection. They just did not believe that Christ's resurrection also entailed our resurrection. Fee rightly points out that a position which goes on to deny Christ's resurrection is totally alien to the Christian faith: "Unfortunately, in today's church many claim to be believers who deny what for Paul was the same as denying the faith itself" (737). At the same time, the author is of the opinion that it is impossible to try and prove the resurrection. When people do that, what "they fail to recognize is that such 'proofs' are valid only to those who believe. Either one believes the witnesses or one does not. But the resurrection of Christ itself finally lies outside the ordinary categories of historical proof." Our calling, says Fee, is "to *proclaim* the Resurrection as those who, with Paul, are absolutely convinced of its reality and significance" (p. 737). No additional comment needed, it would seem to me.

Even if one begs to differ on a certain point with Fee, the commentary remains helpful. Fee mostly outlines the various arguments of others who, for various reasons, come to certain

different exegetical conclusions. Fee really takes his reader along on his journey through 1 Corinthians and through the various exegetical possibilities. Of course this is one of the reasons why the present volume has become somewhat large (880 pages!), but throughout it is a delight to the reader. Almost always, the commentary is quite readable, and the arguments are easy to follow.³

Shaky reconstructions

There are a number of areas where I must take issue with Fee. Without being complete, I will mention a few. Fee is correct in pointing out that the Corinthians were of the opinion that they had already entered the kingdom of glory. I have not been convinced, however, that the Corinthians had a "magical" view of the sacraments. Fee mentions this at several points throughout his commentary but in my opinion never really gives proof. The only passage which would provide some basis for such a position would seem to be chapter 10:1-5. There Paul indeed refers to the exodus, and indirectly to baptism and the Lord's Supper. Speaking of the Israelites he then concludes: "Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert" (v.5). To me, this is insufficient evidence of a "magical" view of the sacraments.

Another example of a rather shaky reconstruction of the historical situation is Fee's contention that some of the Corinthians were upset with Paul for eating marketplace idol food and judged him for it. At first, Fee still appears somewhat hesitant, saying that one "cannot be certain" about this (425). Nevertheless, when it comes to the last section of chapter 10, which deals with various settings in which one would be allowed to eat sacrificial food, Fee maintains that Paul is defending here his own practice of eating sacrificial food when he is not at an idol's temple (476). It seems unwarranted to make such an uncertain reconstruction the key to one's exegesis of an entire paragraph.

On a more serious note, I must express my disagreement with the way in which Fee deals with the role of women. Already in chapter 11 I find that Fee deals in a somewhat cavalier way with those who have a different opinion than he does. Fee regards the entire passage as clearly egalitarian in character and dismisses other interpretations far too hastily. His bias becomes especially a serious hindrance when it

comes to chapter 14:34-35, which states that women should remain silent in the churches. Without any textual support whatsoever Fee decides simply to eliminate these two verses. To be sure, Fee's first stated reason is a textual one: in one particular group of manuscripts, those of the so-called Western tradition, these two verses are found in a different place, after verse 40. Seeing the obvious minority of this group of witnesses, the only logical conclusion is that some scribe erroneously misplaced these verses when copying the text. Fee, however, maintains that "they were not part of the original text, but were a very early marginal gloss that was subsequently placed in the text at different places" (699). At a point like this one can only concur with Carson's comment: "I confess I am always surprised by the amount of energy and ingenuity expended to rescue Paul from himself and conform him to our image."⁴

Even if such a comment is somewhat harsh, it remains unacceptable to simply delete two verses, ultimately not on a realistic textual basis, but on a theological one. Perhaps Fee should have had a closer look at the position of men such as D.A. Carson and J. Van

Bruggen. They convincingly show that Paul's statement about the silence of women in the churches is not intended as a general statement. After all, in chapter 11 women prophesy and pray in the worship services (11:5).⁵ Paul does say, however, that the authoritative interpretation of such prophecies in the worship services remains restricted to men.

Tongues-speaking

A last point which I want to single out is Fee's treatment of tongues-speaking. Fee takes a moderately charismatic stand. He is critical both toward those who argue that tongues have ceased and toward those who regard it as an ecstatic, uncontrollable phenomenon. A key text in this regard has always been 1 Corinthians 13:10, where Paul says that "when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears." One of the questions is whether this refers to the closing of the New Testament canon or to the time that the kingdom of glory will be inaugurated. If it speaks of the New Testament canon, the debate would be settled: tongues and prophecy would then have disappeared once the canon of Scripture was closed. In



my estimation, Fee gives convincing arguments to show that Paul is here speaking about the day of Christ's return.⁶ Both the immediate and the broader context of Paul's letter to the Corinthians is clearly eschatological.

This does not mean, however, that Fee is correct in his pleas for a continuation of tongues-speaking. In the first place, he should have confronted himself with the arguments of Richard B. Gaffin, Professor of Systematic Theology at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia.⁷ In his book, *Perspectives on Pentecost*, the author has argued that it is indeed true that this passage of 1 Corinthians 'no doubt' has the time of Christ's return in mind. Gaffin goes on to say, however, that this does not necessarily mean that prophecy and tongues continue until Christ's return. Gaffin correctly observes that 13:8-13 has in mind the provisional character of the believer's present knowledge. Prophecy and tongues are God's modes of revelation. Paul makes this very clear (13:2; 14:2,6). No one will deny that Scripture is just such a mode of God's revelation for us today. Says Gaffin:

But inscripturation has ceased. And if that be granted, then it is gratuitous to insist that this passage teaches that the modes of revelation mentioned, prophecy and tongues, are to continue functioning in the church until Christ's return. Paul is not intending to specify the time when any particular mode will cease. What he does affirm is the termination of the believer's present, fragmentary knowledge, based on likewise temporary modes of revelation, when "the perfect" comes. The time of the cessation of prophecy and tongues is an open question so far as this passage is concerned and will have to be decided on the basis of other passages and considerations.⁸

Gaffin's point is well taken. 1 Corinthians 13:10 all by itself does not give an answer to the question whether tongues and prophecy have ceased. Light from other New Testament passages needs to be shed on this particular question.

Of course one cannot fault Fee for assuming his own exegesis of other pas-

sages when writing a commentary on 1 Corinthians. Moreover, Fee certainly is correct when, time and again, he stresses that Paul nowhere disqualifies tongues-speaking as such. This is true. After all, tongues were a form of revelation which, in addition, served a number of other purposes. Nevertheless, it is my opinion that Fee insufficiently recognizes the revelatory character of tongues and of prophecy.⁹ This is, after all, an element which Paul himself emphasizes in 1 Corinthians.

These critical remarks are not intended to disqualify Fee's commentary. On the contrary, in any careful study of 1 Corinthians, it is impossible to circumvent this book. Fee correctly identifies the main issues that are at stake in this letter. Fee's is a worthwhile successor to Grosheide's 1953 commentary on 1 Corinthians in this same New International Commentary series. I may end this review, therefore, with the closing words of Professor Fee:

Christians must continually live in the tension between the "already" and the "not yet"; what they must not allow themselves to do is to excuse themselves from obedience because they are not yet fully there. The grace of the Lord and the hope of His coming should cause all to heed the words of this letter so as to be watchful and to do all things in love . . . (840).



¹Review of Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*. New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987. Pp. xxiv, 880.

²Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 571. Fee defines Paul's form of argumentation as follows: "In each case the first 'A' section puts the matter into a larger, more general theological perspective; the 'B' section is an explanatory digression of some kind, yet crucial to the argument as a whole; and the second 'A' section is the very specific response to the matter at hand" (16).

³There are some exceptions: I wonder about Fee's constant interaction with the NIV – either by way of commendation or by way of disagreement. The reason is probably that the NIV lies at the basis of the commentary, but I do not know whether these numerous comments on the NIV were really necessary. On a different note, while I have encountered very few spelling mistakes, there are two places where the meaning is obscured.

On p. 645, n. 23, 1. 9, the author omits the word "not" in the following sentence, thereby making it say the opposite of what he intends to convey: "What neither Paul himself nor the Corinthians could have understood can[not] possibly be the meaning of the text." P. 804, 1. 21 contains a similar mistake, where the word "already" should be replaced by "not yet."

⁴D.A. Carson, *Showing the Spirit: A Theological Exposition of 1 Corinthians 12-14* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), p. 124.

⁵This was one of the exegetical arguments which the Dutch general synod of Ommen 1993 used in its defense to allow women to vote in the churches.

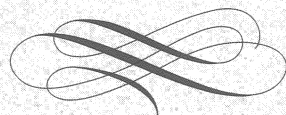
⁶Fee could have strengthened his argument here considerably if he had analyzed more carefully Paul's reference to Numbers 12 in 1 Corinthians 13:12.

⁷Fee dismisses Gaffin's position rather hastily in a footnote: "Gaffin's exegetical skills are obvious, but he has nonetheless set up the questions and gone after the results in terms of his prior questions quite apart from Paul's own interests" (600, n. 94). Rather than simply comment on Gaffin's skills, Fee should have interacted with his exegetical arguments.

⁸Richard B. Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost: Studies in New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), p. 111.

⁹There are also several other problems with Fee's treatment of the issue of tongues in Corinth. He is of the opinion that this gift did not cause division in the church of Corinth, and that those who spoke in tongues were not looking down on others (612, 615). Paul's extended metaphor of the body (12:14-26) suggests otherwise. Clearly, some felt that they did not belong to the body (vv. 14ff.), while there were also people who felt that they did not need others in the congregation (vv. 21ff.). To argue against the existence of an elitist tongues-speaking group, Fee maintains that this metaphor and the division that Paul speaks about in verse 25 refer back to the divisions at the Lord's table (11:17-34). This is untenable, however, because chapter 12:1 begins a new topic about which the Corinthians have asked him ("Now about spiritual gifts, brothers . . ."). Fee's explanation is also strange in light of his own admission that chapters 12-14 deal with speaking in tongues.

Fee's positive view of tongues comes out also when he denies that Paul regards some gifts higher than others (623, n. 34; 643, n. 16). This cannot be maintained in light of 12:31; 13:13; and 14:5



ON WHAT CONDITIONS?

"Without knowing our past, we cannot understand the present and without knowing the past, we will more easily repeat any mistakes that may have been made in the past."

C. VanDam in Clarion Vol. 43, p. 467

The above-quoted words are worth to be kept in mind at all times, but especially when we are dealing with ecclesiastical matters, specifically when we have discussions about a possible ecclesiastical merger.

In the course of these discussions, it seems to me, an inadequate knowledge of the past comes to the fore, at least a not taking into account the lessons from the past.

Here and there very unripe statements are made, and at times one gets the impression that more than one among us is prepared to let go of what the Lord has given us in the past, as long as an organizational unity with others can be achieved. If others are not "budging," so to speak, there seems to be an inclination to make concessions beforehand without any proof that what we have and may enjoy is wrong or anyway should be changed to cause it to be more in accordance with the Word of our God.

Before we proceed I should like to insert a little story.

A little story

It was in the "good old days," when D.E.C. still wrote his regular column "On and around the Church Yard" in *De Reformatie*, that I read a story that he made up to drive a point home. He did this in connection with the discussions going on between members of the churches with prominent figures in the synodical churches, discussions that led to the desertion by these members, even though nothing was changed either with respect to the doctrinal binding or regarding the un-Reformed practices in the field of church polity.

D.E.C. (whose identity was never publicly revealed) wrote about a couple of country-boys who had never yet

travelled beyond the confines of their own village, but who now went on a trip of a lifetime, and travelled to a big city, dressed in their best typical, regional attire.

Having arrived in the big city, they were hungry and went into a large restaurant, even though they felt ill at ease there. It was all so strange, so big, and there were so many people! The impression of a large crowd was even strengthened by a huge mirror that covered a whole wall. They looked at all those people with growing amazement.

Suddenly, however, they discovered a few faces that looked slightly familiar. They were almost certain that somewhere they saw these people before. Besides, they were dressed like they themselves were, and must come from the same village, at least from the same region.

Said the one to the other: "Let's go to them and shake hands with them; then we'll know for sure whether we know them or not."

Thus they rose.

To their astonishment the other two people, who had been looking steadily at them, rose at the same moment.

"Stop," said the one to the other, "Let's go and sit down again: they are already coming to us!"

It was all an illusion.

They had seen themselves in the mirror.

I had to think of that story when pondering the question why some among us seem to be so willing to give up what the Lord has given us in our history, even to such an extent that they imagine that others are coming closer to us whereas, in reality, they themselves are the only ones that are

moving and are willing to make ill-considered concessions.

The initiative

It has always struck me that, as far as the above-mentioned discussions are concerned, the initiative always seems to have come from our side.

I may be mistaken, and if this is the case, I hope that it will be pointed out, also to put my own mind at ease. As far as I am aware, however, it was always one of our own consistories or members who, upon hearing, for example that at a certain place a group of believers broke away from the Christian Reformed Church and organized themselves as an independent or orthodox church, took up contact, expressing the desire to become one. I know of no instance where the first step towards contact was taken by such newly-organized independent church. To my knowledge, it was always one of our own consistories that expressed the desire for closer contact and possible merger.

This may be due partially, but very *partially only*, to others not being aware of the existence of the Canadian Reformed churches, although this is highly unlikely. It may also be due to a distrust of the Canadian Reformed churches, a distrust which is the result of slander spread around concerning the struggle in the Netherlands and concerning our upholding the Reformed confessions and their contents.

With a view to the above it is the more remarkable that there seem to be some among us who are willing to give up various riches the Lord gave us, a willingness that betrays either a lack of historical knowledge or an ignoring of the riches we may have and should be most unwilling to give up.

It is in order to prevent the spread of such a disposition that I write the present article.

A few quotations

It would be incorrect just to make the above statements without adducing any proof. Quoting from what I heard from individual members would not suffice either, as this cannot be verified by our readers.

Let us, therefore, repeat a few things that could be found in the pages of *Clarion*.

First something about our Church Order.

In a so-called "Discussion Paper," we could read: "Concerning the Church Order, we must be flexible Certain articles are consequently non-negotiable, Other articles, however, could be changed, if necessary to come to a common church order, provided that the Reformed principles and the basic ecclesiastical structures in our present Church Order remain intact."

Why state something like this at the outset, as a basis for discussions with others, discussions that have the obvious goal of coming to a merger?

Then something about our *Book of Praise*.

In a "Letter to the Editor" we find the following: "Ought we not, rather, simply announce — right up front — that we do not wish non-essential matters — such as the way we sing — to create an impediment to union?"

From another "Letter to the Editor" we quote the following: "A supplement should be available, containing all the beautiful hymns sung by our choirs. . . . Another reason for a supplement is that some of our Genevan melodies are awful; different melodies could also be incorporated in the proposed supplement."

What has been quoted above is not just an opinion voiced by the writers alone; what they expressed can be heard from more than one church member.

It is for that very reason that we have to raise a warning voice against such willingness to give up the riches and the inheritance which the Lord gave us from the past.

Although both the Rev. G. VanDooren and Dr. J. De Jong issued simi-

lar warnings, yet it appears necessary to repeat them and to elaborate on them.

Our Book of Praise

Repeating some warnings, we first listen to the Rev. G. VanDooren, who wrote that he "was perplexed by the readiness of some of 'our own' to drop it," namely, the *Book of Praise*.

When some of our Genevan tunes are called "awful," I am not sure

whether such a qualification proceeds from a lack of musical knowledge or from an eagerness to accommodate others, with simultaneous denial of our own rich heritage.

Recently Dr. J. De Jong had "A look at Our Church Book," and in his article he quoted "the Scottish church historian Sir Millar Patrick, who said of the Genevan psalter: 'We may justly say of this psalter: 'Here is richness': no other comes near it in either poetic or musical accomplishment or interest.'"

So much for those "awful melodies."

Dr. De Jong also mentioned that the Committee for the *Book of Praise* received requests to add more hymns to the sixty-five we have adopted.

Why would one want more hymns?

Those we have adopted follow the articles of the Apostles' Creed; those that follow in the last part of the Hymn section are almost exclusively rhymings of Scripture passages. What else do we need for the worship services? Is there any of the "main" events in the history of salvation we cannot sing about by using the *Book of Praise* without any addition?

I am not referring to singing in the home or at work or while driving to and from work or when going somewhere just for the pleasure of going there. There are many songs I love and love to sing.

We are dealing, however, with singing in the worship services.

For praising the Lord in the assembly of His people, for confessing our sins, for expressing our joy because of the forgiveness, for making known to our Father "all our trouble and our woe," for imploring our heavenly Father's mercy, for asking for His guidance, for praying for the coming of His kingdom, briefly, for all and every occasion we find abundant "material" in what we have.

What could we add that would enrich the contents of our *Book of Praise* or that could enhance our worship during the services?

And then "all the beautiful hymns sung by our choirs!"

It is my experience that more than once our choirs do not even realize what in fact they are singing and from what wrong line of thought the words proceed.



*"Since He came us to
ransom,
Let Him now be
adored,
The King once born in
Bethlehem,
Our Saviour and our
Lord.
Repeat the song again:
"To God on high the
glory,
And peace on earth to
men!"*

**Hymn 16:4
BOOK OF PRAISE**

Would one perhaps want to insert *Ave Verum Corpus*, "Hail! O True Body!"? Or *Panis Angelicus Fit Panis Hominum*, "Bread of angels becomes the bread of man?"

O res mirabilis!

Personally I love some of the Negro Spirituals, and I would not mind singing them in a choir. They originated with the Negro slaves who identified themselves with Israel, making the songs of pain and sorrow, of hope and deliverance their own. But I would not for one moment consider them for use in the worship services.

And *that's* what we are dealing with.

"Amazing Grace" has been mentioned in this connection. I love the tune and find it haunting. But does the song as such add anything that is still lacking in our *Book of Praise*? That would be the only valid reason for adding a song: that it contains elements which until now have been sadly lacking in either the Psalms or our present Hymns.

Who would even dare to suggest that any necessary element is lacking in the Psalms? What we confess of the Scriptures as a whole we also confess of the Psalms: that "the whole manner of worship which God requires of us is written in it at length." And then we have already even added some songs for our worship services by means of which we can sing of the fulfilment of the shadows.

As for the Lord's amazing grace, what song praising it could surpass the beauty and truth of the inspired Psalm 103? Or, for that matter, of Psalm 130, or 32, or 6, or 51?

Or take another favourite: "Great Is Thy Faithfulness." I like it and do not mind singing it at wedding parties or in the home or on other occasions. But would we really need it for the worship services? Is anything contained therein needed to add to the inspired Psalms, for instance Psalm 3, or 25, or 27, or 104, or 136, or 145, or 147?

Also in this respect we are to bear in mind the warning quoted at the head of this article. When scanning history, we learn that gradually the hymns replaced the Psalms once the number of hymns was increased step by step. The path chosen when the number of hymns is increased is a path that follows a steep incline: the development into the wrong direction goes on with an ever increasing speed.

At the Classis Holland, Michigan, of April 7, 1857, the church at Graaf-

schap gave as one of its reasons for seceding "The collection of 800 Hymns, introduced contrary to the church order."

Although it was remarked at that same Classis "that people secede by reason of hymns is a rejection of all the Protestant churches of the Reformation, which have all made use of Hymns ever since the time of the Reformation, even of the Holland Reformed Church, which adopted for use only those hymns which it approved, and rejected lawlessness and that which was tainted with Popery and Arminianism," yet we must conclude that the brothers of Graafschap were vindicated in their objections by the later development.

Even when one cannot agree in every respect with the conclusions of its author, proponents of the hymns for worship services should study a work by Michael Bushell *The Songs of Zion, A Contemporary Case for Exclusive Psalmody*. It was published by Crown and Covenant Publications, 7408 Penn Avenue, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 15208-2531.

From the Preface to the first edition we note the author's conviction that "Our churches will never restore the psalter to its rightful place in worship until, by the grace of God, the scales are removed from their spiritual eyes and they see the psalms for what they are: an all-sufficient well-spring of hope and consolation from heaven itself into a troubled and sinful world."

And then we should give up what we have and adulterate the purity of worship singing by adding songs in which man and his feelings and experiences are in the centre?

Never, I pray and hope.

About our Church Order

Concerning the Church Order, I should like to start with another warning, added to the one quoted at the head of this article. This time it was extended by the Rev. J.D. Wielenga.

Every church order is a reflection of someone's ecclesiology. . . . The congregational churches slid into dominocracy, every local minister like the minister of the local church at Rome, a pope.

Here, too, we are to be aware of the dangers of giving up what we have and of not appreciating what the Lord has given us as an inheritance from the fathers.

Be it far from me to even suggest that our *Book of Praise* or our Church

Order are sacrosanct, sort of inviolable or inspired. Whenever it is demonstrated clearly that a provision is wrong or that there is a much better or more Scriptural way of stipulating a certain matter, we definitely have to consider this and, if we come to the conclusion that the criticism is justified or that we could do a certain thing in a more Scriptural way, we must bring about a change in this respect most speedily.

But that must then be proved first!

To state that we must be "flexible" with respect to the Church Order is totally wrong, unless it is meant in the sense indicated in the above paragraph. However, the same applies to the confessions as well: if it is proved that in one respect or another they are not fully Scriptural, we must bring about a change. No one, however, states that we must be "flexible" with respect to the confessions! Everyone had better refrain from ever making such a statement, too!

Before giving some arguments for this, I should like to repeat what Dr. De Jong wrote.

Local churches cannot and should not put the Church Order on the table as a negotiable document. In fact, churches of a common Reformed background should do everything in their power to hold on to the Church Order of Dort! It has proven to be a time-honoured vehicle to promote the harmony and the peace of the churches. . . . Let us make use of what we have, and avoid the pretensions of developing a new "hybrid" Church Order to suit the needs of our "unique" situation. Then we are faithful to the past, and so can build a strong and lasting unity for the future.

When I read of efforts to design a new church order instead of returning to the one of Dort, I have to think of what the Apostle Paul wrote to the church at Corinth (and I paraphrase with specific application to the question at hand); Do you really think that wisdom and sound insight into the Scriptures has started with you? Has the Holy Spirit only now begun to give true insight into the questions regarding church federation and the manner in which it can best be organized?

We certainly do not canonize John Calvin, but he had a profound insight into the Word of God. He let himself be guided by that Word when he drew up a church order for the French churches, a church order after which the one of Dort is patterned. Now, all

of a sudden, it is supposed to be discovered that that church order is not all the Scriptural after all? Sorry, but I can't believe it.

Even if we should lift out the period during which no general synod was held (1619-1835), we still have a couple of centuries left during which the basics of the Dort Church Order regulated the life of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands. Besides, also during the years 1619-1835 the affairs of the federation were conducted according to its stipulations, except for the brief period from 1815-1835, when the Regulations imposed by King William I were in force.

What do we see when abuses crept in? Was that the "fault" of the Church Order? Is it so that, if only there had been better and more Scriptural stipulations, things would have gone well and the abuses would have been impossible?

Of course not!

On the contrary, abuses crept in when the stipulations of the Church Order were *not* kept in faithfulness and in sincere adherence to what had been agreed upon.

Yet, when a split was caused thereby, and when part of the membership rejected the abuses, the hierarchical way of dealing with things, they sometimes did blame the Church Order for the deviations from which they liberated themselves. And instead of returning to the Church Order of Dort they sometimes tried to come with a new church order, as if the evil had been in the stipulations and not in the hearts of men who did not honour the agreement.

The churches of the Secession of 1834 were thrown into turmoil and discord when it was tried to introduce a new church order instead of simply returning to the Church Order of Dort.

I repeat Rev. Wielenga's statement: "Every church order is a reflection of someone's ecclesiology."

We see this clearly with the Rev. H.P. Scholte, one of the Seceded ministers. When it comes to the point, he did not want to live in a federation. He was an independentist, although not in the technical sense of the term.

"Looking back upon the past," he wrote, "I believe that I would have done better, according to the light then already given me by God in His Word, by not entering into such an ecclesiastical junction as was formed . . . I believe that, as far as I am concerned, I would have done better by simply continuing

with preaching and baptizing and keeping communion with the believers in the breaking of bread and in prayer, without associating with an ecclesiastical organization."

What was also stated in Rev. Wielenga's warning came true in Scholte's case: he practically became a pope in his own congregation, first in the Netherlands and then in Pella, Iowa. The church in the latter place broke up into several parts, and Scholte himself was even deposed.

In the Seceded churches in the Netherlands the conviction won out that a return to the Church Order of Dort was mandatory. They did return to it indeed, and thereby great disasters were prevented.

Nineteen Forty-four

When the hierarchy crept in in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands, starting around the beginning of the twenties of this century, this was not caused by deficiencies in the Church Order of Dort but by a clear deviation from it, a deviation that was prepared and defended by crooked reasonings. It was tried by means of all sorts of twisted arguments to "prove" that the new course was, in fact, the old, Reformed church polity, wholly in accordance with and based on the Church Order.

The result, we know, was that in 1944 and following years thousands of church members threw off the yoke imposed upon the churches and returned to the freedom in Christ.

When they did so, there was not for one second a desire to draw up a new church order so as to prevent a recurrence of the miseries from which they had been freed. No, there was no question about it that the Dort Church Order should continue to be the agreement for restored ecclesiastical fellowship.

Thereby the peace and well-being of the churches was served and preserved.

Coming to Canada, we brought this Church Order along. We made no changes, except such as were mandatory with a view to the specific Canadian situation and in regard of the changed historical situation. No other changes were contemplated or made. Thereby the peace and well-being of the churches has been served for some forty-five years by now. And should we give that up, whereas no proof whatsoever has been given that any stipulation of our Church Order is wrong

or could be formulated more in accordance with the demands of Scripture?

What happened when the Netherlands Reformed churches (Nederlands Gereformeerde Kerken) were formed after 1967? Independentistic tendencies got their chance, and their promoters succeeded in having the Dort Church Order set aside, instead of which an Accord of Ecclesiastical Fellowship was drawn up, in which several provisions of the Dort Church Order were retained, but the essential ones were so hollowed out that not more than a mere shell remained.

The result is that "everyone does what is good in his own eyes," and that ministers who want to continue in the old, Reformed way are no longer welcome in several congregations.

Alliance attempts

During the past few years *Clarion* gave us reports of meetings of the Alliance of Reformed churches. It is from these reports that I understood that this Alliance is in the process of drawing up a Church Order, as there is a refusal to simply accept the Dort Church Order from which have been removed all the hierarchical changes made by Christian Reformed synods of the last thirty years.

In a report on the meeting of the Alliance Nov. 16-18, 1993, we read: "The Church Order of Dort should be the point of departure for such an undertaking, with special focus being given to more carefully and explicitly guarding against hierarchical abuses."

From what I have written so far it will be clear that this is a wrong approach. The Church Order of Dort does not give *any* opportunity for hierarchical abuse. Such abuse is possible only when the stipulations of this Church Order are *violated*. It is *not feasible* to formulate any stipulation that renders abuse impossible. Hierarchical abuse comes from the *heart*, and the heart cannot be regulated by stipulations in an ecclesiastical document. Here only the Spirit of the Lord can show the correct way and renders one willing to go that way indeed.

A report on a visit by Dr. Venema to Calgary contained the following sentence: "Dr. Venema warned against building the house from the ground up."

I wholeheartedly agree with this. But I cannot see this being in harmony with what I read in another report (Vol. 43, p. 597):

Dr. Venema wondered whether meaningful fellowship between

churches is even possible if there is no submission to broader assemblies. He asked how it would be possible to have meaningful confessional unity if there is no obligation upon churches to accept the decisions of broader assemblies.

Is this throwing off the yoke of hierarchy? It is not but, on the contrary, here hierarchy is being proclaimed to be the only means by which a meaningful fellowship between churches is possible.

Let me repeat what I have stated clearly on other occasions: In truly Reformed church polity there *is no place for submission to broader assemblies!*

In truly Reformed church polity there is the obligation of the churches to accept the decisions of the broader assemblies, because the churches have taken that obligation upon themselves when entering into a federation and accepting the Dort Church Order.

I am, therefore, also very much afraid of any tendency into the direction further pointed out by Dr. Venema (taking it that the report from which I quote is accurate). I quote:

Dr. Venema did state, however, that a federation consisting of formerly

independent Reformed churches, Canadian Reformed churches and possibly others as well, would be possible only with a somewhat less prescriptive Church Order than is presently used among the Canadian Reformed. It would be best if a Church Order prescribed nothing beyond Biblical requirements. Some examples of Articles of the Church Order that should perhaps be reconsidered include those pertaining to a common Psalter or Hymnal, a common Bible translation, days of commemoration (Good Friday, Easter, etc.), and terms of office. According to the speaker, these are examples of matters perhaps best left in the control of local councils."

To these ideas I reply with a heartfelt: "NO."

I become a little suspicious when I hear that a church order should "prescribe nothing beyond Biblical requirements." I heard these sounds before in the history of the Church, and they never spelled much good. Remember Scholte?

Let us, for the sake of argument, mention a few points.

Nowhere does Scripture require that there be classes or synods. And so: Out with them!

Nowhere does Scripture require that there should be a training for the ministry. Consequently: Away with our College!

Nowhere does Scripture require that there even be a church order. Let's discard it altogether.

Besides, our Church Order does not even mention "Good Friday, Easter, etc." Neither does it mention a Bible translation. Where then did the speaker find those "articles?"

Be it far from me to prescribe which way the Alliance should follow. That is totally up to them. But there are discussions going on here and there and in some instances there is the mutual conviction that a continued separate existence is impermissible. We can only be thankful for that conviction and express the wish that it may be realized in a merger.

The big question is, however: on what basis? When there are Independent Reformed churches of whatever



CHURCH PICNIC SUMMER 1995



WATFORD

name they may have chosen when seceding from the Christian Reformed Church, does their secession not mean a return to the situation of before the onset of deviation from the purity of doctrine and the truly Reformed church polity? Does their secession not mean that they returned to the very same basis on which we are still standing?

Is it not always a matter of "liberation or return?"

And is it then too much or unreasonable or proof of pride and haughtiness when we say clearly: Let us

continue now together on that very same old and proven basis without making something new or experimenting, things which have proved to be disastrous in the past?

Once again: I am not trying to tell the Alliance what to do, but what I do say is "If that is the way in which they are going, and if we are to come to a merger on that basis, they will find our whole federation opposed to that, I hope. This would not be a matter of stubbornness or haughtiness but a question of grateful acknowledging the pre-

serving power of the Holy Spirit, by Whose guidance we may still be on the same basis and practise the same church polity that our forefathers stood on and practised ever since the days of the great Reformation.

Only on those conditions would a merger be to the benefit of all and at the same time it would be a safeguard for the future generations who would know that they continue in the path of the catholic church.

Nothing else will do.



THE HI-LITER

By C. Van Spronsen

In Chatham, ON fruitful discussions continue between the Free Reformed Church and the Canadian Reformed Church. They had another joint meeting with many members from the congregation attending as well. Rev. Wieske summarized it as follows: "From our side we stressed, that providing we both accept the Word of God as we confess that in the Three Forms of Unity we ought to come to a federative unity as soon as possible. Differences in emphasis may not keep us apart but can be discussed within the boundaries of the confessions."

From the side of the Free Reformed the desire was expressed to first get to know each other better by interacting in many joint endeavours. Rev. Wieske's response to this is that "if we agree on all that the confessions teach we may not continue on our separate ways. For the church belongs to Christ, not to men. And Christ prayed for the unity of all true believers. A unity not based on knowing each other, never mind how important that is, but on knowing from each other that we submit wholeheartedly to the teachings of the Bible, as summarized in the Reformed Confessions."

In that same city a brother who resigned as a member of a labour union when it voted to accept a strike clause was still required to pay his due. This was appealed and at a hearing they were given the opportunity to give an account why members of Canadian Reformed churches do not agree with labour strikes. The verdict was positive so that this brother is no longer required to pay his dues to the union but may be paid to a charitable organization instead. Encouraging to read that in our justice system this is still possible. The Lord indeed rules!

Candidate J. Poppe has received a "work-permit" for Australia clearing the way for his move to West-Albany which congregation called him. This was a pleasant surprise since it was about six weeks earlier than expected! A Special Synod will be convened for his peremptory exami-

nation. About the same time there was more good news for West Albany: the shire council approved the application for the construction of a churchbuilding.

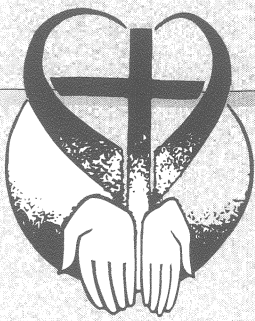
The "Bunbury Group" has now become the "Bunbury Free Reformed Progress Association." It is hoped by a number of families living in Bunbury, Western Australia, that a new congregation and school will be established in this city on the coast, South of Perth. Worship services are already being held in the Bunbury Hall.

The "Family Post" of Attercliffe/Smithville reminds its readers to request an attestation well in time in order for the proper procedure to have time. "Make it a point not to wait till the last minute with your request. After all, you have to be on time to arrange everything with the real estate man and with the hydro - why not with the request for your attestation?" Agree!

The congregation of Taber, AB will soon have their own facilities. The congregation overwhelmingly approved the motion to instruct the building committee to proceed with the construction of the church building. A building permit was also granted. A Sod Turning Ceremony was scheduled for November 18th.

At the present time three students in their last year of theological training in Hamilton are doing the rounds in the churches speaking an edifying word. We have agreed to do so in the Church Order, art. 21 "for their own training and in order that they may become known to the congregations." They are the brothers R. Eikelboom, T. Lodder and J. Van-Vliet. The College receives feedback from the churches by means of evaluation forms sent out to the consistories of the churches where these students conduct the services.





CANADIAN REFORMED WORLD RELIEF FUND

Early this year, C.R.W.R.F. was approached regarding a short-term volunteer effort. Marina Vandermeer, a member of the Ancaster congregation and a student at Redeemer College, had a chance to go to Ecuador with a medical team to give much-needed aid to the people there. Marina, who hopes to pursue a medical degree, needed to raise approx. \$2,000 to meet costs for travel, lodging and medical supplies. C.R.W.R.F. was able to help by matching donations generously provided by people in Marina's home congregation.

The experience was definitely worthwhile as you can read in the following article written by Marina on her return.

Mission to Ecuador

On May 13, 1995 I left Canada with a pediatrician from Toronto and a dental surgeon from Oakville, all three of us on our way to Ecuador. We had signed on as members of a medical relief team working under an organization called Medical Group Missions International. This organization was the working arm of the larger Christian Medical and Dental Society, and is now an independent organization renamed Medical Missions International. Usually, medical teams of Christian doctors, nurses, pharmacists and other medical and non-medical personnel come to Ecuador for two weeks at least eight times per year. Areas are selected according to need and an invitation from local organizations. A contract with the country health ministry gives MMI teams permission to work throughout Ecuador. Our teams work with medical and para-medical staff, coordinators, pastors and translators from the Peace Corp. The MMI mission statement describes the heart of the work which is done: to bring med-



Some local children in front of a typical home.

ical aid in the name of our Lord Jesus to areas of great need or crisis all over the world. Many of the people treated by MMI med teams count on the MMI visits as their only source of medical care.

During a six-hour stopover in Miami, we joined with fourteen doctors, nurses, pharmacists, surgeons and technicians from across the United States and boarded our flight to Quito, Ecuador.

Our arrival in Quito four hours later was, needless to say, exciting for all of us. For the entire non-Ecuadorian team, this was the first visit to Ecuador, a beautiful country which lies along the northwestern coast of South America. The country of Ecuador is as fascinating as the people who live within its

borders. Its lush vegetation and rich variety of wildlife change constantly as one moves from the jungle in the interior along the eastern border to the majestic beauty of the Andes mountains and highlands to the plains and steamy Pacific coast. Its people include native Indians, Blacks and of course the Spanish along with a minority of white immigrants. The languages spoken include many variations of Spanish and the dominant religion is Roman Catholicism, although Evangelicalism is now also showing growth.

The contrast between the rich and poor of Ecuador is sharp. Life in Quito can be somewhat similar to life in any American town. Over 40% of the

national income goes to the richest 5% of the population. However, twelve percent of the people live in absolute

The beautiful little baby Marina helped deliver and his young mother.



poverty and the country's infant mortality rate is the sixth highest in the world. Naturally, organizations such as Medical Missions International try as much as possible to promote interdependence in Ecuador. In addition to providing medical relief, then, we were also involved in the education of the people in good hygiene and sanitation as an important part of teaching good health habits. To place some value on health care we charged the equivalent of about \$1.50 U.S. per person for a medical examination and referral if necessary.

The team of which I was a member flew from Quito which lies in the heart of the Andes mountains, to Esmeraldas on the Pacific Coast. We then boarded a bus and travelled for two hours to Muisne. Muisne is a small, poor town of shacks which lies along the coast and covers a small island located where three major rivers flowing down from the mountains converge and empty into the ocean. Our task was to set up a medical clinic on the island, to provide general and pediatric medical aid and to perform gynaecological surgeries for the people of Muisne and the surrounding area.

Our daily clinic was set up behind the hospital on this island. It consisted of a small, stone building with six rooms. One half of the building was a large open space where we registered the patients and constructed a makeshift pharmacy. This "room" was open at both



This young boy, Juan, was encouraged to take his medicine by the puppet Marina had brought along. If the crocodile ate pills, the children usually followed suit. This was a real blessing since language was a bit of a barrier.

ends and part of the roof was missing, providing little protection against wind or rain. The other half of the building consisted of three small rooms (very cramped for two people and an examination table), a washroom and a storage closet.

A smaller group of our team left the island daily by boat to the mainland. They were sent to a small village called

El Sucio (which means "dirt") on the El Sucio river. This group consisted of an optometry team, our Canadian dentist and two general practitioners plus their assistants and pharmacist. The pharmacist on the El Sucio team also happened to be my roommate, and we were able to share our experiences every night after a long day of work, which was a real blessing for both of us.

The first week in Muisne, I was put in charge of the pharmacy and was asked to set up a temporary laboratory in the storage closet. This lab allowed us to perform urine and simple blood tests. The lab in the hospital was a mess of unlabeled blood sample tubes and broken instruments which would have taken a long time to clean up and get

into working order. We did not have this time.

Each day began at 6:00 a.m. by dedicating the day to the Lord with devotions, breakfast, Bible reading and preparation for the day. By eight o'clock the first Monday morning, we went to examine the building which would serve as our clinic and found a lineup of people waiting for us, a line which grew to about 80 people by afternoon. Each day following, the line of those waiting was 175 patients or more long, many of them children. Most of these people had waited or would have to wait two days before seeing a doctor, many having already walked up to two days to get to Muisne. Our pediatrician, gynaecologist and GP were able to see about 110 people each day by working from 8:00 a.m. to 6:30 or 7:00 p.m.

with half an hour for lunch. We began each day outside the clinic to tell the waiting people about Jesus Christ and about our organization. We then sang the hymn "Alabare" and prayed with them, before opening the clinic.

All patients were treated for parasites and given vitamins for malnutrition. There were many more serious diseases, however, some of which we could treat, some of which we had to refer to Quito and some of which we could do nothing about. These were very difficult for both the doctors and for the pharmacists to deal with, since many conditions would have been readily treatable in North America, where patients have access to all the medications available. The only medications we had were the supplies which the members of our team had brought with them not knowing where the greatest needs might arise. In addition, the meds came in large crates and we spent many lunch breaks searching for a certain drug for which a patient had been told to return in the afternoon. We also had some difficulties with the language and our pharmacy had no translator, since our team was short a few translators. This is no small problem when you have to explain how and when to take three or four different medications to people who don't have the same sense of time (hours of the day) which North Americans have. However, the Ecuadorians, having a good sense of humour, were very patient with us and tried hard to under-

stand our broken Spanish phrases. Despite all these obstacles, however, many who came to us worried and sick went away relieved, healthier and having heard about the good news of Jesus Christ. Praise God for this!

I was blessed with several experiences which really affected me both spiritually and emotionally. Friday evening, May 19, I assisted Helen in delivering a baby. Helen is a nurse practitioner from Canada who works with the Inuit in the N.W.T. The mother was 16 years old and we were delivering her first child. She was in a lot of pain and we had difficulty communicating with her because of our limited knowledge of Spanish. She did not understand the reason for her pain and was very frightened. The Ecuadorian resident and nurse who were with us couldn't understand what we asked them to tell her, but we did the best we could. The U.S. obstetrician had gone back to his room to sleep for a few hours since the time for delivery did not appear to be near. He arrived just as the baby was being born. Although she did require a little surgery, the mother forgot all her pain when she saw her beautiful little boy!! What a miracle a new life is!

Most women in Ecuador have between 15 and 20 children. They are usually married by the age of fifteen,

Much-needed dental care was also given. Note the facilities!



although one 21-year old woman delivered her eighth baby while we were in Muisne, having had her first at age eleven. The number of children carried by the Ecuadorian women causes complications later on in life, often requiring surgery which is impossible to get.

The hospital, a filthy, single floor building was about twenty beds large, contained a small storage closet, one operating room and one recovery room. With the exception of OR and recovery, all the other rooms had windows at ground level which were missing glass panes and had no screens. Most of the rooms had six beds each with no sheets or dividing curtains for privacy. Several times while making rounds with the American obstetrician, we would examine surgical wounds and change bandages, only to turn around and find the local men leaning in at the windows to watch. Although the Ecuadorian people are very modest, there was little privacy for the patients. No curtains hung in the windows and we had a hard time getting the spectators to leave.

The second week in Muisne, I assisted in surgery and the recovery room as well as prepping patients for surgery. During the day on Monday, I had some difficulties with fainting due to dehydration, bronchitis and heat stroke. However, 6 L of rehydration fluids and a day in bed as well as some antibiotics quickly eliminated the problem and I was able to go back to work. We prepared the patients for surgery, injected their pre-op anesthetic and accompanied them to the OR. After assisting in the surgery, the patient was taken to recovery where vital signs were recorded and the patients were made as comfortable as possible. I worked with a Brazilian nurse named Fabiana, with whom I had become good friends.

Between surgeries we had about 10-15 minutes to throw a bar of soap into a rusty tub of cold water and scrub our surgical instruments, afterwards soaking them in a basin of disinfectant before reusing them for the next surgery. We also reused as many scrubs as we could, since these were not well-stocked. Our surgeon performed five to seven surgeries every day depending on the complications encountered. Patients had to bring their own sheets, pillows and anesthetic for the surgery! We ran into some problems with this system when anesthetics ran out during surgery and the patient woke up, but there was no way for the hospital to be able to provide for its patients and we

made do with what we had. God blessed our work, healed the wounds and caused the patients to recover without serious infection



Wednesday was our last day in surgery and after we had finished I went back to the clinic to help finish up there. It was difficult to leave the smiling, trusting people behind, their children who followed us everywhere and called out our names, the fathers who brought their babies and left with tears of gratitude running down their faces, the women who came back again and

The operating room in the small hospital in Muisne. Over 35 surgeries were successfully performed in six days.

again with their children and the children of their neighbours and relatives. We could also see such a great need

for the Gospel there and left with mixed feelings of work accomplished and so much left undone.

We worked until 7:00 p.m. and packed so we could send our suitcases to Quito the same night, as the Ecuadorian transportation workers were planning a strike for Thursday, which was when we were scheduled to travel back to Quito. Although the strike did occur, we managed to find a bus to take us back to the Esmeraldas airport. Our flights were unaffected by the strike and on Saturday, May 27 we were on our way home.

We had provided medical and spiritual care for 1,261 patients, 313 optometry patients and 155 dental patients during the eight days running the clinic. We had also performed over 35 surgeries, and 30 of the patients which were referred for cardiology were able to see the cardiologist in Quito. God richly blessed our efforts and we offer all our praise to Him for the work which we were able to do.



Gifts for the works of CRWRF may be directed to:

**Canadian Reformed
World Relief Fund**

PO BOX 85225
Burlington, ON L7R 4K4

All gifts are gladly received. Donors of \$10.00 or more will be issued a receipt for tax deduction.

*Behold, the amazing
gift of love
The Father has
bestowed
In us, the sinful sons
of men
To call us sons of God*

*Concealed as yet this
honour lies;
'Tis to the world
unknown.
For this world knew
not Him who came
As God's eternal Son.*

**Hymn 54:1,2
BOOK OF PRAISE**

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Please mail, e-mail or fax letters for publication to the editorial address.
They should be 300 words or less. Those published may be edited for style or length.

Dear Editor:

The 3 November 1995 issue of *Clarion* contained an interesting article, entitled "May My Four Sons Play The Lord Jesus, Judas, Peter and Pilate in a School Easter Play."

I would be interested if the author, J.L. Van Popta, could respond to the following question: "May I, or my Children, Participate in a Performance of J.S. Bach's St. Matthew Passion?"

Yours truly,
Dr. P. Janson

Dear Editor:

I appreciated the article by Rev. J.L. VanPopta regarding Bible drama (Nov. 3 1995), and I wonder if a few brief questions could be answered.

First, can we conclude that drama itself as a genre (a type of art or literature) is neutral and thus acceptable and the Bible is one topic of drama to be avoided?

Moreover, how should we view the use of dramatizing of a text as it is read to us – for example, a heavy dose of emphasis in voice and the lively use of gestures by a teacher or minister as he reads from Scripture? I trust that a dynamic, emphatic reading of God's Word does not classify as dramatization of the text. Where do we draw the line?

Yours in Him,
Ron de Haan

Response:

The editor has received a number of letters concerning my article on the dramatization of the biblical text. I have also received some private mail about that article. Each of these letters asks different questions, testing my thesis "at the boundaries" – in the gray areas, so to say.

We can condense and summarize the questions. May we read the Bible narrative "dramatically?" In a Bible story book, or in a sermon, may we "paint in the background" drawing on geographical, archeological and historical data? What about pictures in the Bible story books – are they permitted? Should choirs sing *St. Matthew Passion*, or *Messiah*, or *Israel in Egypt*? What about the Jesus video in Evangelism? I asked myself similar questions as I pre-

pared my submission and concluded that I did not have clear and simple answers for all of them.

First of all, however, my article was directed against using Bible drama in school curriculum as a means for students to understand the text by experiencing it, by re-living it. My argument is against those who say that the revelation of God is not *Word* but *Event*. Modern biblical drama, used as a teaching tool in Christian schools is, I think, a product of this theological idea. As Reformed confessors we should reject that position.

Second, (though this might not satisfy all questions) perhaps we need to make a distinction between retelling and re-enacting. We always need to retell the Story. That is what the LORD instructs His people to do. In Deuteronomy 6:20 we can read, "In the future, when your son asks you, 'what is the meaning of the stipulations, decrees and Laws the LORD our God has commanded you?' Tell him: 'we were slaves in Egypt, but the Lord brought us out by a mighty hand. Before our eyes the LORD sent miraculous signs and wonders – great and terrible. . . .'" In other words, tell and retell the Story. Tell the children of the miraculous signs and wonders that the LORD has done.

This tentative distinction between retelling and re-enacting allows for dramatic reading of the Biblical narrative. We can also include background material in the Bible story and in preaching, though we always need to be cautious in how this is done. Many Bible story books for children are inaccurate and speculative, adding all sorts of material. The Bible story then becomes entertainment, not the inspired account telling of the LORD's great redemptive acts. We can retell the story set to music in *Messiah* by Handel. The words of the oratorio simply being scripture set to music. (Even more accurately than our rhymed versions of the Psalms and other passages of scripture in the *Book of Praise*!)

I would, however, reject the *Jesus Video*, also for evangelism. (Recently, Rev. D. Wynia of the Independent Christian Reformed Church of Calgary has written clearly and succinctly in *Christian Renewal* on the matter of the

Jesus videos. He rejects the use of these videos for evangelism on much the same grounds as I reject Bible drama as a teaching tool.)

As for illustrations in Bible story books I have mixed feelings on the matter. The answer to this question is certainly tied to Q&A 98 of the Heidelberg Catechism. This needs further study, however.

J.L. Van Popta

Dear Editor:

I read Rev. E. Kampen's review in the August 25 issue of Morton H. Smith's *The Subscription Debate: The Studies in Presbyterian Polity* with great interest. There are a few things that should be noted to clarify further the "subscription debate."

First, since the Adopting Act of 1729, Presbyterianism has believed officially that members of the church ought *not* be required to subscribe, or be bound, to the confessions at all. Any talk of subscription, or binding, to the confessions in the Presbyterian world applies only to ministers and elders. In fact, there is, in American Presbyterianism in general, a marked disagreement with and, at times, even a disdain for those who would require members to believe the Reformed confessions as a necessary vow of membership.

Second, Rev. Kampen noted from Dr. Smith's book that the PCA is in danger of "letting go of a strict subscription to the confessions." The PCA is known to have ministers holding to a wide range of "confessions." It is a denomination that has within its bosom everything from dispensationalism to theonomy, from arminianism and amylaldianism to hyper-calvinism. The PCA is, in fact, broadly evangelical and houses more divisions than even the OPC. Indeed, it is this extreme doctrinal diversity which, in part, scuttled the "joining and receiving" between the PCA and somewhat less diverse OPC. This being the case, one might well ask, "Just what sort of strict subscription is being let go?" Indeed, one is justified in questioning whether or not Dr. Smith's definition of strict subscription is meaningful.

Sincerely,
Bret C. Davis

GLORY TO GOD

When our oldest son sang in the Dordt College Chorale in the late sixties, I translated the well-known "Eere zij God" into English, and composed the music for this assembly. They sang this song partly in Dutch, partly in English depending upon the audience; as the director explained when the chorale sang this number in Sheldon, IA, the audiences liked this piece the best of all.

I was amazed that this song has not been printed in our *Book of Praise*. Could this be done at a later printing?

Glory to God!

Bernie Postma

Maestoso $\text{♩} = 66$ $\text{♩} = 104$ ***ff***

Glo- ry to God! Glo- ry to God! In the high-est, In the high-est, In the

rit. ***fff*** $\text{♩} = 72$ ***p*** ***mf.***

high - est! Peace from hea- ven, Peace from hea - ven In the

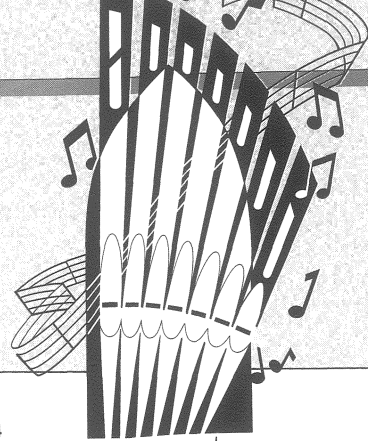
$\text{♩} = 96$ ***f***

peo - ple of His good plea - sure. Glo- ry to God in the

$\text{♩} = 72$ ***p***

high- est. Glo- ry to God in the high - est. Peace from

hea - ven, Peace from hea - ven, Peace from hea- ven, Peace from



♩=104

f

hea - ven In the peo - ple, In the peo - ple of His good plea - sure, In the

rit. *ff* *a tempo* ♩=104 *mf*

peo - ple of His good plea - sure, of His good plea - sure. Glo - ry to God!

Glo - ry to God! In the high - est, In the high - est, In the high - est!

♩=72 *p*

Peace from hea - ven, Peace from hea - ven In the peo - ple of His good

♩=40 *p* *rit.* *pp*

plea - sure! A - men. A - men.

MEETING OF THE ALLIANCE OF THE REFORMED CHURCHES

November 14 and 15, 1995 in Lynwood, Illinois

The Alliance of Reformed churches met once again in Lynwood, Illinois. This meeting of the ARC was eagerly anticipated by many of the Independent churches because of a strong desire to federate on the basis of God's Word, the Reformed Confessions and a Reformed Church Order. As this report demonstrates, their eager anticipation was not disappointed. Mr. Peter Elzinga, chairman of the 1994 meeting of the ARC, opened the meeting in a Christian manner. He read the *Form of Subscription* to which all the delegates gave their assent by standing up. After the meeting was declared constituted, Elder Peter Moen was elected chairman and Rev. Edward J. Knott was elected vice chairman. Rev. Jerome Julien remained as stated clerk. Fifty-eight member churches of the ARC were represented; most of them are independent churches, while a few are still federated with the CRC; one is the Canadian Reformed Church at Chatsworth, Ontario. The following churches were represented by their delegates or observers: Canadian Reformed churches, l'Église Réformée du Québec, Free Reformed Church, General Association of Reformed Congregationalists, Reformed Church in the United States, Reformed Church of Myanmar and Reformed Presbyterian Church General Assembly. Representatives of these churches were given the opportunity during the meeting to address the ARC. Rev. R. Aasman and Rev. W. den Hollander who are on the committee of *Deputies for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity* of the Canadian Reformed churches were present as observers and received the opportunity to address the ARC. See below for a copy of the speech.

It was clear from the very outset of the meeting that there was a strong desire among the independent churches to

come to a federation of churches. One overture requested that Thursday, Nov. 16 be set aside for a meeting of all member churches who wish to federate. Accordingly no schedule was adopted for Thursday so that the possibility of such a meeting might take place.

Missions report

The *Missions Committee Report* informed the ARC that the Covenant Christian Church of Wyoming, Ontario hopes to begin a new work among immigrant peoples in the city of Toronto and that Rev. Tony Zekveld has been called to this evangelistic outreach ministry. Among the ARC churches there is also a foreign mission work being carried out by Rev. Ernie Langedoen who is a missionary working in Honduras.

Office of deacon

A lengthy study committee report on *The Office of Deacon in the Churches* was adopted unanimously. This Report mentioned that it borrows from the *Church Order* and *Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons* of the Canadian Reformed churches. The Report gives an excellent overview of the concept, nature and authority, task and place of the deacon. This Report is recommended to the churches for further study and implementation. It is also recommended that this Report be considered and implemented in connection with formulating and adopting both *Church Order* and *Form for Ordination of Elders and Deacons*.

Church correspondence

The *Committee for Church Correspondence* reported on correspondence received from and pursued with the Canadian Reformed churches, the Orthodox Christian Reformed churches, the Protestant Reformed churches and

the Reformed Church in the United States. This Report and its acceptance by the ARC demonstrates a clear desire of the ARC to seek unity with other reformed churches. In the correspondence with the Canadian Reformed churches, the committee requested clarification regarding what it means when a Canadian Reformed consistory recognizes an Independent Church as a true church of Jesus Christ. The implication of this basically comes down to the question whether such recognition will lead to pulpit exchange, etc. The ARC looks forward to a continuation of correspondence with the Canadian Reformed churches.

Liturgical forms

The *Report from the Liturgical Forms Committee* presented and recommended forms for Baptism, Lord's Supper, Profession of Faith, Discipline, Ordination and Installation, Marriage and Subscription. The committee could not quite finish its mandate and asked for more time to complete all required forms. Most of the forms in this Report are taken from the 1934 and 1957 editions of the Psalter Hymnal, with some changes. Some serious concerns were raised about the *Form for the Administration of Holy Baptism* (infants). The Report is not adopted. It is decided to continue the committee and give the churches opportunity to study the Report for two years and give their comments or criticisms.

Constitution of the ARC

The ARC ratified a decision of the previous ARC meeting regarding a change of wording for the *Constitution of the Alliance of Reformed Churches*. The *Purpose of the Alliance and the Basic Confessional Statements* now include a reference to the Westminster

Standards. This means that churches who join the ARC must subscribe to God's infallible and inerrant Word as summarized in either the Three Forms of Unity or the Westminster Standards. It should be clear to the reader that this is the constitution of the ARC which is an organization to which different reformed and presbyterian churches may belong. Should the independent churches federate, they would have to draft and adopt their own constitution.

Church Order

On Wednesday morning, the ARC meeting began their discussion on the *Church Order Committee Report*. First the *Foundational Principles of Reformed Church Government* was adopted. These are scripturally based principles which act as a foundation to a Reformed Church Order. The proposed church order was then tabled. This proposed church order contains sixty-seven articles. Although some changes have been made, this proposed church order demonstrates a close affinity with the traditional *Church Order of Dort*. After some minor changes, this proposed Church Order was adopted as a provisional church order. In the discussion it was indicated that such an adoption by the ARC is a bit of an anomaly. The ARC is not a federation of churches and cannot impose a church order on independent churches who might subsequently federate. This was well understood. However the ARC had mandated a committee to draft a proposed church order and this mandate was now fulfilled. What the ARC is doing by this action is recommending a basis for federation. It would of course be up to a federation of independent churches whether they would want to make use of the church order provisionally adopted by the ARC.

Quite a number of overtures regarding the proposed church order were answered by the above decision. The agenda of the ARC was completed by supper time, Nov. 15. It was mentioned that there would be a meeting that same evening of all independent churches who wished to federate. The point was also raised whether there would be any need for an ARC meeting next year if the independent churches decided to federate. It was not clear what the status of the ARC would be under such circumstances. Would it continue to function as a conference for churches of different federations? For the time being the ARC would continue to meet and a meeting was set for Nov. 12 and 13,



1996. The chairman closed the meeting in a Christian manner.

Conclusion

The undersigned Canadian Reformed observers were struck by the strong desire of unity and peace among the brothers at the ARC meeting. There was evidence throughout the meeting that there was a desire for the independent churches to unite on the basis of God's Word, the Reformed Confessions and a Church Order along the lines of the *Church Order of Dort*. As observers we saw not only a unity among the ARC brothers but we sensed a unity between them and us. Here were brothers who want to remain true to the infallible and inerrant Word of God, who love the Reformed Confessions and recognize the value of a Church Order. Moreover they desire unity with federations such as our own who are also faithful to God's Word as summarized in our confessions. It also became manifest in the many private discussions which the two observers had with delegates of the

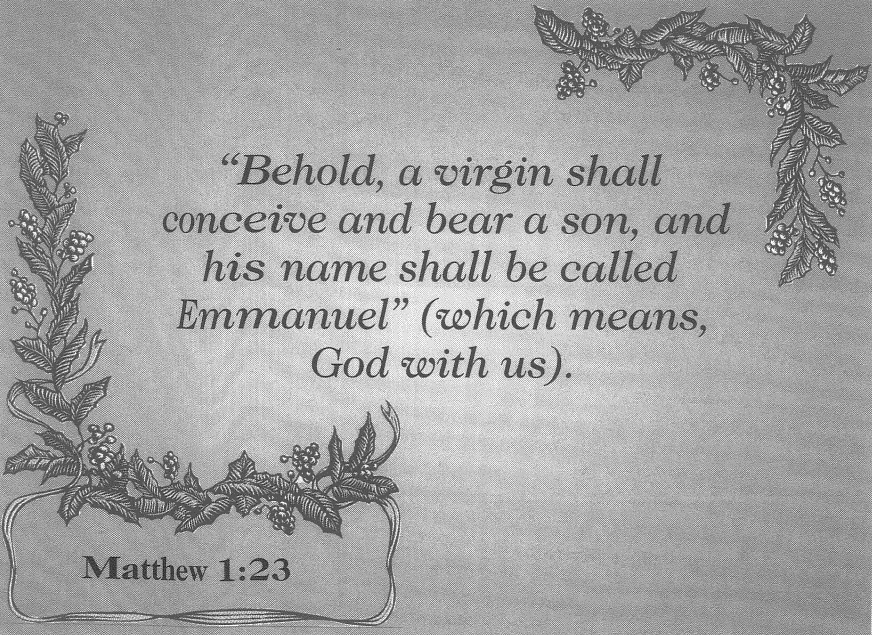
ARC during coffee breaks and meal times that there was a genuine desire to have good contact and discussions with the Canadian Reformed churches. May the prayer of our Lord Jesus Christ, "that they may be one," be fulfilled as the Lord continues to bless the endeavours of the ARC. May this lead to a unity among faithful independent churches and eventually with other faithful churches as well.

R. Aasman
W. den Hollander

MEETING OF INDEPENDENT CHURCHES

**Immediately following the
meeting of the ARC
Nov. 15 and 16, 1995 in
Lynwood, Illinois.**

The consistories of the Trinity Reformed Church of Lethbridge, Alberta, of the Orthodox Reformed Church of Wellandport, Ontario and of the Beverly



*“Behold, a virgin shall
conceive and bear a son, and
his name shall be called
Emmanuel” (which means,
God with us).*

Matthew 1:23

Christian Reformed Church Independent of Wyoming, Michigan had requested (via a letter of July 14, 1995) a meeting of all Independent Reformed churches who are committed to taking the necessary steps for the formation of a federation of churches. A letter of invitation had been sent out on July 14, 1995 in connection with this. Approximately forty-two independent churches were represented at this meeting. The undersigned who were present as observers to the ARC meeting naturally stayed on for this meeting of the independent churches. The ministers of the three churches who called for this meeting served as executives of the meeting: Rev. Edward J. Knott, chairman; Rev. Jelle Tuininga, vice chairman; and Rev. Arthur J. Besteman, clerk.

It was quickly decided by a unanimous vote to form a provisional federation of churches. It was also decided: “That this federation be based on God’s Word as confessed in the *Three Forms of Unity* (*Heidelberg Catechism*, *Belgic Confession* and the *Canons of Dort*) and the 1934 edition of the *Church Order of the CRC*.” The matter of the church order raised some discussion. However since the churches wanted to stay in the line of the *Church Order of Dort* without taking over the modern changes of the CRC, it was decided to take the older form of the *Church Order of the CRC*. Of course there is time and opportunity for revision in the future. It was also decided to send invitations to other independent churches presently not represented and other

congregations committed to the above basis to join this provisional federation and the ultimate permanent organization. The consistories of the Lethbridge, Wellandport and Wyoming congregations were also commissioned to call a second meeting within twelve months for the purpose of effecting a permanent ecclesiastical organization.

On Thursday morning, it was decided not to adopt a name for the federation at this point in time. However in the interim situation, it would be called *The Fellowship of Uniting Reformed Churches in North America*. Twenty-seven churches signed up to join the new federation. Since others were not authorized by their consistories to sign, it was decided to give the opportunity until mid January for consistories to join and still be considered a founding member.

It is with deep gratitude to the Lord that we may see the independent churches resist the spirit of independence and congregationalism, as well as the temptation to move away from the Church Order of Dort because of the suspicion that it may have an inherent predisposition to the type of hierarchy which has seized the CRC. As the speech of deputies which is published below indicates, the Canadian Reformed churches have recognized that for practical purposes and for reasons of principle, it is good that the independent churches federate together. This would be conducive to engaging in fraternal relations which by the will

and blessing of God will lead towards United Reformed churches.

The Lord has richly blessed the independent churches who are now provisionally federating on the basis of God’s Word as confessed in the *Three Forms of Unity* and with a Reformed Church Order. May the Lord continue to bless this fledgling federation in the year which lies ahead so that it may come to a permanent ecclesiastical organization. In local situations where a Canadian Reformed Church has contact with an Independent Church which is now entering into the new provisional federation, there will be appreciation for the basis of this federation. This should greatly assist any future contacts and discussions. May the Lord bless the contacts between our churches, at the federal and local level, and may it lead to true ecumenical unity!

R. Aasman
W. den Hollander

OBSERVER’S SPEECH AT THE ALLIANCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES

Esteemed Brothers,

Already for a number of years deputies for ecclesiastical unity of the Canadian Reformed churches are present as official observers at your annual Alliance meeting. By way of these much appreciated opportunities we have become acquainted more and more with you as brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ, and also with you as assembly, Alliance of Reformed churches. Year after year we have expressed our deep gratitude for your willingness to receive us and to have us address you concerning the matters that are foremost on our mandate and dearest to our hearts: the unity of the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ. These choice opportunities have also given us special occasion to observe your discussions, deliberations, and decision-making in the process to greater unity among the Alliance churches. As deputies we have taken sincere delight in the direction of your meetings, the pursuit of your desire for ecclesiastical unity, and the commitment to do this all in obedience to the Word of God, in faithful adherence to the *Three Forms of Unity*, and in loyal observance of the Scriptural principles for Church polity!

It is by way of reporting on these developments that the work of your

Alliance has become well-known among our churches. However, also by means of a growing number of subscribers to *Christian Renewal*, acquaintance with the Alliance churches is deepening. Also via reports on other activities in the circles of the Independent and Orthodox Reformed churches, the conviction is established in our midst that we see in all your endeavours that same sincere desire to be faithful churches of the Lord Jesus Christ, which binds us together in the unity of the true faith in the Canadian Reformed churches. No wonder, therefore, that also our latest General Synod, which was convened in May 1995 in Abbotsford B.C., reappointed the *Deputies for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity* with an express view to your churches, considering "that the Canadian Reformed churches seek to be one with all those who desire to be Church on the basis of the Scriptures as confessed in the *Three Forms of Unity*." Thanks to these years of acquaintance with one another, the recognition of this unity in the true faith led to the sincere desire to see this expressed not only in words but also in deeds. By the power of the Holy Spirit and in continued submission under the yoke of Jesus Christ, we should come to this act of obedience and love in the near future!


As deputies for ecclesiastical unity we could also share with General Synod Abbotsford 1995 a survey of all the local contacts that have taken place during the past few years. We could report on combined meetings for the pursuit of ecclesiastical unity, ministerial workshops for this purpose, also about joint gatherings of local Councils in which the mutual recognition as true Churches of Jesus Christ received deepened meaning and urgent obligations. In fact, progress is being made in some places to the extent that combined meetings or exchange of ministers became the points of discussion in one of our Classes. Although the actual implementation of these contacts and exchanges could not materialize yet, we should not see this as a negative development nor as deterrent for further pursuit of these matters. On the contrary, the positive message coming from these experiences is a greater incentive and urgency for mutual understanding, for spiritual considerateness, and for continued evaluation of our common reformed heritage, of our common original tradition, and of our common roots in Church Polity. All these, and much more, must become part of our discus-



sions locally and at the level of a federation of churches.

In view of all these observations and considerations, it is with great thankfulness that we have studied the Agenda for this Alliance Meeting. In all the Overtures, submitted by the Alliance Churches to this meeting, we see the

past developments consolidated! More and more clearly there is the express desire for a federation of Reformed churches. Although we can sympathize with the sentiments expressed by the Contact Committee of the RCUS, that you should rather seek an existing reformed federation to join, instead of establishing a new federation, we have agreed so far that for practical and principle intent and purposes a provisional federation would be conducive in the process towards United Reformed churches. With joy we observe a steady progress in that direction. With gratitude we appreciate the move in the direction of a Church Order a la Dordt, and we endorse Rev. J. S. Gangar's defence of the same in *Christian Renewal*. Keep moving in this direction, strengthening the proposed Church Order rather than weakening Dordt! Also the fact that the Committee for the study of the *Three Forms of Unity* and *Westminster Standards* made use of the results of studies made by our *Committee for Contact with the OPC* means a recognition for us of our mutual struggle for the pursuit of the unity of the true faith! In regards to your studies on the office of deacons and the designs of Liturgical Forms as well, we observe a growing acceptance of one another. In this all we thankfully acknowledge that by the power of the Holy Spirit past reservations and even animosity of the flesh is making place for unity in the Spirit!

Indeed, may in this way of exploration, acquaintance, and recognition, our churches grow together towards the unity of our churches with all those who desire this unity in obedience to God's Word, the Confessions, and the Reformed Church Order. Seeing that the major part of your Agenda focuses on the establishing of a Reformed Church Order in order to facilitate a federative cooperation on the basis of Reformed principles of Church Polity, it is my pleasure and honour to present to you a copy of the recently published book **Bound Yet Free, Readings in Reformed Church Polity**, edited by Dr. J. DeJong, our professor of Diaconiology at the Theological College in Hamilton, ON. By means of this gift we would like to encourage the Committee for the establishing of a Church Order to continue in the right direction. We would also like to wish you God's indispensable blessing on your assembly and Alliance of Reformed churches. 

W. den Hollander

NEWS FROM THE WOMEN'S SAVINGS ACTION

Contributions received

During this past fiscal year we collected a total of **\$34,299.99!** A very substantial increase since last year when we collected \$28,799.63 in 13 months. Over the years we have seen a very steady increase in the contributions received. In 1989 we collected \$17,350. The number of congregations participating has also risen sharply from 32 in 1989 to 42 during this past year. This year we also received \$3,290 from the congregations of Armadale, Bedfordale, Byford, Kelmscott and Rockingham in Australia. We were once again the grateful recipients of royalties from the sale of ILPB books written by Prof. L. Selles. All in all, many reasons for gratitude. A big thank you

to all of you, including, of course, Australia! It is wonderful that at this time one-third of our students (6) have come to us from or via Australia!

Annual donation for the College

On the College evening we presented the principal with a pledge for **\$25,000**. Although we had thought last year that we would make a special donation of \$25,000 for the 25th anniversary year of the College, we decided to maintain that amount. During the past year we had few other expenses; the only item besides books and periodicals for which we provided funds was a VCR at the cost of \$476.10. The VCR is being used with profit in the sermon sessions.

College library

About 265 books were purchased during the past year. This is a more accurate count than last year; it is now done by computer. Almost \$4,000 was spent on periodicals. This puts the **average cost of a book** at about **\$75**. The declining value of the Canadian dollar continues to impact greatly on the purchase of books and periodicals. With the slight improvement in the foreign exchange rate purchases which had been put on hold for the past year can now hopefully be made in this coming year.

Need for expansion

Some of the funds remaining after our pledge of \$25,000 for books and periodicals will be kept in reserve for any other items which may be requested during the coming year. The remaining funds will be designated for **expansion**. With a growing student body and a growing library collection expansion is very much a living issue at the College. We quote from the Library Report dated April 20, 1995:

The physical library facility has been altered substantially. The front platform was removed, the entire library was cleaned and then the library could be rearranged. The ranges were extended, and 24 new steel bookcases have been added. This allowed for the reintegration of the periodical collection into the library and the shifting or spacing out of books to alleviate space problems in certain areas. Now that this has been done, the library can at most place another two bookcases in the library. It has become obvious that the library will soon reach its capacity in terms of space.

In the meantime Synod Abbotsford directed the Board of Governors to prepare a detailed and definite proposal for the expansion of College facilities. Synod also indicated that the Governors seek the possibility of financing this project without increasing the assess-



ment of the churches. Hence funds needed for expansion will have to come from other sources. As Women's Savings Action we would like to do our part. Last year we transferred \$12,233 to the expansion fund. At the present time we have a short-term investment of \$30,000 designated for expansion. This past year we had a surplus of \$9,000. So we have made a very good start to making a substantial contribution towards expansion. In 1985 when the College moved to their present facilities we made a contribution of \$125,000. Wouldn't it be nice to surprise the College community once again with a similar large donation from the sisters of the church? Please do keep this in mind when you give your donation for the Women's Savings Action!

Tax receipts

During this past year many tax receipts could again be given out; we are very thankful that we do receive so many donations of \$10.00 and more. We have set a minimum limit of \$10.00 because of the costs involved in the printing and mailing of receipts.

Sincere appreciation

The College community repeatedly expresses their sincere appreciation for the work of the Women's Savings Action. Be assured that the contribution of the Women's Savings Action for the library of the Theological College is never taken for granted. We are grateful for the willingness of the representatives and all those who assist them to collect and count the funds every year again. Also heartfelt thanks to all of you for your donations. And if perchance you did not make a donation . . . remember we do value every contribution, whether large or small! (Just think how even \$10.00 per year – not even \$1.00 per month – from every address would even add up!) That is how the Women's Savings Action started – many small amounts combined together make one big amount every year! What a privilege to be part of this labour of love – ove for the College community, but above all, love for the Head of the Church!

chair

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2372 Cavendish Drive
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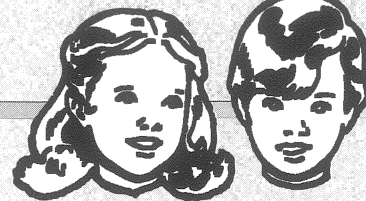


Theological College Women's Savings Action

Contributions July 1, 1994 to June 30, 1995

ABBOTSFORD	\$2,172.59
ALDERGROVE	1,230.00
ANCASTER	639.15
ATTERCLIFFE	436.75
BARRHEAD	730.00
BRAMPTON	123.75
BURLINGTON EAST	1,469.01
BURLINGTON SOUTH	730.00
BURLINGTON WEST	1,477.99
CALGARY	
CARMAN	542.00
CHATHAM	508.00
CHILLIWACK	633.00
CLOVERDALE	2,080.00
COALDALE	874.50
EDMONTON, IMM.	829.57
EDMONTON, PROV.	1,782.93
ELORA	239.95
FERGUS	427.04
GRAND RAPIDS	66.10
GRAND VALLEY	83.60
GUELPH	168.96
HAMILTON	1,221.00
HOUSTON	
LANGLEY	1,980.00
LINCOLN	229.45
LONDON	104.00
LYNDEN, WASH.	150.00
NEERLANDIA	1,723.40
ORANGEVILLE	458.36
OTTAWA	110.85
PORT KELLS	1,000.00
ROCKWAY	
SMITHERS	837.87
SMITHVILLE	1,153.75
SURREY	1,548.50
TABER	860.00
TORONTO	103.69
VERNON	417.50
WATFORD	
WINNIPEG	
YARROW	1,492.27
AUSTRALIA	3,290.00
Royalties (Selles)	374.46
Total collected	\$34,299.99

Please note: Our fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30. Any contributions which came in after June 30 will appear on the financial statement next year.



Dear Busy Beavers,

Jesus Christ was born in the town of Bethlehem. Even though He was a King, only a few people came to worship Him.

But there were some men from far away who came to Bethlehem, looking for a king. They were the wise men we read of in Matthew 2.

These men saw a star, bright and beautiful, in the east. They thought that since it was so beautiful, it had to mean something special had happened.

These men were wise men, the Bible tells us. They knew of a prophecy, that a Great King would be born in Judea. So they came to Jerusalem, but they couldn't find the young king.

Finally, after asking even King Herod, they were told to look in Bethlehem. There they found the child Jesus, and His mother Mary.

Even though there was nothing special in His looks, they believed that He was a King. They worshipped Him and gave Him presents.

Today, we know that the One who was once a child in Bethlehem, is now our Lord in Heaven. He is reigning there as our King!

HAPPY BIRTHDAY!

To all you Busy Beavers who have a birthday in January, congratulations!

May you have a wonderful day, and a wonderful year blessed by our Heavenly Father.

Brenda Dalhuisen	January 4
Stacey Tenmeer	5
Karina VanLaar	7
Sharalee VandenBos	9
Jodi Wemekamp	10
Brenda Grim	12
Cindy Beijes	13
Robin Bosscher	13
Marian Wierenga	15
Jennifer Bisschop	16
Tracy Breukelman	20
Marian VanderVeen	23
Alisha Hummel	24
Corrine Heemskerk	25
Kaylie Raap	26
Charlene Tuininga	28
Erin Kottelenberg	28
Brian DeGelder	30
Denise Vis	31
Jessica Vis	31

Quiz Time!

BIBLE PUZZLE

Remember that new Bible Puzzle from a couple of months ago? Here's another one. (Answers at end of column)

- ☐ 1. Research: Created on sixth day. (Genesis 1:27)
Answer: _____
Jumble Word: _____
- ☐ 2. Research: Who cut off the ear of the High Priest's servant? (John 18:26)
Answer: _____
Jumble Word: _____
- ☐ 3. Research: All people should do this (Acts 2:38)
Answer: _____
Jumble Word: _____
- ☐ 4. Research: Old Testament man of God (2 Kings 2:19)
Answer: _____
Jumble Word: _____
- ☐ 5. Research: Son of Noah. (Genesis 7:13)
Answer: _____
Jumble Word: _____
- ☐ 6. Research: Son of Pethuel (Joel 1:1)
Answer: _____
Jumble Word: _____
- ☐ 7. Research: Persecutor of believers. (Acts 9:1)
Answer: _____
Jumble Word: _____
- ☐ 8. Research: God is _____ (Nahum 1:2)
Answer: _____
Jumble Word: _____
- ☐ 9. Therefore you also must be _____, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. (Matthew 24:44)
Answer: _____
Jumble Word: _____
- ☐ 10. Research: Give us each day our _____ bread (Luke 11:3)
Answer: _____
Jumble Word: _____
- ☐ 11. Research: Do this in the Spirit. (Hint: This word starts with the letter L Galatians 5:25)
Answer: _____
Jumble Word: _____
- ☐ 12. Research: Adam's wife. (Genesis 3:20)
Answer: _____
Jumble Word: _____
- ☐ 13. Research: What the prodigal son's father gave to the older brother. (Luke 15:31).
Answer: _____
Jumble Word: _____
- ☐ 14. Research: Second city Israelites attacked in Canaan. (Joshua 8:1)
Answer: _____

Unknown Letter: _____

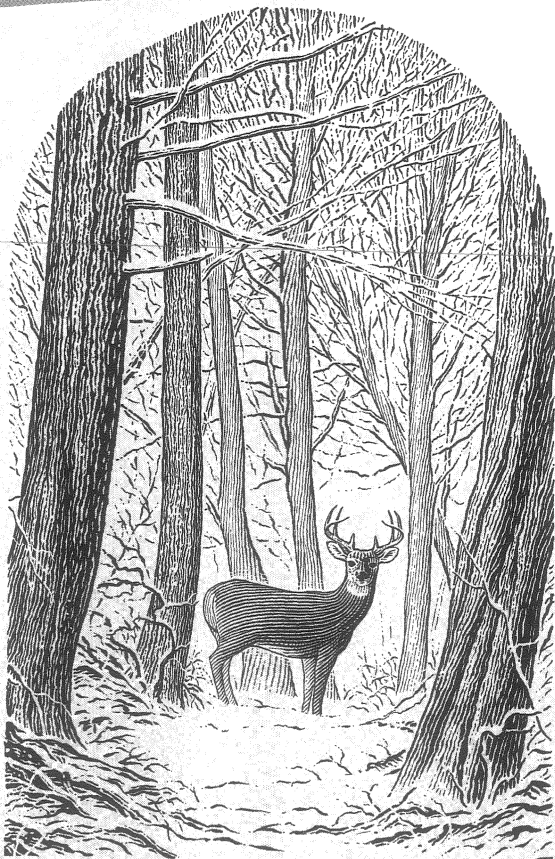
TRUE-FALSE CHRISTMAS QUIZ.

Do you know which statements are true or false, about Christmas? Check the texts before you check your answers!

True or False

- _____ 1. Mary and Joseph travelled by donkey to Bethlehem, Luke 2:3-5.
- _____ 2. Jesus was laid in a manger, Luke 2:7.
- _____ 3. The cattle kept Mary and Joseph company in the stable, Luke 2:7.
- _____ 4. The shepherds were told to follow a star, Luke 2:11-12.
- _____ 5. Angels told the shepherds of Jesus' birth, Luke 2-11.
- _____ 6. Three Wise Men visited Jesus, Matthew 2:1.
- _____ 7. The Wise Men found Jesus in a house, Matthew 2:11.
- _____ 8. The angels sang, "Glory to God in the Highest," Luke 2:13-14.
- _____ 9. The Wise Men were kings who rode on camels, Matthew, 2:1,2.
- _____ 10. Herod wanted to find Jesus to worship Him, Matthew, 2:8,12.
- _____ 11. The Wise Men presented gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, Matthew 2:11.

(see answers)



More Puzzles!

CRACK THE CODE

by Busy beaver Luanne Feenstra

A ☆	F ☒	K #	P ·	U ☒
B ♥	G ⊕	L ●	Q ∩	V !!
C ♡	H ©	M €	R ⚡	W ▲
D ✱	I ▲	N ☼	S ÷	X ♦
E X	J ✕	O %	T +	Y ◆
				Z \$

God bless us in

the year to

come!

CHRISTMAS WORD SEARCH

by Busy Beaver Kimberly Tuininga

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

Can you find these words?

Christ
holidays
friends

candles
December
family

celebrate
New Year

SCRAMBLED CHRISTMAS WORDS

by Busy Beaver Amanda Jager

1. LNOE _____
2. GNLEA _____
3. RMCSTAIHS _____
4. HPRDSHEE _____
5. GMAREN _____
6. NIN _____
7. YMRA _____
8. SJPHEO _____
9. SUJES _____



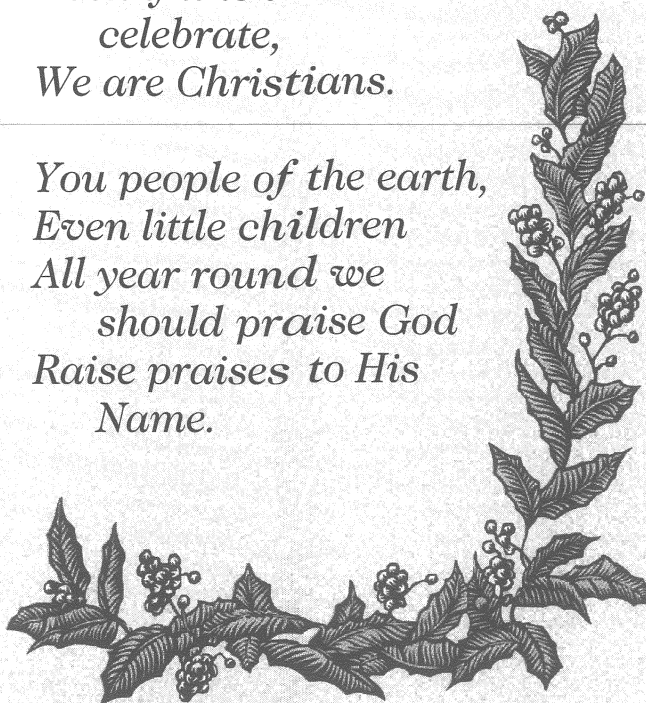
HAPPY NEW YEAR!

by busy Beaver Danielle deJong

*Happy holidays to all of you
Around the world.
Praise God's Name
Praise His Son
You people of the earth.*

*Now let us not forget,
Even if it is time to
celebrate,
We are Christians.*

*You people of the earth,
Even little children
All year round we
should praise God
Raise praises to His
Name.*



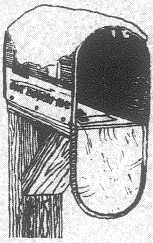
POEM

by Tamara VanLeeuwen

*On Christmas Day
Jesus was born.
When He grew up
someone put on His
head*

*a crown of thorns.
We thank you Lord
for the one who is
your Son,
who took our sins
away.*

*For the one who was
born on Christmas
Day!*



FROM THE MAILBOX

Welcome to the Busy Beaver Club, Here are four new members! *Meagan Strating*, *Rebecca Bethlehem*, *Rianne Boeve* and *Melanie Spanninga*.

Hi, *Meagan Strating*! What kinds of fun things do you do in school? No, you don't have to send in all the answers, maybe someone at your house can help you check them if the answers aren't in the column.

Bye, Megan.

Hi, *Melanie Spanninga*. How old are you and when is your birthday? I'm glad you enjoy the activities, Melanie. I can see you like puzzling. Bye!

Hi, *Rianne Boeve*. So you have four sisters, but no brothers? What kind of farm do you live on? You sure have a lot of friends! What kinds of things do you do together? Bye, Rianne.

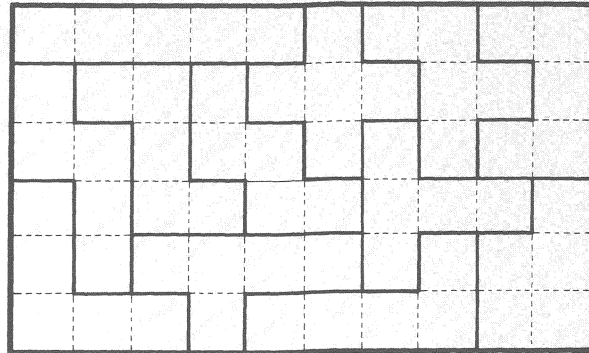
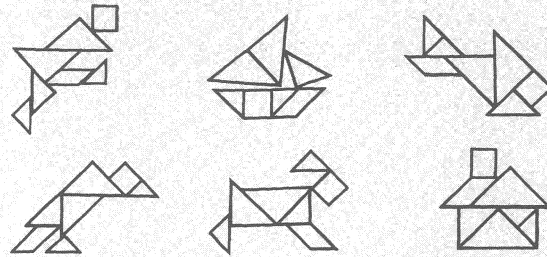
Hi, *Rebecca Bethlehem*. Thanks for sending in the word search puzzle. When is your birthday? I need to know this so I can put your name on the birthday list. What kind of family do you have? Bye, Rebecca.

Here are the answers for the Bible Puzzle:

1. Man, 2. Peter, 3. Repent, 4. Elisha, 5. Shem, 6. Joel, 7. Saul, 8. Jealous, 9. Ready, 10. Daily, 11. Live, 12. Eve, 13. All, 14. A! Unknown letter: R

True-False Christmas Quiz
 1. false; we are not told, 2. true, 3. false; cattle aren't men-
 tioned, 4. false; the Wise Men were told to follow the star,
 5. false; an angel not angels, 6. false; no number is given,
 7. true, 8. true, 9. false; we are not told, 10. false; Herod
 wanted to kill him, 11. True

Solutions for last time's puzzles!



Dear Busy Beavers,

I wish you a very blessed Christmas season celebrating the birth of our Saviour.

Love to you all,
Aunt Betty

Aunt Betty

c/o the Busy Beaver Club
Premier Printing Ltd.
One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB R2J 3X5



Season's
Greetings

from all
of us at

PREMIER
PRINTING
LTD.

