

Clarion

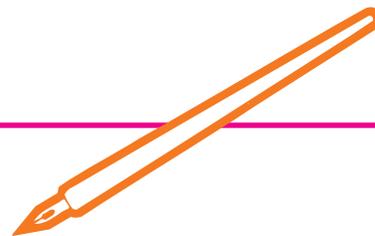
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By J. Geertsema



Judge Not That You Be Not Judged! Or Should We Judge?

Judge not

This is what our Lord Jesus Christ tells us. You can find it in Matthew 7:1 and Luke 6:37. (The same warning is found in Romans 2:1, 14:4, 1 Corinthians 4:5, James 4:11.) There are two different ways of judging. The one is wrong; the other is a must. When Christ and his apostles warn us not to judge others, this judging means that we must not condemn others. We are not called or even allowed to *condemn* others. Such a judgment is not up to us.

Do judge

However, there is a different judging that does not include a condemning rejection of persons but, rather, judges ideas and actions. This is a judging in the sense of examining whether ideas or actions are good or are wrong. In Luke 12:57 the Lord asks the multitude, "Why do you not judge what is right?" (The same sense is found in John 7:24, Acts 4:19, 1 Corinthians 5:12 and 11:13.)

For this second sense of judging a norm is needed. What is right and what is wrong is determined according to a norm. This norm is, of course, God's Word. God has made all things. God has also determined what is right and what is wrong. And He has revealed this to us in the Scriptures.

Here enters the difficulty of sin. In a sinless world, to have God's Word would be enough. Through sin, man seeks to twist God's Word in such a way that it says what sinful man wants it to say. This is the deceit of Satan as it began in paradise. Over against this satanic deceit of twisting the truth of God, the church has received the calling to preserve the truth of the Scriptures. In the course of the centuries, the church has defended and maintained the truth of God's Word in its creeds and confessions. In opposing false teachings, the church has said that God's truth is as she confesses it in her creeds and in her confessions.

The adopted norm

When we look at our creeds, the first and basic one is the Apostles' Creed (or the Twelve Articles), usually read or sung in the afternoon service. The Nicene Creed, the next one, is an elaboration of the Twelve Articles, specifically on the point of the divine and human natures of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our third creed, the Athanasian Creed, is a further elaboration of what the church confesses to be the truth of God about himself as our triune God and about the two natures of Christ. By way of these creeds, the church maintained the truth of the Scriptures over against the heresies of the early days.

In the days of the Reformation, the truth of God's Word had been obscured and twisted by the church of Rome. In His grace, God led His people back to His Word through Luther and Calvin and those who followed them. There was also a struggle with the Anabaptists and other radical movements. Over against Rome and the Anabaptists, the churches of the Reformation maintained once again the regained truth of God's Word. They did this in the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism in the Netherlands, and with other confessional statements in Scotland, England, Germany, France, and so on.

When we compare the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism, we discover that they elaborate in more detail the contents of the Twelve Articles, adding a section about God's Word (Belgic Confession, Articles 3-7), about the sacraments (Belgic Confession, Articles 33-35; Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 25-30), the Ten Commandments (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 34-44), and praying (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 45-52).

In the centuries after the Reformation, the churches did not faithfully adhere to the truth of Scripture as confessed in the confessions. But God again gave a return to His Word in Europe, for example in the Netherlands (Secession, Doleantie and Liberation); in Scotland (Free Church); and North America (Orthodox Presbyterian Church) – to mention only these. Remarkably, return to God's Word was, in all these cases, accompanied by a return to the confessional standards of the churches.

Why did churches which returned to God's Word also return to adherence to the confessions? Because they believed their confessions to speak according to God's Word. They also returned to them in order to have them as a helpful tool to abide faithfully by the truth of the Scriptures. The *norming* norm for the church is God's Word. The (by-the-Scriptures) *normed* norm is the confession. And so our churches bind to the doctrine of the Word of God as it is summarized in the Twelve Articles which are worked out in our other creeds and confessions. This is the doctrine taught in our Reformed Churches.

In order to abide by the Scriptures, our churches have the following article in the Church Order:

All ministers of the Word, elders, deacons, and professors of theology shall subscribe to the Confessions of the Canadian Reformed Churches by signing the form(s) adopted for that purpose.

Anyone refusing to subscribe in that manner shall not be ordained or installed in office. Anyone who, being in office, refuses to do so shall, because of that very fact,

be immediately suspended from office by the consistory with the deacons, and classis shall not receive him; and if he obstinately persists in his refusal, he shall be deposed from office (Article 26).

As Reformed Churches, we say herewith that one who cannot or can no longer fully stand behind, defend, and abide by what we confess to be the truth of God's Word cannot be an office bearer in our churches.

We do not condemn

Do we now judge those who cannot place themselves unreservedly behind the confessions in the sense that we condemn them? Certainly not. It is a judgment of our churches concerning what is right or wrong according to the truth of God's Word. It is not a condemnation. Again, a condemning judgment is not up to us. We can and do acknowledge the fact that there are many non-Reformed Christians who sincerely believe in our triune God, and in this faith love Him and seek to serve Him with their whole heart and life. In no way do we condemn them. But we do what our calling from the Lord is. We maintain and abide by His truth as we confess it. For this is the apostolic, catholic doctrine of the Scriptures.

It is, therefore, a cause for great sadness when one of the ministers says that he can no longer function in the midst of the churches because he can no longer maintain his signature under the Subscription Form. We appreciate his honesty. We do not judge and condemn him. But we pray that God will give him a change of mind so that he can again fully and unreservedly accept being bound to the doctrine of the Word of God as this is confessed and taught in our churches. 

What's inside?

From publishing condensed versions of the reports going to General Synod Fergus (see recent issues of *Clarion*) we change gears to begin reporting on Synod. *Clarion* has a reporter on site in Fergus following the action, summarizing the decisions, and putting it all into a reader-friendly package. Our man in Fergus is the Rev. P. Aasman of the church in Grand Valley. In these pages you will find his first report together with some pictures.

A federation of churches in North America with whom our differences are not confessional but in emphasis is that of the Free Reformed Churches. Our respective sister churches in the Netherlands have been talking. Here and there we have been talking on our continent too. *Clarion* is happy to facilitate this discussion by publishing Dr. J. De Jong's "The Appropriation of Salvation – Some Comments." We echo the author's concluding wish: "May God guide us in seeking to understand one another better, so that we may attain a greater and more perfect unity in Christ."

After reviewing *Bound Yet Free* (edited by Dr. J. De Jong) in the last issue, Rev. J. de Gelder now provides some further reflections on the collection of essays.

These are the main items. In addition, you will find a few more things to read.

GvP



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By J. VanWoudenberg

Play Like Gretzky!

And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia – your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead – Jesus who rescues us from the coming wrath. (Thessalonians 1:7-10)

In the world of sports, the matter of “role modeling” is important. Children admire and sometimes even adore sports figures. Parents often hold the sports hero up before the eyes of their children as a role model to follow in sportsmanship, dedication, and skill. “Son, get out there and play like Gretzky!”

Role models, however, can become “gods” that people worship, doing anything to imitate them or to get their autograph. But not everything Wayne Gretzky has done and does is something that should be modeled. Nor is the game of hockey that important. Yet, having role models and being one is in itself not bad. In fact, role modeling is a very appropriate response to the gospel of salvation.

Paul begins his first letter to the Thessalonians by thanking God for the work that God had done in the midst of the Thessalonians. The Holy Spirit has used the preaching of the Word to touch their hearts: “In spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit” (1:6). Paul then praises the Thessalonians by saying, “And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia” (1:7). In other words, reception of the gospel resulted in the Thessalonians becoming role models to others.

The Thessalonians became “models.” Paul uses a word for “model” that refers to the imprint left in the wax by a signet ring. The imprint is a picture or an imitation of the signet ring. Paul had said to the Thessalonians, “You became imitators of us and of the Lord.” Paul, Silas, and Timothy, the first preachers in Thessalonica, were “imitators” or “models” of the Lord. That meant that just as Christ Himself had been driven completely by devotion to God, so had Paul, Silas, and Timothy. In that way they imitated Christ, and in so doing became a picture of Christ and a role model for the Thessalonians to follow.¹

This example caught on with the Thessalonians so that they in turn became models for others. “The Lord’s message rang out from you.” The Thessalonians were like loud speakers for the Word of the Lord. How did the word “ring out?” By the Thessalonians all becoming

preachers? No, through their modeling! “Your faith toward God became known,” it “came out.” The Thessalonians did not keep their faith a private matter.

The Thessalonians welcomed Paul, Silas, and Timothy and gave them a good reception, even though others rejected them. Hearing the Word, they “turned to God from idols.” They completely reversed the direction of their lives. Typically each family, city, and trade had its own god. The Thessalonians turned away from all this “to serve the living and true God.” They no longer divided their loyalties between many gods; they now loyally served the one living God whom they knew controlled everything: family life, finances, the state, labour, the economy. God’s Word: that is what now counted! His paths: those were now the important paths to follow, no matter what the obstacles, nor what others thought.

All that would have profoundly affected practical every-day life. They would have “stuck out” from the crowd. They trusted in their God to give them all that they needed, and that came out in their attitude. They lived, not in fear of cold fate, but knowing that their God was in control of everything.

They lived as expectant people waiting “for His Son from heaven.” The people around them may have lived as if life on this earth would go on forever, and that after they died their soul would go, who knows where. Others may have lived entirely for the here and now, following the popular philosophy, “eat drink and be merry, for tomorrow you die!” just like many in our society do today. But the believers in Thessalonica had an entirely different outlook: Christ was coming to judge the living and the dead. And everyone will have to give account for every word spoken and deed done. They lived with that in mind.

As such they lived fully aware of the coming wrath of God against sin (1:10). That did not mean that they lived in constant fear of the last day. No, they looked forward to it eagerly. They knew Jesus as the one “who rescues us from the coming wrath.” As such their lives were completely focused on Christ. They

understood that apart from Him all they could look forward to was the suffering of eternal wrath, but that with Him they could be assured of the eternal inheritance. Realizing that all their hope rested completely in Christ, they did not live abrasive or arrogant lives, but lives of humble gratitude. That’s the only way it can be with such an outlook.

By living in this way then, the Thessalonians became role models. Says Paul, “that indeed is the appropriate response to the gospel.” Paul knows that all this had been done with many weaknesses, but yet he praises them in order to urge them on, and also to urge us to look to the Thessalonians as role models. In response to the gospel, we should strive to imitate the Thessalonians (and thus imitate Christ) by turning every aspect of our lives away from sin and towards the service of the one and only true God. That means that we should forsake all false gods, whether these be the gods of self, money, sports, pride, whatever. We should live aware of the coming wrath of God against sin, thus taking sin seriously by fleeing from it. At the same time we should live in humble joy and confidence that in Christ we have the complete forgiveness of all our sins. As such we should live for God in our marriages, in raising our children, in our financial management, on the job site, at school, on the bus, wherever. We should live in hope, trusting our gracious and sovereign God to give us today what we need as we walk in obedience to Him, and to give us tomorrow the inheritance in store for us that is simply incomparable to anything, no matter how great, in this sin filled world. That’s what it means to have the Thessalonians as role models – and in so doing to become role models ourselves.

¹Cf. Philippians 3:17, Titus 2:6-7; 1 Timothy 4:12; 1 Peter 5:3.

Rev. J. VanWoudenberg strives to live as role model in Watford, Ontario, where he is Minister of the Word and Pastor to the Canadian Reformed Church. 

THE APPROPRIATION OF SALVATION

— Some Comments

By J. De Jong

In the final two issues of 1997, we published a document written by Rev. A. Baars (and translated by Rev. P. VanderMeyden) entitled "The 'Appropriation of Salvation' in the Creeds." This document had served as a discussion paper in the Netherlands between the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken* (sister churches of the Free Reformed Churches in North America) and our own sister churches. This document has also been formally accepted by the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken* in their 1995 synod. The reason for publishing this document in *Clarion* was to encourage greater understanding between the Free Reformed and the Canadian Reformed Churches. As a follow up (be it somewhat belated due to Synod issues), we are now printing Dr. J. De Jong's response to this document. This will be followed by the response of Rev. P. VanderMeyden, minister of the Free Reformed Church at Grand Rapids. The interchange will be concluded with an editorial summary of where we are at on these particular issues. — Editor

Some comments

Now that we have published the overview of Rev. Baars on the appropriation of salvation, we may offer a number of reflections both on the statement and on the current state of our relationship with the Free Reformed Churches. As Rev. VanderMeyden pointed out, communication is needed to evaluate the nature and the weight of the "misunderstandings" and disagreements between us. My remarks then must be seen in the light of Rev. VanderMeyden's call for continued discussion and interaction on these points.

To be sure, Rev. Baars deals with only one perceived point of difference between us and the Free Reformed Churches, that is, the appropriation of salvation. However, this is perhaps one of the more prominent areas of concern, and several other aspects, as, for example, the role of experience in preaching, all hinge on this area. Thus, we deal with a fairly comprehensive area of concern in the relation between our two church federations.¹

Our readers may know that the overview on the issues as adopted by the synod of the *Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken* in Holland met with a very positive response from the deputies of the Reformed churches (liberated). In general they voiced their agreement with the document. Later the Committee of the Reformed Churches drew up a memorandum of their own on this subject which overlaps in many ways the sentiments expressed in this overview.² So it will not be strange if we begin by echoing the same sentiment. In general, we can only concur wholeheartedly with the statement of Rev. Baars, and in fact can be thankful for the effort he has taken to let confessions be heard in his approach. Thus the reflections given here are made in the context of an overall appreciation for the overview as published in *The Messenger*, and in the context of an overall unity of faith with the author.

Granting and appropriating

Let me begin with what in itself is a relative minor concern, but one which becomes more significant in the context of the entire overview. Rev. Baars makes a very careful and in my view correct distinction between granting and appropriating the promises of salvation. The reference to Lord's Day 23 is fitting, as the language here distinguishes two sides to appropriation: the granting of the promises, and the appropriation of the granted promises. However, in the context of covenantal language I would not refer to this, (as he does in section 3), as a "subjective-objective" framework. For in the first place, if we use these terms, clearly the objective has priority. After all, the granting comes first, just as we say that the Holy Spirit comes first in the granting of faith. However, the entire framework does not fit in a covenantal context. For, secondly, God's prior claim extends to the whole subject: heart and life. The personal appropriation can most assuredly be distinguished from God's prior claim, but can also be seen as an outworking of God's prior claim. Therefore we never have an "objective pole" matched at some later time by a "subjective pole" entirely divorced from

it. To fall into this sort of a scheme would be systematizing that which is beyond human understanding.

Beginning versus continuation?

Isolating a subjective pole becomes more of a pressing difficulty in the light of the further train of thought in the *Overview*. Rev. Baars has taken a cautious and reserved approach in his study, yet clearly intimates that the Canons of Dort focus on the *beginning* of the new life in the heart of the believers. In section 5, in dealing with the Belgic Confession Art. 24, he says: "Here regeneration is viewed as the *manifestation of new life* which is the fruit of faith. The Canons of Dort speak of regeneration as the *beginning of new life*," (emphasis Baars). My question is whether one can make such a firm distinction on this point. It is true that some expressions in the Canons lean in the direction of emphasizing the beginning of regeneration. For example, Canons III/IV, 12 speaks of regeneration as "a new creation, a raising from the dead, the making alive,"— all terms and images which include the idea of an entirely new beginning, a creation out of nothing. At the same time, the expressions in the same section are not limited to the beginning of the work of God in the believer. For example, Canons III/IV, 11 refers to a continuing process when it says: "He takes care that the gospel is preached to them (the elect, JDJ), and powerfully enlightens their minds by the Holy Spirit, so that they may rightly understand and discern the things of the Spirit of God." Here the language emphasizes an *ongoing* work of God, and all further statements in the article reflect God's *continual* dealings in the life of the believer even to its very end on earth.

Thus, the distinction in the *Overview* is too forced. Indeed, one can distinguish the beginning and the continuation of regeneration. There is an inception, a planting of the seed of the word, to use an image of Scripture (cf. Mt. 13:1ff.), which then is nourished and cultivated by God through the entire life of the believer. But this distinction cannot become a separation: the beginning is normally coupled to the blossoming, the

growth and the culmination of what is essentially the continuing *process* of regeneration. And although the manifestation of the new life is reflected in Art. 24 BC, its beginning is equally reflected in the Belgic Confession, Art. 22. There the phrase is: “the Holy Spirit kindles in our hearts a true faith.” What highlights the beginning more than the term *kindles*?

In sum, the confessions are one and the same in positing a beginning to regeneration, but primarily see regeneration as a continual process of growth in faith and sanctification.

Word and Spirit

The *Overview* is very careful on the relation between the Word and Spirit, and here again we can only voice general agreement and appreciation. However, the line of argument betrays a certain tendency to isolate the role of the Spirit above and beyond the Word. Rev. Baars takes great pains to emphasize the sovereignty of the Spirit even above the means He uses (end, section 4), and then, focusing especially on the beginning of the Spirit’s work in the heart of the believer, insists that “the ‘how’ of the appropriating work of the Spirit at the beginning of spiritual life is for the most part hidden,” (section 5). All this is true if it concerns a description of the work of the Spirit. Jesus Himself said: “The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes or where it goes,” Jn. 3:8. And in the parable of the sower, He speaks of seed that would sprout and grow in a way “he knew not how,” Mk. 4: 23.

However, the tenor of the *Overview* seems to be that this *hidden* work of the Spirit needs more attention in the pastoral approach and in the preaching ministry. For does not Rev. Baars have precisely this beginning of the Spirit’s work in focus when he says: “It would be wrong if we would neglect all this teaching without putting it to good use. It ought to function in our preaching and pastoral labours, in our discussion about spiritual guidance and spiritual life,” (end section 5)? Or, if the beginning of the Spirit’s work is not in focus, does not the danger arise that we begin to concentrate on the Spirit’s work apart from the Word?

Rev. Baars clearly maintains that the Spirit works both through (or by) the Word and with the Word, (section 4). The Spirit works through the Word, but also prepares the hearts to receive the Word. Do we then agree that this also applies to the first moments in regeneration? We must be conscious of the all important role of the Word both at the beginning and in the entire process of regeneration. Lord’s Day 7 says that faith is

worked in my heart “by the gospel.” Art. 35 BC says that spiritual rebirth, or regeneration “is effected by the word of the gospel in the communion of the body of Christ.” Peter speaks of being born anew through the proclaimed Word, 1 Peter 1: 23ff, and James exhorts us to receive with meekness the implanted word that “has the power to save your souls,” Jas. 1: 21. James also says that “God gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures,” Jas. 1:18. Lord’s Day 35 says that faith comes to us through the preaching of the gospel. Therefore, we need to emphasize the role of the Word at the very beginning of regeneration.

Faith or regeneration?

Often one of the sensitive issues in the discussion on appropriation concerns the order of the two elements: faith and regeneration. Does faith precede regeneration, or follow from it, as a shoot from a plant? The line of Art 24 BC is that faith not only precedes regeneration, but is active in fostering it.³ The line of the Canons of Dort seems to reflect an opposite approach. Canons III/IV, 12 states: “Hence all those in whose heart God works in this amazing way are certainly, unflinching, and effectually regenerated and do actually believe.” Given this variation in formulation, the distinction that Rev. Baars makes between the emphasis of the Belgic Confession (emphasizing the process of conversion) and that of the Canons (emphasizing the beginning of conversion) acquires all the more significance. For one could receive the impression from the *Overview* that the beginning of regeneration does not necessarily incorporate the element of faith. The seed is planted before faith itself germinates. This may be a question of misinterpreting Rev. Baars’ intent, since this is not explicitly stated in the *Overview*. But if the discussion is limited to the Canons of Dort, one opens oneself to following the line of the Canons that faith follows regeneration, and hence is not present at its very beginning.

A closer look at the Canons of Dort indicates that there is really no difference with the Belgic Confession on this point, and even the Canons themselves bring out both views on the relation between faith and regeneration. It is remarkable how often the Canons stress the priority of the gift of faith, placing it even before justification and sanctification. In I, 4 the Canons first introduce conversion as “embracing Jesus the Saviour with a true and living faith.” In I, 7 the Canons speak first of the “gift of true faith,” then of the gift of justification through faith, sanctification, and the other blessings of

Christ. In Canons II, 8 we have the same order: “God further willed to give them (the elect, JDJ) faith . . .” and then follow the references to justification and renewal. In Canons III/IV, 10, we read: “He gives them faith and repentance; He delivers them from the darkness and transfers them to the kingdom of His Son.” All these references illustrate the crucial place of faith in the thought of the framers of the Canons.

Therefore we need to keep the Word and Spirit closely together – I would think more closely than reflected in the *Overview* of Rev. Baars. We cannot for a moment forget the crucial role of faith as the means God uses to bring His elect before His face in glory, even at the very beginning of regeneration. And we cannot for a moment forget that rebirth includes within it a specific *knowledge* of faith. In other words, in our preaching we cannot deal with an unexplainable and inexpressible mystical experience, but need to articulate in clear terms that rebirth incorporates a living faith, the knowledge of God as revealed in Christ.

Faith as root and shoot

The *Overview* goes a long way to underscore the promissory character of the language of Scripture (section 3). We always need to appropriate the promises of God through faith, and there is never room for an automatic salvation. In this vein we may speak of the need for experiential aspects in the appropriation of salvation. Faith requires constant activity!

There are two dangers here. The first is to isolate the beginning of conversion, and make that a life-transforming event of such significance that all requirement of ongoing conversion becomes secondary and less important to the believer. The continuation of the conflict with sin is here reduced to a mere scrimmage in the light of the all important “new birth,” in whatever way one may view this one-time experience. Here the Reformed answer is that no specific accent needs to be placed on the *initial* experience of faith or regeneration. In fact, in most cases it cannot even be isolated. The life of conversion and faith, as a continual dying to sin and rising to obedience, is one unified life-experience of faith and obedience in the lives of God’s elect.

The other danger is that faith is seen as an ongoing act of appropriation, to that point that one only possesses faith in the measure that he is actively engaged in the act of appropriating salvation, and as soon as this fails, all faith would be lost. In other words, faith is seen as something you can have one day, and not have the next. Here the Reformed

say: The words of Scripture are promissory, and always we need to appropriate them in faith. Yet there is a distinction between root and shoot. Once we come to faith, we receive a gift that is deeply rooted in the human heart, penetrating the inner most recesses of man, and involving his whole being, mind, will and soul. Faith is more than an ongoing act of obedience: it involves a transformation of the *will* by which we are, in a more or less steadily rooted pattern, inclined to hate evil and turn to the good.⁴ To be sure, we must cultivate this faith every day! But that which grows through the Word is nourished day by day through the presence of God's Spirit, and we at the same time may grow in the knowledge and assurance of God's salvation in our hearts.

Is this the same as positing an automatic salvation? Or taking salvation for granted? Not at all! For the call to obedience and continual appropriation of the Word of God remains. However, we can also be sure that once God has begun a work in us, He will bring it to completion. We need not fear the loss of the faith and commitment tomorrow that we have gained today. The Canons stress that faith grows with assurance, and despite many falls this assurance deepens over time, Canons I, 12, V, 9,10.

Admittedly, as the Canons say, there can be grievous falls in the lives of the elect. Yet the language of the Canons of Dort is carefully chosen. Canons V, 5 does not speak of losing one's faith, but of an interruption in the "exercise of faith." Canons V, 6 speaks freely of the "grace of adoption" and the "state of justification." Were the fathers positing an automatic salvation? Were they suggesting that once one is in the fold, he can take his place for granted? I do not think so. Rather, they were carefully distinguishing between root and shoot. The Scriptural image of the seed of the word and its germination plays a dominant role here. A seed once germinated, will only continue to live and take deeper root. And once it takes root, if so planted by God, it cannot be uprooted. There can and will be trials and struggles, and times of weakness in faith. Repeatedly the believer will admit that "we do not have perfect faith and we do not serve God with such zeal as he requires."⁵ Yet the believer is continually brought back to the rock of God's Word! Therefore in our preaching and pastoral labours, we should not isolate a beginning, giving it special attention, but focus on the whole process of regeneration, with its beginning, continuation, and consummation, and with extensive attention to the many trials and con-

flicts facing believers along the way. Then the focus will continually fall on both the daily trust required in faith, and on the growth in knowledge and assurance resulting from maintaining the exercises of faith.

The role of the preaching

The brings me to the last element of importance in this connection, the role of the preaching in the appropriation of salvation. This does not figure strongly in the overview of Rev. Baars, and it is mentioned only sporadically. The overview stresses that the preaching must reflect in descriptive terms upon the beginning of regeneration, or the new life, (end section 5). This would imply a focus upon experiential aspects in the preaching, with a particular emphasis on those elements of regeneration that do not include conscious appropriation of the Word as preached.

The response memorandum of the deputies of the Reformed Churches (liberated) written by Rev. A. Hendriks goes into more detail on this question.⁶ The Reformed (liberated) deputies say that, among other characteristics, the preaching must be discriminating, and experiential. The preaching must be discriminating, not in the sense that the congregation is divided into those who believe and those who are unbelievers or hypocrites. The whole congregation must be seen as the one people of God. Yet within the family of God there are people in various states of faith and various situations and circumstances in their spiritual life. Therefore the preaching must always include both comforts as well as admonitions and threats. But these threats and admonitions must be directed to believer and unbeliever alike, for we all need to hear the regular warnings, corrections and exhortations of the gospel. Grace is conferred through admonitions, Canons III/IV, 17. It is through this preaching of the full counsel of God to the whole congregation that God in effect discriminates: He gathers His elect and drives the unrepentant away.

As Rev. Hendriks points out, the preaching must be experiential. The preaching must be priestly, and not speak only of what God brings to us in salvation, but also of what He works in our hearts.⁷ The order of salvation needs to be brought forward, and aspects of the order of salvation must be treated in every sermon. Only, says the memorandum, this should be done within the overall framework of due respect for the history of redemption.⁸

Here again I see the position in the *Overview* as being in danger of becom-

ing somewhat one-sided. The emphasis seems to fall on the descriptive function of the preaching and pastoral ministry, specifically with regard to the beginning of regeneration in the life of the believer. At the same time I believe we must stress the *prescriptive* role of the preaching and pastoral ministry not only with regard to the beginning, but with the entire process of regeneration. In other words, we need more stress on the role of the preaching as instrument in regeneration rather than as a vehicle used to inform us about it. Here again, I do not want to read all kinds of ideas into the *Overview*, but only wish to draw attention to what I perceive as a tendency to one sidedness.

So much for my thoughts on this *Overview*. I think it is a fine gesture on the part of Rev. Baars to put this document into discussion as he has done in Holland, and it as also a fine gesture of Rev. VanderMeyden to make it available to the English speaking world in order to promote greater understanding among Reformed believers. For my part, it certainly helps us in understanding the Free Reformed, and it indicates we are very close together in these matters. May God guide us in seeking to understand one another better, so that we may attain a greater and more perfect unity in Christ.

¹Although the document functioned in Holland, for the sake of making the material more relevant to our situation, I am assuming that there is relative unanimity between the sister churches in North America of the two federations in dialogue in Holland.

²See "Nota over de toeigening van het heil" in *Acta van de Generale Synode van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, Berkel Rodenrijs*, 1996, (Barneveld: Vuurbaak, 1996) 308-323. This memorandum was written by Dr. A. Hendriks of Amersfoort.

³"This true faith, worked in man by the hearing of God's Word and by the operation of the Holy Spirit, regenerates him and makes him a new man." Note the emphasis on the preaching of the Word as the means used to create faith.

⁴So also J. Van Genderen and W.H. Velema, *Beknopte Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, (Kampen: Kok, 1992), 543: "Whoever labels faith as uncertain, or as something only on the road to certainty, denying that this certainty is given with the *fides quae*, shortchanges the essence of faith." (My translation).

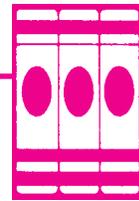
⁵Quoting the *Form for the Celebration of the Lord's Supper*.

⁶See the "Nota" referred to in note 2.

⁷The memorandum here quotes W. Kremer's *Priesterlijke prediking* (Amsterdam: Ton Boland, 1976).

⁸The memorandum says literally: "the order of salvation must have an unmistakable place in the preaching, but it must, according to a phrase of K. Schilder stand under the direction of history of salvation," (my translation) See the *Acta*, 322.

By J. De Gelder



Bound Yet Free (second of two parts)

***Bound Yet Free: Readings in Reformed Church Polity.* J. De Jong, ed., Winnipeg: Premier Publishing, 1995. 252 pages \$ 11.00 CDN**

Valuable building-blocks

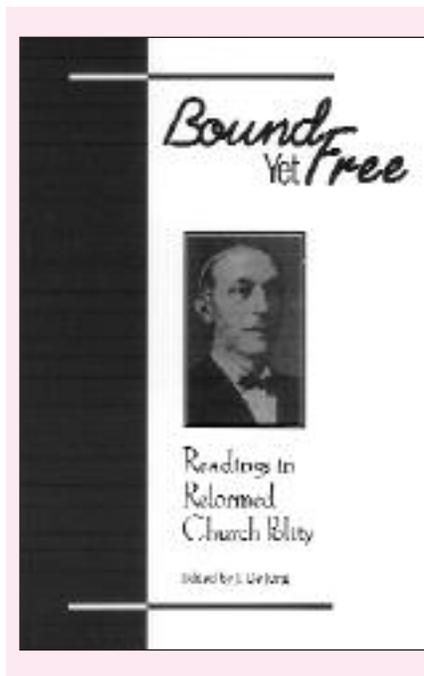
Bound Yet Free is a valuable and highly recommended book. It is an excellent and helpful collection of church political study material, accessible to all who are interested in the Biblical foundations for Reformed church polity, and who desire to learn how these principles functioned in various historical circumstances.

The material collected in this book places emphasis on Biblical data. The Word of God is confessed as the source, as well as the norm, not only for all our thinking about church polity, but also for our application of church political rules.

There is, however, quite some variation among the authors. This is especially true in the practical elaboration and application of these rules. The editor realizes this. In his preface he indicates "that there is some overlap of material in the selections." I would say that there is quite some overlap. That does not necessarily hurt, of course. But then he adds, "There are also points where some difference of opinion can be discerned." Of course, the more overlap, the more variation and difference of opinion becomes apparent.

It sounds nice to say that "there is enough room for the reader to draw his own conclusions, and make up his own mind." It is, of course, true that confrontation with a variety of opinions can be very helpful in making up your own mind, but it may not always be that simple, especially since all these authors emphasize that their position is based on Scripture.

This makes me wonder about these so-called "Biblical building blocks" in this book. The publisher claims "This book provides Biblical building blocks for instituting sound church government today." That sounds wonderful,



but the question is, do all these various blocks fit together? If you want to build something you better make sure that your blocks and bricks do fit, otherwise your building might not be so solid. If the blocks in this book don't fit very well, it may become somewhat complicated to build sound church government with them.

Church historical context

For the most part the church historical context, or background of the various contributions is lacking. This is a weak point in the presentation of this material. Except for some general indications and a little biographical information about the contributors the reader is not informed about the more precise church historical circumstances from which these articles arose. Researching the background is difficult for the book does not give us the original (Dutch) titles, nor the place and year of the first publication of this material. It may not be such a terrible omission, but it would be helpful if this

information could be inserted in a subsequent edition.¹

This context is essential

The articles in this book should have been presented in a clear and concrete historical framework, not just because it would be interesting to learn more about the background, but rather because the opinions explained and defended in them can be better understood in a historical context. Whoever wants to think and speak about proper order in, and proper government of, the church of Jesus Christ must start with a biblical basis. It is also important, however, to realize that church polity is not just general theory, but that we always practice church polity in concrete historical situations which influence the manner in which the church political principles are applied. Church polity shapes church history and church history shapes church polity. Thus, the historical context is essential to understand and to appreciate the differences in opinions and choices, as well as the variation in emphasis in the way in which the various authors apply the Biblical data. In this book this historical context is almost completely lacking, and for many readers will be unknown. Therefore, some of the contributions, especially if compared, evoke more questions than they answer.

Proper use

Taking these writings out of their church historical context, runs the risk of applying them (or parts of them) according to what is convenient today, addressing other questions in another church historical situation.

An example of this can be found in the discussion between Dr. J. Boersma and Dr. J. De Jong in *Clarion* (Vol. 45, p.517-519 and p.537-538) on the matter of ecclesiastical unity. They were discussing what local churches can do and how far they can go in expressing ecclesiastical unity with churches of a different background

without the approbation of the other churches in the federation.

Dr. Boersma defended his position that in this matter the local church is not dependent on the federation. Among other things, he referred to what Prof. Greijdanus wrote in his essay which now appears in *Bound Yet Free*. In his response Dr. De Jong, emphasizing that the local church must not walk ahead in these things, but that the federation is to determine the speed in these developments, refers to the article of Dr. Kamphuis in the same book.

In both cases the references are correct. The problem is that references and quotations are first isolated from the specific church historical context, and subsequently are used to address a matter in a totally different church historical situation. The impression is given that Prof. Greijdanus and Dr. Kamphuis are each others opponents, thoroughly contradicting one another. I am not so sure, however, that there would have been such a contrast or even disagreement between Prof. Greijdanus and Dr. Kamphuis if they would have been confronted with the question Dr. Boersma and Dr. De Jong were busy with in the specific situation of our churches today.

S. Greijdanus in the forties

Is there not a substantial difference, then, between the lines of thinking in the articles of Prof. Greijdanus and Dr. Kamphuis? I think there is, definitely. The difference of opinion the editor refers to in his preface comes out sharply in these two chapters. But to understand and to appreciate these differences, and at the same time to put them into proper perspective, these essays must be read in the light of the church historical circumstances of their own time.

Dr. Greijdanus often speaks with much reluctance, or even hesitation, about the need and the importance of an organized federation of churches. He emphasized that the spiritual unity between the churches is much more important than any organizational unity. He believed that external, visible relations and organized coherence are not really necessary to be able to speak about ecclesiastical unity. His dislike for hierarchy made him stress so strongly the aspect of the autonomy of the local church, that he hardly left any room to speak with much appreciation about the federation of churches, and about the mutual responsibilities the churches have accepted within the fed-

eration. Seriously warning of the dangers of a strong bond between local churches, Prof. Greijdanus did not say much about the benefits of such a bond.

We must not forget that shortly before this was written Prof. Greijdanus had been suspended and deposed as office bearer without any grounds, after many years of faithful service as minister and professor. He had experienced personally the humiliation and the pain, caused by the hierarchical violence of a general synod which went far beyond its authority. Small wonder, then, that you have a sharper eye for the dangers than for the benefits of major assemblies.

Dr. Kamphuis in the sixties

Dr. Kamphuis, on the other hand, wrote his articles in the sixties in a totally different situation in church life. It is good to realize here that the people who gathered after the Liberation of 1944 to continue the Reformed churches were not really all of one mind. That is to say, they were very much united in their rejection of what had happened in the forties, but their motives for this rejection were quite different.

There were those who had liberated themselves mainly because of the doctrinal decisions, but there were others who were more indignant because of the abuse of power of the general synod. Others felt forced to go this way for both reasons, but there were also people who joined the Liberated churches for merely personal reasons. Some were convinced that this abuse of power by a general synod proved that major assemblies as such were useless, and always a danger for the churches.

These differences did not show up right away, as long as the people were focused on dealing with the past. It became visible when in later years more and more the attention was focused on the future of the churches. When, for instance, in the Synodical Reformed churches the doctrinal decisions of 1942/43 were first replaced (in 1946), and a few years later put aside (in 1959), the reactions within the Liberated Reformed churches were quite diverse.

Among the Liberated churches during the Fifties and Sixties some openly diminished the mutual responsibility of the churches, living together in one federation. Others denied, or at least questioned the usefulness of the Church Order, and the role of major assemblies.

This was not motivated by hierarchical actions of the major assemblies, but it did lead to the concrete danger

of independentism. The aim was a loose bond of autonomous churches, without a real commitment, which would give up the congregations to the hierarchy of local consistories and office bearers. In this climate Dr. Kamphuis wrote his articles in *de Reformatie*, stressing that the LORD himself requires organizational unity in the federation of churches. The whole distinction between a spiritual unity and an organizational unity was rejected by him as flimsy and unworkable.

Variety

How much variety there can be in the practical use of Scriptural data comes out clearly in the manner in which some of the authors work with the exegesis and implications of Acts 15, the famous chapter about the Council meeting in Jerusalem.

It goes beyond the scope of a book review to go further into the explanation and the use of this chapter in the church political literature. After all, my point is not to determine who is right, but I have tried to show how important it is to distinguish very carefully in these matters. It is significant to recognize how the application of what we find in the Bible as church political principles is influenced by the concrete church historical context in which we are living. That was true for Prof. Greijdanus and Dr. Kamphuis; it is also true for us today.

Dr. Kamphuis and Rev. Visee

This becomes somewhat sharper, when we realize that what we read from Dr. Kamphuis in *Bound Yet Free* is only the second part of his original series. The articles have been written in a discussion with the Rev. G. Visee, who had written about the matter of the church federation in the magazine *Opbouw*.

In the beginning of his reaction Dr. Kamphuis responds directly to the statements and arguments of Rev. Visee. This part has not been translated and published in this collection. It was considered less relevant for the readers of this book, because of the limited question Dr. Kamphuis dealt with. As such I can agree with the editor, who explains this in his introduction, but the disadvantage is that in this way we lose again part of the historical context.

Rev. Visee wrote about what he saw as the very significant contrast between federation in a spiritual sense and in a church political sense. If you would go into his thoughts and verify his argu-

ments you would find out that he refers several times to what Prof. Greijdanus had written in his essay, now presented in this anthology.

Dr. Kamphuis vehemently resists Visee's annexation of Prof. Greijdanus to support his independentistic views on the church federation. And rightly so. He points out that in the same brochure Prof. Greijdanus says other things as well. For instance, *the local churches are bound before God to enter into communion with each other* (46). He describes church federation as *a divine obligation* (34), or *a divine calling* (47). These aspects of Prof. Greijdanus' position are not mentioned by Rev. Visee.

And yet, in my eyes Dr. Kamphuis is not really conclusive in defending Prof. Greijdanus. In fact he glosses over too easily the arguments Rev. Visee puts forward from Prof. Greijdanus' booklet. In this way he does not do justice to the tension which is present in the writing of Prof. Greijdanus. It cannot be denied that in Prof. Greijdanus' essay, there is a remarkable tension between the spiritual unity and the organizational unity of the church; between the divine calling to form a church federation on the one side, and the little value, the relative insignificance, and even the dangers of such a federation on the other hand.

Flexibility and variation

Again, within the framework of this book study it is not the issue to determine who is right. We can learn, however, that the history of Reformed church government is characterized by a constant tension between hierarchy and independentism. Walking the narrow path between the two, we must learn not to read more into the Bible than what it says – but not less either! Within the framework of the Scriptural data there might be more flexibility and variation possible in the practical organization of the federative way of living together as Reformed churches than we have been used to and than we sometimes think. We can learn from Prof. Greijdanus that more significant than any practical structure is the total submission to Christ as the only head of the church. If that is lacking then the best federative structure will fail. Even the Church Order of Dort in its most purified form will not be able to prevent that.

What can we learn?

This can help us (and with 'us' I mean the Canadian Reformed churches) to

have a great deal of understanding that many of the (formerly) Independent Reformed churches, after their experiences with the hierarchical structures of the CRC, at first have been very hesitant to enter right away into a new federation. It can also teach us patience when we get the feeling that those now United Reformed churches still seem to need a lot of time (in our eyes, that is!) to find a proper form for their federative structure.

At the same time we can learn in our contacts with Presbyterian churches (I think of the Free Church of Scotland and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church) to understand and appreciate the fact that their church political structure is different from ours. Here too church history has shaped the manner in which Scripture has been applied to establish church government.

Would it be impossible that at a certain time confrontation with other (new or old) church historical developments would open our eyes for possible weaknesses or perhaps a one-sided emphasis in the way in which we have applied the same Biblical data in our own church polity?

Helpful

The remarks do not mean that I am not pleased with the translation of these contributions from the history of Dutch church polity. On the contrary, it is a very valuable collection of material for every one who wants to become more familiar with the Dutch sources of Reformed church government.

There is also another reason why I am happy with the availability of these articles in the English speaking ecclesiastical world. It means that now this material is also accessible for office bearers and members of Presbyterian churches.

We know that there are various differences between our *Church Order* and the Presbyterian *Form of Government*, especially with regard to some of the issues discussed in *Bound Yet Free*. The relation between the local churches and major assemblies, and the authority of a Presbytery and a General Assembly compared to our major assemblies are differences which come to mind.

I trust that this review has made clear that I, by no means, want to suggest that with this book the Reformed light has finally shone into the Presbyterian darkness. That is definitely not the case. Rather, I see this translation as a welcome means to show our brothers in the OPC and the FCS not only what the differences are, but also from



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where they come. This may help them to appreciate our position in these matters as well.

Timothy or Titus

As far as the translation as such is concerned, I do not dare to say too much, being relatively Dutch myself. I did check several passages of the translation with the Dutch original and it is my impression that the translator did a fine job. He did make a little but remarkable mistake, though. On p. 240 it states that according to Galatians 2, the apostle Paul refused Timothy to be circumcised. But in Acts 16:3 we read that Paul did circumcise Timothy because of the Jews. Galatians 2 speaks about Titus, who was indeed not circumcised, also because of the Jews. Here the translator got mixed up, for Dr. Kamphuis (in the original, quoting a letter from K. Schilder) is correct in referring to Titus. This point may generate interesting exegetical questions, but they have nothing to do with this book review.

¹The speech of F. L. Rutgers is the first one in the report of the Gereformeerd Kerkelijk Congres, with the title, *Het Juk der Tweede Hierarchie*, published in 1887 by J.A. Wormser in Amsterdam. Shortly after the Liberation, S. Greijdanus wrote his brochure, *Schriftbeginselen Van Kerkrecht Inzake Meerdere Vergaderingen*, published by J. Boersma in Enschede. In 1946 J. van Dalen's booklet *De Schriftuurlijke Beginselen van het Kerkrecht* was published by Oosterbaan & LeCointre in Goes. The contribution of C. Veenhof was originally published as a long series of articles in the magazine *Dienst*, starting in volume 2 (1948), p.65. The final article, written by J. Kamphuis appeared for the first time as a series of articles in the magazine *De Reformatie*, vol. 38 (1962/63), and was recently re-published in a selection of Dr. Kamphuis' essays *Begrensde Ruimte*, Oosterbaan & LeCointre, Goes 1996, p.133 - 186. 

Middle East Reformed Fellowship

NEWS from MERF-Canada

Additional staff

MERF is very thankful to the Lord that two ministers have been found willing to join the staff of MERF and share with Rev. Atallah the additional responsibilities which have come with the greatly expanded facilities. As of January Rev. D. Buchanan from the United States has assumed the role of coordinator of local ministries and resident instructor. Pastor Thabet Megly from Egypt is now assisting with the growing Arabic broadcast work.

Saudi believers cling to Christ

Saudi Arabia is the only country in the world which officially bans the existence of any structure for Christian worship. There is not one single church building in the entire nation; expatriate Christian workers are unofficially allowed to worship within diplomatic mission compounds. Legally, all Saudis are confessing and practicing Muslims. Non-Muslim guest workers are considered infidels and are not allowed to get near the "holy" city of Mecca. Yet, the Gospel is having impact on many Saudi lives. The Gospel can be heard over the radio throughout the country. There are indications that many Saudi men and women are listening and thinking. A leading Muslim clergyman wrote an article in a local newspaper in which he expressed concern over the impact radio broadcasting and Christian literature was having on young people. He called for more organized efforts to persuade Muslims in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere to "cease from listening to Christian propaganda or reading infidel publications." He added: "The very presence of such voices and publications in the Arabic language is most disturbing." The conversion of a young Saudi like F.S. indicates that the clergyman's fears are well-founded. F.S. says: "Brothers, I hereby declare that I have embraced the Christian religion. . . . The only Christian I have met is from Sudan. He is considered by all here an unclean person. This is how they all view Christians.



Participants (pastors and their wives from Egypt) of the 90th study term. Back row, at left, guest instructors, Rev. L. Eyres (from the US) and Rev. E. Hempenius (from the Netherlands). Back row, at right, Ben Vandervelde (from Australia) and Simon Kooistra (from the Netherlands) who served on the house parent team.

Now I am one like you; I believe that Christ is the Son of the Living God. . . ."

Reformed witness among Palestinians

In Jordan, there are a few Palestinian families of Reformed persuasion but there are no Reformed congregations. In Gaza, the West Bank and within the borders of Israel there are quite a few small Arab evangelical groups, mostly Arminian and/or Dispensationalist. At least four of them show a growing interest in doctrines of grace. MERF seeks to help them. In Gaza a young man of Reformed persuasion, converted while studying in Egypt, is conducting a small Bible study group. This work was initiated by an elderly man who trained at MERF's study center in Larnaca. As well, a growing number of Palestinian Muslims are responding to Gospel broadcasts.

First impressions of a volunteer librarian

What follows is taken from a report written by Veronica 't Hart (from Aus-

tralia) who has volunteered her services to help organize the library.

. . . The congregation has a "core" of around 40 persons, who come from a variety of countries. Some of these work for MERF, others are expatriates who either work in Cyprus or are married to a Cypriot, and some are from the local Cypriot population. On each of the five Sundays that I've been here, however, there have always been visitors, either from abroad or from people who live here. The Church is advertised well, and is known by many in the community, and it's wonderful consistently to see people coming in "off the street." I've spoken to quite a few who did so previously and have stayed, recognizing this Church to be the one where the Lord and His Word is proclaimed in truth. It's wonderful to hear their stories of God's work in their lives, and it's our prayer here that many more will continue to come to be fed by the "bread of life."

We have been discussing the significance of the "bread of life" at the



Rev. and Mrs. V. Atallah with two Sudanese elders and their wives who came from Khartoum to participate in the October 1997 study term at the John Calvin Centre.

(English) Bible Study evenings, held every Thursday (there's also an Arabic Bible Study each Wednesday). Also in this way the Lord feeds His people here. Rev. Atallah has been discussing the miracles of Jesus, as they are recorded in the Gospel of John. In connection with these we have spent several evenings digging deep into the treasures of John 6, which contains so much that's necessary both for doctrine and life. One thing that has stood out for me in

this study has been Rev. Atallah's repeated insistence that, unlike the Jews of Jesus' time, we should not seek after "signs and miracles" – for earthly, personal benefit – but we should feed off Jesus, the "bread of life," who has revealed himself in his Word. We do not need special (extra-Biblical) revelations of the Spirit, faith healing, or even entertaining worship services, as the charismatic and evangelical circles would have us believe, but we

should always focus on what God has revealed in Holy Scripture. God feeds us through His Word.

This is also the aim of MERF: "revealing the whole counsel of God." My main task here is to set up the library at the John Calvin Centre. It is our hope that the library will be of much benefit for those who come here to study the Reformed faith. . . . The work of "revealing the whole counsel of God" requires people with different gifts and talents, and it is a wonderful privilege to play (a small) part in this.

We are grateful that we in Canada may also play a small part in God's church gathering work in the Middle East with our prayers and financial support. In a letter Rev. V. Atallah writes: "We praise God for the faithful support of his people and are glad to know of the prayers which are an important part of this spiritual battle."

Thank you for your continued support!

If you would like to make a personal donation please make your cheque payable to MERF-Canada and send it to MERF-Canada
1225 Highway 5, R.R. #1
Burlington, ON L7R 3X4

On behalf of MERF-Canada,
Rev. J. Mulder, chairman
Mrs. J. Van Dam, secretary 

Dreaming, Planning, Building in Calgary

By John Hoogerdijk

May 1, 1998 in Calgary dawned as a typical spring day on the prairies with a crystal clear blue sky, warm breezes, and the signs of spring growth teeming everywhere. This ideal prairie weather was to be a perfect setting for the opening of the home of the congregation at Calgary. The second instance of a growing trend in our churches, the new facilities are home to both the church and Tyndale Christian School.

Just after 7:30 pm, the master of ceremonies for the evening, Br. Henry van den Hoven, invited the congregation and guests to assemble and begin the celebration of God's blessings and steadfast love in our congregation. During the course of the evening, Br. van den Hoven read a number of letters of congratulations from churches and former members and pastors.

As one of the few charter members of the congregation, Sr. Judy van Ellenberg presented a brief history of the congrega-

Chairman of the Board – John Hoogerdijk – presenting Chairman of consistory a Bible – on behalf of the school board.





Some sisters of the congregation making a presentation.



Enthusiastic students with eager props.



Tyndale students rejoicing.



Tyndale and future Tyndale students.

tional life since institution in 1964, outlining that though the church had a rather transitory nature and membership fluctuated, it still enjoyed the blessings of the LORD throughout its history.

Br. Bill Dekker, as the chairman of the Building Committee, reviewed the history of the building process, taking us through several years of dreaming, planning and building. Towards the end of his presentation, he invited all past members of planning, building and fund-raising committees to come forward to demonstrate the number of people involved, and indeed, a good portion of the congregation was represented. At the end, Br. Dekker presented a plaque commemorating the first service held in the building on December 25, 1997.

The Ladies Aid also got into the act, demonstrating their mastery of poetry and their superb vocal talents.

As this evening also celebrated the opening of the school, the Chairman of the School Society presented a pulpit Bible to the church, observing that the architectural reality of the school resting

on the foundation of the church was also the spiritual reality.

The children attending Tyndale Christian School, led by Br. O. Bouwman and Sr. K. van Ellenberg, also showed their abundant talents, providing the audience with a short Easter program.

There were also a number of guests who offered their congratulations. Representatives from Coaldale and Taber were present and congratulated the congregation, suggesting that Calgary's central location will help strengthen the bond of the churches in the Classis of Alberta/Manitoba. They also exhorted the congregation to look beyond the walls of the church with respect to our place in the world around us.

Along with numerous letters of congratulations from former pastors, former members, and many churches in the federation, the congregation received gifts – the church received videos for office bearer training from the church at Ancaster, and the school received a globe and a map from Coaldale Christian School.

There were others: Mr. Ron Taylor extended congratulations on behalf of

the Government of Alberta, Department of Education, and Mrs. Marianne Johnson, Principal of Rundle College Elementary, from whom the school had rented classroom space in the formative years, congratulated the community with their new facilities.

Br. E. Vanderveen, as chairman of the Joint Operating Committee, revealed the plaque commemorating the opening of the building. Lastly, Rev. Eikelboom closed the evening with prayer, and invited the audience to view the facilities.

It was a joyful evening, for the congregation, not only because we finally had our own building, but primarily because of what we learned through the whole building process. Through this whole process, we saw in very concrete ways that our Father in Heaven guided us – no significant injuries were sustained, and the resources we required, both financial and otherwise, were there when we needed them. We know that the LORD will continue to provide for us, and enable us to use these facilities for His service, to the glory and honour of His name. 

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. Please include address and phone number.

URCNA and CanRC

I have some comments on the speech made by our delegate at the Synod of the United Reformed Churches of North America (URCNA). All the communicant members in the CRC and URCNA should know what happened in the Netherlands 1942-1944 and why they are members of the CRC and URCNA and not of any other Reformed Church(es). The Lord in his mercy sent to western Canada in the late 1940's and early 1950's the brothers De Haas and Barendregt. They were in Canada for more than a year before they instituted the true church of the Lord in Canada in April 1950. That was about 6 months after the infamous letter of Dr. Danhof, stated clerk of the Synod of the Christian Reformed Churches in North America. His ideas about the church were then exactly as he showed us in 1949. (Classis and Synods are a higher authority than the local consistories. Do not let Prof. Dr. K. Schilder on the pulpit.) Anybody who wants to know when a true church becomes a false church, that was the time and date.

My father hesitated to join the church in Coaldale - Lethbridge right after we came to Canada. We joined in September 1950, six months after we arrived as immigrants. At that time we were invited to join the Christian Reformed Church in Nobleford. Now here comes the reason, why he joined the church in Coaldale - Lethbridge. We were supposed to sit on the same Lord's

Supper table with our former brothers and sisters who either stood passively by, or actively helped to throw us out of the church (GKN) and keep our mouth shut.

Now we are talking and debating with the same people or their descendants. I first want to hear an admission from them that they and their parents were wrong and that the things which happened in the Netherlands should not have happened. If they can't or won't do that, we should stop talking with them. If they do admit it then I can really call them brothers and sisters in Christ. And do not come with any changes in doctrine or Books of Praise, etc.

As for me personally I know that I am in the true church of the Lord in Calgary according to Art. 28 and 29 of the Belgic Confession.

Martin Van Bostelen
Calgary, Alberta

Editorial note: The CanRC have never required an apology from the CRC regarding the past history, only a commitment to the Reformed doctrine today. It is telling that after the CRC declared that the Conclusions of Utrecht (1908) no longer had the status of a binding doctrinal declaration, the only obstacle remaining was the CRC's relationship with the "Synodical" Reformed Churches in The Netherlands. (See Acts of Synod of Orangeville 1968, Art. 134.) Dr. J. Faber put it well. "God gathers a church of true Christian believers. He does not

gather a church of church historians" (The Challenge of Church Union, 169).

The Ice Storm

Undersigned read with interest your article about the ice storm '98. Members of the CanRC who are 65 years and older have a very good insight of what you and your family went through. This is what you can call "an act of God." We went through the same thing the winter of 1944-45 in the northern part of the Netherlands except at that time it was strictly political. We not only had no power, no drinking water and very little heat, but in the western part also very little food. In Canada it lasted from 10-30 days. We went through it for more than 6 months. Most times it was not very cold but it was wet and damp. And the Lord carried most of the people through that terrible winter. Then we could not change anything. Now people in eastern Canada can do a lot of things, so they will not be stuck again. Buy a good wood stove and make sure you have some coal oil and matches. And buy a good 5000 watt generator for your power needs. Remember there is a Dutch saying, "Een ezel stoot zich in't gemeen niet twee maal aan dezelfde steen." Freely translated, "a donkey does not usually let itself be hurt twice."

Martin Van Bostelen
Calgary, Alberta 

BOOK NOTICES

By C. Van Dam

CELEBRATING SALVATION

Clarence Stam, *Celebrating Salvation*. Winnipeg: Premier (One Beghin Ave, Winnipeg, Manitoba R2C 3X5). Paperback; 301 pages \$ 15.75 Can or \$ 12 US.

After more than 25 years in the ministry of the gospel, Rev. Cl. Stam, minister of the Cornerstone Canadian Reformed Church in Hamilton, has put together in this book material "used mostly in preparing sermons for festive

occasions" (p.3). The author covers the high points of the ecclesiastical calendar, namely, the birth, death, resurrection and ascension of our Saviour and the outpouring of His Spirit at Pentecost, by devoting five to eight chapters on each area. In addition, he has written about the return of Christ by providing a section of four chapters with an exposition of Revelation 20.

This book is a pleasure to read! Rev. Stam correctly concentrates on what the Lord our God has done and is doing for the redemption of His people, while at the same time reminding us of our responsibilities. There is awe at God's wondrous ways and joy for His redemp-

tion in this book! Indeed, as minister of the gospel, the glad tidings, Rev. Stam is clearly in a sermonic mode as he takes the reader through the great saving works of God in Jesus Christ. Aspects and details are pointed out that may have escaped the casual reader of Scripture and one cannot but be challenged, enriched, and comforted by the knowledge of salvation when going through this book. There is some repetition and overlap, due to the fact that more than one chapter deals with the topic at hand, but the Biblical material presented here deserves to be savoured and reflected on.¹ Rev. Stam also applies the text to today and so

shows how the great deeds of salvation should impact on our lives now.

This book is very easy to read and can be used with great profit for personal enrichment and meditation on the Word of God. It will also serve well for study purposes at Bible study groups and societies. Highly recommended!

¹There is a confusing inconsistency that should be corrected in an eventual reprint. On p. 268 the author identifies himself as a millennialist but on pp. 285ff he calls his opponents millennialists.

By G.Ph. van Popta

CREDO

***CREDO: An Overview of the Church's Confession as Summarized in the Three Forms of Unity*; by Jack De Jong; Premier Publishing, Winnipeg; 182 pages, softcover, CDN \$9.75**

Dr. J. De Jong, professor at our Theological College, has produced a fine book on the Three Forms of Unity. It was specifically designed for those who wish to make a public profession of faith. In an orderly way, it reviews the contents of our Reformed confessions and gives students exposure to their confessional heritage. *Credo* does not go through the Belgic Confession article by article, although in its main lines it follows the flow of the Confession while bringing in parallel sections of the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort. In 28 chapters, it deals with what Scriptures teach and we confess about God, man, Christ, salvation, the church, and the last things. Each chapter gives the student a brief explanation of a topic. This is followed by an assignment from Scriptures and the three confessions, some questions for homework, and extra questions for deeper reflection and discussion. The section of chapters which deals with the application of salvation and its fruits ends with five chapters explaining the Canons of Dort.

This is a useful book and highly recommended to ministers and others who are called to the pleasant task of taking catechism students one more time through the basic teachings of the Reformed faith as they have been set forth in the Three Forms of Unity. *Credo* will help the teacher ensure that the student has sufficient knowledge of the teachings about our Triune God whom the student desires to profess publicly before God and the church.

By G.Ph. van Popta

LET'S STUDY PHILIPPIANS

***Let's Study Philippians*; by Sinclair B. Ferguson; The Banner of Truth, Carlisle, PA, 138 pages, softcover, US \$9.99**

Let's Study Philippians, by Dr. Ferguson, professor of Systematic Theology in Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, is the first in a series of commentaries written to encourage people to read, understand and apply God's Word. This is not a technical work; however, it does explain the text. While not listing off all sorts of applications, it does speak of how the teaching of Scripture does affect and change lives. It seeks to help one understand the Biblical message and apply it. It does not have in view a reader who is interested in all the scholarly questions relevant to a book or text; however, behind the explanation lies scholarly and responsible work. It is laid out very well in 27 chapters of four or five pages each. Each chapter explains about four verses. A very valuable feature is a group study guide. Following the schedule as it is laid out, a Bible study group could make its way through this letter in thirteen sessions. For the benefit of the leader, an introduction containing some sound principles for Bible study and good suggestions for getting and keeping a discussion going are included.

Many commentaries have been written on the letter of the Apostle Paul to the Philippians. This is a worthy addition to the shelf. Dr. Ferguson has a very clear, pleasant and engaging way of writing. *Let's Study Philippians* can be used with profit in individual study or a group setting.

By G. Nederveen

***St. Augustine, The Confessions*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1997. Paperback, 416 pages. Cost: approx. \$20.00 Cdn.**

Augustine's *Confessions* have been available in print for a long time, but this volume is the first one that I have seen with scripture references and explanatory history notes on nearly every page. This book offers a fresh translation by Maria Boulding OSB. She used as principal text the one of Lucas Verheijen, O.S.A., in *Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina*, Volume XXVII (Turnhout,

1990). Maria Boulding has managed to give a very readable rendition indeed. Also helpful is the Introduction by the translator. The book is well worth the price of \$20.00 Cdn.

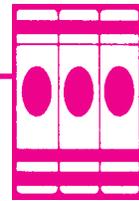
James G. McCarthy, *The Gospel According to Rome*. Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1995. Paperback, 397 pages. Cost: \$20.00 Cdn.

James McCarthy is from Irish stock, and was raised a staunch Roman Catholic. About 20 years ago he left the Roman Church when he "became convinced that the teaching of the Catholic Church could not be reconciled with Christianity as taught in the New Testament" (p.12). He wrote this book to help other Roman Catholics understand what the church teaches. The strength of McCarthy's contribution lies in the fact that does two things. First, he documents the teaching of Rome on issues relating salvation, worship, devotion, and authority. He uses the numbering system of the latest *Catechism of the Catholic Church* to help you check on the accuracy of his work. Second, he supplies ample scripture proof to refute the claims of Rome. The author also makes use of detailed charts to help you through the maze of Roman theology.

I recommend this book with the exception of *Appendix A* on Infant Baptismal Justification. For the rest, it contains a wealth of information, and the whole book is written in a very lucid style. It will open your eyes to what the Roman position is, and the author does so in a compassionate manner. This book will help you in conversations with people of Roman Catholic background who are not sure of what they believe. Which is the case for most! McCarthy calls them more dutiful than devout. They don't ask much of the Church, and the Church doesn't ask much of them (p. 316).

One unfortunate and oft recurring annoyance in the book is that McCarthy keeps on referring to members of the Roman Church as Catholics and other Christians as non-Catholics. Maybe he did this to distance himself from his past, but it overlooks the fact that the catholicity of the church is not the copyright of Rome. If this book receives a reprint – and it deserves one – I hope that this mistaken reference to Catholics and non-Catholics will be cleared up. Having said that, I suggest this book is an asset to anyone's library. 

By R. Schouten



Has the (Evangelical) Church Lost its Way?

***The Coming Evangelical Crisis*, John H. Armstrong, General Editor (Chicago: Moody Press, 1996), 269 pages, \$27.50 CDN.**

This book is a compilation of essays by fourteen pastors and scholars who are concerned about the current state of affairs within the world of evangelical Christianity.

In the introduction, the editor, John Armstrong sets the tone for the book. He states that “deeply disturbing emphases are shaping the present direction of evangelical Christianity” (page 18). He argues that modern evangelicals have drifted away from the sola fide of Scripture and older evangelicalism into “a sea of subjectivism” (page 23).

In chapter one, R. Albert Mohler, jr. shows how the term “evangelical” has become increasingly problematic. Nobody is really sure anymore who is and is not an “evangelical.” It seems that the term is now sufficiently elastic to accommodate many positions formerly associated with liberal theology. Even people who reject “everything the Reformers taught and believed” are accepted as “evangelical.”

Dr. Robert Godfrey, well-known in the Reformed community, offers a helpful essay in which he traces the progress of Luther’s thought on the supreme authority of Scripture. In his struggles against Romanist deviations, Luther gradually came to realize that appeals to history and tradition were not enough. In the Leipzig debate with Eck in 1519, Luther recognized the supreme authority of Scripture over the Fathers and over tradition.

Chapter three is entitled, “Does Theology Still Matter?” Written by Gary L. W. Johnson, this essay is in itself worth the price of the book. Johnson argues that “a healthy Christianity cannot survive without theology, and theology must matter today, especially in our mindless and irrational culture” (page 57). Johnson places himself in

the same line as David Wells whose two books *No Place for Truth and God in the Wasteland* offer a bleak assessment of the current evangelical scene.

Johnson, Wells and many other observers comment on the astounding theological illiteracy combined with actual hostility to doctrine among evangelicals. In place of a theological focus, says Johnson, an ill-defined and unquestioned “spirituality” has become the dominant interest. Ministers and seminary professors who put a high priority on theological knowledge are considered out of touch with reality and do not have a good understanding of the needs of local churches or the culture (page 59).

“An undogmatic Christianity is no Christianity at all.”

When theology is downplayed, the results are inevitable: outright error (e.g. 77% of evangelicals believe that “human beings are basically good”); preoccupation with entertainment in worship (drama, even comedy skits replace preaching); impatience with preaching itself; stress on musical style that attempts to evoke an emotional response simply *for its own sake*; relinquishing cultural authority to pop psychology (Christians today often revel in terms like *co-dependence*, *dysfunctional* but often haven’t a clue what is meant by *propitiation* or *justification*); a demand for *practical* preaching (practical here doesn’t mean “in practice,” but “readily achievable,” “easily followed advice”). Johnson’s bottom line? This: an **undogmatic Christianity is no Christianity at all** (page 67).

In chapter four, R. Fowler White explains how many today believe that God continues to reveal Himself through the gift of prophecy. This thinking used to be confined to Pentecostal sects, but has now become part of evangelical mainstream thinking. White shows that this conflicts with the age-old confession of the Church that God has spoken His

Word, once-for-all, in Christ and in those whom Christ authorized and empowered by His Spirit (Heb. 1:1-2; 2:3-4; Eph. 2:19-20). White fears that the confession of a closed canon is in jeopardy and that all the excitement about alleged prophecy is diverting attention away from the Scriptures.

Written by R. Kent Hughes, chapter five is a plea for Christ-centered preaching and contains some good reminders for both preachers and listeners. Of the latter, he says, for instance, that “the will to concentrate one’s hearing is fundamental” (page 101). And: “you cannot listen to God’s Word the way you listen to TV.” He also applauds “scribbling hands” during the worship service. Apparently, one of the curious by-products of a previous reformation was a sudden interest in shorthand! Renewed hearts make for busy hands (page 101).

In chapter six, R.C. Sproul wonders aloud if the Protestant “protest” against Romanism is over. Several signs point in that direction, says Sproul. If the protest is over in the name of peace, tragedy lies ahead, since the heart of the Gospel of justification by faith *alone* is at stake. Chapter seven by S. Lewis Johnson jr. highlights current objections from within evangelicalism to the doctrine of substitutionary atonement.

Chapter eight offers a fine theological essay by Robert Strimple of Westminster Seminary (California). He shows how the “new” thinking of Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice and John Sanders is really only the “old” thinking of the Socinians of the 16th century. According to these authors, God is not omniscient. God neither foreordains nor has foreknowledge of the decisions of human-beings with free will. Ultimately, all God can do is react to human choices. Again, Strimple makes clear that this is not simply an abstruse doctrinal question. Rather, the gospel is at stake. If theologians such as Pinnock can be accepted as “evangelical,” one may wonder if words mean anything.

The last chapters of the book offer invigorating treatments of topics like worship, music, counseling and spiritual warfare. In each area, the case is made that the Gospel has been compromised by contemporary trends.

This book is a strong effort to steer evangelical Christianity back to its reformational roots. Reading this book will help Reformed believers to be pru-

dent about the offerings of the general evangelical world. It will also intensify their appreciation for their own doctrinal heritage and their own regulated worship. The book should not make Reformed people feel smug – as if all is well in our midst and as if we have no problems. Complacency will lead to disaster. However, this book offers strong hints about where we should be

looking for renewal and reformation, not to the latest trends of evangelicalism, but to our own history as well as our own distinctively Reformed doctrine and worship. Instead of giving in to the lust for respectability in the Christian world, let's rejoice in what God has given to us. This book is available at your local Christian bookstore. Take and read!



PRESS RELEASE



Press Release of the Classis Pacific West of the Canadian Reformed Churches Meeting in Cloverdale, BC on March 31, 1998

On behalf of the convening church, the Church at Cloverdale, Rev. J. Moesker read from Matthew 21: 1-13 and asked the brothers to sing Hymn 25: 1,3. He welcomed all the delegates and made mention of the fact that this is the first meeting of the newly constituted Classis Pacific West. He mentioned one highlight, namely that he had accepted the call to the Church at Carman, Manitoba.

The Church at Cloverdale reported on the credentials and stated that they were found to be in good order. Two churches had instructions.

Classis was declared constituted and the following officers were appointed to act as executive:

Chairman – Rev. C. VanSpronsen
Vice-Chairman – Rev. J. Visscher
Clerk – Rev. E. Kampen

The agenda was updated and adopted.

Classis took note of the decision of Regional Synod West held on Dec. 10, 11, 1996 (Acts, Article 6, E and F.).

An appeal was received, discussed and answered.

The call of the Rev. J. Moesker to the Church at Carman, Manitoba, was approbated and he will be released from his duties in Classis Pacific West on June 15, 1998. The chairman thanked the Rev. J. Moesker for his work in this classical resort during the last ten years.

The Church at Cloverdale requested and will receive pulp supply for one Sunday per month.

Classis Pacific West decided, based on a submission of the Church at Willoughby Heights, to adopt provisionally new Classical Regulations. These will be finalized at the next classis.

The Church at Surrey asked advice in a pastoral matter and this was given.

The Treasurer of Classis Pacific, br. R. Leyenhorst, reported to Classis Pacific West and was thanked for his efforts.

The Committee for Needy Churches submitted its report.

The Church for the Inspection of the Archives submitted its report.

Question Period according to Article 44 C.O. was held.

The following appointments were made:

- a) The Convening Church for the next Classis: the Church of Houston, B.C.
place: Houston
date: June 15, 1998 (alternate date: Oct. 6, 1998)
- b) The proposed Executive:
Chairman: Rev. J. Visscher
Vice-Chairman: Rev. E. Kampen
Clerk: Rev. J. Louwerse
- c) Committee for Examinations: Rev. C. VanSpronsen and Rev. J. Visscher
Examiners:
Exegesis OT – Rev. E. Kampen
Exegesis NT – Rev. C. VanSpronsen
Doctrine and Creeds – Rev. J. Visscher
Knowledge – HS – Rev. J. Louwerse
Church History – Rev. J. Louwerse
Church Polity – Rev. E. Kampen
Ethics – Rev. J. Huijgen
Diaconology – Rev. J. Huijgen
- d) Church Visitors – Rev. J. Huijgen, Rev. E. Kampen, Rev. C. VanSpronsen (c), Rev. J. Visscher, (Alternate: Rev. J. Louwerse).
- e) Church for the Archives – Smithers
- f) Church for Inspection of Archives – Houston
- g) Treasurer – Mrs. B. Meints
- h) Audit Church – Smithers
- i) Committee on Financial Aid to Theological Students – M. VanDriel, C. VanDelft, J. Winkel(c).
- j) Committee on Financial Help to Needy Churches – H. Leyenhorst, P. VanderGugten(c), H. VanDelden.
- k) Deputy for Preaching Arrangements Vacant Churches - Rev. E. Kampen.
- l) Counsellor for Vacant Churches – Rev. C. VanSpronsen for the Church at Cloverdale.
- m) Appointed to represent Classis Pacific West at the farewell of the Rev. J. Moesker: Rev. C. VanSpronsen.
Personal Question Period was held.
Censure ad Article 34 C.O. was not necessary.
The Acts were adopted and the Press Release was approved.
The Chairman requested the brothers to sing Psalm 134: 1,2,3 and led in prayer.
The Classis was closed.

For the Classis, J. Visscher, e.t. 

OUR LITTLE MAGAZINE

By Aunt Betty



Dear Busy Beavers

Do you remember the last time you watched a baby get baptized in the Church? Did you know that when you were born, you also were baptized? Do you know why you are baptized? Well, many years ago, when the Lord Jesus was on earth, He sprinkled lots of children with water, and told them that they were children of the Father in heaven. Although many of these children didn't understand any of these words, later on their Dad and Mom explained to them what this meant.

The same happened to you. You didn't understand anything about baptism when you were baptized. But later on your Dad and Mom told you why you were baptized. You are a child of the Lord because He chose you as His child.

EARLY CHURCH WORKERS

Many people in the New Testament were known for something they did for or to the early Church. Match the person with what he or she did.

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| 1. Peter, Acts 2:14-41 | a. Prayed with a group of women |
| 2. Timothy, Acts 16:3 | b. Served as a missionary |
| 3. Rhoda, Acts 12:12-13 | c. Was chosen to replace Judas |
| 4. Dorcas, Acts 9:39 | d. Paul's helper |
| 5. Lydia, Acts 16:13-14 | e. Lied to the Church |
| 6. Sapphira, Acts 5:1, 8-9 | f. Preached and about 3,000 came to know Jesus |
| 7. Matthias, Acts 1:26 | g. Recognized Peter's voice and forgot to open the gate |
| 8. Stephen, Acts 7:59 | h. Restored Paul's sight |
| 9. Paul, Acts 13:2-3 | i. Died for his faithfulness |
| 10. Ananias, Acts 9:17-18 | j. Made clothes for needy people |

ADD-WORDS

To complete each of the Biblical place-names below, add a word of the number of letters shown by dots and to which a clue is given in brackets.

- SUC . . . H (small bed)
- G . . . R (series of years)
- B (girl's name)
- TUS (distance)
- GIL . . . (snake)
- B . . . AN (tree)
- . . . AH (male sheep)
- LAO A (small cubes)
- B . . . A (before)
- . . . IOCH (insect)
- . . . HAN (shortening of Dorothy)
- GI (metal)

BIRTHDAYS FOR MAY

- | | |
|----------------------|------------------------|
| 3 Andrea Vanderhorst | 18 Michelle Linde |
| 7 Amanda deBoer | 21 Tamsen Lodder |
| 9 Caitlin Meints | 21 Charlene Barendregt |
| 13 Kevin Viher | 21 Jonathan Kingma |
| 14 Rachel Smeding | 27 Chantal Lodder |
| 16 Amanda Feenstra | 27 Angela Brasz |

GOD MADE SPRING

By Michelle DeBoer

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



D S I P E H G T C S -
 G T S F P

Find the following words:

- | | | | |
|------------|--------------|----------|--------|
| BEE | BIKING | BIRDS | BUDS |
| DAFFODILS | LEAVES | PLANTING | RAIN |
| RAIN COATS | RUBBER BOOTS | SEEDS | SHORTS |
| TULIPS | WARM WEATHER | | |

AUNT BETTY

c/o Premier Printing Ltd.
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