

Proceedings of

The International
Conference of
Reformed Churches

September 1-9, 1993

Zwolle, The Netherlands

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Section I

Minutes of the Conference

CONFERENCE MINUTES

Session 1

Wednesday, September 1
Morning

1. **Introductions**

The Conference was convened within the Zwolle-Zuid church building of the Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (liberated), the Rev. J. Hagg, minister of the Congregation of Zwolle-Zuid presiding. On behalf of the Church Council he welcomed all those attending this meeting of the ICRC.

After the singing of the hymn, "Great Is Your Faithfulness," Rev. Hagg read from the Scriptures in Lam. 3:22-26, drawing our attention to the faithfulness of the Lord whose mercies are new every morning. He called upon this to be a singing conference, listening to the biblical call to join in praising the Lord and looking forward to the shared future when all will sing, "My God and King."

2. **Participating Churches**

Following the calling of the roll, the Revs. H.G. Cunningham and Principal A.C. Boyd examined the delegates' credentials and reported that all was in order. The following list records the participating churches and their delegates. (Note: "D" = Voting Delegate, "A" = Advisor.)

Member Churches

Canadian Reformed Churches

Rev. Cl. Stam (D)
Dr. J. Visscher (D)
Dr. N.H. Gootjes (A)
Dr. J. Faber (A)

Gereja-Gereja Reformasi di Indonesia

Rev. D.H. Doko (D)

Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Ireland

Dr. R.C. Beckett (D)
Rev. M.G. Johnston (D)

Free Church of Scotland

Prof. Alasdair I. Macleod (D)
Prof. C. Graham (D)
Rev. D. MacDonald (A)
Dr. I.R. MacDonald (A)
Prof. A.C. Boyd (A)

Free Church in Southern Africa

Rev. David S. Fraser (D)
Rev. B.M. Taho (D)

Free Reformed Churches of Australia

Rev. C. Bouwman (D)
Rev. C. Kleijn (D)

Free Reformed Church in South Africa

Mr. F. Hofsink (D)
Rev. E.L. Van't Foort (D)

Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia

Rev. W. Peter Gadsby (D)
Rev. Rowland S. Ward (D)

Presbyterian Church in Korea

Dr. Kun Sam Lee (D)
Dr. Soon Gil Hur (D)

Reformed Churches in the Netherlands

Rev. A. de Jager (D)
Rev. H. van Veen (D)
Dr. M. te Velde (A)
Drs. C.J. Haak (A)

Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland

Rev. H.G. Cunningham (D)
Prof. W.N.S. Wilson (D)

Churches Applying for Membership

Free Church of Central India

Rev. D. John

Free Reformed Churches of North America

Rev. C. Pronk
Rev. P. Vandermeiden

Orthodox Presbyterian Church (USA)

Rev. J.J. Peterson
Dr. R.B. Gaffin, Jr.
Rev. G.I. Williamson

Reformed Church in the United States

Rev. R. Grossmann

Observer Churches

Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church

Rev. G.J. Syms

Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands

Rev. K. Boersma
Rev. J.C.L. Starreveld

Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa

Prof. P.C. Potgieter
Prof. P.G.J. Meiring

Dutch Reformed Church Sri Lanka

Rev. C.N. Jansz

Ely Presbyterian Church (Reformed) Cardiff

Dr. Peter Naylor
Mr. N. Haines
Rev. R. Holst

Reformed Churches in South Africa

Prof. J.L. Helberg

Gereja-Gereja Masehi Musyafir

Rev. E. Fangidae

Iglesia Cristiana de Fe Reformada Venezuela

Rev. C. Rodriguez

Igreja Presbiteriana do Brasil

Rev. W. de Souza Lopes
Rev. N.D. Bordini Marino
Rev. L. Bonilha Moraes
Rev. J. Marcondes

Netherlands Reformed Churches

Rev. P. Busstra

Mr. P. Wassenaar

Independent Reformed Churches

Rev. C. Tuininga

Rev. J.S. Gangar

Rev. J. Tuininga

Mr. Tom Vandenberg

Reformed Church in Japan

Rev. H. Suzuki

Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America

Rev. T.G. Reid, Jr.

Reformed Churches of New Zealand

Rev. B. Hoyt

Rev. W. Wiersma

Reformed Presbyterian Church (General Assembly) [USA]

Rev. G.W. Donnan

Reformed Presbyterian Church of India

Drs. Mohan Chaco

Second Presbytery Reformed Presbyterian Church in Taiwan

Rev. Yoo Whan-Joon

Rev. Chen Jeng-Hong

Iglesia Evangelica Presbyteriana del Peru

Mr. Luis Torrejón

3. Executive Appointed

It was reported that the Interim Committee was proposing the following new Executive:

Chairman: The Rev. A. de Jager

Vice-Chairman: Dr. S.G. Hur, to be replaced by Dr. K.S. Lee from September 3.

Recording Secretary: The Rev. W. Peter Gadsby

Corresponding Secretary: The Rev. M. van Beveren

Treasurer: Mr. H.A. Berends

The proposal was accepted by the meeting.

4. Additional Matters

4.1 At 11.55 AM, the Rev. A. de Jager took the chair, and formally

declared this meeting of the ICRC constituted.

4.2 It was agreed that Principal A. Boyd and Prof. J. Faber be appointed as official advisors to the meeting, with the right to participate in all discussions but having no right to vote.

4.3 It was also agreed that observers and visiting delegates be granted the right to take part in all discussions, but not to vote.

5. Agenda

The following schedule of normal meeting times was confirmed.

09:00 - 10:30 First Morning Session

10:30 - 11:00 Coffee

11:00 - 12:00 Second Morning Session

12:30 - 14:30 Lunch

14:30 - 16:00 First Afternoon Session

16:00 - 16:30 Coffee

16:30 - 17:30 Second Afternoon Session

18:00 - 19:30 Supper

19:30 - 21:00 Evening Session

21:00 - Coffee

6. Advisory Committees

The Executive proposed the following advisory committees, and the proposal was accepted by the meeting:

6.1 Membership Applications Sub-committees

6.1.1 Orthodox Presbyterian Church

Messrs. Stam (CRC), Ward (PCEA) and Lee (PCK)

6.1.2 Free Church of Central India

Messrs. Kleijn (FRCA), van Veen (RCN[I]), and Fraser (FC in SA)

6.1.3 Reformed Church in the United States

Messrs. Doko (GGRI), Cunningham (RPCI) and Van't Foort (VGK in SA)

6.1.4 Free Reformed Church of North America

Messrs. Beckett (EPCI), Wilson (RPCI) and Bouwman (FRCA)

6.2 Finance Committee

Messrs. Graham (FCS), Johnston (EPCI) and Visscher (CRC)

6.3 Press Release Committee

Messrs. Visscher (CRC), Boyd (FCS) and Ward (PCEA)

7. Notices of Motion

Dr. J. Visscher gave notice of several proposals he wished to make at a later stage of the meeting.

8. Closing

The session closed at 12.25 PM with the singing of Hymn 33.

Session 2

Wednesday, September 1
Afternoon

9. Welcome

The meeting resumed with the singing, *a capella*, of Psalm 8. The chairman welcomed recently-arrived delegates to this meeting of the ICRC.

10. Report: Corresponding Secretary

The Rev. M. van Beveren presented his report, expressing our gratitude to the RCN[1] for hosting this third meeting, when it became impossible for the Presbyterian Church in Korea to do so. (The text of the Corresponding Secretary's report is in these *Proceedings*.)

11. Reports: Membership Sub-committees

11.1 Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC)

(Sponsored by RPCI, FCS, and EPCI.)

Mr. Ward presented the report of the sub-committee, unanimously recommending the reception of the OPC as a member of the Conference. He said:

The OPC has the Westminster Confession of 1646, with modifications on certain church/state issues, as its subordinate standard along with the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, and requires adherence by office-bearers to these as containing the system of doctrine taught in Holy Scripture (Form of Government, pp. 67, 81). A violation of that system of doctrine warrants a judicial process (pg. 111). The Standards of Government, Discipline, and Worship (1985 edition) are regulative. They have been

inspected and there is nothing requiring note for our present purposes.

There are no Declaratory Statements, and as far as we can ascertain the OPC is faithful to its confessional basis and eligible for admission to membership of this Conference. We are therefore glad unanimously to recommend the admission into membership of the ICRC of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

Mr. Kleijn (FRCA) read a prepared statement indicating why the FRCA delegates would abstain from voting on the matter of new memberships. They gave as reason that their churches are still studying the point of what “unity of faith” implies (cf. Constitution, Art. III. 1). Their concerns related to whether it is ethically correct to say that there is unity of faith in the ICRC while at home member churches have not been able to recognize each other as true churches.

Following discussion, it was agreed that the OPC be received into the membership of the ICRC. Of the 11 member churches, there were 10 churches in favour, none opposed and the FRCA recorded their abstention. The chairman welcomed the representatives of the OPC who were present.

11.2 Reformed Church in the US

(Sponsored by CRC, FCS and RCN[I].)

Mr. Cunningham presented the report of the sub-committee, outlining the history of this church. In 1947, the RCUS had 18 congregations, but today numbers 40, with 37 ministers and about 4000 persons associated with the Church. The RCUS's subordinate standard is the Heidelberg Catechism only, but it is in the process of adopting the two other Forms of Unity. The sub-committee unanimously recommended the reception of the RCUS into ICRC membership.

12. Closing

The session was concluded with the singing of Psalm 24, and prayer.

Session 3

Wednesday, September 1
Evening

13. Opening

The session opened with the chairman reading 1 Peter 2:11-12, and the singing of Psalm 46:1-5.

The chairman welcomed delegates, and especially Drs. C.J. Haak.

14. Introduction: Independent Reformed Churches

The Rev. J. Tuininga spoke about the thirty-six independent congregations, embracing some 8000 members, which have left the Christian Reformed Church in North America over the last two years. They are separate, but working toward closer federation.

15. Paper 1: “Mission and the Wrath of God” by Drs. C.J. Haak

Drs. C.J. Haak spoke to his paper, copies of which had been distributed to delegates. (The text of the paper is printed in the *Proceedings*.)

16. Closing

The chairman thanked Drs. Haak for his paper. Following the singing of Hymn 42, Dr. Hur closed the session with prayer at 9.08 PM.

Session 4

Thursday, September 2
Morning

17. Opening

The chairman opened the session at 9.08 AM, reading from 1 Timothy 1:3-15, and commenting briefly upon these words of God. Our spiritual responsibilities in this Conference are not a “job” to do, but the outworking of living by Christ's grace (v. 14). Following the singing of Hymn 57, the chairman led us in prayer.

18. Discussion of Paper 1: “Mission and the Wrath of God” by Drs. C.J. Haak

Drs. Haak introduced this segment, supplementing his remarks from the previous evening, referring to the “Missio Dei” and “incarnational theology” as the background to the thesis of his paper. A period of discussion followed, with the speaker responding to various comments from participants in the meeting.

19. Introduction: Igreja Reformata em Portugal

Following the break, we sang Hymn 433, and the chairman led us in prayer. The Rev. Vitor Maia then spoke about the two churches of which he is pastor: in Lisbon, the capital, and in Porto, 370 kilometers

to the north. He appealed for ministers to come to help in the Reformed work in Portugal.

20. Discussion of Paper 1 (cont'd)

The meeting resumed the discussion of Drs. Haak's paper.

21. Closing

The session was closed with the singing of Psalm 67, and prayer.

Session 5

Thursday, September 2

Afternoon

22. Opening

The session opened with the singing of Psalm 108.

23. Minutes of Sessions 1-3

It was agreed to adopt the minutes of Sessions 1 and 3, with the minutes of Session 2 to be finalized later. (See Article 25.)

24. Reports: Membership Sub-committees

24.1 Reformed Church in the US (continued from Article 11.2)

Discussion on this matter continued. On being put to the vote, it was agreed that the RCUS be admitted to the membership of the ICRC. (Voting: 11 for, 0 against, 1 abstention.) The chairman extended a welcome to the RCUS.

24.2 Free Reformed Churches of North America

(Sponsored by FCS and CRC.)

Dr. Beckett reported on behalf of the sub-committee, mentioning the unqualified subscription of this Church to the Three Forms of Unity, and outlining its history. The sub-committee's unanimous recommendation was that the FRCNA be received into the membership of the ICRC, and the meeting resolved accordingly. (Voting: 12 for, 0 against, 1 abstention.) The chairman extended a welcome to the FRCNA.

24.3 Free Church of Central India

(Sponsored by PCEA and FCS.)

Mr. Kleijn reported from the sub-committee, noting that the

FCCI subscribes to all three of the Westminster Standards mentioned in the ICRC basis. The committee heartily recommended their reception, and the meeting resolved accordingly. (Voting: 13 for, 0 against, 1 abstention.)

The chairman invited Prof. Boyd to welcome the FCCI on behalf of the Conference, and he expressed the joy of the FCS to see this Church, which had been planted by the FCS, received as a member church of the ICRC.

25. Minutes of Session 2 (continued from Article 23)

It was agreed that the minutes of Session 2 as amended be adopted.

26. Report: ICRC Auditor

The Rev. J. Visscher presented the Auditors' Report. (The text of the report is printed in the *Proceedings*.) It was agreed that the report be adopted.

27. Report: ICRC Treasurer

Mr. H.A. Berends presented his report. (The text of the report is printed in the *Proceedings*.) It was agreed that the report be received, and the chairman thanked Mr. Berends for his good work.

28. Report: Finance Committee

28.1 The Committee proposed that the relevant part of the Treasurer's mandate be amended to read: "To assess each member Church, *with the understanding that no member church would bear more than 49% of the assessment.*" This was agreed.

28.2 The Committee further proposed that the relevant part of the Treasurer's mandate be amended to read: "To collect the instalments needed on a yearly basis *or as necessary.*"

Accordingly, the mandate now reads:

- "a. To draw up a budget for the next Conference with the assistance of the Interim Committee.
- b. To assess each member Church, with the understanding that no member church would bear more than 49% of the assessment.
- c. To collect the instalments needed on a yearly basis or as necessary.
- d. To reimburse all costs incurred by the Conference.
- e. To submit a financial report to the next meeting of the Conference."

29. Correspondence from Member Church

The meeting took up the letter from the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia in reference to the text of the Apostles' Creed (see 1989 *Proceedings*, page 33f.). Prof. Faber, the chairman of the former standing Committee on Ecumenical Creeds, commented on this letter from the PCEA. It was agreed that the report from the PCEA be received and incorporated in the *Proceedings* of this meeting.

30. Closing

The session was closed at 4.53 PM.

Session 6

Thursday, September 2
Evening

31. Opening

Vice-chairman, Dr. Soon Gil Hur, called the meeting to order at 7.33 PM. He read from 2 Tim. 2:1-7. He remarked on our duty to preserve and commit the Word of God to faithful men. We then joined in singing Psalm 84.

32. Welcome

The chairman welcomed representatives from the Igreja Presbiteriana do Brasil, and also Rev. Boersma from the Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.

33. Introduction: Dutch Reformed Church in Sri Lanka

The Rev. C.N. Jansz told the meeting about his country, noting that only 8% of the population is Christian, including 6% who are Roman Catholic. The first Dutch Reformed clergyman preached in Sri Lanka in 1642. The DRCSL subscribes to the Three Forms of Unity. There are 24 local congregations, with a total membership of about 5000. It is actively involved in evangelism, mission and diaconal work. The name of the church is to be changed in the near future to “The Christian Reformed Church of Sri Lanka.” On behalf of the Dutch Reformed Church in Sri Lanka, Rev. Jansz presented the ICRC with a copy of *Faith of our Fathers: A History of the Dutch Reformed Church in Sri Lanka*, as well as with a copy of a booklet published on the occasion of the 350th anniversary of the Dutch Reformed Church.

34. Introduction: Igreja Presbiteriana do Brasil

The Rev. W. de Souza Lopes informed us that his church had been in existence for 130 years and today has 3000 congregations embracing 600,000 members and 1800 ministers in 180 presbyteries and 43 synods. The Church has six seminaries and has as its subordinate standards the Westminster Confession and the two Westminster catechisms. It is involved in missionary work in South America and invests 60% of its money in this work.

35. Paper 2: “Prophecy Today?” by Prof. W.N.S. Wilson

At the chairman's invitation, Prof. Wilson presented his paper. (The text of the paper is printed in the *Proceedings*.)

36. Closing

The session was closed with the singing of Psalm 33, and prayer by the Rev. Rowland Ward.

Session 7

Friday, September 3

Morning

37. Opening

The session was opened with devotions led by the chairman. He welcomed visitors from the Ely Presbyterian Church, Cardiff, Wales, and thanked Dr. Hur for presiding at the previous session.

38. Discussion of Paper 2: “Prophecy Today?” by Prof. W.N.S. Wilson

Prof. Wilson spoke briefly, introducing this discussion. He stressed the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, and denied that cessationists limited the working of the Spirit; they sought only to be true to Scripture. There followed substantial discussion around the questions of prophecy and preaching, the apparent granting of remarkable insights to individuals, and the place of other experiences in the Christian life.

The chairman thanked Prof. Wilson for his presentation.

39. Closing

The session was closed with devotions led by the Rev. C. Bouwman at 12.15 PM.

Session 8

Friday, September 3

Afternoon

40. Opening

The session was opened with the singing of Psalm 23. The chairman welcomed Prof. Dr. J.L. Helberg from the Reformed Churches in South Africa.

41. Introduction: Iglesia Evangelica Presbyteriana del Peru

Mr. Luis Torrejón spoke about his church, which had arisen through the missionary work of the Free Church of Scotland. It includes 28 congregations, and 51 different groups, comprising 2500 members. He asked for the continuing interest of ICRC members, and mentioned that his church would consider the report of his visit with us, and whether to apply for membership in the Conference.

42. Introduction: Ely Presbyterian Church of Cardiff, Wales

Rev. R. Holst indicated something of the history of his church, which came out of the Presbyterian Church of Wales for doctrinal reasons. The congregation is active in evangelism and also operates a Christian day school.

43. Minutes of Sessions 4-6

The minutes of Sessions 4, 5, and 6 as adjusted were adopted.

44. Report: Committee on Theological Affirmation

The Convener, Dr. Faber presented the report. Following discussion, the report was received with appreciation, the Committee thanked and the report referred to the member churches for their consideration. (The text of the report is printed in the *Proceedings*.)

45. Dr. S.G. Hur

Vice-chairman, Dr. Hur, rose to express his appreciation for the fellowship he had experienced with all the delegates. (He had shortly to leave Zwolle.)

46. Agenda for September 6-9

The meeting adopted the proposed agenda for Monday, September 6.

47. Closing

The session was closed at 4.15 PM.

Session 9

Friday, September 3

Evening

48. Opening

The session was opened with the reading of Acts 20:25-35.

49. Introduction: Reformed Presbyterian Church in Taiwan

The Rev. Chen Jeng-Hong introduced the church of which he is a minister, in the Republic of China. The church was started through the missionary work of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (USA). There are now 30 churches comprising 900-1200 members. Mr. Chen then introduced his colleague, the Rev. Yoo Whan-Joon, who is the President of the “China Reformed Seminary.” Quoting from Genesis 12:1 and Matthew 28:19, Mr. Yoo spoke of God's call to “Go,” in accordance with which he had come from the Presbyterian Church of Korea (Kosin) to Taiwan as preacher, teacher, and writer. He appealed for help, particularly in the form of teaching missionaries.

50. Paper 3: “Catechism Preaching” by Prof. Dr. N.H. Gootjes.

The chairman welcomed Dr. Gootjes, who presented his paper, supplementing it with further remarks seeking to justify catechetical preaching *vis-à-vis* the textual exposition of passages of Scripture, and answering objections which are sometimes raised against it. (The text of the paper is printed in the *Proceedings*.)

The chairman thanked Dr. Gootjes for his presentation.

51. Closing

The Rev. J. Klammer made some announcements, and after we sang Psalm 87, the Rev. Keith Kleijn closed the session with prayer at 8.55 PM.

Session 10

Monday, September 6
Morning

52. Opening

In the absence of the chairman, vice-chairman Dr. K.S. Lee presided. The session was opened with devotions led by the Rev. Principal-emeritus C. Graham. He read Psalm 8, highlighting the wonder of divine condescension, especially as manifested in the coming of Christ as our Saviour.

53. Adoption of Agenda

It was agreed that the proposed agenda for Sessions 13-21 (Tuesday-Thursday) be adopted.

54. Introduction: The Free Church of Central India (Rev. David John)

The Rev. Mr. John brought greetings in the Lord's name from his Church to this meeting of the Conference. He went on to describe the challenges, work and witness of the FCCI. The chairman thanked our brother, reminding us all that as we exercise our ministries in difficult situations, God is with us.

55. Discussion of Paper 3: “Catechism Preaching” by Prof. Dr. N.H. Gootjes

The chairman invited Dr. Gootjes to come forward for the discussion of his paper presented on the last Friday evening. He introduced the discussion with some remarks seeking to confirm his thesis that catechism preaching is the best kind of topical preaching. The discussion revolved around this issue, but also touched upon the regulative principle of worship, the relative merits of available catechisms and questions of practical implementation. The chairman thanked our brother for his response to the issues raised.

56. Paper 4: “Christology and Mission” by Prof. A.I. Macleod

After the break, Prof. Macleod presented his paper. (The text of the paper is printed in the *Proceedings*.) He prefaced his remarks by noting that his presence in the Netherlands seemed to be associated with writing papers: his only previous visit to this country was in 1964 when, as a boy he had won a prize for writing an essay about milk—and he still does not like milk!

57. Closing

The Rev. Mr. Chacko closed the session by reading the Scripture and prayer at 12.14 PM.

Session 11

Monday, September 6
Afternoon

58. Opening

The session was opened at 2.32 PM by vice-chairman, Dr. K.S. Lee, and we sang from Psalm 84.

59. Introduction: Reformed Presbyterian Church General Assembly (Rev. G.W. Donnan)

The Rev. Mr. Donnan gave the meeting some information about the Church of which he is a minister, embracing 6 congregations in the US, with perhaps 250 adherents.

60. Discussion of Paper 4: “Christology and Mission” by Prof. A.I. Macleod

Prof. Macleod commenced this period by amplifying his comments in the paper on the subject of “Mercy Ministry.” He particularly reminded us of the important place occupied by diaconal ministry in the early Free Church, and also commented on the growing school (in the US) of “discipleship training.”

There followed a period during which a number of issues of practical relevance to the missionary mandate were discussed. The chairman thanked Prof. Macleod for his contribution.

61. Minutes

The minutes of Sessions 7 - 9 were adopted, as amended.

62. Closing

The session was closed at 4.04 PM, to permit time for inter-church discussions among the delegates.

Session 12

Monday, September 6
Evening

63. Opening

The chairman, Rev. A. de Jager presided, and opened the session by reading from Psalm 78. We then sang Psalm 111:1-8.

64. Introduction: Iglesia Cristiana de Fe Reformada Venezuela (Rev. C. Rodriguez)

Our brother told us about the progress of the work in northern and central Venezuela. He had been set aside for mission work, and has done much work translating “Bible Way” materials into Spanish. The Church now has a sister relationship with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated). He gave thanks to the Lord for this, and for the fellowship of this meeting of the ICRC, indicating that he expected closer contacts between his own church, and those in Mexico and Brazil. He concluded with a demonstration of one of his country's musical instruments: the maracas.

65. Paper 5: “Recent Criticisms of the Westminster Confession of Faith” by Rev. Rowland S. Ward

The chairman introduced the speaker, mentioning that this year marks a significant anniversary for the Westminster Standards. (It was on July 1, 1643 that the Westminster Assembly was convened in London.) Mr. Ward spoke to his paper, pointing out by way of introduction that the ICRC represented the “normal” state historically of the Reformed churches, supporting and encouraging each other in the work of the gospel. (The text of the paper is printed in the *Proceedings*.)

66. Closing

Following the presentation of the paper, we sang Psalm 67, and the chairman called on Mr. Hofsink to close with prayer at 9.08 PM.

Session 13

Tuesday, September 7
Morning

67. Opening

The chairman opened the session at 9.07 AM, reading 1 Tim. 2:1-7 and making some appropriate remarks upon this “earliest church order.” He then led us in prayer and we sang Psalm 46.

68. Introduction: Orthodox Presbyterian Church (Rev. J.J. Peterson)

The Rev. Mr. Peterson told the meeting about the origin of his church, and of the Westminster Theological Seminary, in which the blend of Presbyterian and Reformed traditions has always been a significant factor. The Church is active in church planting, Christian education, foreign missions and, most recently, the work in Eritrea has been resumed, in addition to other existing fields. The OPC is also strongly committed to true ecumenism, and rejoicing in their new membership of the ICRC.

69. Discussion of Paper 5: “Recent Criticisms of the Westminster Confession of Faith” by Rev. Rowland S. Ward

The Rev. Mr. Ward supplemented his paper of the previous evening, noting that while an optimistic eschatology was typical of the Westminster divines, no such strong emphasis was included in the Westminster Confession of Faith. He said that such views were also common among the Dutch theologians of the 17th century. There followed an extended period of wide-ranging discussion in which many delegates participated.

The chairman thanked Mr. Ward for his contribution.

70. Report: Missions Committee

The Committee's chairman, Dr. K. Deddens, presented the amended report. (See also Article 75.) (The text of the report is printed in the *Proceedings*.)

71. Communication to RCN[II] Synod at Ommen

The executive proposed that a message of greeting be sent to the Synod of Ommen by this meeting of the Conference, and this was agreed.

72. Closing

The Rev. van't Foort closed the session with the reading of Isaiah 66:18-24, and with prayer, at 12.07 PM.

Session 14

Tuesday, September 7
Afternoon

73. Opening

The chairman called the meeting to order at 2.45 PM, and we joined in singing Psalm 23.

74. Minutes of Sessions 10-12

The minutes of sessions 10-12, as amended were adopted.

75. Report: Missions Committee (continued from Article 70)

Following a suggestion from the floor, the Committee agreed to include India in the “East,” and omit Irian Jaya in its draft recommendation (par. 2). It was agreed that the recommendation as amended be admitted as an additional item in the Committee's report, pursuant to the ICRC Regulations, Article VII.2.

Accordingly it was agreed by a majority of those present that the Conference appoint a Missions Committee with the following mandate:

1. to update information from the member Churches regarding missionary activity in general, and also about missionary training and methodology of mission in particular;
2. to ask the respective member Churches to organize four different mission conferences, two years after each ICRC, one in the West (Curacao, Surinam, Brasil, Peru), one in Africa (South-Africa, Ghana, Zaire), one in the East (Japan, Indonesia, Philippines, Taiwan, India, Papua New Guinea), and one in Europe (including Eastern Europe). The reports of these conferences have to be sent at least one and a half years before the next ICRC to the Missions Committee;
3. to ask the churches which are working among the Jews to contact one another and to send their report to the Missions Committee at least one and a half years before the next ICRC;
4. to inform the member Churches each and every half year about mission work, stating also their needs and strategies, in a newsletter;
5. to send the report to the Corresponding Secretary at least one year before the next ICRC.

It was further agreed that the Missions Committee comprise: Dr. K. Deddens (RCN[1]) [Convener], with Prof. A. Boyd (FCS), Rev. W.M. Mackay (PCEA), Mr. Mark Bube (OPC) and Dr. K.S. Lee (PCK).

76. Introduction: Reformed Church in the United States (Rev. R. Grossman)

The Rev. Mr. Grossman related some information about his church,

which had its origins in the late 17th century German immigration to North America. The present day RCUS continues the witness of the former “Eureka Classis.” Since 1933 the Church has progressed in the Reformed Faith and has close relations with the OPC, as well as other churches. Since 1986 they have cooperated with the RCN[1] in mission work in Zaire. Today the Church comprises 40 congregations in 4 classes across the continental USA.

77. Proposals from Rev. Dr. J. Visscher (CanRC)

Pursuant to the adoption of the proposed agenda (Article 53), Dr. Visscher brought forward some proposals of which he had given notice (Article 7).

77.1 Revision of Constitution and Regulations

It was agreed that PCEA delegates Messrs. Gadsby and Ward function as a Committee to provide to the member churches a proposal to reword Article IV of the ICRC Constitution, and also Articles V.3 and VII.1.e of the Regulations in order to reformulate the requirements for ICRC membership.

77.2 Regional Conferences

There was some discussion for and against this suggestion. It was agreed that this question be referred to the Interim Committee for study; that they request advice from the member churches; and that they evaluate the need for such conferences, the cost, organization and other related matters, and report to the next meeting of the ICRC.

77.3 Third-World Churches

It was suggested that information about such churches be forwarded by member churches to the Corresponding Secretary from time to time.

78. Planning ICRC 1997

Following some discussion, this matter was deferred to a subsequent session.

79. Closing

The session was closed with prayer at 5.40 PM.

Session 15

Tuesday, September 7

Evening

80. Opening

The chairman opened the session at 7.37 PM, reading from Jeremiah 2:1-19. We then sang Hymn 429.

81. Welcomes

The chairman welcomed our speaker, Prof. H.M. Ohmann, and also Prof. W.H. Velema of the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Apeldoorn.

82. Introduction: Free Reformed Churches of North America (Rev. Cornelis Pronk)

The Rev. Mr. Pronk provided some background to his churches which are sister churches to the Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken. He looked forward to the ICRC promoting a biblical synthesis of truth and Christian holiness.

83. South African Situation

At the invitation of the executive, Prof. P. Potgieter, from the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa, gave the meeting his assessment of the worsening crisis in the Republic of South Africa, with the growth of sporadic violence since the announcement of elections in April 1994. Many are very fearful of civil war in South Africa, and in Potgieter's opinion the problem seems almost insoluble. The DRC's efforts to promote peace have met with some success, but only Almighty God holds the key to peace; he called on us all to pray for his land and all its people in accordance with James 5:16.

84. Paper 6: “Redemptive Historical Preaching” by Prof. H.M. Ohmann.

The chairman welcomed Prof. Ohmann, who proceeded to present his paper. (The text of the paper is printed in the *Proceedings*.)

85. Closing

The session was closed at 9.10 PM with the singing of Hymn 205, and with prayer by the Rev. David Fraser.

Session 16

Wednesday, September 8

Morning

86. Opening

The chairman opened the session reading 1 Timothy 2:8-15. He remarked that while this passage had become the subject of controversy, we must not overlook its teaching about the essential inner attitude in prayer, and the spirit of holiness which should characterize the true worshippers of God. He then led us in prayer, and we sang Psalm 24.

87. Introduction: Reformed Churches of New Zealand (Rev. Bruce Hoyt)

The Rev. Mr. Hoyt told of his adopted country and the life and witness of the bond of churches in which he ministers. The churches had begun in the early 1950's, when Dutch immigrants to NZ found a liberal, apostate Presbyterian Church (PCNZ), and formed a new federation of churches. The churches now embrace some 3000 souls, who represent most of the churches which in Holland are still divided. One PCNZ congregation (Buckland's Beach) has joined the RCNZ. There has been a close sister-church relation with the OPC (USA), which has been a great stimulus to unite the Presbyterian and Continental Reformed traditions in the RCNZ.

88. Discussion of Paper 6: "Redemptive Historical Preaching" by Prof. H.M. Ohmann

The chairman invited Prof. Ohmann to the lectern, and he stressed several of the salient points of his previous night's lecture. There followed a period of discussion of various points raised by the lecture, particularly around the issues of whether redemptive historical preaching tends to be too "objective" and lacking in practical application, and whether "exemplarist" preaching fails to do justice to the uniqueness of biblical persons and events, and their place in the history of redemption.

The chairman thanked Prof. Ohmann for his contribution, both for his paper and for his responses to the discussion.

89. Closing

The session was closed at 12.08 PM with singing from Psalm 119, and prayer by the Rev. B.M. Taho.

Session 17

Wednesday, September 8

Afternoon

90. Opening

The chairman called the session to order at 2.41 PM, and we joined in singing Psalm 119:65-72.

91. Introduction: Reformed Presbyterian Church of India (The Rev. Mohan Chacko)

Mr. Chacko brought greetings from his church and from the RP Seminary, mentioning that his church was mostly based in Uttar Pradesh, in the north. It comprises 10 congregations and about 1000 members. The Seminary has 65 students, and is the only Reformed seminary in India. He mentioned political trends, and the progress of the work of Christ's church in some parts of India. The north has been historically unresponsive to the gospel, but in the last year, 15-20 new believers have been baptized.

He requested the interest and prayer support of the Lord's people represented at this meeting of the ICRC.

92. Minutes of Sessions 13-15

The minutes of Sessions 13-15, as adjusted, were adopted.

93. Planning of ICRC 1997 (Continued from Article 78)**93.1 Time & Place of Conference 1997**

The executive reaffirmed their recommendation that Seoul, Korea be the location of the next ICRC meeting, and that the meeting will begin about August 20, 1997.

The meeting agreed to this proposal.

93.2 Alternative host

The chairman read a communication from the OPC delegation, tentatively agreeing to be alternative host for ICRC 1997, subject to confirmation from the full OPC Committee on Ecumenicity and Inter-church Relations in January 1994.

93.3 Further proposals for ICRC 1997

1. Presentations about needs and opportunities of so-called "Third World" countries.
2. Committee consider fewer speakers on many different topics. E.g. *two* speakers on the covenant (Presbyterian and Reformed view) and its practical effects in respective member churches; several speakers on evangelistic

methods.

3. Receiving detailed information well in advance about churches applying, to permit writing of appropriate letters and study of the application.
4. Ethical areas: e.g. marriage, divorce, remarriage; church and state.
5. Topics: “Living in a Non-Christian Society”; “Growth of Islam” (maybe MERF could help with information / speaker).
6. Furnishing of indications to speakers of guidelines, computer formats, style requirements, etc., and distribution of well-edited papers in time. Topics: “The Pre-fall Covenant”; “Doctrine of the Holy Spirit.”
7. Topics: “Applicatory Preaching” (Rev. Derek Thomas); “Women and the Church.”
8. Issues arising in inter-church discussions: doctrines of church and covenant; “Children in the Covenant.”
9. Topic: “The Implications of the Establishment Principle for the Relations Between Church and State in Today's Pluralist Society” (Dr. R.C. Beckett).
10. There should be clear understanding that presented papers should not be widely distributed without the opportunity for amendment in the light of discussion at the ICRC meeting.

94. Closing

The session was closed at 3.55 PM.

Session 18

Wednesday, September 8
Evening

95. Opening

The session was opened at 7.32 PM with the reading of the letter of Jude. We then sang Psalm 126.

96. Introduction: Independent Reformed Church of Edmonton (Rev. C. Tuininga)

The Rev. Cecil Tuininga expressed his great appreciation for being at this ICRC meeting. It reminded him of his first charge, made up of people from all kinds of backgrounds who desired to “find each other in the Word of God.”

97. Message from Ommen

The chairman read out a response from the General Synod of Ommen (RCN[1]) to our message, expressing their gratitude for it, their thankfulness that several new member churches had been admitted, and their good wishes and cordial greetings in Christ.

98. Paper 7: “Remarks on Church and Tolerance” by Prof. J. Kamphuis

Prof. Kamphuis began by remarking on his encouragement at seeing our young chairman and older vice-chairman—Reformed and Presbyterian—together at the front table. After he had presented his paper, the chairman thanked Prof. Kamphuis for his presentation. (The text of the paper is printed in the *Proceedings*.)

99. Discussion of Paper 7

After the singing of Hymn 429, the meeting took up discussion of the paper for about half an hour.

100. Closing

The session was closed at 9.08 PM with the singing of Psalm 32, and prayer by Rev. Mr. van 't Foort.

Session 19

Thursday, September 9
Morning

101. Opening

The chairman opened the session at 9.05 AM, reading from 1 Tim. 3. He commented briefly on v. 1, mentioning the *difficulty* of being an *episkopos*. But it is a glorious calling, linked with Christ's mission to save sinners. In this task we meet the King himself, and through it, his Messianic rule is exercised on earth. The chairman then led us in prayer, and we sang Ps. 134.

102. Introduction: Gereja Gereja Masehi Musyafir (Rev. E. Fangidae)

The Rev. Mr. Fangidae greeted the meeting on behalf of his churches, which traced their origin to 400 years ago in mission work of the

Dutch Reformed Church. The majority of the Protestant church is now liberal, but the GGMM stands firm in the Reformed faith, maintaining a close relationship with the RCN[1]. He sought prayer for the Lord's work among his churches.

103. Introduction: Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (Rev. George Syms)

Quoting from Psalm 133:1, Rev. Mr. Syms spoke of the blessedness of fellowship in this meeting of the ICRC. The ARPC has continued since 1782, and has 30,000 communicants in over 200 congregations in the US and Canada. It is committed to the Westminster Standards, and is a member of NAPARC. The ARPC Seminary is at Due West, South Carolina.

104. Discussion of Paper 7: “Remarks on Church and Tolerance” by Prof. J. Kamphuis (continued from Article 99)

The meeting resumed discussion of the paper presented the previous evening by Prof. Kamphuis. There were a number of contributions on the matters of church and confession, the catholicity of the church, the ability of the church to respond to emerging new issues, and relationships with “evangelicals.”

The chairman thanked Prof. Kamphuis for his contribution.

105. Closing

The session closed with the singing of Hymn 4 at 10.39 AM, to allow the ICRC delegates to attend an official reception by the Mayor of Zwolle.

Session 20

Thursday, September 9
Afternoon

106. Opening

The session was opened at 2.38 PM with the singing of Hymn 5.

107. Introduction: Reformed Church of Japan (Rev. H. Suzuki)

Rev. Mr. Suzuki told us that Protestantism was introduced into Japan about 150 years ago, and now comprises 1% of the population

In 1946, 300 members from 12 churches formed the Reformed Church of Japan which intended to be fully Reformed and Presbyterian, and which adopted the Westminster Standards. It now

has about 130 congregations and ministers, with a total baptized and communicant membership of 9000. There are five presbyteries, and each church is engaged in home mission work. Current growth is about 1.5% per year. There are at present six mission workers, labouring among Japanese communities and elsewhere outside Japan. Ministers are trained at the Kobe Reformed Theological Seminary. Missionaries from the OPC, PCUSA, and CRC of USA labour in Japan in association with the RCJ.

The RCJ is currently a member of the Reformed Ecumenical Council but may eventually seek membership in the ICRC.

108. Minutes of Sessions 16-18

The minutes of Sessions 16-18, as adjusted, were approved.

109. Proceedings of ICRC Meeting of 1993

The Corresponding Secretary proposed a list of material to be included in these proceedings, and this list was approved.

110. Speakers and Topics

It was reported that the following speakers had been finalized:

Biblical Principles for the Relation Between Church and State

Dr. R.C. Beckett (EPCI)

A Survey of Mission Opportunities

Mr. Mark Bube (OPC)

The Ministry of the Word amongst Asian Religious People (Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Zoroastrians)

Rev. David John (FCCI)

Yet-to-be-decided-title

Dr. Richard Gaffin (OPC)

Speaking in Tongues

Rev. E.A. de Boer (RCN[1])

111. Press Release

On behalf of the Press Release Committee, the Rev. Rowland Ward presented the text proposed for a news release, and after adjustment, this was approved by the meeting. (The text of this document is printed in the *Proceedings*.)

112. Admission of new business

The meeting was asked to admit an item of business from the floor. On being put to the vote, there was an insufficient majority to place this matter on the agenda.

113. Closing

The session was closed at 4.10 PM with the singing of Psalm 126.

Session 21

Thursday, September 9
Evening

114. Opening

The session was opened with the reading of 1 Tim. 3:14-16. We then sang Psalm 93:1-4. The chairman welcomed visitors.

115. Closing Remarks

The chairman addressed the meeting, reflecting on this year's meeting and the great benefit of this fellowship of churches. He suggested that delegates report to their churches what had happened at this meeting, so that the wider churches will be more involved in the ICRC in the future. He stressed the importance of cooperation, especially in the field of mission, and made a plea for member churches to keep in close contact with the Corresponding Secretary, so that the agenda of the Conference reflects the interests of the churches.

116. Appreciation

The chairman expressed on behalf of the meeting our great appreciation to the organizing church at Zwolle-Zuid, especially the preparatory committee, and all those involved: the ladies who served, the kitchen staff, the transport people, the organist, and the caretaker and his crew. He then called Mr. and Mrs. Galenkamp to the front and a small presentation was made to them. The Rev. J. Hagg briefly responded. We then sang Hymn 66.

The chairman also thanked the members of the executive committee for their work, and the delegates for their cooperation. He particularly expressed the appreciation of the meeting to Mr. Jason Van Vliet for his highly efficient behind-the-scenes secretarial work.

The vice-chairman, Dr. Lee, briefly responded, thanking the chairman for his capable handling of the meeting.

117. Song of Praise

As a "singing Conference" we joined in singing Psalm 126.

118. Minutes of Sessions 19-21

The minutes of the final three sessions, as adjusted, were approved.

119. Devotion

The chairman briefly addressed the meeting, basing his comments on

the passage of Scripture previously read.

He then led us in prayer to the Lord mentioning particular matters of praise and petition from the various member churches. We then sang Psalm 133, and the chairman closed the 1993 Meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Churches with the benediction (2 Cor. 13:14).

Section II

Speeches and Reports

Sermon of Prayer Service

*Rev.**O.J. Douma**Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.***Hebrews 13:8**

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

This text is viewed by some Christians as an indication that today those who believe can still do signs and wonders. When Jesus is the Same, in the past and now, so they say, it follows that also at present, just like 2000 years ago, the deaf will hear and the sick will be healed.

But it is striking that in this letter to the Hebrews we do not hear anything of signs and wonders among the believers at all. And they would have found these things very helpful. For the Hebrews were having a hard time. Believing fell short of their expectations. What was so beautiful at the beginning had faded. They were disappointed. They were weary.

Such signs and wonders, how well they could have used them! But what do we read? They are told quite a long story (chap. 11) about believers who had been afflicted. How heavy were the trials which had tested their faith. One even had a harder time than the other. And in the next chapter it even says, "In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood." And the author goes on to say, "do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor lose courage when you are punished by Him" (12:4f).

Did they really have to be drawn from their depression by discipline and punishment? Man does not want to be subdued. He would rather have his circumstances improved, in order that he might lift himself up and live. Yes, but God wants to conform those whom He foreknew to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29). And He will lift them up in the way of humiliation under his mighty hand (1 Peter 5:6). How deep-rooted is the evil of pride in man. He wants to build up his own life alongside God. And then God is allowed to assist him in giving food and drink and signs and wonders.

The letter to the Hebrews, however, speaks a completely different language. It is not the circumstances that have to be improved, but man has to be converted. The proud man has to become humble. He who has placed himself next to God has to learn to place himself under God. And in doing so, we read in 12:2f, we should be "looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith . . . so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted." It is Jesus Christ alone who will redeem them from their disappointment and weariness.

I preach to you that **God delivers us from our pride by fixing our eyes on Jesus Christ**, for 1) He has always been what we should have been and 2)

He sees to it that we shall be like Him.

1.

This age is a heyday for pride. Very many people live from the spirit of revolution, the reversal of God's order. Mankind wants to be equal to God. The word "submission" has become a despicable word. And so, in our time, man "expands" to the number of 666, to the greatest expansion God has allowed him. But in doing so, the proud man is spiritually slipping further and further to the deepest depths of hell. For God opposes the proud. But He gives grace to the humble (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5).

And who is the humble one? From the Bible we could give examples of humble people: Moses, Joseph, and Mary. But the first whom we have to mention is our Lord Jesus Christ. He himself said, "learn from Me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart" (Matt. 11:29). It is only Jesus Christ, the Word incarnate, who could say so. For only He is the same yesterday and today and forever. He IS yesterday. . . . This seems to be incompatible with our rules of language. But it can really be said of Jesus: His whole life IS all submission to the Father.

In this (in this union with the Father) He is always the same. Time can change. Clothing can change. Language can also change. In his deepest suffering our beloved Saviour called out in Aramaic: *lama sabachtani*. He did not speak the language of the temple, the Hebrew of Psalm 22: *lama asabtani*. No, Jesus Christ was in every way like us in language and custom. But He was always the same in union with the Father in submission and obedience and faithfulness.

The first we hear of Him, as a twelve year old boy, is that He had to be in His Father's things. He did not set up a business of His own. But He was a servant in his Father's business. And that was the very reason He went down to Nazareth with his parents. And then Luke says, "He was subject unto them" (2:51 KJV). To Him it was natural. This submission characterized Him all His life on earth. "He humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:8).

When God wanted to save us from our pride, Jesus Christ came to stand in our place. And He bowed under His heavenly Father. He said that it was His food to do the will of His Father in heaven (John 4:34). He lived on that. He could not live without submission, without obedience. Thus He was as our Surety.

Because we took our place alongside God and opposite God, our Lord Jesus had to relive our life on His Father's command. And He did so. And He will remain faithful to the Father. For we know what the outcome of history will be. When everything will be subjected to Christ, then He himself will also be subjected to Him who put all things under Him (1 Cor. 15:28).

Submission is not a despicable word, but a sacred word. Jesus Christ Himself never did otherwise. He was anointed to make proud people humble again, to pay off their debts and to give them his righteousness.

The whole letter to the Hebrews is full of this. The angels were God's loyal servants. But none of them could be the Messiah. They were not able to reconcile man's debts, neither were they able to relive man's life. Moses was faithful in his service. But he was not capable of being the Christ. Aaron was high priest for God's people, but his ministry of reconciliation was only a shadow of what was needed. Aaron, too, was not capable of being the Christ.

When God wanted to redeem his people from debt, this was only possible through His Son becoming man and taking our place (2:10). For it was only He who was able to remain submissive in the face of the most profound contempt. And it was only He, with His divine love, who was capable of bearing our punishment to the end. He could be Lamb and High Priest at the same time. And by a single offering (10:14) expiate all our sins for all time. His whole life was bowing under God's will of redemption.

He never changed. Never did his love cool off. No thought of disobedience was in Him. He could not do otherwise and did not want anything but His Father's will to be done. And Father's will has been done. Christ has paid and He has been raised from the dead. For God saw that everything His Son had done was good. Therefore Christ now sits at God's right hand and He intercedes for his people.

This was the comfort for the Hebrews. They should not see too little. They should not only see the church below, that is, only see themselves and all those other people in their struggles and their disappointments. But they especially should see the church above, that is, Jesus and this great cloud of witnesses (12:1). They should see how far they had come. Then they would be persevering!

In our time many people are living in fellowship with pride. They are waging war against the submission to God and people. What God has placed under authority—woman under man, man under Christ, children under parents, subject under government (Eph. 5)—is set side by side by the proud. Everyone has to be equal to everyone: woman to man, children to parents, subject to government and man to God. This is the ancient maxim of Satan. But this folly continues to be proclaimed as something new, as the real way to true freedom.

Now the proud can promise a lot. But he will never grant what he promises. The humble, however, may lose everything and yet possess everything. For “all things are yours; and you are Christ's and Christ is God's” (1 Cor. 3:23). Let the congregation of Jesus Christ glory in Him, here and everywhere!

And eat in submission of the food which will not perish, but will last forever and ever.

2.

And so we have arrived at the second point. Our text seems to be a disconnected remark at the end of the letter: a monument in space. But it is not like that. Here we see Jesus Christ as Head of His Church. The previous verse (v. 7) directs our attention to the leaders of Christ's Church. "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God." Christ had given "leaders" (pastors, ministers). They spoke the Word of God. They bowed under this Word to the end of their lives. They preached it and they held onto it, always, also in difficult circumstances. And so they died as they lived. These leaders manifested the image of Christ, their Saviour. They did not change. In spite of all their weaknesses, they remained the same. For God's Word made them alive and that kept them in God's eternal kingdom.

But, beside this, as you can see in v. 9, the believers are warned against false doctrine. "Do not be led away by diverse and strange teachings." They are teachings which deviate from God's Word on two counts at least. In the first place they are strange. They do not accord with the Word of God. But they are also "diverse." That is to say, there are many false doctrines. One false doctrine always drags down the other. These strange teachings, so it says here, are leading away. You could let yourself be carried away by them. And you could easily sail past the harbour. This could happen so easily because strange teachings always appeal to people. For such doctrines have more to do with people than with God. And if you should lose heart, like the Hebrews did, isn't it tempting to join in them?

What a blessing when Christ gives good leaders who manifest His image. For leaders exert a great influence over the congregations. In this last chapter of the letter to the Hebrews they are mentioned three times. In v. 7 it says, "**Remember** your leaders . . ." And in v. 17 it says, "**Obey** your leaders and **submit** to them. . . ." Oh, this submission is so important. It is a key word in God's redemptive work. And in v. 24 we read, "**Greet** all your leaders. . . ." Yes, leaders occupy a prominent position in the congregation of Christ. And so they have a great responsibility, that is, keeping the congregation to the Lord: to love Him and submit to Him. Therefore the leaders have to be submissive themselves to the Lord and to His Word. And they should not come with ideas and experiments which are foreign to this Word.

In chap. 10 the Hebrews are reminded of their confidence. They should not throw their confidence away. We might also say, they had to hold onto their confession. They had to keep upright all good things they had learned from God in this difficult life. They ought to speak highly of God's Anointed and

of God's Word and of God's Church, of everything they had received from their faithful leaders. That is why it is so good that the officers in Christ's Church are expressly tied to the confession. For only he who holds fast his confession, who keeps all Christ's commandments, will cast aside all pride and begin to show Christ's image.

He can also endure tribulation. He who places himself under the Word of God, will crush Satan under his feet, Paul wrote to the Romans (16:20).

The day before yesterday it was exactly one hundred years ago that a general synod of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands was opened in Dordrecht. On its first meeting day the delegates were informed about a letter from a Scottish Church. In this letter the Reformed Churches were reminded of their great Synod of Dort of 1618. They were especially reminded of the proclamation at the end of this synod, namely, the conviction that this synod made hell tremble. For in those difficult days in Holland, they rejected the strange doctrines of the Remonstrants. And they gave a new confession to the churches, a new song of praise to the Lord.

This confession has not become antiquated through the centuries. Times did change, as God Himself foretold. In Western Europe the time has come that people will no longer endure sound teachings and they wander into myths (2 Tim. 4:3, 4). We know what lies ahead of us. Humility will increasingly disappear and pride will triumph. Submission, as God ordered it, will make place for equalization of modern society. But these are not strange things which will overtake us. It is all in God's programme. And all things have to work for the honour of God. That is why we need not ask special signs and wonders of Christ in disappointing circumstances. We need not speak in tongues. If only we speak the tongue of the Scriptures. If only we continue to glory in Jesus Christ who was crucified for us and will always remain the Same! The Son will subject everything to the Father. For God will be everything to everyone (1 Cor. 15:28). And how great must God be, when He is everything!

Congregation of Zwolle-Zuid, see to it that they can say of you what Paul said of the congregation of Rome: your obedience is known to all (16:19). This is a wonderful testimony. It encompasses everything: believing with the heart and confessing with the mouth. In this way you will be able to face the difficult future. You know that the nearest future is given to the antichrist. But the eternal future belongs to the humble. They will inherit the earth. Therefore, continue to say many good things of your Saviour, Jesus Christ. And continue asking Him: O Lord, conform us to Thy image.

And brethren delegates to the ICRC, you have the wonderful commission to hold up the banner of Christ in this world. Fulfil this commission in submission. For the strength of the Church lies in its submission. You have come here from all over the world. And you speak different languages. But

you do have one common language. That is Father's language in Scriptures and mother's language in the confession of the Church. In this language the conference can be of great significance to church and mission. Take every thought captive to obey Christ (2 Cor. 10:5). In that way the Church will remain the same, in the knowledge that Jesus Christ's plans cannot be wrecked. He is in control of all times. History is His story. Amen.

Chairman's Opening Remarks

Rev. A. De Jager

Brothers,

According to the decisions made by the meeting of the ICRC in Langley, Canada in 1989, this third conference may be held—albeit not in Korea, as planned—but in Zwolle-Zuid. Due to circumstances of a temporary nature, the Netherlands was chosen as an alternative host.

First and foremost, however, we see this conference as a possibility given to the churches by the grace of our God, who provided well for all those who had to organize and those who had to travel, sometimes over long distances. And our thanks reach out to Him.

On behalf of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands we bid a cordial welcome to all of you. Up to this moment there are eleven member churches present in their delegates and advisors. Four churches are applying for membership and there is a considerable number of observing churches, which according to the Regulations are to be called visiting delegates or visiting churches. These delegates have the privilege of the floor and the usual courtesies. If, however, one of these delegates wish to briefly present their church to the Conference, they are kindly requested to do so after consultation with the chair, in order that the necessary arrangements can be made on the agenda.

The ICRC is still young. This is brought to light, for example, in the purpose of the conference, which has to shift its agenda more and more to the practical work of the churches. We are happy that this time no committee is needed on constitutional matters. We are also thankful that we noticed in some contributions some concrete proposals as to our possible and necessary tasks. If we look at the purpose as worded in Article III of the constitution (cf. *Proceedings* 1989, pg. 301), we may expect that a greater stress will be put on points 3-5, while the first two points will naturally, not be ignored.

Also in a more formal way, the youthfulness of the conference is noticed in the way the executives are presented. Not by free vote, but by proposal of the Interim Committee. The reason simply is a practical one. Delegates are still not all that familiar with one another, although the member churches are coming to know one another more and more, also by way of intensified contacts and correspondence. Within the ICRC several churches worked on their rules for ecclesiastical fellowship and found one another as sisters.

We hope that this Conference may contribute to the strengthening of these ties. All this we may receive in humbleness and thankfulness from the Lord,

who gathers His Church in the unity of faith, by Word and Spirit. He proves His power in His daily love and care for His people in these last days of much apostasy and false ecumenism. It is our prayer that this conference may testify of this grace of our Lord and God as a living witness in this world. With these words I declare the third International Conference of Reformed Churches constituted.

Report of the Corresponding Secretary

Rev. M. van Beveren

First of all, we wish to express our appreciation for the willingness of the Reformed Churches in The Netherlands to receive the Third Assembly of the ICRC in their midst. When, due to unexpected delays in the construction of their new facilities, the Korean Presbyterian Church was unable to host the Conference, the Dutch Churches did not hesitate to initiate the preparations for the meetings in their own country. And they did so in an efficient manner.

Meanwhile, we are happy to report that the Korean Church has again decided to invite the next ICRC meeting to Korea. It is expected that their new Church Center Building in Seoul will be completed this year.

When speaking about the activities during the four years since the Langley Conference in 1989, we may mention that regular consultations have taken place with the members of the Interim Committee, namely, with Prof. A.C. Boyd, Rev. J. de Gelder, Dr. J. Visscher, and the Treasurer, Mr. H.A. Berends. The fact that by telephone the chairman, Dr. Visscher, was only a relatively short distance away, made the contact effective and pleasant, except when we reached his answering machine.

In accordance with the decision of the 1989 Conference and with the cooperation of the churches, a *Directory* containing a so-called family tree of each of the member churches was published January 1992. It was out of print sooner than expected. On a rather regular basis a *Newsletter* was mailed out, but the “information supplied by the churches”—as stipulated by Langley—was not abundant. Improvements could be made if the Churches would decide to provide the Corresponding Secretary periodically with the public Acts and Minutes of their General Assemblies and Synods.

The interest in the ICRC has been growing steadily. Compared with the previous interim, the volume of correspondence has doubled, and today we witness a considerable increase in the number of churches that have sent observing or visiting delegates. Still, several churches, eager to be represented here, were not able to send delegates because of high travel expenses.

We rejoice that four churches have decided to apply for membership. The Free Church of Central India, the Free Reformed Church of North America, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Reformed Church in the United States each have their own particular history, yet, as we may believe, they

are firmly rooted in the faith as it is delivered to the saints. It is gratifying that each of those churches is sponsored for membership by at least two member churches, as required by the *Regulations*.

It may be mentioned here that in the past the stipulation that churches applying for membership need recommendations from any two member churches has not been formally upheld. The wording of the *Regulations* on this point may have caused some misunderstanding. But through combining Art.V,3 and Art. VII,1,e of the *Regulations*, the Interim Committee concluded that the above stipulation undoubtedly is the intent of the Conference.

We may also welcome four Independent Reformed churches which recently seceded from the Christian Reformed Church in North America. They have not yet joined a federation, but we hope and pray that their presence will promote the visible unity of Christ's Church, which after all is the first purpose of the ICRC.

At the previous Conference several proposals were on the agenda, especially regarding the *Constitution* and *Regulations*. For this Conference, however, no proposals have reached us. We may consider it an indication that the basis and direction of the ICRC has been accepted as established and that the Churches are looking forward to pursuing the purpose of the ICRC with determination.

After dealing with the Report of the Committee on Ecumenical Creeds, the Conference at Langley invited the Churches to submit their comments if any to the next meeting of the Conference. Only the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia has sent its comments. A copy of this letter has been mailed to the Churches.

The list of respectable speakers gives us high expectations for the coming days. We recognize with gratitude that those brethren have agreed to contribute to the significance of the Conference. Also, the cooperation of the Churches by recommending the speakers, has greatly facilitated the preparation of the agenda.

One of the aims of the Conference as formulated in the *Constitution* is "to encourage cooperation among the member churches in the fulfillment of the missionary and other mandates."

As a result of this stated purpose, the *Committee on Missions* has submitted a report that provides extensive information on the missionary activities of the churches, for which we should be thankful. The report also reveals that there is no lack of possibilities for joint action. The Committee, however, had no mandate to make recommendations or proposals for specific cooperation. And, as we all know, the Conference has no power to make arrangements in this respect either.

We are aware that some cooperation is already in existence and that plans are being worked out for coordination of activities in certain areas. Yet, we like to mention a suggestion from one of the churches regarding educational assistance to churches in underdeveloped countries, namely, "that churches in the ICRC, or a combination of such churches, make a concerted effort to provide either teaching in those churches or scholarships for students to go to Reformed seminaries abroad." What is suggested here is in line with what the *Constitution* calls "cooperation in the fulfillment of the missionary and other mandates," and deserves to be taken into consideration.

Noteworthy in this connection is that the latest General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches endorsed the statement of its *Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad* that "the ICRC is a suitable organization for sharing our wealth, experience and manpower with young churches in the 'third world'." It is true that this statement highlights only one aspect of the ICRC. But it can not be denied that in the context of the missionary mandate of the churches this aspect can hardly be overemphasized.

When we look at the five-fold purpose formulated in the *Constitution*, one may ask how the Conference will accomplish its goal. We realize that in its brief existence the ICRC has barely begun to apply itself to the task. And nobody would be surprised if at the end of this Conference many wishes would still be unfulfilled.

We have to keep in mind, however, that the result of our Conference can not just be measured by e.g. smooth proceedings of the meeting. The question whether the Conference has been fruitful can more adequately be answered from the activities in the churches in the years following the Conference. Without necessarily crediting the Langley Conference for it, it is to be noted that during the past four years, developments took place among the member churches which are in line with the object of the ICRC: important strides have been made e.g. to establish ecclesiastical fellowship.

We should not be overly optimistic. But we may be confident that in the coming years further steps will be taken towards attaining the goals of the ICRC. The only condition is that the churches walk in obedience to the Word of God in accordance with their calling. For the Church of Christ is designated as the pillar and bulwark of the truth as well as the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Financial Report

Esteemed delegates and members:

As your treasurer it is my pleasure to report to you on the financial affairs of the ICRC.

The mandate received was to collect and disburse the necessary funds for the expenses of the 1989 “Langley” meeting in Canada.

On the Income and Expense statement dated December 31, 1990, you will find that indeed all expenses for this meeting were covered. As a matter of fact we ended the year with a positive balance in our account.

The mandate was further,

- a) to draw up a budget for the next Conference with the assistance of the Interim Committee;
- b) to assess each member Church;
- c) to collect the instalments needed on a yearly basis;
- d) to reimburse all costs incurred by the Conference;
- e) to submit a financial report to the next meeting of the Conference.

In consultation, especially with the secretary, I prepared a budget, a copy of which you will find in the report. The member's assessments were based on the formula adopted during the Edinburgh Conference, i.e. to assess the Churches on the basis of their baptized members as well as the estimated average per capita income of the members' countries. Attached to this report you will find the basis for this assessment. The sources for the per capita income we have relied upon are taken from the United Nations financial statistics.

Since the Conference had sufficient funds to take care of its immediate needs we decided not to assess the members until 1991. Generally speaking the assessments have come in well and therefore there are sufficient funds available to cover the costs of this Conference.

One of the expense items we had not anticipated before the 1989 Langley meeting was the publication of the 1989 *Proceedings*. The cost of publishing was over 5000 dollars, however, even though these *Proceedings* did not turn out to be a “bestseller,” the secretary managed to recover over 50% of the cost from sales of this interesting publication.

Unlike the last reports I presented in 1989 where some items were expressed in Canadian currency, this time you will find that all the reports submitted are expressed in United States dollars. This is to avoid currency confusion.

While the reports submitted to you reflect the financial situation as of April 30, I can now also report that almost all the outstanding assessments have been received.

In closing I would like to express my appreciation to the members for their good cooperation in providing me with the means to look after the financial affairs of the Conference. May the Lord continue to bless you and may through these endeavours His name be promoted and praised.

Respectfully submitted,

Henk A. Berends, Treasurer

Income Statement

as of December 31, 1990 (in USA currency)

INCOME

Assessments	\$13,004.94
Sales <i>Proceedings</i>	3,018.34
Interest	476.16
Donations	1674.99
Total Income	\$18,174.43

EXPENSES

Administration	\$1,944.93
Publishing <i>Proceedings</i>	5,541.61
Provisions and Refreshments	3,682.99
Travel	4,119.41
Miscellaneous	304.60
Total Expenses	\$15,593.54

NET INCOME **\$2,580.89**

Bank Reconciliation

as of December 31, 1990 (in USA currency)

Opening Balance, March 31, 1989 (\$498.44 Cdn.)	\$398.75
Income	18,174.43
Expenses	15,593.54
Closing Balance	\$2,979.64

Proposed Budget

Zwolle Meeting 1993 (in USA currency)

Administration:

Secretary's Regular Expenses	\$2,500.00
Processing <i>Proceedings</i>	3,000.00
Committee Costs	1,000.00
Publishing <i>Proceedings</i>	4,000.00

Travel Expenses:

Interim Committee	\$3,000.00
Standing Committee's Expense	2,000.00
Travel Assistance	3,000.00
Miscellaneous	1,500.00

Food and Refreshments	\$10,000.00
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TOTAL	\$30,000.00
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Basis for Assessments 1991

(in USA currency)

	Number of Members	Per Capita Income	Percentage of Total
Canadian Reformed Churches	12,794	\$18,070	9.6
Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland	563	8,640	0.2
Free Church of Scotland	12,900	13,329	7.2
Free Church in Southern Africa	1,692	2,360	0.2
Free Reformed Churches of Australia	2,811	12,580	1.5
Free Reformed Churches in South Africa	1,265	2,360	0.1
Gereja Gereja Reformasi di Indonesia	2,000	880	0.1
Presbyterian Church in Korea (Kosin)	94,000	4,045	15.9
Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia	650	12,580	0.3
Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated)	115,589	13,170	63.5
Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland	3,850	8,640	1.4

Assessment Detail

(in USA currency)

	Assessed	Collected
Canadian Reformed Churches	\$1,470	\$1,470
Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland	70	0
Free Church of Scotland	1,080	1,080
Free Church in Southern Africa	0	0
Free Reformed Churches of Australia	225	225
Free Reformed Churches in South Africa	70	0
Gereja Gereja Reformasi di Indonesia	0	0
Presbyterian Church in Korea (Kosin)	2,385	2,385
Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia	105	0
Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated)	9,525	9,525
Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland	210	210
TOTAL	\$15,140	\$14,895

Balance Sheet

as of April 30, 1993 (in USA currency)

ASSETS

Bank	\$18,482.19
Accounts Receivable	12,370.00
Total Assets	\$30,852.19

LIABILITIES

Total Liabilities	NIL
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MEMBERS' EQUITY

\$30,852.19

Income Statement

as of April 30, 1993 (in USA currency)

INCOME

Assessments Received	\$17,582.10
Interest	398.09
Miscellaneous Income	44.75

Total Income **\$18,024.94**

EXPENSES

Administration	\$1,098.24
Committee Expense	190.57
Travel Costs	1,233.58

Total Expenses **\$2,522.39**

NET INCOME **\$15,502.55**

Bank Reconciliation

as of April 30, 1993 (in USA currency)

Opening Balance, December 31, 1990	\$2,979.64
Income	18,024.94
Expenses	2,522.39
Closing Balance	\$18,482.19

Auditors' Report

Mr. J. Hendriks, R.I.A.

Mr. P. Vandergugten

To the International Conference of Reformed Churches,
meeting in Zwolle, the Netherlands:

Having been appointed by the Canadian Reformed Church of Cloverdale, the undersigned have examined the financial statements of the treasurer of the I.C.R.C.

We have found the books to be in good order and the statements reflect fairly the financial position of the I.C.R.C.

Based on our review, nothing has come to our attention that causes us to believe that these financial statements are not, in all material respects, in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles.

With brotherly greetings,

J. Hendriks, R.I.A.

P. Vandergugten

August 25, 1993

(The signatures of the auditors appear on the original letter.)

Report of the Missions Committee

In accordance with our mandate (cf. *Proceedings* of the 1989 Langley Conference, p. 51), we hereby send our report for the Conference of September 1993.

We make the following observations:

- 1) Seven of the ten member churches informed the Committee about their missionary activities and missionary training;
- 2) Regarding missionary activities among the Jews, two churches answered that they are not active in this matter, four gave the answer that they are active indeed, and also four did not answer the question;
- 3) As far as listings of relevant missionary literature is concerned, five churches gave a positive answer, and the same number of churches gave no answer;
- 4) Concerning the magazine "Reflection," three churches answered in a positive sense, two more negative, while five churches did not answer the question.

May we have a fruitful and blessed Conference in 1993!

With greetings in the LORD, the Committee,

W. Boessenkool

A.C. Boyd

K. Deddens

C.J. Haak

Ho Jin Jun

D. MacDonald

W.M. McKay

RECOMMENDATIONS OF MISSIONS COMMITTEE

The Conference appoint a Missions Committee with the following mandate:

1. to update information from the member Churches regarding missionary activity in general, and also about missionary training and methodology of mission in particular;
2. to ask the respective member Churches to organize four different mission conferences, two years after each ICRC, one in the West (Curaçao, Surinam, Brasil, Peru), one in Africa (South-Africa, Ghana, Zaire), one in the East (Japan, Indonesia, Philippines, Taiwan, India, Papua New Guinea); and one in Europe (including Eastern Europe). The reports of these conferences have to be sent at least one and a half years before the next ICRC to the Missions Committee;
3. to ask the churches which are working among the Jews to contact one another and to send their report to the Missions Committee at least one and a half years before the next ICRC;
4. to inform the member Churches each and every half year about mission work, stating also their need and strategies, in a newsletter;
5. to send the report to the Corresponding Secretary at least one year before the next ICRC.

A.C. Boyd

K. Deddens

C.J. Haak

RESPONSES TO THE MISSIONS COMMITTEE

Canadian Reformed Churches

Missionary Activities Presently Undertaken

a) Brazil

- i) sending church: Maranatha Church at Surrey, B.C.
- supporting churches: Churches in Classis Alberta-Manitoba and Classis Pacific
- area: Northeastern Brazil - City of Recife, towns: Maragogi, Sao Jose
- missionaries: Rev. R.F. Boersema in Recife, Rev. P.K. Meyer in Maragogi
- mission aid worker: Br. G. Glas (Sao Jose), br. J. Kuik (Maragogi) (These mission aid workers are sent out by the Mission Aid Committee which works in cooperation with the sending Church at Surrey and the supporting Churches in Western Canada.)
- language: Portuguese
- religion: predominantly Roman Catholic
- results: Sao Jose - 200 worshippers
Maragogi - 100 worshippers
Recife - 30 worshippers
- elders/deacons: none as of April 1992, although it is expected that elders will be ordained by the end of 1992 in either Maragogi or Sao Jose or both.
- activities: worship services, Sunday school, catechism classes, evangelism efforts, Christian day school, nursery and health clinic, diaconal aid, etc.
- evaluation: The work is going well and the institution of these mission places as local churches is approaching. As soon as elders and deacons can be ordained, this will become a reality. The training of native pastors in Brazil itself is also receiving more and more attention. It is hoped that this will become possible through the work of the missionaries as well as making selective use of the Presbyterian Seminary in Recife.

- ii) sending church: Church at Hamilton, Ontario
supporting churches: Churches in Classis Ontario-South
area: northeastern Brazil - city of Maceio (Alagoas)
missionaries: Rev. J. Kroeze, Rev. R. Sietsma
mission aid worker: none
language: Portuguese
religion: Roman Catholic
results: The work is just beginning and no definite areas have been determined as yet.
- b) Indonesia (Irian Jaya)
- sending church: Bethel Church at Toronto, Ont.
supporting churches: Churches in Classis Ontario-North
area: Irian Jaya - Kawagit, Mangelum, Sentani.
missionary: Rev. H. Versteeg
mission aid worker: none (br. B. Vegter worked as Mission aid worker for many years, but has been repatriated to Canada. Whether a replacement will be sent out is not known at this time.)
language: ?
religion: Animism
results: Quite a number of churches have been instituted and local pastors appointed. The missionary is involved more and more as a teacher and advisor to these local churches and pastors.
activities: worship services, catechism classes, Bible study, office-bearer training, diaconal aid, etc.
evaluation: The work is progressing and the churches are maturing; however not without difficulties and setbacks. The churches are becoming increasingly indigenous and self-supporting.
- c) British Columbia (Bulkley Valley - Native people)
- sending church: Church at Smithers, B.C.
supporting churches: Churches across Canada
area: Bulkley Valley
missionary: Rev. M.K. Marren

mission aid worker:	none
language:	English and a variety of native Indian languages
religion:	nominally Roman Catholic
results:	Indian Centre has been established in Smithers and is used for worship, instruction and fellowship purposes. About 30-40 attend regularly. Other outposts have been established Babine Lake, etc.
activities:	worship, instruction, Sunday school, Indian Camp, etc.
evaluation:	The work is progressing; however, it will take a great deal of prayer, effort and time, seeing the history of negative interaction between the native people and the white people. Alcoholism, family breakdown, cultural and employment problems abound.

Missionary Training

The Canadian Reformed Churches have no official training program for missionaries. Those who are called as missionaries can receive special instruction and assistance from the Professor of Diaconiology at the Theological College; however, such instruction is sporadic and limited. The result is that currently missionaries are largely self taught, and may also follow courses given at Calvin Seminary, the Theological University at Kampen, Westminster Theological Seminary, etc.

Mission among the Jews

At present the Can. Ref. Churches are not active in mission among the Jews.

Missionary Literature

No doubt our missionaries would benefit from the periodic publication of lists of relevant articles and studies being done in their areas.

Reflections Magazine

Whether or not a certain liaison should be established between the missionaries and the sending churches is hard for us to judge. It would be better to direct your questions to the individuals and churches concerned. From our perspective as CRCA, we can see that such a development might be helpful.

Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Ireland*Missionary Activities Presently Undertaken*

We co-operate with the Free Church of Scotland Foreign Missions Board in missionary endeavour. We maintain in our churches an active interest in the Free Church Missions work in Southern Africa, Peru and India. We also follow carefully the progress and development of the work in Glasgow among the Asian community and overseas students. We receive from the Free Church the monthly missionary prayer notes as well as *From the Frontiers*, the annual missionary news magazine. We have a non-voting representative on the Free Church Foreign Missions Board.

One minister, Rev. Sidney J. Garland, works with the Qua Iboe Fellowship in Nigeria. He is the Vice-Principal of the Theological College of Northern Nigeria. Mr. Garland, whilst not formally commissioned by the EPC for work in Nigeria, maintains his status as an EPC minister.

We should also mention that we have a congregation in Dublin, the capital of the Irish Republic. This congregation is seeking to bear witness to the Gospel and the Reformed Faith in a land dominated by Roman Catholicism and most of the members would be converted Roman Catholics.

Missionary Training

We have no formalised programme of missionary training.

Mission among the Jews

We wholeheartedly support the work of Christian Witness to Israel. Rev. John Ross, its Deputy Director, was formerly an EPC minister.

Missionary Literature and Reflections Magazine

Yes, there is a need for the type of literature that you mention and any involvement with the magazine *Reflection* would be viewed positively by us.

Free Church of Scotland

There have been no major changes in the mission activity of the Free Church of Scotland since the last meeting of the ICRC in 1989.

*Missionary Activities Presently Undertaken***PERU**

The IEPP, the church that has grown out of FC Mission work in Peru, has made repeated appeals for ordained men from Scotland to help her in her

outreach work, but there has been no response from ministers in Scotland. Only one ordained minister of the Free Church of Scotland remains in Peru and he is mainly occupied in theological training. One male and three ladies have continued in educational work in Lima, but one of the ladies will shortly be seconded to work among deaf children. Several short-term workers have been involved in the educational work.

While still willing to send suitable men to work alongside the Peruvian Church, the Free Church of Scotland sees an important role in helping with the training of Peruvian pastors, both in Peru and, where thought appropriate, in Scotland. One Peruvian has just completed a three year course at the Free Church College in Edinburgh and has now returned to Peru where he expects to be involved mainly in church planting work.

INDIA

Visa restrictions still make it impossible to send missionaries into India. The Free Church of Scotland continues to support financially the Free Church of Central India, and also Christian medical work in the area in which the church is located.

A teaching ministry, on a short-term basis, is possible and is being pursued.

SOUTHERN AFRICA

The number of ordained ministers of the Free Church of Scotland working alongside the Free Church in Southern Africa has now increased to seven (five at time of previous report), along with one non-ministerial worker. One of the ordained men is engaged full-time in theological education and another spends more than half his time in that work. Most of the men are involved in direct evangelistic, as well as pastoral work. The aim is to use the Scottish missionaries and elders more and more in the way of training the African ministers and elders.

MISSION TO IMMIGRANTS AND OVERSEAS STUDENTS IN SCOTLAND

The work in these fields (on an official basis) is still confined to the city of Glasgow. There has been some change of policy. Formerly the same workers were involved in both areas of the work. About two years ago it was recognized that these were two quite distinct communities, calling for different approaches and while still closely cooperating, the workers (two full-time ordained married men, one of them a converted Sikh) have separate responsibilities. The number of different nationalities represented among the students is almost unbelievable and the work among them has been encouraging. The work among the resident immigrants, mostly Asians, Moslem, Sikh and Hindu, in that order, is proving very difficult. An area of special need is among the teenage children, especially the girls. For

a while we had a young lady working in that area, but she has been unable to continue.

Mission among the Jews

The Church's commitment to Jewish evangelism continues through the CWI.

Free Reformed Churches in South Africa

Mission Activities Presently Undertaken

PRETORIA

1. Mission Field

Country: South Africa, environs of Pretoria, black townships (Mamelodi and Soshanguve)

Language: North Sotho (mainly)

Religion: Traditionally: worship of spirits of deceased people
Today: much syncretism

Culture: Black

2. Activities

Mission and congregational work: Phase 2

Training and courses: no own training (existing training is used as much as possible, e.g. of the Reformed Church in South Africa.)

3. Staff (foreign)

Number of workers: 2 missionaries

4. Staff (native)

Number of workers: 1 evangelist, 1 vacancy of evangelist

5. Results

Number of congregations: 2 mission posts, each with 2 places for worship (congregations are not yet instituted)

Number of members: together 250 (130 communicant members, 120 non-communicant members)

Officebearers: 6 members are trained for elders, 2 for deacons

Confederation: not yet realized; after institution all mission congregations will be included in the confederation of the Free Reformed Church of S.A.

Identity: The confessions of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands are

used (in North Sotho translation); liturgy is based on the Netherlands Reformed model; the hymnbook comes from the Evangelical methodists (a choice is made from these hymns)

The mission posts are in financial respects far from self-supporting. A church building was built in Mamelodi with financial help from the Netherlands.

6. Prognosis and Evaluation

Extension is stressed very much in Soshanguve (Mission work among half-christianized people); the same can be said of Mamelodi, but there is also much energy spent on the training for future office bearers; so in Mamelodi there is a conscious effort to work in the direction of institution of the church in the not too distant future. Generally speaking there is very much work to be done in the territories around Pretoria (and other cities) which are urbanizing in a very short time.

The problem is that everyone has been baptized, but that there are few active believers and that many of these active ones have only a small beginning (because of all kinds of sects, syncretism and magic).

7. Organization of the Home Front

Structure: Pretoria is the sending church, the classis Groote-gast of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands is the cooperating confederation.

The consistory of Pretoria decides on matters of policy, admission to the church, and church discipline.

A mission committee of the sending church prepares all the decisions. The "Mamelodi-committee" of Zuidhorn looks after information in the Netherlands.

A structural problem is that the financial limit is reached very easily; a third missionary cannot be sent out from this cooperative confederation. The missionaries are mainly recruited from the Netherlands. Zuidhorn accompanies them as long as they have not departed for the Mission field.

Training of the missionaries is done by RME: Reformed Missiological Education.

Post-Education: ?

Bottle-necks: 1) the distance between the sending church and the cooperative confederation can easily lead to misunderstanding and fraction; 2) the financial limit is reached very easily.

8. Remaining remarks

It is necessary to restructure financial matters in the Netherlands.

Why should the one mission field be short of money, while the other one has millions in hand?

BELHAR

1. Missionfield

Country: South Africa, in Belhar, a suburb of Cape Town.

Language: Afrikaans

Religion: almost everyone has a church or sect background

Culture: a Cape-Dutch Brown-people culture with poverty problems

2. Activities

Mission work: evangelization, congregational work, training elders and deacons, catechism classes, Sunday school

Social work: a social worker presents courses in self-motivation and self-consciousness. He also leads the Christian youthwork, and children's projects

3. Staff (foreign)

Missionary: Rev. E.L. van 't Foort

Social worker: Br. W. Griffioen (send out by the Dutch mission aid association "De Verre Naasten")

4. Staff (native)

One elder affiliated with mission

5. Results

There is one place of worship with about 70 worshippers.

Number of members: 25 communicant and 24 non-communicant members.

Officebearers: there are 2 elders and 2 deacons in training.

Confederation: "Belhar" is as a district integrated in the Free Reformed Church of Cape Town.

Identity: a) the confessions are: the three Ecumenical Creeds and the Three Forms of Unity;
b) the liturgy generally follows the liturgy which the RCN (liberated) are using;
c) financially the congregation of Belhar is starting to become self-supporting.

6. Evaluation and prognoses

This young congregation is now growing by about 20 members per year. We expect that during 1994 the first elders and deacons will be ordained and that one of the members will start his theological study at the Theological University of the Reformed Churches of South Africa in Potchefstroom.

Another member is currently busy studying social work in Wellington (RSA) to replace the foreign social worker.

Realistically speaking it will take several years for the

above-mentioned prognoses to eventually be realized.

In the meantime we hope to establish a second place of worship.

7. Organization on the homefront

Structure: The Free Reformed Church of Cape Town remains the sending church and for the time being the consistory is responsible for all decisions in matters of church discipline, admissions and policy.

The Missionary Committee, led by the missionary, advises the consistory and carries out the work.

The mission work is financially supported by the Reformed Church (liberated) of Groningen-East in the Netherlands.

Missionary Training

Nothing special about missionary training.

Mission among the Jews

We have nothing to say about mission activities among the Jews.

Missionary Literature

Listings are desirable. Let Drs. C.J. Haak in Kampen receive a student assistant (if necessary two of them) and let him draft such a listing. This can be paid by the Theological University of Kampen, by the Reformed Missiological Education. By selling these listings to sending churches, etc. something of the money can be earned back.

Reflections Magazine

We do not see the possibility of establishing a liaison with the magazine *Reflections*.

Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated)

Mission Activities Presently Undertaken

- a) Brazil - Curitiba
 sending church: Assen-S
 personnel: Theology - 2
 results: Congregations - 2; Members - 30; Evangelist - 1
- b) Spain - Madrid, Barcelona
 sending church: Bussum-Huizen
 personnel: none
 results: Congregations - 5; Members - 360; Evangelist - 1
- c) Indonesia - Kalimantan
 sending church: Drachten-SE
 personnel: Theology - 3; Education - 1

- results: Congregations - 20; Members - 1200;
Evangelists - 16
- d) Indonesia - Irian Jaya
sending church: Enschede-N
personnel: Theology - 3; Education - 1
results: Congregations - 17; Members - 1800;
Evangelists - 12
- e) Indonesia - Irian Jaya
sending church: Groningen-N
personnel: Theology - 2; Education - 1
results: Congregations - 6; Members - 400; Evangelists - 6
- f) Indonesia - Irian Jaya
sending church: Middelburg
personnel: Theology - 1
results: Congregations - 4; Members - 300; Evangelists - 3
- g) Curaçao
sending church: Rijnsburg
personnel: Theology - 3
results: Congregations - 4; Members - 50; Evangelists - 2
- h) Zaire
sending church: Spakenburg-S
personnel: Theology - 2
results: Congregations - 75; Members - 16,500; Elder / Evangelists - 350
- i) Belgium - Gent
sending church: Axel
personnel: Theology - 1
results: Congregations - 1; Members - 50; Elder - 1
- j) North Limburg - Venlo
sending church: Brunssum
personnel: Theology - 1
results: Congregations - 1
- k) Rotterdam
sending church: Rotterdam
personnel: Theology - 0
results: Members - 20

Missionary Training

1. Theological Education

All ordained missionaries being VDM should finish the theological study first, e.g. at the Theological University in Kampen. Next, all candidate missionaries of the Reformed Churches in Holland are obliged to follow the curriculum of the RME, Reformed Missiological Education (Dutch GMO, *Gereformeerde Missiologische Opleiding*). This RME is founded by the General Synod through a Deputy as there is also a separate Deputy for the Theological University. The teachers of the RME are appointed by the Deputy on part-time basis and (geographic) division. The Docent of Missiology of the Theological University is also main Docent Missiology of RME.

In cooperation with other institutes RME also provides courses on non-theological subject, e.g. cultural anthropology, health education, technical and agricultural courses, bookkeeping and financial administration, reporting and information, photography, development economy, education in the third world countries, orientation on history and politics of the target country, sensibility training (conflict controlling).

The ordained missionaries (VDM) finish their RME study by classical examination. The non-ordained missionaries are examined by the Board of teachers of the RME and attended by a committee of the Deputy RME.

2. Language Training

As far as possible the language training occurs in Holland, mostly organized by the sending church. This concerns the main language spoken in the target country (*lingua franca*). In case of working in tribal areas (e.g. Irian Jaya) most missionaries attend the courses of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, connected with the Wycliffe Bible Translators. The SIL courses are generally excellent and adequate, although views on Dynamic or Functional Equivalent Translation methods may differ.

3. Special Items

Some sending churches have their special items. Usually they set up a literature program or training course in coordination with the former missionary or special institutes and/or courses.

Mission among the Jews

There is a Foundation for Promoting Evangelisation among the Jewish People. The aim of the Foundation is to support the actual work of the Rev. Ben Tvi in Jerusalem. The Foundation has tried to find support from the local churches, but has not yet succeeded. The issue of Jewish mission is not a hot item in the sending churches.

Most churches reacted positively to the need of such lists. They suggest that the Missiological Docent at the TU in Kampen produce lists in which new books are announced, evaluated and recommended in relation to the practical need of current Reformed theology. Other suggestions concern articles on the praxis of Reformed missionaries.

NB The suggestion was mentioned to give more structural consideration to the collecting and spending of mission money. Why should there be a surplus in one area (of the Dutch churches) and a shortage in other ones?

Reflection Magazine

Although the need for methodological study of missiology is accepted, none of the churches reacted positively to the question of whether there should be a liaison with the magazine *Reflection*.

Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland

Mission Activities Presently Undertaken

At present the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland is engaged in missionary work in four different locations.

BELFAST

James Anderson engages in a ministry of personal evangelism through literature in two of the predominately Roman Catholic housing areas of Belfast. There is a weekly market nearby where he rents a stall and sells Christian literature. James commenced this ministry in 1989 after being involved in missionary work in Galway for 20 years.

NEW LIFE BOOKS (NORTH WEST IRELAND)

Rev. Samuel Cromie, after retirement, recognised the needs for a Christian literature ministry in the rural parts of Donegal where he had pastored two congregations. With Presbytery support they purchased a mobile library vehicle. Well stocked with books, Mr. and Mrs. Cromie commenced this missionary outreach in May 1991. In the first five months they sold over 800 books and have had 3500 visits to their mobile book shop.

GALWAY

Mission work in the city of Galway commenced in 1966. Initially, the work consisted of a literature ministry among the predominately Roman Catholic population of Galway (99%). This ministry developed into a church planting ministry and at present there is a team of four adults engaged in this work. There is a weekly worship service attended by a small but

growing number of converted Roman Catholics from Galway.

FRANCE (NANTES)

The church has a mission team in Nantes, consisting of two ordained ministers, their wives, their six children and a trained mission worker (single lady). They are engaged in a church planting ministry in this large French city. All the missionaries have had two years language training and speak fluent French. The missionaries arrived in Nantes in 1988. They have a weekly worship meeting in a rented building. The number of French people attending is growing. Several have professed conversion to Christ.

Missionary Training

Missionary training is given at the Reformed Theological College where a course is taught on missions. The text book used for this course is *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* by J.H. Bavinck.

Mission among the Jews

The Reformed Presbyterian Church appoints a representative to the Council of Management of Christian Witness to Israel and the congregations actively support this evangelistic ministry among Jewish people.

Missionary Literature

We believe a listing of relevant missionary literature for the promotion of the study of methodology of missions would be helpful.

Reflection Magazine

We believe our church and college could establish a liaison with the magazine *Reflection*. Our ministers and missionaries would have the opportunity of sharing their learning and experience, as well as benefiting from others.

Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia

Missionary Activities Presently Undertaken

The Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia participates in the missionary work of the Free Church of Scotland and gives support along with the Irish Evangelical Presbyterian Church to assist church development, medical and educational work in India, Peru and South Africa which is under the general oversight of the Foreign Missions Board of the Free Church of Scotland. Also, through the Missions Committee of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, support is being given to the development of a Free Presbyterian Church in Fiji. Many years of service have been given by medical missionaries in India and South Africa in hospital, health care and pastoral work as doctors and nurses. In Peru pastoral and educational work has received support from the church in Australia. A retired teacher is our

only serving missionary at the moment, working on a short-term basis in St. Andrew's College, Lima, Peru.

Mission among the Jews

Assistance is given to the work of Christian Witness to Israel.

Free Reformed Churches of Australia*Mission Activities Presently Undertaken*

The Free Reformed Churches of Australia appointed the Free Reformed Church of Albany to act as calling church for the mission work to be conducted among Christian Papuans residing in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea. These Papuans are mostly Irian Jayan refugees who fled from their country in and since 1962. They were members of the Evangelical Christ Church, Irian Jaya. These people have struggled to maintain some order by form of church life in their new country. Since 1971 the Free Reformed Churches of Australia have had contact with these West Papuan refugees, but it was not until 1983 that concrete proposals to give assistance started to materialize. Till January 1992 this work was done with the support of the Gereformeerde Kerk te Amersfoort West, the Netherlands, which gave financial assistance and has also given advice as regards the work of calling a minister.

From January 1989 till January 1991 Rev. J. Koelewijn has worked as missionary in Port Moresby. In December 1990 he was relieved from his task. Over the years political considerations and motivations have caused many a setback with respect to the work among these Papuans. Yet the Lord Jesus Christ has preserved His church also in this part of the world.

In March 1992 the Free Reformed Churches in Australia agreed that the Mission work in Papua New Guinea had entered into a new phase which was characterized by lending support to an autonomous church. Much emphasis was placed on the training of an indigenous minister instead of calling another missionary. At present a brother of the congregation in Port Moresby is following some courses at a Christian Leadership Training College in Port Moresby. In addition he is also taught by ministers and others from Australia. The sending church has arranged support visits to the church in Port Moresby three times a year. Recently we are investigating the possibility of sending a full time support worker.

Missionary Training

We have no missionary training in place. At the time that Rev. Koelewijn prepared himself for his missionary task in Port Moresby, he followed some courses at the GMO in the Netherlands.

Mission among the Jews

We have no missionary activity among the Jews.

Missionary Literature and Reflection Magazine

Due to limited manpower the Free Reformed Churches of Australia have not undertaken any study in the field of mission methodology. We surely are interested in receiving material about this subject.

Report of the Committee on Theological Affirmation

1. MANDATE

The committee received the following mandate:

“to take up the suggestion of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia regarding an agreed statement as to what constitutes a ‘true church’ and the consequences of such a statement for intercommunion, etc.” (see *Proceedings ICRC* 1989, p. 53).

The Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia had proposed that

“the Conference aim to develop an agreed statement on what is a ‘true church,’ together with the implications of such for issues such as inter-communion, acceptance of attestations, etc., and that such statement relate the centrality of Jesus Christ to these issues.”

2. MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

As members of the committee were appointed Prof. E. Donnelly, Prof. Dr. J. Faber (convener), Prof. B. Kamphuis, Prof. D. Macleod, Prof. Dr. N.H. Gootjes (substitute).

Prof. Kamphuis declined his appointment to the Committee for personal reasons and because he had reservations concerning the mandate. The convener asked Prof. Gootjes to take his place.

Prof. E. Donnelly, too, declined. At his advice Mr. F.S. Leahy, professor of Systematic Theology of the Reformed Theological College at Belfast was found willing to serve on the committee.

Prof. Macleod was ill when the committee met. In his place Prof. A.C. Boyd participated in the discussions. Prof. H.M. Cartwright attended the meetings on July 1 and 2.

3. PROCEDURE

Members of the committee submitted individual reports. The committee received a brochure, written by the Rev. C. Bouwman *The Doctrine of the Church in Reformed/Presbyterian Contacts* (Kelmescott, Western Australia, 1991).

The committee met in the Free Church College in Edinburgh, from June 30-July 2, 1992.

4. DISCUSSION ON THE MANDATE

A. SHOULD AN AGREED STATEMENT BE MADE?

The Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia had proposed that “the Conference aim to develop an agreed statement on what is a ‘true church.’”

The committee is of the opinion that it is not necessary to develop such a statement.

The Scots Confession (1560) says in ch. 18:

“The notes of the true Kirk, therefore, we believe, confess and avow to be: first, the true preaching of the Word of God, in which God has revealed Himself to us, as the writings of the prophets and apostles declare; secondly, the right administration of the sacraments of Christ Jesus, with which must be associated the Word and promise of God to seal and confirm them in our hearts; and lastly, ecclesiastical discipline uprightly ministered, as God’s Word prescribes, whereby vice is repressed and virtue nourished.”

In the churches in Scotland the Westminster Confession was accepted as in nothing contrary to the received doctrine of the Scots Confession. The Belgic Confession (1561) states in Art. 29:

“The true Church is to be recognized by the following marks: It practises the pure preaching of the gospel. It maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as Christ instituted them. It exercises Church discipline for correcting and punishing sins. In short, it governs itself according to the pure Word of God, rejecting all things contrary to it and regarding Jesus Christ as the only Head.”

There appears to exist a remarkable consensus between Presbyterian and Reformed churches that adhere to one of these confessions. The committee concluded that there *is* an “agreed statement” as to what constitutes a true church and that there is no need to make a new statement.

B. CONSEQUENCES

1. MUTUAL RECOGNITION

The committee first discussed the consequences of the membership of the ICRC.

The first and most important condition for a church to be admitted as member of the ICRC is that it adheres and is faithful to the confessional standards stated in the Basis (Art. IV.1.a). If a church is admitted on this condition, it implies that at least two thirds of the member churches acknowledge it as true church.

On the other hand, the ICRC is a conference of Reformed

Churches and not a Synod and therefore its decisions are advisory in character (Art. V). Admission to the ICRC, then, does not take away the right of the member churches to determine their sister church relationships.

At the same time, membership of the ICRC should be a stimulus to seek fraternal relations or ecclesiastical fellowship with the other members.

2. OPENING OF THE PULPIT

Both the Scots Confession and the Belgic Confession mention the true preaching of the gospel as the first mark of the true church. In order to lay a basis for answering the question what the consequences are of the recognition as a true church for opening the pulpit, we will look at some Scriptural data.

When the apostles went out to preach they proclaimed the Word of God. Paul writes to the church of the Thessalonians: "When you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God" (1 Thess. 2:13. N.B. all quotations from scripture are given in the RSV). Paul insists that his preaching is the Word of God, not the word of men. It should therefore be accepted as the Word of God.

This means that God speaks through the mouths of the apostles. When Paul speaks of the word of reconciliation he says: "So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). Speaking the word of reconciliation means for Paul to speak in the name of Christ, and to speak the words of God. This conviction of representing Jesus Christ is so strong that Paul can even write: "You received me as an angel of God, as Christ Jesus" (Gal. 4:14).

It should be noted that the apostle Paul in these passages did not speak about himself alone. He repeatedly used the plural "we." In 2 Corinthians he includes Timothy (2 Cor. 1:1), in 1 Thessalonians he includes Silvanus and Timothy (1 Thess. 1:1). He writes about these two men: "For the Son of God, Jesus Christ whom we preached among you, Silvanus and Timothy and I, was not Yes and No, but in him it is always Yes" (2 Cor. 1:19). Not only Paul's word, also that of his helpers Silvanus and Timothy was the word about God's Son Jesus Christ. And the promises they spoke in the name of God

were the promises of God.

There is an obvious difference between Paul and these helpers. Paul is an apostle, he receives revelation from God. His work is foundational, his helpers have to build on it. In a passage in which he compares his work to that of Apollos he says: "According to the commission of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid the foundation, and another man is building upon it. Let each man take care how he builds upon it" (1 Cor. 3:10).

The same relation between Paul and his helpers is indicated in the epistles to his former helpers Timothy and Titus. Timothy has to teach according to Paul's instructions. "If you put these instructions before the brethren, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the words of the faith and of the good doctrine which you have followed" (1 Tim. 4:6). Timothy is not to think up his own message, he has to teach what he received, the (O.T.) Scriptures and the teaching of Paul. Then he will be a good servant of Christ. Therefore Paul can instruct Timothy that he has to command and teach what Paul wrote (1 Tim. 4:11).

In a similar way Paul wrote to Titus that the elder "must hold firm to the sure word *as taught*, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it" (Tit. 1:9). The standard for teaching is given: it is the sure word as taught. The elder has to work with it, positively, in instructing, and negatively, in refuting. A new elder does not mean another teaching.

In his ministerial testament to Timothy Paul once again emphasizes that he has taught the right doctrine and that Timothy should teach accordingly: "Follow the pattern of the sound words which you have heard from me" (2 Tim. 1:13). "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it" (2 Tim. 3:14).

Timothy, obviously, should not be the last one to teach the gospel Paul preached, he has to hand it over to other instructors: "And what you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2). The line of preachers should continue, but it is always the same gospel that should be preached.

The conclusion of this brief survey on the content of the preaching is clear: The same word as was preached by the apostles must be preached today. The preaching and teaching in the church has a precisely defined content: the Word of God. The minister may only preach what is in accordance with that Word.

Since the first mark of the true church is the true preaching of the gospel, a church should be tested first of all on the point of its preaching. No one, of course, can listen to all the sermons preached in a church in order to test the preaching. The “test” will come down to investigating what *should* be preached in that church (its doctrinal statements) and whether it upholds this standard, e.g. are there synodical decisions weakening the binding to the confession? The true church does not preach its own words and thoughts, but proclaims what God has revealed to us in his Word. The people in the pew should not be exposed to the private ideas of the preacher but to the doctrine of the Word of God.

The consequence of this for the true church is that not everyone can be allowed to preach. Only he of whom the church can be assured that he will preach the doctrine of the Word of God, can be allowed to preach.

In the Presbyterian and Reformed churches this has led to the institution of an ecclesiastical examination of those who want to be ministers of the Word. It has always included an investigation of the doctrinal convictions of the candidate. There may be differences in the practical rules for this examination, but the main idea is clear: the pulpit should be fenced. No one should be invited to preach as a kind gesture, or because the congregation is curious what this preacher is thinking. The pulpit is not the place to be courteous or to satisfy curiosity. For the congregation should only hear from the pulpit the pure preaching of the gospel.

We may conclude that recognition of a church as true church implies recognition of the doctrine that is preached in that church. After recognizing a church it should be possible that ministers from that church are invited to preach. Recognition of a church is recognition of its preaching. If pulpit exchange is not permissible then there should be no recognition as a true church.

This does not impinge upon the right of the local consistory or minister (who is answerable to his presbytery) to exercise

discretion in inviting a guest preacher. The local consistory or minister remains responsible.

This opening of the pulpit for guest preachers from churches in ecclesiastical fellowship does not imply mutual eligibility for call. The churches have the right to maintain their own standards and make their own regulations.

There is already a remarkable similarity between the rules of member churches of the ICRC concerning the opening of the pulpit. The fifth point of the decision concerning FRATERNAL RELATIONS BETWEEN CHURCHES (1992) of the Free Church of Scotland states: "There should be willingness to allow ministers of one Church access to the pulpits of fraternal Churches as a matter of courtesy." Since the basic rule is that "fraternal relations should exist between Churches that openly and practically profess the true faith of Christ as summarised in one or more of the classical Reformed symbols," this allowance is to be taken as an expression of fellowship in the ministry of the gospel.

The corresponding regulation in the RULES FOR ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING SISTER CHURCH RELATIONSHIPS WITH CHURCHES ABROAD (1993) of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands reads: "The churches shall in principle open their pulpits for each other's ministers in agreement with the rules adopted in the respective churches." (5)

The same is proposed by the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad of the Canadian Reformed Churches (1992).

3. INTERCOMMUNION

The churches of the Reformation confess that the sacraments should not be profaned. The Heidelberg Catechism deals with this in L.D. 30, Q&A 82:

"Q. Are those also to be admitted to the Lord's Supper who by their confession and life show that they are unbelieving and ungodly?

A. No, for then the covenant of God would be profaned and his wrath kindled against the whole congregation. Therefore, according to the command of Christ and of his apostles, the Christian church is duty-bound to exclude such persons by the keys of the kingdom of heaven until they amend their lives."

The Westminster Confession states in ch. 29, section 8:

"Although ignorant and wicked men receive the outward

elements in this sacrament, yet they receive not the thing signified thereby; but by their unworthy coming thereunto are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, to their own damnation. Wherefore all ignorant and ungodly persons, as they are unfit to enjoy communion with him, so are they unworthy of the Lord's table, and cannot, without great sin against Christ, while they remain such, partake of these holy mysteries, or be admitted thereunto."

This last statement implies that the celebration of the Lord's Supper is to be supervised. In this supervision the church exercises discipline and manifests itself as true church. This supervision is to be applied to members of the local church as well as to guests.

This has led to the following rule for guests in the Free Church of Scotland:

"An authentic intimation from a Minister or Elder, that a person is in full membership with the congregation in which that Minister or Elder officiates, is sometimes allowed to stand as sufficient ground for the temporary or occasional admission of the person to communion in another congregation." (*The Practice of the Free Church of Scotland in her Several Courts*, Rev. ed.; ch.1, part 2, p. 8).

A similar practice of supervision exists within the tradition of the continental Reformed churches. We quote Art. 61 of the Church Order of the Canadian Reformed Churches:

"The consistory shall admit to the Lord's Supper only those who have made public profession of the Reformed faith and lead a godly life. Members of sister-churches shall be admitted on the ground of a good attestation concerning their doctrine and conduct."

It is clear from these rules that within the churches of the Reformation the eldership has a responsibility in supervising the admission to the Lord's Supper.

This responsibility of fencing the Lord's table should also be acknowledged between churches in fraternal relations or ecclesiastical fellowship.

In the meantime, we should not forget that it is a great privilege and a deep joy to welcome brothers and sisters of recognized sister-churches at the table. It shows that the church gathering work of the Lord Jesus Christ is not limited to one nation and it is an expression of the communion of saints. We profess one holy catholic and apostolic church. Therefore these brothers and sisters should be encouraged to participate and should be gladly received.

In conclusion, then, we can say that members of churches that are recognized as true churches should be allowed to participate in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, upon valid attestation or certification.

4. ACCEPTANCE OF ATTESTATIONS

A similar line of reasoning can be followed with respect to the acceptance of attestations or certificates of good standing. Recognizing one another as true churches of the Lord implies acceptance of one another's members.

This has already been covered in the rules of member churches of the ICRC. The Free Church of Scotland has formulated the following policy: There should be willingness to accept certificates of communicant membership, normally without personal examination. "Fraternal Relations between Churches" (1992), 3.

The proposed Rules for the Establishment and Maintenance of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with Churches Abroad of the Canadian Reformed Churches state in this connection:

"4. The churches shall accept one another's attestations or certificates of good standing, which also means admitting members of the respective churches to the sacraments upon presentation of that attestation or certificate."

CONCLUSION

The Committee for Theological Affirmation was struck by the apparent similarity between the several sets of rules regarding ecclesiastical fellowship that were accessible to us. We will append them to this report.

In answer to the question put to this committee we conclude that there exists a consensus between the Reformed confessions concerning the marks of the true church. Recognizing one another as true churches has consequences with respect to admission to the pulpit, admission to the celebration of the Lord's Supper and acceptance of attestations or certificates of consistories or sessions.

May the discussion of this report be subservient to the upbuilding of the catholic church of God.

Respectfully submitted,

A.C. Boyd

J. Faber (Convener)

N.H. Gootjes

F.S. Leahy

H.M. Cartwright (advisor)

Rules for Inter-Church Relations of some Member Churches

THE FREE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

Fraternal Relations between Churches

There should be one simple rule to the following effect.

Fraternal Relations should exist between Churches that openly and practically profess the true faith of Christ as summarised in one or more of the classical Reformed symbols — i.e. the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgian Confession, the Canons of the Synod of Dort.

Certain duties and courtesies devolve upon Churches sustaining fraternal relations.

1. There should be a spirit of cordial love and trust as becomes brothers in the faith.
2. There should be an attitude of mutual helpfulness. Each should be willing to share problems and difficulties with the others. By the same token each should be allowed to exhort to more exact obedience any who appeared to relax faithfulness to their avowed confession. This should not invite to inquisitorial interference but to strengthening one another in love for Christ.
3. There should be willingness to accept certificates of communicant membership, normally without personal examination.
4. There should be in the highest courts of the Churches a cordial welcome to visiting delegates from other Churches recognised as in fraternal relationship. This need not amount to according membership in the court to the visiting delegate.
5. There should be willingness to allow ministers of one Church access to the pulpits of fraternal Churches as a matter of courtesy.
6. Churches should exchange copies of the Acts and Proceedings of their highest courts or at least inform one another of major decisions.

REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF IRELAND

A sister Church is one that holds to the same distinctive position as the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland, and there is, therefore, mutual eligibility of ministers and members.

Fraternal relations with other Presbyterian and Reformed Churches, that are faithful to their confessional standards, would allow for occasional reception of delegates and lecturers, exchange of Synodical Minutes and

official publications, exchange of pulpits and joint action in areas of common concern.

Other Christian bodies requesting some form of ecclesiastical fellowship should be asked to provide details of their confessional and doctrinal basis. Synod shall consider each case on its merits.

CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCHES

Proposed Rules for the Establishment and Maintenance of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with Churches Abroad

The following Rules for Ecclesiastical Fellowship shall apply:

1. The churches shall see to each other as much as possible in order that they do not depart from the Reformed faith in doctrine, church polity, discipline, and liturgy.
2. The churches shall inform each other of the decisions taken by their broadest assemblies, if possible by sending each other their Acts or Minutes and otherwise, at least by sending the decisions relevant to the respective churches (if possible, in translation).
3. The churches shall inform each other when entering into relations with third parties.
4. The churches shall accept one another's attestations or certificates of good standing, which also means admitting members of the respective churches to the sacraments upon presentation of that attestation or certificate.
5. The churches shall in principle open their pulpits for each other's ministers in agreement with the rules adopted in the respective churches.

In exercising these relations, the churches shall strive to implement also the following:

6. When major changes or additions are being considered to the confessions, church government or liturgy, the churches shall be informed in order that as much consultation can take place as possible before a final decision is taken.
7. The churches shall receive each other's delegates at their broadest assemblies and invite them to participate as much as local regulations permit.

(Tentatively adopted at the meeting of the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad of the Canadian Reformed Churches held on Feb. 28, 1991).

REFORMED CHURCHES IN THE NETHERLANDS (liberated)

Rules for Sister Church Relationships

Having entering into a sister church relationship with a foreign church a few rules regarding this relationship shall apply. The goal of these rules shall be that as Reformed Churches we remain faithful to the Word of God, assisting, encouraging and stimulating each other mutually to bear witness to the Lord Jesus Christ in this world by word and deed.

From the side of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, the following rules shall apply:

1. The churches shall as much as possible assist each other in the maintenance, defence, and promotion of the Reformed Standards according to the Scriptures in doctrine, church polity, discipline and liturgy.
2. The churches shall inform each other of the decisions taken by their broadest assemblies, if possible by sending each other their Acts (or Minutes) and otherwise, at least by sending the decisions relevant to the respective churches (if possible, in translation).
3. The churches shall inform each other when entering into a sister church relationship with third parties.
4. The churches shall accept one another's attestations or certificates of good standing, which also means admitting the members of the respective churches to the sacraments upon presentation of that attestation or certificate.
5. The churches shall in principle open their pulpits for each other's ministers in agreement with the rules adopted in the respective churches.

In exercising these relations the churches shall strive to implement also the following:

6. When major changes or additions are being considered to the confessions, church government or liturgy, the sister churches shall be requested to take due notice in order that as much consultation can take place as possible before a final decision is taken.
7. The churches shall receive each other's delegates at their broadest assemblies and invite them to participate as advisors, as much as local regulations permit.

The Reformed Churches in the Netherlands state that in case a foreign church has its own rules for ecclesiastical relations, this fact does not necessarily preclude the entering into and entertaining of a sister church relationship, provided that there is no conflict between the rules of this foreign church and the rules of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands.

(By the General Synod of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands,

Letter from Member Church ¹

Submission on Ecumenical Creeds

Somewhat belatedly, I have to convey to you the decision of our Synod about the text of “Apostles’ Creed.” This matter seems to have been overlooked previously.

It was resolved

That Synod write to the International Conference of Reformed Churches with the following comments on the Report of the ICRC Committee on Ecumenical Creeds:

- (a) The PCEA does not normally make use of the creeds in its liturgy. Although the text of the “Apostles’ Creed” is to be found in printed collections of its subordinate standards, none of the “ecumenical creeds” is formally part of the Church’s constitution.
- (b) The courts of the PCEA have considered the ICET text of the Apostle’s Creed, and we support the text proposed by the ICRC Committee with the following amendments:
 1. the non-use of capitalized pronouns in reference to deity (eg. “His only son,” “He descended,” “He arose”). This usage violates the normal rules of English grammar, and is distracting to the reader;
 2. the capitalization of “son” in clause 2;
 3. the substitution of the words “conceived from the Holy Spirit” in clause 3, as more accurately reflecting the Latin *de*;
 4. the addition of an explanatory note to clause 4c, “he descended into hell,” along the lines of “ie. continued in the state of the dead, and under the power of death till the third day.”
- (c) We agree with the ICRC Committee in omitting the adjective “Christian” in clause 9.
- (d) We agree with the inclusion of the *filioque* clause in the Nicene Creed, as recommended by the ICRC Committee.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely in Christ’s service,

W. Peter Gadsby

(Rev. W. Peter Gadsby wrote on behalf of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia as Clerk of its Synod.)

¹ See Article 29 of the Minutes.

Section III

Conference Papers

The Wrath of God as an Essential Part of Mission ¹

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Mission with a view to the coming of Christ to judge the living and the dead
(2 Tim. 4:1).

Introduction

It looks as if mission has survived her difficult years. In the '70s and '80s Bangkok (1972/3) dominated the scene with her call for dialogue and immediate salvation for the world. At the same time we heard the "Missionary, go home" slogan, the call longing for the end of Western mission.

However, the tide turned in the mid-'80s. The church was challenged, also in developing countries, by secularisation, the revival of religions (eg. Islam), the breakdown of communism, pollution, the widening North-South gap, etc. Is the church relevant for the world, here and now? The church had to prove her credibility for the sake of her own existence. Now or never!

The name for the new identity of mission was *Missio Dei*. Mission is God's own work for the salvation of the world. The church is God's chosen instrument. The whole church is sent by God to the whole world with the whole gospel. A holistic method of mission.

Mission is not only the task of missionaries and missionary churches and organisations. It is the task of all Christians, all over the world. They all are responsible for this world and mankind which is in desperate need. They all have to act, by word and deed, so that mankind will survive to the end of the 20th century. The Church and Christians are called to live out the love of God in all aspects of life. *Missio Dei* means: the church has to be or not to be.

Since this concept is more or less adopted both by ecumenicals and by evangelicals we need to question whether this mission really brings the whole gospel. Recently the concept of sin in the modern missiology was criticized.² We will explore how this modern thinking has affected the view

¹ With thanks to Prof. Dr. C.J. de Ruijter.

² Joosse, L.J., "Kerkgroei: een menselijke mogelijkheid in elke cultuur?" in: *Het zondebesef*

on the punishment of sin. What is God's reaction toward sin? What consequences does it have on the methodology of mission and the organisation of a young church? In this paper we focus our attention on the aspect of the wrath of God. Thus the paper is entitled "The wrath of God as an essential part of mission: Mission with a view to the coming of Christ to judge the living and the dead." We will limit ourselves to three elements: 1) the approach, 2) the administration of church discipline and 3) the stimulus for holiness. In Part 1 we will investigate the issue in ecumenical circles; Part 2 will deal with the evangelical views, and Part 3 presents our opinion. We will conclude with a Reformed perspective of mission.

Briefly put, we ask your attention to whether and how modern mission will bring men into an encounter with the living and fearful God.

PART 1 The Wrath of God in Ecumenical Views

1.1 Approach and missiology

1.1.1 "Mission and Evangelism: an ecumenical affirmation"³ (abbreviation: ME)

ME is the official, accepted document by WCC (Vancouver 1983) which deals with the evangelical criticism and WCC concerns. It was meant to stimulate a new age of mission.

The introduction (A) states that sin only starts with the rejection of God's program of salvation. That leads toward an optimistic anthropology, relativising the wrath of God. God promises the Kingdom to the poor, the ones who are usually not (yet) reached by the gospel. It ends up with common redemption. The walls of separation have been pulled down, the world is redeemed with God. Only by rejection is one alienated from God. Without it, no punishment.

We conclude that by this anthropology mission loses her address and relativises the wrath. Only rejection is wrong. The poor are already God's people. They don't need to confess, or to respond to God's Word. This radical change is caused by denying the historical creation of the world and the disobedience of Adam and Eve in Paradise.

Paragraph 2 changes the doctrine of reconciliation. The cross of Jesus is not a retribution, but a symbol of his self-denying, sacrificing love for men.

*in de moderne missiologie, serie: Missionaire
thema's, GMO, Kampen 1987.*

3 in: WCC *Mission Series* no. 4, Geneva 1983. We used the Dutch translation in: *Allerwegen*, Vol. 14, no. 3, 1983.

Paragraph 6-8 calls the church to mediate, just as Christ did, between God and creation. Christ's suffering is the same as what the oppressed experience from powerful men, poverty and political manipulation. All the oppressed are Jesus' disciples and beloved by God. The cross shows the definite battle between demonic powers and God's love (par. 8). On the one hand, there is the human tragedy and alienation, on the other, there is the self-denying offer of Christ, the perfect man. The church will only be apostolic by an incarnational mission. That means that she, like Christ, has to be in solidarity with the world, participating in her sufferings through self-denial (Jn. 20:21).

We note that there are radical changes in the doctrines on Mediator, reconciliation, and incarnation. There is not a word about wrath.

1.1.2 San Antonio 1989 on Mission and Evangelization⁴ (abbreviation: SA)

The conference of the Committee on World Mission and Evangelization in San Antonio 1989 discussed evangelical criticism even more. It lists "turning to the living God" as one of the goals of mission. But the declaration is close to the ME statement of 1982. Sin, guilt, and the separation of men because of unbelief, etc. are scarcely dealt with, if at all. God's unrestricted love for all men and his whole creation is stressed. The church then should care for unity and communion among all human beings. Incarnation means that God operates on a human level, in human cultures, participating with human suffering and identifying with the poor. Proselytism is rejected.

Personal salvation means the vocation of ministry in the Kingdom. Witness as a personal commitment has to cooperate with dialogue. Christians should never judge other people with living faith, but just be witnesses.

We conclude that on the topic of evangelism SA is a compromise of ecumenical and evangelical thinking. A Christian need not call other people. It looks as if unbelief and opposition towards the Gospel do not exist any longer. The church is not God's chosen people out of the world, but God's chosen instrument by which He comes to the world and saves mankind.

1.1.3 Ecumenical Introduction to Missiology⁵ (abbreviation: EIM)

⁴ Published in *International Review of Mission*
Vol. LXXVIII, Nos. 311/312, July/October 1989.

⁵ Verstraelen, F.J. ed. *Oecumenische Inleiding in de missiologie: Teksten en konteksten van het wereldchristendom*, Kampen 1988. This is the

We hear the same issues in the new Dutch handbook on missiology. The main goal of mission is to sustain and provide a foundation for one human community (pp. 475/6). Christians and other “believers” are just pilgrims on their way to God, telling each other about their experiences with God (pg. 197). The basic issue is: “God with us”, that is, with everybody. Human unfaithfulness can not annul God's faithfulness.

We note that EIM articulates common redemption, that is, there is no separation of believers and unbelievers. All religions point to the same God. There is no punishment for unbelief and disobedience.

1.1.4 Transforming Mission⁶

Also the view of the famous David Bosch points in the same direction. Incarnation means God's participation, that has to be continued by his church in the world. Evangelization contains no threat, no fear for hell (pg. 413). The eschatology is realised now (pg. 508). The Last Judgment is not mentioned. It is a horizontal plea for humanizing, since the wrath and vengeance of God are superseded. There is hope for the ultimate, perfect world, but no room for judgment and separation of mankind.

1.2 The exercise of church discipline among ecumenicals

Church discipline is not often discussed in WCC circles. Yet we can draw conclusions from what is not said. First, let us consider the structure of WCC itself. WCC develops great programs and impressive statements. But who is responsible? Who is supposed to implement them? Who is controlling? What sanctions will be used to convince the dissenters? In fact, is not the structure of the WCC itself the greatest hindrance to concrete and adequate action in the world, here and now, beginning with the church?

1.2.1 Mission and Evangelism

new missionary handbook, used at most Theological Universities in the Netherlands. It is written by authors from Roman-Catholic, Netherlands Hervormde and (synodical) Reformed background. It promises to be the standard for (ecumenical) mission in the years to come.

⁶ Bosch, D.J., *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, New York 1991. This book is accepted worldwide as the authority on mission trends. He tried to find his position somewhere between radical ecumenical concepts and (liberal) evangelical views.

Incorporation into the body of Christ, the Church, is part of the message (par. 20 ME). However, the church is “the community with the ultimate goal the celebration of the Holy Supper and the praise of God, that exceeds all our separation” (suppl. 5, pg. 57). The unity of the church is the primary missionary enterprise. Although there is a growing unity in doctrine as far as the LIMA-documents are concerned, there is no overall doctrinal unity.

We conclude that there is a tolerance of doctrinal freedom and syncretism. The boundaries between church and world are consciously ignored. In this climate church discipline can not flourish, not to mention the negative influence towards non-ecumenical organisations.

1.2.2 San Antonio

The SA documents often call for a breaking down of the walls of hostility and separation. The unity of the human family is number one. Unity in missionary action is stimulated. The main doctrinal issues are the participation of women in the offices and the open eucharist. The main heresy of this time seems to be the fencing of the Lord's Supper and the rejection of women in the office. Proselytism is rejected as denying the authenticity of the faith of other Christians. The local community has to become the source of mission, because the world will primarily believe through the experience of a relevant human community.

We note the open eucharist (the ecumenical name for Lord's Supper) is an implicit rejection of church discipline. The authority of Scriptures is replaced by authenticity of believers. That means that the main power of mission is diminished. The world has to believe because of the (ideal) community of believers, not because of listening to God's Word. In fact, the world will only be impressed by a unity based on the Scriptures, rather than one based on human compromises and joint action. Then the church reveals that she is built on God's grace and not just a human institution. This was also the case in the Age of the Reformation.

1.2.3 Ecumenical Introduction on Missiology

The EIM tries to solve the ecclesiastical polarisation of the 20th century (pg. 476/7). Church walls have to be broken down in order to join together in social action for the benefit of the unity of mankind in the future. All churches are welcome: evangelical, Roman Catholic, Russian Catholic and Greek Orthodox churches. No one is excluded.

We conclude that this is a fundamental rejection of church discipline, since we are not to judge the religious feelings of others. If no one is excluded, then church discipline is excluded! In the future the WCC could organize a World Council on Religions. There is no Christian identity in this mission.

1.2.4 Transforming Mission

Bosch applauds the shift towards the local church (pg. 378). But it means an “event among people.” There is no call to repent, no proclamation of

salvation. With others he opposes the *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* ("there is no salvation outside the church"). For God is also working his salvation in the world outside the church.

Besides, the imperfect church is the main object of *Missio Dei* (pg. 386). She has to repent in humility because she made many mistakes in history. *Semper reformanda* is the judgment on the church in order that she might serve better in a changing world. Ecclesiastical admonishing becomes an accusation and charge towards the church herself!

We conclude that the reappearance of the issue of the local church is not intended to protect the true doctrine but to promote social action. The identity of the church is diminished. Church discipline and church boundaries seem to hinder the relevance of the church for the world. In fact, it is an endorsement of the world: the church is to fulfil the expectations of the world.

1.3 Wrath of God and sanctification of life among ecumenicals

1.3.1 Mission and Evangelization

Paragraph 4 ME confesses the great importance of the life of Christians (Act 2:46f). The life of Jesus, identified by justice and forgiveness, education, the unmasking of evil, and self-denial, is the model for Christian life (par. 5 ME). Sanctification is entirely comprised of the ministry of mission. Christ, the Lamb, has to be the main issue. The church has to prove her credibility by wilful poverty. She has to read the Bible from the perspective of the poor.

We note that in this view a moral life is a functional instrument for mission, more than a concrete proof of thankfulness to God. Besides, why not also mention the sometimes harsh words of Christ and his rejection of unbelievers as an element of the model? The issue of structural ethics seems to be more important than personal ethics. Why not exhort the churches for tolerating hostility, manipulation, selfishness (abortion), and lovelessness in personal lives? How should the church keep the Christians untarnished by the world in marriage, family, employment / unemployment, and education? More importantly, why are the poor not admonished to repent to a holy life, e.g. from hate towards their employers and government officials? The issues of structural problems and the opposition towards governments sounds more like Anabaptist zeal for revolution than Christian patience.

1.3.2 San Antonio

Paragraph 6 SA states that the unholy life is punished by Christ as Judge. The new lifestyle is the most authentic and clear way to bring the gospel and to live out the gospel. Dichotomy and compartmentalizing have to be replaced by asceticism and simple lifestyle (par. 19 SA). The church has to

implement the values of unity, reconciliation, justice, equality, freedom, harmony, peace, and love (par. 33 SA).

Final conclusion: On the whole the sanctification of life concerns the structural problems more than personal ethics. Besides, the inner power to act rightly in social affairs is heavily stressed. In opposition to that Scripture teaches (Gal. 5; Eph. 4-6) that the Spirit wants to renew persons, who have to start over again each new day (Heid. Cat. LD 43). Also the new life has to be proclaimed within ecclesiastical spheres and maintained by mutual Christian support and the exercise of discipline. A plea for Christian ethics can only flourish within the framework of preaching the grace of God and calling to thankfulness.

PART 2 Wrath of God in Evangelical Views

2.1 Wrath in methodology and preaching

The evangelicals accept the Scriptures as the infallible Word of God. We are thankful for that. Much of their opposition towards WCC theology is ours, too. Yet we question whether the issue of the wrath of God is dealt with on an acceptable level in their main documents and some of their trendsetting leaders.

2.1.1 Church Growth as a holistic view on mission⁷

The Church Growth Movement of D.A. McGavran is trying to incorporate human sciences and communication techniques into missiology. They explore how the processes of church growth are stimulated or hindered by human activities. The success of mission is defined by the numerical growth of the church. Preaching has to accommodate to the “felt need” and try to work as much as possible with “homogeneous units.”

We conclude that in this movement preaching is too dependent on the hearer. Since a fearful God who accuses men is not pleasing to most ears, the wrath of God should not be mentioned. Next, God does not deliver man from all the felt needs, but He reveals the depth of the real need. The optimistic American view and the success thinking are based on unscriptural anthropology. We do not read about the total corruption of man or the opposition to the Gospel which is not from men (Gal. 1:11).

2.1.2 Incarnational mission

⁷ McGavran, D.A., *Understanding Church Growth*, Grand Rapids 1985, fully revised, reprint 1985. Also same author, *Effective Evangelism: A Theological Mandate*, New Jersey 1988.

The famous and respectable John Stott is inclined to follow the WCC missiology on the issue of incarnation, especially by his exegesis of John 20:21. A church which preaches the cross should be marked by the cross.⁸ As Christ identified Himself with the world its culture and the concerns of this world and suffered by it, the church also has to participate in the problems of this world (Phil. 2:5-7).

We note here again an inaccurate exegesis of John 20:21 and also an identification of the suffering of Christ and the concerns of the world. The church is not called to imitate and repeat Christ's unique offer, but to follow Christ, in all aspects of his life.

2.1.3 Incarnational communication of Kraft⁹

According to Charles Kraft, Incarnation is God's model of revelation: limited, imperfect, restricted, and accepting human cultures (pg. 30). Because Christ was using the rules of communication perfectly He had a real impact on his hearers (pp. 147ff; 173ff).

We conclude that revelation is, according to Kraft, an ongoing dynamic process, in which God is dependent on human understanding and restricted to human cultures. Kraft's biblical rules for effective communication do not mention an wrathful Jesus, who can reject the unbelievers and proclaims "woe unto thee" to unwilling listeners (Matt. 11:21).

2.1.4 Wrath in the Lausanne Covenant¹⁰ (LC)

8 Stott, J.R., *An explication of the Lausanne Covenant*. I used the German translation in: *Lausanne geht weiter*, Stuttgart 1980 (abbr. Weiter). From the same author, *Christian mission in the modern world*. I used the Dutch translation: *Zending in de moderne wereld*, Goes 1978.

9 Kraft, Ch.H., *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-cultural Perspective*, New York 1981.

10 Lausanne Covenant, ed. J.R. Stott in: *The Lausanne Covenant: An Exposition and commentary*, Minneapolis 1975. I used a Dutch translation in: W.J. Bouw, *Evangelisatie: Wat verstaan we er onder?* Kampen 1981.

The Lausanne Covenant of 1974 functions as the basic statement for the evangelical Lausanne Movement. It does mention the wrath of God in par. 5. But then, it is related to injustice in the human society, against oppression etc. Par. 15 states that the coming of Christ is a stimulus for mission.

We conclude there is no mention of the issue of guilt or God's punishment of human deprivation and misery. The Second Coming is not openly presented as a warning for the final judgment of unbelievers.

2.1.5 Wrath in Manila Manifesto¹¹ (MM)

As in ecumenical missiology, the Manila Manifesto stresses the “social responsibility” of the church even more. Guilt concerns the church who neglected her service to the poor. MM clearly confesses that there is no salvation without Christ. Apologetics are supported as an effective means for the defence of the gospel.

We miss the aspect of God's rejecting wilful unbelievers and those who oppose the Gospel. Apologetics means the rational and intellectual defence of faith to answer the attacks, but it is not preaching the wrath of God as an assuasion of men. Judgment and wrath of God are certainly realities, to be accepted by humble faith not demonstrated by logical argumentation.

2.2 Holiness in the Church, especially in the exercise of church discipline

This is a delicate issue. Most evangelicals are disappointed with the established churches because of the unholy Christian lifestyle. We agree with them on this point. They try to find their way in free movements, fellowships, and new ecclesiastical communities of godfearing and usually like-minded people.

They prefer revival over reformation. At their conferences one experiences the unity in faith and often celebrates the Holy Supper without restriction. After the conference each returns to his/her own so called “denomination” without longing for more ecclesiastical unity. On the contrary, the differences are seen as necessary for different personalities and lifestyles. They are not a sinful separation in God's eyes, although it might be an attack on ineffective missionary action. Because of these weaknesses there is little room for consequent church discipline.

2.2.1 Role of wrath in Church Growth thinking

The “homogeneous unit principle” of the Church Growth Movement teaches the collective approach of people of the same clan, tribe, class of

11 Manila Manifesto, ed. A. Nichols in: *The whole Gospel for the whole World: Story of Lausanne II Congress on World Evangelization*, Manila 1989, Singapore 1989.

population, etc. This prevents an individualistic alienation after conversion and promotes incorporation into an indigenous church. This strategy works, according to McGavran. Also the traditional powerstructures and procedures should be maintained in the church, and the natural leaders should be ordained as elders.

We conclude that the homogeneous unit principle will lead to the volkskerk. One becomes a churchmember because of clan and tribal relations, not because of the relation with Christ. Besides, the natural leaders will not automatically behave as humble servants (1 Pet. 5:1-5), and criticizing family relations is often impossible. In such circumstances there will be no church discipline.

2.2.2 Cross-cultural approach of Kraft¹²

The administration of church discipline is closely connected with the concept of sin. For the interim period Kraft accepts the traditional tribal concept of sin and ethical values as normative. The missionary should first train the new churchmembers to lift their lifestyle up to the ideal traditional level of values. After that comes the next stage of the divine standard of values, for Kraft believes that God accomodates the standard of ethical life to the understanding of men.

We come to the conclusion that church discipline is impossible for Kraft. Human values can never be a forerunner of divine standards. The holy Christian life is not just behavior, but the personal relationship with God, in accordance to the Scriptures, directed by the Spirit. We reject Kraft's view of man being able to behave well on the basis of his will. Kraft is right that God in his revelation does use the understanding of man, but often in an antithetical way and is certainly not restricted to the horizon of limited human cultures.

2.2.3 Lausanne Covenant

The Lausanne Covenant calls the unfaithfulness of the church deplorable. Heresies should be fought against. Stott pleads that Christians be awakened to heresy.¹³ Converted men should join the church. But the church is more a community than an institution with certain fixed marks. Besides, cooperation in mission with other churches (Roman Catholic, Lutheran,

12 Kraft, *Christianity in culture*, pp. 245-253.

13 Stott, J.R., *Lausanne geht weiter*, p. 184.

etc.) is recommended.

We miss the way in which the heresy should be rejected from the church. Just being awake and watchful is not satisfactory. Discipline is neither mentioned nor used, notwithstanding Gal. 1:6-9. The functional concept of church dominates the scene. Differences in doctrine are relativized by cooperation with other churches. The right to administer discipline vanishes. The point and the power of the gospel are broken.

2.2.4 Manila Manifesto

The Manila Manifesto runs in the same direction. Cooperation in mission between different churches is necessary and competition (rivalry) should be avoided. Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox and even ecumenical churches are welcomed in missionary enterprise.

We conclude that also in MM the church is not protected. The judgment of God is expelled from church affairs. Joint action in mission diminishes individual identities and destroys discipline. More importantly, would not the world be aware of the sponginess and incredibility of such a functional unity of churches?

2.3 The wrath of God and the sanctification of life

The evangelicals undoubtedly wish to live pious and holy lives. They are indeed reacting to the unholiness and corruption they see in the lives of many so-called Christians and churches. That is why they stress the personal conversion, often together with rejection of infant baptism as automatism of the church. Personal conversion is the important issue. Sometimes it leads to forced lifestyles: no smoking, no drinking. Sometimes even more characteristics are required.

2.3.1 Holiness with Kraft

For Kraft the sanctification of life is the dynamic process of conversion: a natural human process via psychological laws of consciousness development. The key for changing to a new life is to be found in the weaknesses and shortcomings of the old system of life. The missionary should find this key and step by step push through the changes in religious thinking and behaviour.

We conclude that a natural process is not the same as the fruit of the Spirit. Kraft is far too positive on existing religious thought and traditional lifestyle. He uses cultural anthropology to point out the many similar forms in religion, but does not explore the deeper meaning of it. Rejection and antithesis are not found in his view, which does not permit discipline.

2.3.2 Sanctification in LC and MM

In the LC, more than in former days, the holiness of life is recommended as a means for witness, by word and deed. Dualism should end and a

functional lifestyle of service and witness has to be promoted. The church is sent into the world also for social and political action. Although this is not evangelism, it is service to the world, because of the great commandment of love, states par. 5 LC.

The MM underlines holiness as a condition of credible witnessing. Holiness is the proof of the gospel. Also here there is a shift to structural problems: the woman, the youth, the poor, the society, etc. And little is said about personal devotional life.

Our final conclusion on evangelical thought of wrath is that there is an absence of God's judgment and punishment on unholiness and uncleanness of mankind. The call to a holy life is not so much based on the awareness of personal weakness and inclination to returning to sin, as it is promoted as an effective strategy for credible witnessing to the world. It seems that the message of sanctification is only addressed to the church. The wish to alter structures identifies Christian values with humanitarian actions. But mission should call for a personal holy life before God who restrains his judgment in divine patience. Also in the midst of unjust structures the church has to show her credibility by showing patience until Christ's Day.

PART 3 Our Opinion

3.1 The wrath of God is an essential part of the missionary preaching

3.1.1 The fact of proclaiming the wrath¹⁴

To limit ourselves to New Testament data, we notice that right from the start the proclamation of Christ also included the proclaiming of God's wrath. John the Baptist speaks about the axe, the fire, and the burning of chaff. Christ continues that preaching: fire, worms, darkness, and Gehenna. He is the Lamb of wrath, Rev. 6:16. Judgment is given into his hands. Jesus makes the decisions concerning life and death. There will be a separation in mankind with serious consequences. The Good News is deadly serious.

The apostles followed Jesus's teaching. 1 Thess. 1:9-10 gives a summary: turning to the living and true God, expectating Christ's coming, and being delivered from the terrors of judgment. The proclamation of wrath was a constant element in apostolic preaching. The gospel is no gift without obligation. Without Christ, there is just God's vengeance. A real warning is issued to unbelievers, but also to believers, since the judgment starts with God's own household (1 Pet. 4:17-18). What will be the end of those who

14 Floor, L., *Het gericht van God volgens het Nieuwe Testament*, Amsterdam 1979, p. 141.

refuse?

We conclude that in the New Testament, both in preaching to heathens and in the upbuilding of the church the reality of God's wrath was never forgotten. On the contrary, it is an essential part of the whole message (John 3:36).

3.1.2 Background of the wrath

Does God's wrath contradict God's love? Is not the wrath an element from the Old Testament which we have to overcome in the New? Is not God aiming for the salvation of men?

- a) God is reacting to His rejection by men.

The wrath of God is His reaction to the refusal of men to honour Him as God and Creator. It started in Paradise and reached its climax in the rejection of Christ. Everybody is under the power of sin and guilty before God (Rom. 3:9ff; 5:12). God takes sin seriously. Many of the problems in modern missiology originate from denying the divine origin of history and the fall of Adam and Eve in Paradise.

- b) God does not permit His love to be trampled upon.

God's sharp reaction to sin will only be understandable from the perspective of His love. Although wrath may seem to be the opposite of God's love, in fact, it is a true expression of real love. He wants to give Himself in total love to man, but man mocked this love. By experiencing God's wrath man is obliged to realise how serious and deep God's offended love is. God is not to be trifled with. He is not a playmate subject to man's whim. He is God! He cannot deny Himself (2 Tim. 2:13). He remains God, also in His just wrath.

But that is Good News too. Imagine if God would just bypass the disobedience of man and the rebellious program of Satan! That would leave this world in an eternal compromise between good and bad, a never ending struggle without justice. But God is God. He does not leave room for Satan and evil in His world. He does not allow His love to be trampled upon forever. He starts an overall program of redemption and deliverance, because He can not deny His love for His creation and His Church. The cross reveals the depth of God's wrath when Christ died for our sins. It also reveals the seriousness of his intention to accept man again in his love.

- c) The God of wrath is the holy God.

Because God is a holy God, He hates all sin and evil. Sin provokes His wrath in His curse on this world (Rom. 1:18ff). The very essence of His wrath is God Himself: His majesty, His glory, His holiness. He will not give His glory to another god (Is. 42:8). Everybody,

Satan included, will have to admit God's holiness. That's why God redeems His people by the cross, judgment, and grace. Not a cheap, but a full gospel!

3.1.3 Expression of God's wrath

God's wrath is revealed over the whole world. We mention three points:

- a) God's wrath on non-christian religions, (cf. OT history, Rom. 1). The most serious sin is to sweep God away and replace Him by home made products. Then God leaves men to themselves. They are caught in their own nets.
- b) God's wrath on the religious decline of His people. If Israel is dealing with God as one of the many gods, then God deals with them as with the other nations, leaving them on their way to death.
- c) God's wrath on the ethical decline, both of the nations, and of His people (Rom. 1). It looks as if God permits sin to increase in full power, like the gangrene (2 Tim. 2:17; 3:13).

Answer 3 of the Heidelberg Catechism is relevant on the mission field as well. We know our misery only from the law of God. If God's wrath is not revealed and proclaimed then man will continue in his evil ways. The “felt need” masks the real need. Indeed, the proclamation of wrath reveals the seriousness of His love. This is Good News!

3.1.4 Goal of proclaiming wrath

Preaching wrath is to be considered within the perspective of the Gospel. We could also say: proclaiming wrath is Good News. Because, indeed, the fact that God let His wrath be proclaimed gives man the opportunity to repent (cf. Jonah in Nineveh).

- a) Let man discover the depth of his misery.

Proclaiming wrath is meant to awaken man from his (religious) delusion. In Acts 2:37 the listeners asked, “What are we to do?” It reveals the seriousness of the situation. Judgment arrives not just when wrath is preached, but man lives under the wrath (John 3:36). Preaching wrath reveals sin; it unmask the human innocence. Men are confronted with the harsh fact of God's wounded love. They are accused by the Holy Spirit through the Word before the throne of God (John 16:8ff).

- b) Aiming at conversion and salvation

Preaching wrath is a delicate and difficult issue. It is not making people scared and frightened by shouting “hell and damnation.” It is the earnest and humble call for people to be aware of their guilt before the living and holy God, Creator of the universe. But indeed,

the hearers do come into a “crisis.” But in the perspective of the gospel. They are called to give up their resistance to God and repent. Because only this true God promises salvation.

c) Proof of the depth of the gospel

In His wrath God reveals how seriously He takes man. If He would not care, why would He send His beloved Son to die for sinners? No other religion teaches such a heavy sentence and judgment. It proves that God is God, the Living One, who takes Himself seriously and man seriously. God reveals to man the full consequences of his behavior. That means also the reality of God's love and His longing for a response in human love.

Without wrath the Good News of the Gospel becomes cheap and superficial. It is indeed a unique view of God, man and the future. The cross is not just the climax of God's love but also the centre of His wrath. Only by judgment and grace can the way to God be opened again. There is no other love than serious love, commanding a response of serious love.

d) Preaching the gospel, coloured by the seriousness of judgment

We conclude that the proclamation of wrath does not contradict the gospel, but is an essential part of it. By it the seriousness of the gospel is highlighted and the true depth of God's love is revealed. In this way man is thrown back to the living God. Wrath, punishment, Golgotha, and the Last Judgment are fully included in the gospel of salvation. A preacher of the Gospel who does not proclaim the wrath of God acts like a fireman who turns up when there is no fire alarm.

3.1.5 The result of proclaiming wrath

The result of preaching wrath is a separation of mankind into believers and unbelievers. In this way God realises His election and reprobation (1 Thess. 5:9), although we will not touch upon that aspect now.

a) Hardening in unbelief

The New Testament often states that men reject Christ and His apostles. They reject God's judgment on Christ at the cross. They harden themselves in their unbelief and will receive a harsher judgment (Matt. 11:20-24).

b) Salvation through faith and conversion

The New Testament also reveals conversion as a result. Those who repent are redeemed by faith in Christ. They come “home,” *coram Deo*, before the throne of the living God as citizens of His Kingdom.

c) Consolation and hope

Wrath also teaches that in the end there will be justice in an unjust world. Justice not for “the” poor as such, but for the downtrodden and oppressed church of Christ (cf. Rev.; Belgic Confession, Art. 37). The adversaries and teachers of heresy will be silenced. No wonder that eschatology and missiology belong together. In this way the church is eagerly expecting the Day of Christ, who comes to judge the living and dead, including His and my enemies (Heid. Cat. Answer 52). The church will never be glad about the perdition of men, but will really rejoice about the victory of God's justice and His love.

d) Dominance of the perspective of love

We conclude that the proclamation of wrath should be included in the perspective of God's missionary love. In this manner God reveals to man his guilt and unmasks him as a fugitive, hiding himself from God. Indeed in this way seriousness and love compel man back to God. He has to come up before the throne of God, whether he likes it or not. Missionary preaching is dangerous for the listener. Only by kneeling before the cross of grace can he stand before his Creator. Missionaries are going their way with the ultimate intent of God's whole message, with a view to salvation.

3.2 The wrath of God in the upbuilding of ecclesiastical life

The wrath of God also concerns the process of upbuilding His church, especially in the administration of church discipline.¹⁵

3.2.1 Church discipline in the New Testament

The church of Jerusalem had to deal with church discipline in her early days, the case of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-12). It seemed to be a setback for the missionary outreach, but it started a new wave of conversions and the expansion of the church (Acts 5:14). God protected His church from becoming a religious fellowship. It is indeed dangerous to be a member of God's house. Discipline results in sifting, sorting out, separation,

¹⁵ We accept the warning of J.H. Bavinck in his *Introduction to Missiology*, p. 185 (Dutch version), that church discipline should not precede the conscience and understanding of sin of the churchmembers. Indeed, this asks for instruction and patience. But his warning may not be interpreted as asking for the abolition of discipline.

but also winning serious men for Christ. The Church can not do without discipline to protect the boundaires between Church and world, true religion and non-christian religions, true and false churches.

The letters of the New Testament present the same picture. Discipline is mentioned in churches of second and third generations. The love of the first hour is weakened. Church is considered to be normal. Children and grandchildren did not experience the struggle to break with traditional religion and behavior, as their parents did. In that situation the Church is called to point to the seriousness of the gospel by instructing the youth and administring discipline.

3.2.2 The administration of discipline is a proof of love.

Discipline is not a means to expel or excommunicate someone from the church, but the ultimate means to save a member of the church. It is the battle against evil and the power of sin and Satan in the life of a sinner who maintains his sin, in order to save him. It is not a cold administration or regulation but the implementation of God's warm love, by visits at home and intercessions in prayer. Discipline means that Christ is holding you close. Discipline means feeling the power of grace. The whole congregation is involved. The one who is disciplined feels the strong hand of the Shepherd, who wants to gather the whole flock by His rod and staff (Ps. 23). He who refuses to be disciplined, refuses the love and care of God.

3.2.3 For the holiness of the congregation

Church discipline is necessary for the whole congregation. There should be an official, public statement of the church council stating that sin is not tolerated in the church. This helps the wavering believers to remain on the right track. It also reminds the non-christian community and government that the church expels sin from her midst. Discipline has to prevent the church of Christ from being compromised. Discipline has its patience, but it is not endless! The church is not a religious club, but the house of God who hates evil and sin. Discipline has a very important missionary role.

3.2.4 The procedure of discipline

Discipline keeps the church healthy. It is the concrete proof of life by grace in a sick society. Discipline needs to be taught, in the sermons, catechism, home visitation, also by the confession and forms of excommunication and readmission. Particularly in practice the church has to show how she fights agains unholiness. Mission should prepare the national church for this serious task. We mention some main points:

- Office bearers should be spiritual fathers, shepherds, not bureaucrats, church leaders, or worldly rulers.

- The church council is the one who decides who is to be admitted to the sacraments, not the minister, congregation, family, or government.
- All human fear and cultural hindrances for mutual discipline (Acts 20:28), should be analysed and replaced by biblical boldness (Acts 4:30f).
- Home visitation related to practical preaching has to support Christians in their struggle against sin.
- Ecclesiastical agreements about procedures on discipline, excommunication, and readmission are indispensable.

The issue of self-government has to focus on protecting the sacraments and administration of church discipline. It is even more important than deputies, commissions, office-buildings, etc. The love of God's heart burns in the local exercise of church discipline. That is the place where God dwells and there He bestows His blessing.

3.2.5 Dangers in exercising church discipline

Implementing and exercising Church discipline calls for Christian boldness. Young churches often have to struggle against traditional feelings. The church has to pray for wisdom in order to structure God's love in adequate forms. We point out some dangers:

a) Lukewarmness weakens the discipline

In the second and third generation problems of lukewarmness will arise. Christian customs become accepted but without knowing the content. Motivation to examine and, if need be, reject new influences, is lacking (cf. Rev. 2-3).

The modern tendency towards a practical and ecumenical Christianity often plays down doctrines as intellectual, cognitive issues. The congregation will lose her own identity.

Pressure by government on behalf of political stability and nationalistic feelings can tempt the church to greater tolerance on issues of participating in civil ceremonies of (semi-) religious character or even supporting other religions.

The changing social and economic world often provides lack of time for church affairs and a materialistic mood. Direct financial relationship of church council or officebearers in developing projects can heavily frustrate the exercise of discipline.

We conclude that the weakening of church discipline by lukewarmness will reduce the church to a religious hobby club.

b) Legalism petrifies church discipline

It also occurs that discipline is maintained, but as a rigid means to remove different minded men. This legalism also means paganism in the church. With juridical accurateness one controls and checks the code on e.g. clothing, ecclesiastical customs, and practices, in order to excommunicate the “sinner” without pardon.

Also the interest of family, clan, or tribe can influence discipline. Sometimes an unqualified elder is chosen to be the representative of a particular group instead of being shepherd of the whole flock. They are easily tempted to pre-judgment. Tribalism and ethnocentrism shorten the broadness of God's love.

The legalistic exercise of discipline also often includes the obligation to have or obtain something special: a history of personal conversion, speaking in tongues, healings, dreams, special activity in evangelism, or great financial sacrifices. That creates new elite groups who reject other Christians by a clear shibboleth (e.g. charismatics and so called “independent churches”).

We conclude that legalism in church discipline petrifies the church and makes it sectarian.

3.2.6 The vocation of mission and national church

It is necessary, all the more in this age, that the church maintains and exercises church discipline. The wrath of God is evoked by many churches in the world. On the one hand, church boundaries are wiped out by ecumenism and criticism of Scriptures, and on the other hand, the concept of church is easily replaced by the structures of schools, movements, and sects. The depth of God's love is not fathomed nor experienced. Discipline becomes a means to self-destruction.

Reformed mission and churches have to maintain consistent brotherly love in implementing discipline. Only then the Holy Spirit will protect the church's life by grace, as the city where peace, justice and truth will meet each other (Ps. 85; 122(:5!), 132:7; 1 Cor. 13:5).

3.3 The wrath of God and the holiness of His people

Scriptures reveal that God is often fulminating against the unholiness of men, particularly of His people. The church is admonished to live a holy life in order not to lose the inheritance of the Kingdom (Heb. 12:14). What is the missionary impact of church's lifestyle?

3.3.1 Character of holiness

a) Gift of God

Holiness, like justification, is a gift of God in Christ (1 Cor. 1:30). A

relationship with Christ by living faith is the main condition, and consequently, the relationship with the believers in church. There the Holy Spirit brings forth the fruits of the cross. Therefore, we reject perfectionism and holiness by activism, but also the automatic expectation of success by implementing the rules of human sciences. Unholiness will only be broken down by the Spirit of Christ.

b) Command to believers

God's order for sanctification is the call to reflect Christ in personal and ecclesiastical life. The holy God does not tolerate unholiness in His household. The bride of Christ has to reflect His holiness and keep herself clean for the wedding celebration.

c) Meaning

Sanctification does not mean a life without sin, but a life in struggle against sin. A conscious act of separation from “worldly” practises, in worship, lifestyle, and doctrine. It means a life dedicated to God in full trust to Him. Most religions limit sanctification to the religious realm of life. Christian life includes all aspects of life. It is not the separation of sacred and secular but of belief and unbelief and of the Church and the world.

3.3.2 The wrath of God on unholiness

a) The character of wrath

As stated earlier, wrath is not the opposite of God's love, but the proof of His refusal of sin. God is on His way to a new earth and heaven, where only He will be honoured. That's why God fulminates also in this world, particularly against religions (Rom. 1). If God leaves men to his religion and lifestyle that will lead him to death. These main factors in Reformed missiology exclude relativism or inclusivism.

b) The function of wrath

Salvation

An unholy life creates worshippers of idols (Eph 5:3ff), who will not enter God's Kingdom. The warning against unholiness opens the way to salvation. A holy church is a warning and sign for a sick and dirty world. There *is* an alternative life, but only by Christ's blood and Spirit.

Keep close to grace

Some Christians think baptism is a ticket to heaven. They neglect holiness and often continue their former lifestyle. They do not live from the source of grace. To stimulate them in sanctification, the

Church and mission have to discuss ethical issues at their meetings. Moreover the sermons have to encourage holiness as a gift of grace, not in a legalistic way, but as Good News. God's laws and orders deliver His people from the slavery of sin. God's commands set the believer in real freedom and keep him close to grace.

Perseverance

The rejection of the Gospel and the oppression of the Church can create anger and feelings of wrath in the believers. They are inclined to become judges of the world. God asks for patience and prayer, not for revenge (Rom. 12:19), because He will avenge at His time. The church can persevere in Christian lifestyle because they have the hope of life, overagainst pagan lifestyle that masks their fear for death (1 Cor. 15:34ff). A holy life will bear fruit, now and in the future.

Winning for Christ

By the holiness of the Church God wants to demonstrate to the world His refusal of an unholy life. If the church does not manifest holiness, who on earth will? It is God's dwelling place by Word and Spirit. The world has to be convinced that God is there, in the church (1 Cor. 14:25). By the good behaviour of the church outsiders will have to reflect and repent in order to be saved at the Day of Judgment (1 Pet. 2:12).

The New Testament shows that personal holiness is a primary means of mission work.¹⁶ Without it, missionary activities are paralysed. The church should be the first to confess the seriousness of God's wrath. That's why a holy life is a missionary life as well. It lures outsiders to come and enjoy salvation in Christ. Structuring, organizing and maintaining the Christian lifestyle is a serious missionary vocation of the church, in order to win people for Christ.

Ultimate seriousness for unbelievers

God will also judge the non-believers for their ungodly behaviour. The church has to proclaim wrath to them by her own holiness. Then she will be both a demonstration that the real joy of life originates from God's love and a warning with ultimate seriousness.

Glory to God's justice

16 van Swiggchem, D., *Het missionair karakter van de christelijke gemeente*, Kampen 1955, pp. 106-108.

God's wrath also reveals that God is God and remains God. All opposition against his righteousness will be destroyed. In the end all will confess that He is a holy God. The wrath is the just judgment of a glorious King.

3.3.3 Consequences of holiness for Church and mission

Holiness has its consequences. Unbelievers will question why Christians reject their way of life (1 Pet. 4:4).

a) The call for more love

If the church confesses the meaning of holiness, she will increase her efforts. Scriptures call for growth in faith, greater zeal, more ministry of love, and a deeper holiness. There is a growing towards Christ in unity with the saints and steadfastness in doctrine, in order to grasp the depth of Christ's love with all the saints (Eph. 3:18; 4:16ff).

b) The gap between the church and the world widens

While the church has to live in a more holy manner, the world of unbelievers will grow more unholy (Rev. 22:11). The gap between church and world will widen. This should not discourage mission, but it prevents astonishment. The unholiness of the world may grow so enormous that the church has to end her witness in dignified silence. Let the church never forget that shaking the dust off her feet is a missionary action (Matt. 10:14).

c) Ongoing preaching

There will come a time that because of unbelief certain persons and areas are beyond the reach of missionary action. Scripture says that God puts men under a delusion which causes them to believe the lie (2 Thess. 2:11; 2 Tim. 4:3-4). They are unable to obey God. Preaching evokes resistance, refusal and hardening of hearts. The church can not "sell the message at any price." She humbly has to accept God's work of reprobation too. Not we, but God creates the Church, where and when He pleases. Although it is disappointing that not everybody repents by our missionary efforts, yet the church has to accept and confess the widening gap between the church and the world.

Then she will direct her attention to other people and other areas. The preaching has to go on. Some seed will not grow up. But proclaiming was never in vain. The Word of God never returns fruitless (Is. 55:11). Many will have to render an account why they rejected the proclamation of Christ. May the Lord yet bestow His mercy on them. . . .

3.3.4 Conclusion

Church and mission have to reckon with this process. God can remove lamps from their place, and He indeed does so! He can turn established churches over to their unfaithfulness. Then true Christians should question whether and how long they remain members of those churches. Then pious and zealous evangelicals should reflect on how the separation of true Christians is caused by their ecclesiastical indifference.

We do praise God's work through the Revival, Pietism, and the Evangelical Movement, but Scriptures teach that the reformation of the church is the strongest stimulus for mission. If life by grace is discovered, there will be room for repentance, and the planting and extension of churches.

Reformed mission still has an enormous task. She will relate to God's work in former ages. She will also be aware that the gap between the Church and the world is often masked by Christian churches and institutions. Then she will call them to the true ecclesiastical unity in faith and truth and admonish them to return to the living and true God and his Word. The separation of true believers into different churches is a sin hindering mission. But maintaining unscriptural unity is closing God's Word and destroys mission.

PART 4 Perspective

The gospel of Christ gives new perspectives. It prevents us from despondency and defeatism towards the end of the 20th century. It does not close our eyes to sin and wrath. The principles of humanism and enlightenment are more and more becoming a reality, the masks of men fall down. Modern man, also in third world countries with urbanization and crowded cities, does not need God and Christ any more.

Yet the pain, suffering, and concerns of the world still remain. World peace is threatened. Although we live in abundance, famine has not been solved. AIDS is a terrifying disease. Non-Christian religions replace the gap left by a shrinking Christianity.

Do these expressions of God's wrath not awaken mankind? But how could ecumenical or evangelical "spirituality" really help out?

While the gap is widening, the task remains. Mission was never ashamed if it was not successful. But she would also never accommodate the message of the human "felt need" or misunderstanding. In methodology and strategy the church will continue to distinguish between not being able to listen and not being willing to listen.

The church is to bring her message clearly, she also has to check whether it is understood and accepted. She has to examine people whether or not they will be admitted to profession of faith, baptism and Holy Supper. Mission is not just sowing, it is also watering, caring, cleaning, harvesting, and not

harvesting. Everything happens at God's time. We will not get a perfect Church on earth. But we must be a holy Church, in life and doctrine, for the living God.

The church has to persist in that mission work. All churches in the world are needed for this task. I suggest, therefore, that the ICRC appoint a Committee to organize a sort of International Missionary Council. Through this Council all strengths, gifts, means, and experiences of different parts of the world can be organized in order to stimulate and coordinate national and international mission activities. Then we may expect a lot of encouragement, wisdom and insights from each other, and continue the work until Christ comes again to judge the living and the dead. Then it will be revealed that the mission enterprise, based on Scripture, was not in vain. It prepared the world for an encounter with Christ.

On that Day, Christ will embrace his clean Bride. What a wonder of grace that she may inherit the Kingdom, notwithstanding her sins. Unbelievers will be confronted with the consequences of their unbelief. They will not be allowed to enter because in the Kingdom there is only room for those sanctified in Christ (Rev. 21:17).

That is why we can encourage each other in complete trust in God with Paul's words to Timothy:

“Before God, and before Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead, I charge you solemnly by His coming appearance and His reign, proclaim the message, press it home on all occasions, convenient or inconvenient, use argument, reproof, and appeal with all the patience that the work of teaching requires” (2 Tim. 4:1-2).

Prophecy Today?

Rev. Prof. Norris Wilson, M.A., M.Th.

The question as to whether or not the N.T. gift of prophecy should continue in the life of the church today is currently a very vexed one for the Reformed community because of the challenge posed by influential writers like Wayne Grudem and Graham Houston who, while still wanting to be thought of as Reformed, argue strongly for the use of the prophetic gift (as they understand it) in today's church.

Broadly speaking up till now with regard to prophecy we could speak of a Reformed consensus view which runs more or less as follows: the prophetic word was an infallible revelation of God to His people. In all essentials it functioned in the N.T. Church as it had done in the O.T. The dawning of the new administration of the covenant was accompanied by much prophetic activity as the Lord, through his servants the prophets, attested to and explained the crucial fulfilment complex of redemptive events accomplished by Christ which culminated in His once-for-all pouring out the fullness of the Gift of the Holy Spirit. Many prophets were active, yet, out of that abundance, the Lord chose an apostolic corpus of written prophetic words to serve as the sure, once-for all, foundation of the new covenant church's life and ministry. He then sovereignly guided His church to set aside this corpus as the N.T. canon. Since then the "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church" (as the Nicene Creeds puts it) has regarded the completed canon as God's full and final word of prophecy. This climactic episode in the history of redemption having been completed the stream of prophetic utterance in the church dried up. From then on the church's prophetic task has been the more "ordinary" but nonetheless glorious task of expounding and applying the full completed canon of God's prophetic Word. One of the main reasons why this Reformed view does not feel the need of or seek for fresh prophecy today is its strong insistence on the doctrine of the authority and sufficiency of Scripture.

However, as we have noted, this viewpoint has received a strong challenge from Prof. Grudem (a graduate of Westminster Theological Seminary) in his book *The Gift Of Prophecy in the New Testament And Today*. Since its appearance not only has it been widely circulated, but, apparently, it has become a standard reference work amongst many of the current "charismatic" prophecy movement. Grudem has been ably followed by Rev. Graham Houston (Church of Scotland) in his book *Prophecy Now*, whose thesis and arguments are broadly the same. However, in the interests of time and space it is to Grudem's challenge in particular that I wish to address myself in this paper asking the basic question "Is there a case for prophecy today?" Our focus will be on his exegetical base.

The central thesis of Grudem's book is as follows: he claims to have found a "middle ground" between the "charismatic" believer who claims the gift of prophecy as a direct "word from the Lord" (what we might call the "high view continuationist" position) and the Reformed believer who views the gift of being able to speak God's very words as threatening the unique authority of Scripture (what we might call the "high view cessationist" position). This "third" position is what we might call "low view continuationist." He argues that the gift of prophecy in the N.T. and in the church today is essentially different from O.T. prophecy. The equivalent of the O.T. prophet in the N.T. was the apostle who likewise spoke with unique absolute divine authority. This office was foundational and has ceased in the church. However, "ordinary prophets in local N.T. congregations" were different. There, "prophecy was not equal to scripture in authority, but was simply a very human—and sometimes partially mistaken—report of something the Holy Spirit brought to someone's mind." This "low" view of prophecy deals with the concerns of the opposing camps. The cessationist concern to preserve a closed canon and the sufficiency and unique authority of scripture is not undermined. The "charismatic" concern to preserve the continuing use of prophecy (now properly understood) is not undermined. Thus the plea of the book is for Reformed cessationists and "charismatics" to modify their "high" views of the nature of prophecy today and come together (along with many other believers, "who are neither 'charismatic' nor 'cessationist' but are simply unsure about what to think") on Grudem's "middle ground." "We must not," he says "be disobedient to scripture." If (as he argues) God intends prophecy (as he understands it) to be used until Christ returns and "all christians are given permission to prophesy in church if God so prompts them" then our churches should be making provision for the use of prophecy "both by men and women." Indeed his closing chapter gives practical suggestions as to how prophecy can be encouraged and regulated in the local church today. As he says, "Just as prophecy functioned simultaneously with the actual presence of living apostles in the churches and did not compete with or pose a challenge to the unique ruling authority of the apostles, so today prophecy can exist and function simultaneously with the presence of the completed written scripture in our churches without challenging or competing with the unique ruling authority which scripture and scripture alone has in our lives."

So the challenge to the Reformed community is clear: can we move with Grudem onto this "middle ground" where the rift between us as cessationists and the "charismatics" can be healed? Despite the nobility of such an aim and despite aspects of the book that we commend (e.g. his curbs on extremes of the "charismatic" movement) it is the considered opinion of the present writer that we cannot. Such a conclusion is based on a careful examination of the exegetical foundations upon which his arguments are based.

1. His early attempt to downgrade the role of prophecy in the N.T. is not persuasive.

In his second chapter he sets forth his argument that the counterpart of the O.T. prophets were N.T. apostles alone and not N.T. prophets. He tries to cut the link between O.T. and N.T. prophets. "N.T. prophets are never connected with O.T. prophets as apostles are." Even Jesus (he says) is connected with the O.T. prophets as an apostle (Heb.1:1-2; 3:1). But surely he is building too much on one text here. What of Christ's own words in Matt. 13:57, not to think of how he was thought of by the general public (e.g. Matt. 16:14; 21:11, 46; 24:19; Lk. 7:16; Jn. 4:19; 6:14; 9:17) not to mention Peter's words in Acts 3:22 or Stephen's in Acts 7:37? Surely Christ was that "great prophet" who came with God's authority in the line of those who had been repeatedly rejected by the Jewish establishment? Grudem says there is no instance where N.T. prophets are associated with O.T. prophets. Plainly this is not so. What of John the Baptist (Luke 1:76)? Not only did the general public accept him as a prophet (Matt. 14:5; 21:26), but Jesus in Matt. 11:9, 13-14 says he was a prophet directly in the line of the O.T. prophets. Moreover, in Matt. 10:41 Jesus speaks not only of apostles (Matt. 10:2) being received by the general public but of prophets being likewise received, doubtless prophets who like the apostles have the right to proclaim God's truth. He signals that prophets are active already and will continue to be active (alongside the apostles) in the new administration as they were in the old. Then in Matt. 23 He says to the Scribes and Pharisees that they are descendants of those who murdered the prophets and *now he is sending out more prophets* whom they will likewise kill (vs. 30-34). In fact He then goes on to mourn over Jerusalem as a city (literally "killing the prophets and stoning the apostles" in v. 37). Thus Christ sees an unbroken succession of prophets in the new administration being treated as they were in the old.

Another small (if very obvious) point is that Luke in Acts in the same chapter where O.T. prophets are quoted will simply speak of N.T. prophets and their activities without any qualification lessening their authority, or signal that we are not to take them as being on a par with their O.T. predecessors (e.g. chs. 13 & 15). Another point that could be made is how some commentators see 1 Thess. 2:15 as a reference to N.T. prophets on a par with apostles. If this is so then we have a direct fulfilment of Luke 11:49 where Christ speaks of his present generation being held guilty of killing prophets and apostles and being punished for it (something that indeed happened in A.D. 70). Finally when in Rev. 16:6 and 18:24 final judgment is spoken of as being poured out on those who killed saints and prophets and when in 22:9 reference is made to John's brothers the prophets, can this refer only to O.T. prophets? (It's interesting also that in Rev. 22:9 apostles and prophets are linked together). Thus we would argue

the evidence refutes Grudem's thesis that N.T. prophets are not to be associated with O.T. prophets but are some kind of "lesser breed." (Of course this in no way takes away from the special authority the apostles had—a point well made by Grudem.)

Grudem puts much stress on 1 Cor. 14:37-38 in seeking to establish his thesis. There, he says, Paul as an apostle, asserts his authority over the several prophets who were active in Corinth: "If anyone thinks that he is a prophet . . . he should acknowledge that what I am writing to you is a command of the Lord. If anyone does not recognize this he is not recognized." However, while it is true Paul is writing to regulate the practice of prophetic activity (much as Moses wrote to regulate prophetic practice in the O.T.), is he not just saying here that one who has the true prophetic gift will know that this regulation of things is from God and not to be ignored (i.e. if one of the "prophets" rejects God's prophetic word on the matter he has proved himself to be a false prophet and should therefore not be listened to). Just because Paul, like Moses, brought God's word to regulate the exercise of the prophetic gift does not mean that a lessening of prophetic authority (as contra apostolic authority) automatically follows.

Grudem then asks the question why were the N.T. apostles not called prophets? He gives 3 reasons.

First, he says, because Joel predicted that all of God's people would prophecy (Joel 2:28-29). Grudem's conclusion from this text is that "the new covenant age was expected to be an age when all God's people would be able to prophesy." However this surely misses the point of the passage, which is that "all flesh" is to receive the outpoured gift of the Holy Spirit (something that happened at Pentecost). When that happens, Joel says, there will be prophecy, dreams, visions i.e. various special manifestations, prophecy amongst them. We cannot argue from this, as Grudem does, that prophecy will be a gift available to all believers. Anyway this would run counter to Paul's teaching on gifts in Corinthians (e.g. 1 Cor. 12:28-30).

Second, he attempts to show that the word "prophet" had, by N.T. times, become debased coinage. He speaks first of its meaning in secular Greek usage, where, he says, it did not "automatically suggest 'one who speaks with absolute divine authority'." For a start he does not establish this point very convincingly as the evidence he presents appears to be somewhat contradictory (e.g. secular usage included the senses "one who has supernatural knowledge" and "one who declares/proclaims what is not his own"). Anyway he admits that it's a weak argument to say that the N.T. must use words in the same way as secular Greek. (After all one might ask, would the same argument not apply to the word "apostle"?). However he goes on to make the startling point that the "choice of a new term . . . prevented much misunderstanding . . . not just from the secular uses of the word, but even from the O.T. itself"(!) Just how, we ask, could the O.T.

meaning so distort things that a new word is necessary? (Was the latter phrase just a gaffe on Grudem's part, or has he no sense of the organic, unfolding nature of revelation where scripture interprets scripture and we expect a word in the O.T. to mean the same in the N.T.?) Then a few pages later we find Grudem writing on the one hand, "of course when the N.T. writers have occasion to use the word 'prophet' . . . it will most often be in contexts dealing with the . . . prophets of the O.T. . . . But (he goes on) that does not tell us what 'prophet' will mean when it is applied to people other than these O.T. prophets"(!) He goes on to say, therefore, that the new term "apostle" was necessary as it did not conflict with, "O.T. expectations" or "misleading (O.T.) implications." Again we ask how does he mean "misleading (O.T.) implications?" Is it not a much safer way of thinking to "let scripture interpret scripture" and expect that, unless holy writ gives indications to the contrary, or the context demands otherwise, a word in the O.T. will mean essentially the same in the N.T. (or, at least, the O.T. will help us in understanding the N.T.)?

He speaks second of the use of the word "prophet" in first-century Jewish usage, where, again, he tries to establish that it did not necessarily mean "absolute divine authority." Here again, however, the evidence presented appears contradictory to this thesis (e.g. he quotes Josephus who spoke of one having the gift of prophecy which meant that, "the Deity was with him and enabled him to foresee and foretell the future." Surely there is not so much "watering down" in that statement as Grudem would have us believe!) Anyway, to think that a N.T. Jewish believer might be influenced to take his understanding of a key word like "prophet" from a hypothetical misleading first-century usage and not the normative Word of God is surely stretching credibility!

The third reason Grudem gives as to why the N.T. apostles are not called prophets is that, "a new term . . . showed the newness of the New Covenant church." This is however a weak point. After all there were prophets in the N.T. as well as apostles and continuity between the old and the new administrations of the covenant was important also.

Anyway the crucial point surely is that all of this argumentation would not be necessary were it not for the fact that Grudem must somehow shape the evidence to suit his underlying thesis, namely that N.T. prophecy is fundamentally different from O.T. prophecy and is rather one with the lesser revelatory phenomenon that has emerged, after all the centuries, in "charismatic" circles.

Grudem then turns to the Book of Revelation "the largest example in the N.T. of 'a prophecy'." However for him this is "high" view prophecy such as we get from the writing prophets of the O.T. significantly written, of course, by an apostle (for him the N.T. equivalent of the O.T. prophet).

Thus he asserts the book cannot teach us anything about how the gift of prophecy functioned amongst “ordinary Christians in first century churches.” Thus unlike prophecies like Revelation, there was prophecy given by “ordinary Christians . . . in the worship service of some local group . . . brief prophetic words given to meet the need of the moment in some local church.” However, apart from the fact that Grudem is assuming conclusions about prophecy before he has established them, we need to take note of what we find at the end of the Revelation. In 22:6 the angel says, “The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place.” In v. 9 he speaks of John’s “brothers the prophets.” We might well ask, “If the prophecy of Revelation is what one of a whole brotherhood of prophets to whom revelations are being made, received, why then should Grudem insist that Revelation tells us nothing about what prophecy was like in the N.T. church?” In this context Grudem also refers to Paul, whom he sees as superior to the Corinthian prophets. Yet Paul included himself with them in his statements about prophecy: “We prophecy in part” (1 Cor. 13:8). He also speaks to them of the purposes or role of prophecy. It involves “the fathoming of mystery . . . and knowledge” (1 Cor. 13:2), and he speaks to them of the effect of prophecy: to “strengthen, encourage, comfort, edify” (1 Cor. 14:3-4). We ask the question: is Revelation not a prime illustration of prophecy so defined for all its apocalyptic features that so baffle the twentieth century mind, but which meant so much to a church more familiar with such a mode of writing? Are we not led to conclude in spite of Grudem that the book does inform us as to what the gift of prophecy was like in the N.T. church?

2. His handling of the key texts, Ephesians 2:20 & 3:5 is not persuasive.

The usual interpretation of Eph. 2:20 (reflected in the translations) is that Paul distinguishes two groups in the N.T. church, apostles and prophets, who together were foundational and thus temporary. Grudem recognises how crucial these verses are. He admits that if the reference to prophets as foundational applies to all prophets in the N.T. then he would have to concede that they had, “a unique ‘foundational’ role in the N.T. church and . . . we would clearly expect this gift to cease once the N.T. was complete.” Grudem, however, attempts to get out of this difficulty for his position by arguing that only one foundational gift is being referred to—that of “apostles who were also prophets” (according to his understanding of prophecy) or “apostle-prophets.”

In arguing this way Grudem acknowledges that he is up against Prof. R.B. Gaffin’s position as set forth in his book *Perspectives On Pentecost*. We might outline Gaffin’s position briefly as follows: For him Eph. 2:20 is

crucial in orienting our understanding on other N.T. statements on prophecy because here Paul is taking a comprehensive look at the whole church structure as-it-were. There prophecy has a foundational place, in association with, but distinct from, apostleship. As foundational to the church prophets thus had a “temporary, noncontaining function . . . and so by God’s design pass out of its life along with apostles.” Thus for him apostles and prophets are separate groups. As he says Paul in Eph. 4:11 and 1 Cor. 12:28 clearly distinguishes between them. Nowhere else does Paul designate apostles either individually or collectively as “prophets.” Thus an attempt to do so in Eph. 2:20 would have been lost on his readers, “without at least some word of explanation.”

Grudem, however, attempts to oppose Gaffin and establish his own position. We shall carefully assess the main points in his argument.

First, he argues that his interpretation (“apostle-prophet”) is possible grammatically and is consistent with the construction in 4:11 which is often interpreted as “pastor-teacher.” However, both context and syntax would weigh heavily against such an interpretation. First context: earlier in the Eph. 4:11 verse itself Paul plainly lists apostles as a group distinguished from prophets as a group (“some to be apostles, some to be prophets . . .”). Second syntax: in the construction we have two plural nouns, but the “Granville-Sharp Rule” says that plural nouns do not share the same article, only singular ones. Grudem gives many grammatical parallels to justify his interpretation, but unfortunately for him, every one of the texts quoted involves something other than two plural nouns. Only Eph. 4:11 is a true grammatical parallel of the “article-noun-*kai*-noun plural” construction (“some pastors and teachers”). A thorough study of this construction in these two texts has been done by D.B. Wallace (*Grace Theological Journal* 1983) studying its semantic range. He concludes that while the interpretation Grudem adopts is a theoretically possible meaning, statistically speaking it is the least likely (i.e. “two groups identical”).

He suggests a “first group subset of second” interpretation i.e. “the apostles and other N.T. prophets” (since certain apostles have prophetic activity attributed to them). Another possibility is the “second group subset at first” i.e. “apostles and in particular prophets” (i.e. out of the apostles some are prophets). The point is that in neither of these two possibilities are apostles and prophets identified as one group. Another strong possibility is of course the “two distinct groups, though united” interpretation. The context of 4:11 (where apostles and prophets are distinguished as they are in 1 Cor. 12:28) surely makes this the most likely of these options. Apostles and prophets are two distinct groups united by their function as foundation stones of the church. This too is the conclusion of Gaffin, “The usage in Acts and Revelation as well as Paul makes plain that ‘prophet’ designates those who in their frequent or regular exercise of the gift of prophecy are a distinct

group within the church distinguished also from the apostles, who likewise exercise prophetic functions . . . the lack of the definite article before the word 'prophets' in Eph. 2:20; 3:3 shows how closely Paul associates them with the apostles as a unit in the activity of foundational, revelatory witness to Christ and the 'mystery' revealed in Him." (As Gaffin notes, the great majority of commentators share this view.)

Second, Grudem asserts that the prophets in the N.T. did not receive the revelation that Gentiles were to be included in the church. This came to apostles only. Yet Eph. 3:5-6 says it was revealed to apostles and prophets (or as Grudem will have it apostle-prophets). Grudem gives many passages showing this "major item in the history of redemption" being revealed only through apostles. However what does quoting these passages ultimately prove? Even allowing that there appear to be no passages where we find prophets speaking of this does this mean it was not revealed to them? At the very least we might say it might well have been revealed to them and they did their part in making it known even though there is no record of this in holy writ. The argument from silence cuts both ways! However there are in fact two cases in point that we believe disprove Grudem's assertion. These are the N.T. prophets James and Agabus. In spite of what Grudem tries to argue in his appendix Gal. 1:19 does not give unequivocal proof that James was an apostle in the strict sense. He certainly was a prophet (witness his letter). Yet in Acts 15:13ff, he speaks clearly to the whole matter of Gentile inclusion. Then the prophet Agabus in Acts 11:28 brings a revelation prompting Gentile believers to help their Judean fellow believers, thus cementing the bond between Jew and Gentile.

Third, Grudem asserts that the foundation metaphor of Eph. 2:20 being a picture of something that is complete and will not be added to fits well with apostles, but not with prophets for, "if the foundation consist of all those who had the gift of prophecy in all the N.T. churches . . . then it would have to be a foundation that is continually being changed and added on to." However we feel Grudem puts too much restriction on Paul's metaphor here. Paul is not presenting a narrow picture of something that must be completed before the rest of the building can begin. Rather we could say he is standing back viewing the "big picture" as it were, in terms of the history of redemption. Obviously, apostles are still active (Paul among them), so likewise are prophets. The apostolic foundation itself had to be added to after the superstructure was begun, because well after the dramatic events of Pentecost, Paul himself was added to it. Yet while the foundation awaited the addition of Paul (surely a crucial foundation stone) the building was not held up. Paul is not setting strict deadlines. Obviously, it will take a while for the foundation to be complete. After all the canon was still open when Paul was writing. However, we do have a problem if we accept Grudem's view of prophecy. If, even in his view, apostles who also functioned prophetically (in his sense) were foundational, what does that

say of his twentieth century prophets? Surely the implication of Paul's metaphor is that prophecy being foundational will not always be present as it then was.

Fourth, Grudem make the assertion that, while in Eph. 2 and 3 Paul is speaking of the church universal, ordinary readers of Paul's letter in the local church at Ephesus "would not think of the men and women (and perhaps children) who were their friends and neighbours and who had the gift of prophecy, as part of the 'foundation' of the universal church." However this assertion assumes his view on the "low" non-foundational nature of non-apostolic prophets in the rest of the N.T., a case which he has not yet established.

Fifth, he asks the question: as Paul was seeking in the passages to prove that Jews and Gentiles are equal members in Christ's church and as presumably Gentile prophets would have been in the church's foundation (if indeed all N.T. prophets are in the foundation) then why does Paul not emphasize that fact here? Here however is another argument from silence. All we can say here is, "Yes, it would have been a good point in Paul's argument, but then the Holy Spirit did not bring it to his mind at that point so obviously it was not necessary"! In any event Grudem's argument only applies to chapter 2, for in chapter 3 Paul's concern is not to establish the equality of Jew and Gentile believers, but his own credentials as a preacher.

Sixth, Grudem asks the question if these foundational authoritative prophets existed, then where are they and why is there no record of their divinely authorized words? As he says, "to my knowledge nowhere in the N.T. is there a record of a prophet who is not an apostle but who spoke with absolute divine authority attaching to his very words. And we have no books of the N.T. written by anyone who claims to be a 'prophet' as well." In answer we would just ask what about John the Baptist? What about the writers of the N.T. who were not apostles, like Luke, the writer to the Hebrews, James, Jude? Apart from this the argument from silence cuts both ways. Just because the inspired, authoritative words of prophets are not recorded in the canon does not mean they never existed. We know that there were other inspired letters of Paul doing the rounds that did not make it into the canon (1 Cor. 5:9; Col. 4:16). So just because inspired revelations by the prophets were not included in the canon does not mean they lacked the full authority of the Word of God as written by an apostle.

Seventh, Grudem says that Rev. 21:14 emphasizes the unique foundational role of the apostles alone—the walls of the city had 12 foundations on which were the names of the 12 apostles. But John's purpose is different from Paul's. He is describing a vision of a perfect cube where the 12 tribes function together with the 12 apostles in the description of the completed church. In actuality we knew there were 13 apostles when Paul was added. Just because in the interest of symmetry, John does not include him here

does not mean he wishes to exclude him as an apostle. Likewise just because he does not mention prophets here does not mean he must have thought of them as Grudem does! Anyway we know about John's view of the foundational importance of N.T. prophets from the next chapter (22:6, 9).

Eighth, he attempts to show that Eph. 4:11 where prophets and apostles are clearly distinguished is in fact different from Eph. 2:20 and 3:5. He says it must be admitted that Paul uses the word “prophet” in Eph. 4:11 to refer to non-foundational prophets in local congregations, whereas the people in 2:20 and 3:5 are foundational. But must this be admitted? On the one hand, it's clear that in 2:20-22 Paul is assigning a foundational role not just in the universal church (v. 21) but in the local church as well (v. 22). On the other hand, 2:20 and 4:11 are in the same context (2:11 - 4:16) in which Paul is discussing the church universal and local. Chapter 4:7-16 is merely an expansion of 2:11-22. Given this contextual connection between the two it is surely most unlikely that without any explanation Paul would use the word prophet in two different senses. Grudem tries to say that grammar supports his case here, but sadly for him having failed to establish his congregational (non-foundational) vs. universal (foundational) distinction his points instead buttress the opposing case for a distinction between foundational apostles and prophets. Thus he argues that Paul's use of the definite article before the words apostles and prophets “clearly shows that two different groups are in mind” and that his use of the Greek *men . . . de* construction (lit. “on the one hand the apostles, on the other hand the prophets”) puts apostles “in a separate group . . . clearly distinguished from the prophets.” Is this not a telling point against himself?

Ninth, he offers no argument against the 1 Cor. 12:28 parallel, where again apostles and prophets are distinguished except to say that the two words do not have to be used of different groups every time they are used in the N.T., “One example of the use of a word does not prove that it must have the same sense in other examples.” Yet it must have the same sense unless there are very strong contextual indications to the contrary. All the more so when the same person is using the same word and all the more so when he is using it in the same context (as Paul is).

Tenth, he argues that since the apostles performed prophetic functions (e.g. the apostle John we know wrote a prophecy), there is no inherent reason why the apostles as a group could not be called prophets in Eph. 2:20, “provided the grammar and context favour this interpretation.” However, we have seen above that grammar and context do not favour the interpretation “apostles who were also prophets” in Eph. 2:20 and 3:5. Anyway John's prophecy was prophecy in the “high” sense which Grudem does not want (presumably) to allow into the Eph. 2:20 and 3:5 texts. Grudem wishes to assert also from 1 Cor. 14:6 that the apostle Paul also engaged in prophetic activity. However, it is clear that Paul is only speaking

hypothetically here. Moreover just because it can be shown that the apostle John engaged in occasional prophetic activity does not mean that his key calling in life was not the related but separate task of being an apostle. A postman may do some gardening, but that does not make him a gardener by calling!

Eleventh, he argues that Paul's readers would have known that he was using this different sense of "prophet" in the Ephesian passages because of the grammatical signals Paul puts in. However since we have shown these grammatical "signals" to mean something different from Grudem's interpretation, then we have to conclude that that different sense of the word "prophet" would have been lost on Paul's readers without some word of explanation.

Finally, feeling perhaps that this argument is not conclusive, Grudem urges that if we are not persuaded by his argument and must still see two groups of people in the texts then that is all right as long as we do not make prophets here refer to all N.T. prophets! The prophets he concedes would share authority similar to the apostles but still we must allow for "ordinary prophets scattered through many congregations." Now this is quite an admission from one who had argued so strongly for his contention that the reference is to one group. He is in effect admitting that there were unique foundational prophets who ceased as soon as the N.T. was written. To give ground on such an important pivotal text as Eph. 2:20 and 3:5 which gives a comprehensive survey of the church as a whole and the place of prophecy in it and opt to put more stress on the Corinthian passage where Paul writes to regulate a local situation in Corinth is a step that weakens Grudem's case considerably. Surely we may conclude Eph. 2:20 does make a statement about prophecy in the N.T. generally and its function and its temporariness. Here our assessment of Grudem's position could end as he had conceded that if the Eph. 2:20 and 3:5 passages could be shown to refer to N.T. prophecy in general then he would accept that the gift was temporary and has ceased. However, we move on to assess his remaining case for seeing N.T. prophets as having a different, lesser authority.

3. His treatment of 1 Corinthians 12-14 is not persuasive.

In 1 Corinthians 12-14 Grudem considers 5 passages seeking to establish his "low" view of N.T. prophecy i.e. that, "the prophets at Corinth did not speak with a divine authority of actual words and were not thought by others to speak with an absolute divine authority . . . (their) prophecy . . . while it may have been prompted by a revelation from God, had only the authority of the merely human words in which it was spoken. The prophet could err, could misinterpret and could be questioned or challenged at any point."

First in 1 Cor. 14:29 where we read that “the others” are to “weigh carefully what is said” by a prophet, Grudem argues that this is not a discerning of true versus false prophecy (i.e. evaluating the prophet) but a discerning of true and false elements in the prophecy they hear. Thus he concludes, “the prophets at Corinth must not have been thought to speak with divine authority attaching to their actual words . . . (since) each prophecy might have both true and false elements in it.” He says it could not have meant testing the prophets as Paul is talking of familiar well-attested prophets, who would not have to be tested again and again as to their genuineness. Yet surely at least some of the prophets could have been itinerants passing through. Surely also even accredited prophets could apostatize. Also Christ warned of unbelievers who would profess to practise the gift. It is clear here that Paul envisions a plurality of prophetic oracles being heard, so it seems natural to take it that he is preparing the church to be ready to sort out the false prophecies from among the many they might potentially hear. Moreover since the same verbal root “distinguishing, weighing carefully” used here is used of the gift of “distinguishing between spirits” of 1 Cor. 12:10 can we rule out the exercise of this gift (for determining the sources of prophecies) here as Grudem does? Paul's instructions here are in line with the N.T. teaching on judging prophecies in order to pass judgment on the prophets giving them (1 Jn. 4:1-6). He gives standards by which the Corinthians could judge prophecies (1 Cor. 12:3; 14:37). This all ties in with the judging of O.T. prophets where the basic judging criteria are the same. Surely what we have here is God's word (through Paul) regulating a situation where professed prophets are active in the new administration, just as His Word regulated it in the old through Moses. Grudem argues that the verb *diakrino* means to “make distinctions” i.e. he envisages every member listening to the prophecy and “distinguishing what he or she felt to be good from the less good, what was thought to be helpful from the unhelpful, what was perceived to be true from the false . . . accepting some of the prophecy as good and helpful and rejecting some of it as erroneous or misleading.” However it is clear Paul uses the verb to mean “pass judgment one way or the other” in 1 Cor. 6:5. Moreover it also seems clear that the absolute polarity between good and evil prophecies that believers are to distinguish in 1 Thess. 5:21-22 leaves no room for the more subtle distinctions Grudem suggests. Thus we do not accept his view on the judging of prophecies which he introduces in an attempt to rob the true, accredited Corinthian prophets of divine authority attaching to their very words.

Second, his discussion of 1 Cor. 14:30. He makes two points here. First Paul's instruction means that the prophecy of the first speaker who sits down to give way to the second could be lost forever and never heard. This he says shows that he could not be speaking the very words of God. Much better to think that this N.T. prophet was only speaking merely human words to report something God had brought to mind so it did not matter if he was “rudely interrupted” by the first. But is this a necessary implication

from Paul's words? Surely the context is that Paul is writing to regulate a chaotic situation where various apparently authentic prophets were all speaking at once in a disorderly way (not to mention all the other things that were going on at the same time!). He wants them to prophesy in turn. The fact that one speaker makes way for another does not mean that thereby words of God would be lost. The first speaker could hold his peace till the second was finished and then resume. Or it could just be that the second carries on with and develops the prophecy of the first. Finally we have already made the point that just because prophets' words did not make it into the canon does not mean that they did not speak with absolute divine authority. Second, he argues that the word "revelation" here does not imply divine authority on the part of these prophets i.e. in reporting the revelation he would use his own words not the actual words of God. This is a crucially important point with regard to Grudem's understanding of prophecy then and now. However, he establishes it on very shaky exegetical grounds. He makes the dubious distinction between receiving a revelation from God and reporting that revelation. He finds four other uses of the word "revelation" in the N.T. (Phil. 3:15; Rom. 1:18; Eph. 1:17; Matt. 11:27) and says that the people reporting the revelations in these instances would not be speaking infallibly so likewise the prophets of 1 Cor. 14 would not report infallibly. But for a start apart from the fact that he is applying the use of the term "revelation" from a different context, it could be argued that in two of his references (Phil. 3:15; Rom. 1:18) Paul refers to a revelation that comes through God's infallible Word and is already recorded. Then surely a revelation comes in words. To give a revelation is to give those words as God gave them. To talk about the implications of a revelation from God or do a rough summation in one's own words is one thing—to give the revelation in the words God gave is quite another. It seems gratuitous to assert the Corinthian prophets were in effect doing the former. Not only that but such a view goes against the whole context of Scripture's teaching on the nature of prophecy. The prophet speaks not his own words, but the words God gives him. It is not a matter of him trying to express an idea brought to his mind and not doing a good job of it in the process, as Grudem proposes. This would not only lessen, but indeed totally undermine, his prophetic authority. A prophet reveals truth from God by giving the words God tells him (Deut. 18:18-20). Paul speaks in Rom. 1 of the gospel as a righteousness of God revealed, as well as the wrath of God revealed. This gospel "mystery" is now made known by revelation through prophetic writings by the command of God (Rom. 16:25) and through prophetic speaking (Eph. 3:5). Whether a prophet speaks or writes he has the same infallible authority. For Grudem prophecy here is "purely human words" that can be a "mixture of truth and error." It includes "leadings," "insights," "hunches," "premonitions," "senses," and "intuition." Yet they are still revelatory messages received from God, inspired by the Holy Spirit! So here we have a type of revelation from God which is a mixture of

truth and error. What does this say about our doctrine of God? If we imply that God may reveal Himself errantly then perhaps the Scriptures are an errant revelation. The dangerous implications of Grudem's position should be apparent.

Third, he argues from 1 Cor. 14:36 that as Paul says the word of God “did not go forth from them” he means the Corinthian prophets have not been speaking words with absolute divine authority and should not think they could, as the word of God came only from apostles. However, we feel that Grudem has misconstrued this verse. Surely in the context Paul is speaking to women who are speaking out in church contrary to accepted practice shaped by the Word. Also he uses “the Word of God” here in a different sense than Grudem proposes. Paul is referring to the gospel message from Jerusalem. This is confirmed by the remainder of the verse: “Are you the only people it has reached?” Since it appears some in the church are being contentious and adopting unbiblical practices (such as are mentioned in the preceding verses) Paul tersely reminds the Corinthians that the church does not begin and end with them and they should accept God's regulations. So then Paul is breaking off to speak more generally to the church rather than to the prophets specifically.

Fourth, he takes 1 Cor. 14:37-38 to mean that the Corinthian prophets had less authority than Paul the apostle. We have already answered this point. Suffice it to say here that just because the Lord through Paul in the new administration (just as he did through Moses in the old) regulates the office of prophet does not mean that the authority of the office is undermined. Just as John in Rev. 22:9 expects other prophets to acknowledge and submit to his prophecy (22:18ff.) does not mean that the authority of their prophecies is lower in principle, any more than Paul's demand that Peter submit to his teaching (Gal. 2:11ff.) means that his teaching authority was superior to the other apostles.

Fifth, he says that since Paul speaks of women prophesying in 1 Cor. 11:5 and yet forbids them to speak in 14:34, the “type of prophecy done by women at Corinth did not involve authoritative speech.” However Grudem is mixing two separate issues here. In chapter 11 Paul is dealing with the matter of a head covering that a prophetess must wear while prophesying authoritatively. In chapter 14 he is dealing with women “speaking” in the public services. Does this speaking involve prophesying? Only the immediate context would demand this. However even if it is prophesying all Paul is saying is that it not be done in the public service. In giving this regulation from God Paul is not thereby in any way undermining the authority of Corinthian prophetesses.

So then it should be clear we feel that none of these passages establishes Grudem's thesis that the Corinthian prophets did not speak with absolute divine authority. Thus we conclude that the Corinthian prophets spoke the

authoritative word of God.

4. His attempt to downgrade N.T. prophecy by using the example of Agabus is not persuasive.

Grudem in chapter 4 attempts to defend his “low” view of N.T. prophecy by an appeal to N.T. example. His most important example is Agabus.

First, he goes to Acts 11:28 where the prophet Agabus “foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over the (Roman) world.” This we are told came to pass in the days of Claudius, a fact recorded by secular historians. His prophetic word resulted in the church at Antioch being galvanised into famine relief action. Yet even though here is a word from God predicting something that came to pass Grudem says that here we have prophecy with “vagueness” and “imprecision” and “not reported in divinely authoritative words.” Surely the opposite is the case. Have we not here something of the authority of Elijah in 1 Kings 17?

Second, Acts 21:10-11. Grudem says that since Agabus gave “an inaccurate prophecy” by O.T. standards “he would have been condemned as a false prophet.” Agabus' mistakes were his saying that the Jews would bind Paul and hand him over to the Gentiles whereas in actual fact it was the Gentile Romans who bound him having rescued him from the Jews' murderous intentions! Grudem says, “. . . the events of the narratives do not coincide with the kind of accuracy which the O.T. requires for those who speak God's words.” Thus Grudem concludes Agabus had a “revelation” from the Holy Spirit concerning what would happen to Paul in Jerusalem, where the content was only generally revealed and he gave a prophecy which included his own interpretation of this revelation (and therefore some mistakes in the exact details). Thus, he says Agabus fits the pattern of 1 Corinthians where a prophet, “receives some kind of revelation and reports it in his own words.”

However we feel that this interpretation must be rejected. Instead we would take this example of N.T. prophecy as typical of N.T. prophecy and showing that it is plainly in continuity with the O.T. prophecy. For a start Agabus begins, “Thus says the Holy Spirit.” This is in essence the introductory prophetic formula of the O.T. where the prophet claims direct divine authority (“Thus says the Lord”). Agabus' words as a prophet are the words of the Holy Spirit Himself, a quote of what the Holy Spirit says. Thus, he has received and is communicating inspired revelation. Then, like the O.T. prophets, Agabus goes on to a prediction accompanied by a symbolic act. The question is does Deut. 18:28 require the pedantic precision of exact detail for predictive prophecy Grudem says it must? When we examine O.T. predictive prophecy we find it does not. To take just a few examples: Jeremiah predicted Rachel weeping in Ramah (ch. 31),

Amos predicted the raising up of David's tent (ch. 9:11 cf. Acts 15:16-17), Malachi predicted the coming of Elijah (ch. 4:5-6)—all were fulfilled, but not with the pedantic precision of exact detail that Grudem imposes upon Agabus. Was Agabus then in error? Did it actually require the Jews to bind Paul for the prophecy to be fulfilled (that is assuming they did not take a hand in helping the Romans)? Paul himself spoke of how he bound believers before his conversion (22:4). Did he himself do the binding? In the same way though it may have been Roman hands that bound Paul the Jews were the ones responsible. Likewise though it says the Jews would “hand over” Paul to the Gentiles and in the end he had to be rescued from their hands yet they did hand him over albeit reluctantly. Anyway Paul in speaking of this event said in Acts 28:17 that he was “handed over to the Romans.” So it was indeed because of the Jews that Paul was bound and put in Roman custody. The prophecy was fulfilled, though not with wooden literalism as with O.T. prophecy generally. The Jews did bind Paul and hand him over to the Gentiles! Thus we cannot draw the link between N.T. prophecy and the “prophecy (that is) imperfect and impure and (contains) elements that are not to obeyed or trusted” that is occurring in present day “charismatic” circles, as Grudem does.

5. His efforts to argue that prophecy is a gift available to all Christians are not persuasive.

In chapter 10 Grudem argues that we must not think of N.T. prophecy as a clearly defined, publicly recognized right or responsibility limited to a publicly recognized group. Rather than describing an office, prophesying merely describes a function. Anyone who prophesies (i.e. as Grudem understands prophecy) can be called a prophet—then and now. He argues that Paul encourages all believers to prophesy in 1 Cor. 14:1, 5, 39 and Grudem himself concludes the chapter by urging believers to take positive steps to seek the gift for themselves (in line, he believes, with Paul in 1 Cor. 14:1, 39). However Grudem seems to have forgotten some controlling principles Paul has laid down in 1 Cor. 12. There he states that God only gives the gift of prophecy to some (1 Cor. 12:10, 28-29: “in the church God has appointed first apostles, second prophets . . . Are all prophets?” Answer implied “No!” cf. Rom. 12:6; Eph. 4:11) Thus when Paul says in 1 Cor. 14:1, “eagerly desire the gift of prophecy” it cannot mean he urges all to seek the gift. Rather we take him to mean, “Desire that the gift be manifest amongst you in those to whom the Lord will sovereignly give it.” Likewise in v. 5 when he says, “I would like every one of you to speak in tongues, but I would rather have you prophesy,” it cannot mean all without exception. It is more, “It would be great if you all could (something Moses has also wished!), but obviously you all cannot—you all think you can (v. 26, ‘everyone has a revelation’!), but only two or three prophets (i.e. not those sporadically exercising a common gift, but those recognized as

prophets) are to speak.” Thus we would see (contra Grudem) that the instructions concerning prophecy in ch. 14 relate to the special, formally recognized group of prophets in Corinth. Grudem states that there is, “no hint of any ceremony of recognizing someone in a prophetic office.” We would dispute this in the light of 1 Cor. 12:10 and 14:29 where Paul associates the gift of discerning the spirits with prophecy and commands that the statements of prophets be weighed or evaluated by “the others.” This latter expression may refer to the other prophets, but even if it does not it would be hard to see those who had the gift of discernment as not playing a leading role in the evaluating process. Finally, we would urge against Grudem's position here what Paul has to say about the content of prophecy. It is a gift whereby one can fathom or know “mystery” (1 Cor. 13:2), by means of a revelation from God (14:29). Elsewhere in Paul's writings “mystery” refers to that which is hidden and inaccessible to man apart from God's sovereign unilateral disclosure by inspiration. The content is the salvation revealed in Christ that, Paul says, is now made known by the foundational apostles and prophets (Eph. 2:20; 3:4-9). Thus, we conclude that the revelation granted to and made known by the N.T. prophets in Corinth, as in all the N.T., is one with the inspired revelation granted to and made known by the apostles. Like the O.T. prophets the N.T. prophets “foretold” (Acts 11:28; 21:10) and “forthtold” (Acts 15:32; 1 Cor. 14:3) the words of God as inspired by the Holy Spirit. For these reasons then we cannot accept Grudem's position that N.T. prophecy is a gift available to all believers today.

6. His argument that 1 Cor. 13:8-13 clearly teaches that prophecy will continue and function until Christ's return is not persuasive.

Grudem confidently asserts, “In 1 Cor. 13:8-13 Paul tells the Corinthians that prophecy will continue until but not beyond the time when Christ returns . . . that prophecy will last among believers until that time. This means that we have a clear biblical statement that Paul expected the gift of prophecy to continue through the entire church age and to function for the benefit of the church until the Lord returns.” But is this quite as clear as Grudem asserts? For a start if the “now . . . then” comparison in verse 12 is a reference to the present age versus the situation following our Lord's return then the average believer in Corinth might well have objected, “But will I not see Him face to face and be fully known by Him when I die. Surely I do not have to wait till the second advent for these experiences?” Is it clear that Paul is speaking in verses 10 and 12 about the post-resurrection state? In v. 10 the neuter noun translated “perfection” means “the completed or whole thing.” Used 18 times in the N.T. it never once refers to the parousia or the consummation that follows it, but significantly twice it is translated “mature” as contrasted to “childish” in 1 Cor. 2:6 and 14:20.

Thus we could render vs. 9b-10 as follows, “for . . . we prophesy in part (or our prophecy is partial—and here we note how Paul includes himself with these Corinthian prophets) but when that which is whole (or complete) comes the partial will be abolished.” Thus Paul speaks clearly of the completion of the revelatory process, of a time when prophecies will cease. N.T. prophecy, like O.T. prophecy is partial, the prophet only has part of the full picture. “It’s like being a child,” Paul says, “the child thinks, talks, and reasons but it is only when he became mature that he sees the full picture. So, for now,” he continues (that is the “now” of the present time of his own prophesying together with the Corinthian prophets) “we are seeing things as in a mirror—things are blurred, fragmentary, partial, unclear” (lit. “in a riddle”). However in the “then” of the completed revelatory process we shall see the full picture clearly—it will be “face to face.” Commentators have seen a deliberate echoing of God’s word about Moses here in Num. 12:6-8, “When a prophet of the Lord is among you I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams. But not so with my servant Moses. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles.” The contrast is between what is partial and what is full. (It is interesting that Moses was the one prophet chosen at the time to infallibly record in writing that full revelation he received.) “So,” says Paul, “for now our knowledge and prophecy is partial but in the ‘then’ of the completed revelatory process we shall have full knowledge.” Obviously from our vantage point in the history of redemption the completion of the revelatory process is the completion of the canon, which we hold to be utterly sufficient for all our needs at this time we await the second advent. The three revelatory gifts Paul mentions here we take as the ones whereby God has revealed to us His supernatural, authoritative, infallible truth. (This whole matter of the sufficiency of present revelation is an important one as we come near the end of this paper. It is hard to escape the conclusion that if, as Grudem asserts, additional prophecy since the close of the canon (be it ever so “low”!) is not only possible but necessary to the church’s life, then the Reformed doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture is undermined.) Thus the N.T. preserves in the only reliable form the essence of the completed apostolic and prophetic revelation.

There are two final points that buttress the above interpretation of 1 Cor. 13:8-13. First, Grudem’s interpretation of the passage involves the contrast of the three revelatory gifts that, as he sees it, are to continue in the church till the second advent, with the three graces that will remain after the second advent. Yet how, we ask, will faith and hope remain after that? Surely in heaven faith becomes sight and as for hope does not Paul say, “Hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has (Rom 8:24)?” However the above interpretation allows us to see these two latter graces as remaining in this life. The gifts we expect to cease, while faith, hope, and love will last till the end.

Second, a crucially important point is the presupposition concerning the meaning of “prophecy” that we bring to 1 Cor. 13:8. For Grudem of course it means prophecy in the “low” sense he has tried to establish. However, if we have established that prophecy in 1 Cor. 12-14 is prophecy in the sense of inspired words from God then, when Paul says that prophecy shall cease, is he not making explicit what was implicit in the foundation metaphor of Eph. 2:20 and 3:5?

Conclusion

While there are doubtless other points in Grudem's work that would merit attention in this paper we believe we have isolated the main reasons why we hold his thesis to be based on unsound exegetical foundations. His view involves a dualistic understanding of revelation i.e. there is canonical apostolic revelation for the whole church that bears on our salvation and there are private prophetic revelations for individuals or groups of believers that bear on our individual life situation and need. Commenting on this point Gaffin (who Grudem has argued against all through his book) says this: “such an understanding of revelation is in irreconcilable conflict with what the Bible itself shows to be the covenantal, redemptive-historical character of *all* revelation. God does not reveal Himself along two tracks, one public and one private. As long as revelation is viewed in the first place as God's Word to me as an individual and as given to provide me with specific, explicit directions and answers to the particular concerns and perplexities of my individual life situation it is fundamentally misunderstood and a sense of the inadequacy of the Bible alone as a guide for life is almost inevitable.” With this view we would heartily concur. We come back to the Reformed consensus view that prophecy in the true Biblical sense has ceased. Our view we believe is in line with the teaching of the Westminster Confession to whom we give the last word: “The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for His own glory, man's salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: *unto which nothing at any time is to be added*, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men” (I,6). Grudem's position, we believe, would call the truth of this into question.

Catechism Preaching (Part 1)

Dr. N.H. Gootjes

Introduction

Catechism preaching is not a general practise within the churches that together form the ICRC. In general it can be said that the catechism is preached in churches with a Reformed, Dutch background, and that churches with a Presbyterian, English/Scottish background do not have this custom. When churches who have catechism preaching and churches who do not have it meet in an organisation like the ICRC it can be helpful to discuss such a difference. For a good discussion, however, they first of all need a common understanding of it.

What is catechism preaching, and why did it come up? Let us take our starting point in what Ph. Schaff wrote about it in his *The Creeds of Christendom*. What he said may even for today express the general understanding of catechism preaching. Schaff was an admirer of the Heidelberg Catechism. In his book on the history of the creeds he devoted one of the largest paragraphs to this catechism. About catechism preaching he said the following:

Whole libraries of paraphrases, commentaries, sermons, attacks, and defenses were written about it. In many Reformed churches, especially in Holland (and also in the United States), it was and is to some extent even now obligatory or customary to explain the catechism from the pulpit every Sunday afternoon. Hence the division of the questions into fifty-two Sundays, in imitation of the example set by Calvin's catechism.¹

In a footnote he added about the division into fifty-two Sundays:

This division was first introduced in the Latin edition of 1566, perhaps earlier.²

What Schaff said about catechism preaching, can be summarized in three statements:

1. Schaff is unclear whether preaching was one of the original purposes of the Heidelberg Catechism. If it was not original, it was at least early.

1 Schaff, Ph. *The Creeds of Christendom*. With a History and Critical Notes (revised by David S. Schaff; 3 vols. 6th edition; Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1990) I, pp. 536f.

2 *ibid.* Schaff makes this remark against scholars as Van Alphen and Niemeyer who said that the division was even later than 1566.

This catechism was first published in 1563, the division in 52 Sundays in the 1566 edition shows that from that time onward the catechism had to be preached.

2. The division into 52 Sundays goes back to Calvin. From this it can be concluded that the custom of catechism preaching goes back to Calvin.
3. Catechism preaching was and is especially a custom in the Dutch churches and the churches from Dutch descent.

In the view of Schaff, and probably also in the view of most Reformed people in the world, catechism preaching has a double limitation: It belongs to the Calvinist tradition, and within the Calvinist tradition, to the Netherlands.

In the following we will investigate the three statements of Schaff. This will provide us with the background necessary to adequately discuss the value of catechism preaching.

Heidelberg Catechism and preaching

The Heidelberg Catechism was officially adopted in January 1563. This catechism went through some changes before it was included in the Church Order of the Palatinate, which the Elector of the Palatinate issued on November 15, 1563. The division into 52 Lord's Days occurs for the first time in this edition.³ Schaff, then, was right when he advocated an early date for the division in Lord's Days. But this division is even earlier than Schaff knew. It dates from the year during which the catechism was first published.

It is interesting to read in the Church Order how home, school, and church had to cooperate in instructing in the catechism. The students had to learn the questions and answers of the catechism at school and at home. In the afternoon service they had to say the questions and answers the minister had preached on the previous Sunday, and the questions and answers for this service. For that purpose the catechism had been divided into Lord's Days. The minister had to preach through the catechism at least once a year.⁴ The Church Order shows that the division into Lord's Days is

3 Bakhuizen van den Brink, J.N. *De Nederlandse Belijdenisgeschriften* in authentieke teksten met inleiding en tekstvergelijkingen (2. ed.; Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Ton Bolland, 1976) p. 30.

4 See the text in Niesel, W. *Bekenntnisschriften und Kirchen-ordnungen der nach Gottes Wort reformierten Kirche* (3. ed. Zürich: Zollikon, n.d.)

connected with preaching.

Yet, the impression could still linger that the preaching on the Heidelberg Catechism was an afterthought. For the catechism was published in January of 1563, and the Church Order which prescribes preaching on the catechism was not published until November of that year. History teaches differently, however. There are several indications that catechism preaching was intended right from the beginning, when the Heidelberg Catechism was made.

An indication can be found in a letter Ursinus, the main author of the Heidelberg Catechism, wrote in 1563. He complains in this letter that he had too much to do. The authorities have added to his workload that he has to preach the catechism in the Sunday three o'clock catechism service. This

p. 149. The rule itself is formulated rather complicatedly, I will attempt an English translation: "Furthermore, catechism preaching, too, shall be observed every Sunday afternoon at the hour that is convenient for each place . . . After this [the minister] has some among the young people say a certain number of questions of the Catechism explained in the preceding, and especially in the following sermon (as we have let it be divided into Lord's Days for this reason) and which they previously have learned in school or at home. And when these have been said in the presence of all the people the minister shall explain the next few questions, so that he will yearly preach through the catechism at least once a year." There are even more regulations concerning the catechism in the Church Order. Every Sunday in the afternoon a three page summary of the catechism should be read (pp. 184ff.) In cities and villages the catechism service should be observed on every Sunday and Feastday. The church order also contains a special prayer, to be said after the catechism sermon (p. 200).

sermon was previously preached by Olevianus.⁵ This shows that catechism preaching, at least in Heidelberg, the capital of the Palatinate, antedates the publication of the Church Order.

Probably we can trace catechism preaching back right to the beginning of the catechism. In the preface to the first edition of the Heidelberg Catechism, dated January 19, 1563, the elector urged and directed the preachers and teachers of his principedom, to inculcate it into the young people in schools and churches, and into the common man from the pulpit.⁶

The Heidelberg Catechism was made to be taught in class as well as to be preached in church.

Catechism Preaching before the Heidelberg Catechism

Schaff said that the division of the Heidelberg Catechism in 52 Lord's Days goes back to Calvin. This implies, even though Schaff does not say so explicitly, that it was also customary in Calvin's Geneva to preach the catechism every Sunday. The last statement is correct, the first is not completely correct.

Calvin wrote two catechisms, one before he was expelled from Geneva, and one after his return. The second of these has the same form as the Heidelberg Catechism, in questions and answers. This catechism was published in two languages, in 1542 in French and in 1545 in Latin. The French edition has by way of footnotes, a division in Lord's Days.⁷ This lack of division in the Latin version is remarkable. This version was meant for the ecclesiastical world in general, to show how the reformed doctrine

⁵ See for the quotation Hollweg, W., *Neue Untersuchungen zur Geschichte und Lehre des Heidelberger Katechismus* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1961) p. 137.

⁶ See Bakhuizen van den Brink, *op.cit.*, p. 151

⁷ See for the French text Niesel, *op. cit.*, pp. 3ff; the division in Lord's Days is not indicated. The Latin text was published by Barth, P., Niesel, W., *Joannis Calvini Opera Selecta* (vol. 2; Monachii in Aedibus: Kaiser, 1970), pp. 72ff; the division in Lord's Days is here indicated as chapters. An English translation was published in *Calvin: Theological Treatises* (vol. XXII of the Library of Christian Classics; tr. J.K.S. Reid; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, n.d.) pp. 88ff.

was taught in Geneva. It was therefore not necessary to make a division in Lord's Days. But the French version was made for Geneva, for the church members. They needed the division in Lord's Days since this catechism was preached on the Lord's Day. It is, however, not a division into 52 Lord's Days, as the Heidelberg Catechism, but a division into 55 Lord's Days. Does that mean that Geneva did not have the same rule as Heidelberg to preach yearly through the whole catechism? How was catechism preaching organized in Geneva?

Calvin had made the catechism to comply with the rules of the church order of Geneva of 1541 concerning the preaching. This church order prescribed that three services should be held on each Sunday; of these the middle one, which begins at noon, is the catechism service: "At midday there is to be catechism, that is instruction of little children in all three churches."⁸ When this instruction is repeated later in the church order, something is added: "A definite formulary is to be composed by which they will be instructed, and on this, with the teaching given them, they are to be interrogated about what has been said, to see if they have listened and remembered well."⁹

These regulations give us some insight into the customs of that time. The catechetical instruction of the church did not take place during the week, but on the Sunday.¹⁰ The service itself was used as a catechism class. Therefore the students had to say the catechism during the service, and they had to answer questions to show that they had understood the sermon. Who attended these catechism services? The ordinances do not make that completely clear, but certainly not just the children. The schoolmasters and the fathers had to accompany the children, the domestics should be sent, too, and the foreigners who lived in Geneva.¹¹

Nowhere in the church order of Geneva, however, do we find a rule that the catechism should be preached through within a year. Here is a difference

8 See the translation in Reid, *op. cit.* p. 62.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 69.

10 Catechetical instruction was not limited to the church, however. The parents and the schoolmasters, too, had to instruct the children, see Van 't Veer, M.B., *Catechese en catechetische stof bij Calvijn* (doct. diss. Free University; Kampen: Kok, 1942) pp. 61ff; 90.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 171.

between Geneva and Heidelberg. But in general there is a striking similarity concerning catechetical preaching. Yet it would be wrong to conclude from this that the preaching of the Heidelberg Catechism was derived from Calvin. In fact, it was the general custom of the churches of the Reformation.

Catechism Preaching in the churches of the Reformation

Catechism preaching can already be found with Luther. In 1527, ten years after Luther had published his 95 theses, church visitation was organized in the churches that had followed Luther on the path of reformation. One of the first church visitors was Luther himself. He now had the opportunity to see for himself how the reformation he had begun was progressing at local level. He was appalled. He found that the common church people knew next to nothing, particularly in the rural areas. One of the main reasons was that the ministers had not been trained to be ministers of the Word. They were often former priests who were not taught how to preach.

Then Luther revised sermons he had preached on the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the sacraments and published these under the title "Larger Catechism" (1529). They were intended to serve as preaching models for the ministers, so that they could preach about the main parts of the doctrine.¹² To this Larger Catechism Luther added the Smaller Catechism, a catechism to be read daily and to be used for the instruction of the children. Catechetical instruction was Luther's answer when the reformation movement faltered through a lack of knowledge.

This led to the instruction concerning catechism preaching in the church order for Wittenberg, 1533. Every Sunday early in the morning the priest or deacon had to preach from the catechism. When the whole catechism has

12 A Latin and German version of the Larger Catechism can be found in Müller, J.C., *Die symbolische Bücher der evangelisch-lutherische Kirche* (New edition, 9th impression; Gütersloh: E Bertelsmann, 1900) pp. 375ff. An English translation is given in *The Book of Concord. The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (tr. and ed. by Th. G. Tappert; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959) pp. 358ff. The sermons on which the Larger Catechism was based, are published in *Luther's Works* vol 51: Sermons (ed. and tr. by John W. Doberstein; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959) pp. 137ff.

been dealt with he has to start all over again. Thus the preacher has opportunity enough to explain well and diligently the whole catechism, especially that which the common people need.¹³ Preaching from the catechism means here preaching about the main parts in which children and church members had to be instructed: the Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer, to which a part on the sacraments was added. There were differences between the Lutheran and the Calvinist practice of catechism preaching. The Larger Catechism of Luther gave examples of catechetical sermons, the Catechism of Geneva, on the other hand, did not consist of sermons, but was to be used as the starting point for preaching. Another difference is that in Lutheranism catechism preaching was from the beginning distinguished from catechetical instruction of the young members of the church. Separate catechetical instruction had started as early as 1521. The Reformed churches came late to the realization that the catechetical instruction which leads to admission to the Lord's Supper can best be conducted separately from the catechism preaching. This was the beginning of more than two centuries of catechism preaching in the Lutheran churches.¹⁴

The need for catechism preaching was felt not only within Lutheranism, also within the Zwinglian reformation. In 1532 Bullinger and Leo Judae made a Regulation for ministers for the city of Zürich. One of the rules was that the ministers should preach on an article of the Christian faith in the afternoon service. When in the next year the catechism of Leo Judae was published, this was used as the basis for catechism preaching.¹⁵

We may conclude that catechism preaching was instituted in the three main streams of the reformation on the continent: within Lutheranism, Zwinglianism, and Calvinism. England and Scotland seem to have been the exception. I have not been able to find traces of catechism preaching there.

13 See for the text Th. L. Haitjema, "De prediking als catechismus-prediking," in *Handboek voor de prediking* (edd. S. F. H. J. Berkelbach van der Sprenkel; P. J. Roscam Abbing; Amsterdam: Holland, 1948) II, p. 287f.

14 T. Hoekstra says that during the 16th C. excellent rules were given for catechetical instruction in the Lutheran churches, but that in reality not much came of it, see his article "Catechese" in *Christelijke Encyclopaedie* (Kampen: Kok, 1925ff.) Vol. 1, p. 428. W. Jetter, however, has shown with many examples that catechism preaching was fully developed in the Lutheran churches, see his article on catechism preaching in *TRE* vol. 17 (Berlin; New York: W. de Gruyter, 1988) 753-769. Catechism preaching was, according to Jetter, responsible for the establishing of a new kind of evangelical Christianity (756). He blames the Enlightenment as the cause for its disappearance (774ff).

15 See Dijk, K. *De dienst der prediking* (Kampen: Kok, 1950) p. 406.

The exception is the congregation of refugees which met in London. According to their church order the catechism had to be preached.¹⁶

Schaff, therefore, was too limited when he saw behind the preaching of the Heidelberg Catechism only the reformation of Calvin in Geneva. Catechism preaching was a common institution in the churches of the reformation on the European continent.

Catechism preaching before the Reformation

Is catechism preaching, taken in the sense of preaching on the the summaries of the Christian faith (the Creed, the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer and the meaning of the Sacraments) an invention of the Reformation? Luther said: "We have the catechism on the pulpit, something which did not happen for a thousand years."¹⁷ This is correct, in the sense that, generally speaking, the preachers did not preach about the catechism. Yet, it can be shown that the necessity of catechism preaching was recognized during the Middle Ages.

To begin with the Netherlands, by the end of the 13th Century the local priests were instructed to expound the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed every Sunday, and the Ten Commandments and the seven Sacraments of the church once a month, or at least three or four times a year. From the additional remark that this exposition should be given in an easily understandable way and in the mother tongue it appears that the intention was that the common church members should understand these articles of faith.¹⁸ The explanation will not have amounted to much, if it had to take place every Sunday in addition to the sermons on gospel or epistle. Yet a flood of explanations about the catechetical summaries show that the

16 Micron, M., *De Christlike Ordinancien der Nederlandscher Ghemeinten te Londen* (ed. W.F. Dankbaar; 's Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1956) p. 68. Noteworthy are the rules that the older children have to say by heart a part of the catechism, and that the whole congregation should be present in these services.

17 In his Table talk, no. 4692, see M.B. Van 't Veer, *op. cit.*, 153, footnote 16.

18The text of this instruction is published and explained in Troelstra, A., *De toestand der catechese in Nederland gedurende de voor-reformatorische eeuw* (diss. Utrecht; Groningen: J.B. Wolters, 1901) pp. 105ff.

instruction of 1294 had its effect.¹⁹

A few years earlier a similar decision was made in England. Synod Lambeth 1281 complained about the lack of knowledge among the clergy. All local pastors were ordered to teach the Creed, the Ten Commandments, the two main commandments, the seven works of mercy, the seven main sins, the seven virtues and the seven sacraments.²⁰

In Germany Johannes Gerson preached catechetical material: he discussed the Ten Commandments and the Creed. Many other popular preachers preached on themes from the catechism.²¹ This must have led to a custom of catechetical preaching. A book about the ministry praises this kind of preaching. It is called a good custom when priests explain in the morning or afternoon service the Articles of Faith and the Ten Commandments for young and old, and ask them how much they have understood. This book was published in 1498, less than 25 years before the beginning of the reformation movement.²²

Catechism preaching existed before the Lutheran reformation. We can even use Luther himself as a proof for this. Luther himself preached catechism before 1517.²³ And in his preface to the Larger Catechism Luther mentioned

19 See A. Troelstra, *op. cit.*, pp. 112ff.

20 A. Troelstra, *op. cit.* p. 108. W. Jetter mentions that catechism preaching became an organised custom in the church; Synod Lambeth required it from the clergy four times a year, see his article "Katechismuspredigt" p. 747.

21 See the article "Katechismuspredigt" p. 747.

22 The quotation is given in A. Troelstra, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

23 M.B. van 't Veer, *op. cit.*, p. 169. See also Luther's introduction for his catechism preaching in 1528: "It has hitherto been our custom to teach the elements and fundamentals of Christian knowledge and life four times each year and we have therefore arranged to preach on these things for two weeks in each quarter, four days a week at two o'clock in the afternoon." in *Sermons I*, Luther's Works, vol. 51 (ed. and transl. John W. Doberstein; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), p.

the names of several manuals from the Middle Ages which contain everything the pastors should teach.²⁴ Luther, in instituting catechism preaching, only enforced a Middle Age rule which never was really implemented in the churches.²⁵ Luther's insistence that his reformation first brought the catechism on the pulpit is only correct in the sense that then the rule was made and maintained.

How far does this custom reach back in the Middle Ages? At least as far as around 800 A.D. catechism preaching was emphasized in the restoration of the church under the influence of emperor Charlemagne of France. A rule dating from 789 orders the bishops to see to it that the priests maintain the true faith and understand themselves the Lord's prayer and preach it in a way that is understandable to all. An instruction from 852 says that each priest should study the explanation of the Creed and of the Lord's Prayer according to the tradition of the orthodox fathers extensively, and then by preaching (this) instruct the people entrusted to them.²⁶ These rules show that catechism preaching was neglected, but at the same time that its importance was recognized.

Catechetical preaching goes back even to the time before the Middle Ages. We can find sermons for catechetical instruction already during the patristic period. Well known are the sermons Augustine (354-430) preached on the Creed. He also preached a series of sermons on the Decalogue. Other examples of catechetical preaching can be found in Cyril of Jerusalem given around 350 A.D. He explained the Creed, the sacraments and the worship service in these sermons.²⁷

Catechism, as the instruction in the fundamentals of the Christian religion, is as old as Christianity. Already at the time of the Church Fathers one of the means of catechetical instruction was catechism preaching.

135.

24 J. T. Müller, *op. cit.* p. 375; translation in Th. G. Tappert, *op. cit.*, p. 358.

25 See A. Troelstra, *op. cit.*, p. 127ff; M. B. Van 't Veer, *op. cit.*, p. 153ff.

26 See the quotations in Gieseler, J. C. L., *Lehrbuch der Kirchengeschichte* (3. ed.; Bonn: Adolph Marcus, 1831) vol. 2/1, p. 71. See also the article "Katechismuspredigt," p. 747.

27 Sermons on the creed were at the time usually not preached in public since the creed was seen as something only for the initiated. Therefore sermons about the creed could only be preached on special occasions for special persons, see J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (New York: Longman, 3rd ed. repr. 1983) pp. 32; 62.

Catechism preaching in the Netherlands

The third remark Schaff made was that catechism preaching was maintained especially in the Netherlands and in churches descendent from the Netherlands. That is correct, but observations need to be made. This preaching did not take root without opposition and was not maintained without the support of churches in other countries. First we will see how catechism preaching became established in the Netherlands.

As early as 1566, three years after its adoption in Heidelberg, this catechism was preached on a regular basis in Amsterdam.²⁸ That means that catechism preaching had been established locally even before a church order for the Reformed Churches had been adopted.

The first attempt to organize the life of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands was made at a meeting held in Wezel, in 1568. In the regulations that were made there catechism preaching was dealt with. Three forms of catechetical instruction are distinguished: next to the church, the parents and the schoolmasters have to teach the catechism. Concerning the duty of the church the general rule is given that every effort should be made that the children not just learn to recite the catechism to the letter, but also understand what it means. Therefore the children should be interrogated (publicly, during the worship service!) to see whether they know the words, but also whether they understand the content. The brothers who met at Wezel realized that therefore simple language was required for the catechism preaching. To say it in the words of the articles of Wezel: "In explaining the catechism more than anything else a language is needed which, as much as possible, is very plain and accommodated to the understanding of children."²⁹ Catechism preaching, as means of primary instruction, requires plain language.

By the time the provincial synod of Dordrecht met, in 1574, catechism preaching seems to have become established in the churches. This Synod made the regulation that even in the afternoon service in which the Lord's Supper is celebrated "the preaching of the catechism will be maintained as usual."³⁰

28 T. Hoekstra, *Gereformeerde homiletiek* (Wageningen: Zomer & Keuning, [1937]) p. 369.

29 The text in Rutgers, F.L., *Acta van de Nederlandsche Synoden der zestiende eeuw* (2. ed.; Dordrecht: Van den Tol, 1980) p. 21.

30 F. L. Rutgers, *op. cit.*, 148. The rule was repeated at the national Synod of Dordrecht, 1578, *op. cit.*, p. 251; and weakened by Synod

This is not the only reason why preaching the catechism was discussed at this synod. The question was raised whether it would not be good to have good homilies on the Heidelberg Catechism. Presumably the ministers did not find it easy to preach on material such as the Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer. At this point we remember Luther, who intended his Larger Catechism as a collection of model sermons on catechetical material. Synod, however, came with a different solution. At meetings of classis the ministers should take turns in giving brief expositions about some questions and answers from the catechism. In this way they could help one another and learn to explain the catechism "thoroughly and edifyingly."³¹ But this seems not to have been sufficient. The national Synod of 1581 had to deal with a request to have the homilies of Dr. Bastingius or some other explanations on the catechism printed, after they had been looked over by persons appointed by synod. It is decided that Bastingius and the classis his church belongs to, will make explanations on the catechism.³²

Synod 1586 again made a regulation concerning catechism preaching. The ministers everywhere should keep the rule to preach the catechism in the afternoon service. In this way they will preach through the catechism in a year, according to the division of the catechism in Lord's Days.³³

Middelburg, 1581, *op. cit.* p. 409.

31 F. L. Rutgers, *op. cit.*, p. 160; see for the question, p. 212.

32 F. L. Rutgers, resp. p. 418 and p. 438, see also p. 371. Two words are used in the request, *homilia* and *exegemata*. The Synod decided that not *homilia* but *exegemata* should be made. S. C. Grobler says that *homilia* are popular sermons directed toward the application on the lives of the people, and the *exegemata* are sermon that are exegetically founded. According to Grobler this means that Synod Middelburg 1581 decided that not popular explanations of the catechism should be made, but exegetical explanations of Scripture [passages] connected with the content of the Catechism; see his article "Katechismusprediking en gemeente-opbou" in Venter, C. J. H., (ed.) *God bou op deur sy woord* (Potchefstroom: Departement Sentrale Publikasies Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir CHO, 1988) p. 128. I think that Grobler is correct in deriving from the decision that Synod thought that simple sermons (*homilia*) were not enough. There is no ground, however, for the supposition that *exegemata* are exegetical explanations of Scripture. Synod wanted Bastingius to write exegetical expositions of the catechism. This explanation of the Heidelberg Catechism was published in 1588, and republished by F. L. Rutgers: Hieremias Bastingius, *Verclaringe op den Catechisme der Christelicker Religie* (Amsterdam: J.A. Wormser, 1893).

33 Rutgers, F. L., *Acta van de Nederlandsche synoden der zestiende eeuw*, p. 501.

These decisions could give rise to the impression that catechism preaching was established in the Netherlands without much difficulty. It is true, in the end the catechism was preached in all the churches, but that custom was not firmly established until one hundred years after these decisions. Before that time catechism preaching had to overcome two challenges. The first objection was of a practical nature, the second was an attack against catechism preaching as such.

Several practical problems arose. Catechism preaching was not always easy to organize, especially in the small villages in the countryside. Some ministers served several rural congregations and preached in three or four places in turn. In that situation it was difficult to have regular catechism preaching. But more importantly, the catechism service was not a popular service. One ecclesiastical meeting decided that the ministers in the country who have only one congregation, should preach the catechism in the afternoon, even when only a few people attended. They gave as reason: to prevent profanation of the sabbath.³⁴ The attendance at the catechism service was low. In one classis the attendance in the different churches was polled. Church A had announced the catechism service three times, but no one had turned up. In church B no more than two people had been in church for three catechism services in a row. Church C had tried many times to hold a catechism service, but there were no attendants. In church D the caretaker had been the only listener.³⁵ This should not be seen as a rejection of catechism preaching as such. The people had been accustomed to having the Sunday afternoon off for their own enjoyment. It took about a century to firmly establish catechism preaching. Once established, however, catechism preaching resulted, to use the words of Schotel who traced its history, to “mature congregations which were not tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine.”³⁶

The second objection against this form of preaching was weightier. The minister of the church of Gouda broke the rule of Synod 1586 and refused to preach the catechism. Ostensibly the reason was that a human text should not be read and preached in the churches. The major assemblies did not let this pass. A provincial Synod admitted that a catechism in the form of questions and answers is not prescribed in Scripture. However, having and teaching a summary of the fundamental articles of the Christian religion is

34 See the decision of the provincial Synod of Brielle, in A. N. Hendriks' “De Catechismusprediking,” 3 articles in *De Reformatie*, Vol. 54, Nrs. 48ff. (1979) pp. 757f.

35 From an article of S. Tuininga, in *De Reformatie*, Vol. 62, No. 33 (1987), p. 683.

36 See for the development Schotel, G. D. J., *Geschiedenis van den oorsprong, de invoering en de lotgevallen van den Heidelbergischen Catechismus* (Amsterdam 1863).

an apostolic custom, Hebr. 6:1. It has always been maintained in the church and has great usefulness.³⁷

The real reason behind the refusal to preach the catechism was the fact that several ministers, especially of Arminian conviction, had objections against the doctrine of the Heidelberg Catechism. That came to light at a particular incident a few years before the Synod of Dort. Remonstrant ministers were asked to state their agreement with a number of propositions taken from the Heidelberg Catechism. These ministers, however, could not declare that they agreed with the doctrine of the catechism.³⁸

As a result of these objections the preaching of the catechism was discussed at the Synod of Dort, 1618.³⁹

The discussion at the Synod of Dort

It is noteworthy that catechism preaching was discussed at the Synod of Dort when not only the national representatives were present, but also the representatives of the foreign churches. Catechism preaching was not seen as merely a Dutch affair. Remarkable is that in the *Acts of Synod* only the advices of the foreign delegates have been preserved. Since these advices

37 See A. N. Hendriks, “De catechismusprediking” p. 774; see also S. C. Grobler, “Kategismusprediking en gemeente-opbouw” p. 123f.

38 This happened at the Conference of Delft, 1613, see the theses in J. D. De Lind Van Wijngaarden, *De Dordtsche Leerregels of de Vijf Artikelen tegen de Remonstranten* (2. ed.; Utrecht: Ruys: 1905) pp. 52ff. The church order of Utrecht, 1612, published under Remonstrant influence, is interesting in this connection. It contains an article on catechism preaching. This preaching should be maintained in those places where it has been established (this is contrary to the rule in the nationally adopted church order that the catechism should be preached in all the churches). This church order also says that the rule about catechism preaching is temporary (*by provisie*), see *Christelijke kercken-ordeninge der stadt, steden, ende landen van Utrecht* (Utrecht: Samuel de Roy, 1612) p. 10.

39 H. Kaajan summarizes the difficulties around catechism preaching as follows:

- the negligence of the ministers themselves who either did not preach or did not urge the people to come to the service
- the ministers had the care of two or more churches and could not sufficiently supervise both
- the difficulty to refrain the people on Sundays from games or work
- the unwillingness of the Remonstrants to preach the Heidelberg Catechism
- the fact that the government allowed the people to work on the field on Sundays see his *De groote Synode van Dordrecht in 1618-1619* (Amsterdam: De Standaard, n.d.) p. 94.

form a direct source for the history of catechism preaching in the Reformed churches of that time, we will here give some extracts.⁴⁰

The *theologians of Great Britain* began with the general rule that the practice of the Apostles, reason and experience teach us that catechizing is necessary. There are two opportunities to explain the sacred doctrines of the faith: the usual one takes place every Sunday and the special one belongs to the preparation for attending the Lord's Supper. At the first one, the catechism service, people of all ages should be present, but only the young will have to submit themselves to the interrogation. This shows that the English representatives see the catechism service as a public catechism lesson. The public recitation of the questions and answers is seen as important not just for the younger, but also for the older people. It helps them, too, to memorize the catechism.

The British have also an advice for the minister. He has to explain every answer as clearly as possible. And he has to ask his students about his explanation, to see whether they have understood it. If it appears from the answers that the explanation was understood, he can be satisfied, but if not, he has to give (if possible) a clearer explanation and repetition. Another interesting remark is that the government has to uphold catechism preaching. If the minister is negligent he should be punished, and if the older people are not present at the catechism sermon, they should be fined.

The *theologians of the Palatinate* state that they do not doubt that the main reason why so many heresies can be found everywhere is the neglect of catechizing. They describe the situation in their state. On Sundays in the afternoon a brief catechism sermon is preached. After that the minister comes down from the pulpit, reads some parts of the doctrine and explains some selected questions and answers of the catechism to the adults who never went to school. The afternoon service here has a double function: it is for catechism preaching as well as for catechism teaching of those who did not learn the catechism at the schools.

The *theologians of Hessia*, another German state, declare that first of all there should be a catechism which is not only conform Scripture, but also suited for the understanding of the students. The Dutch churches have this in the Heidelberg Catechism. These theologians, then, wanted to go on

40 See *Acta ofte Handelinghen des Nationalen Synodi* (Dordrecht: Canin, 1621) I, p. 30-41. The advices usually deal with catechism teaching as well as catechism preaching; in our summary we will limit ourselves to the remarks about the preaching.

record that they did not agree with the opposition of the Remonstrants against the Heidelberg Catechism.

The ministers have the duty to teach the catechism at the regular hours and to preach the catechism. Those who are negligent have to be punished. The parents have to be present at the public catechetical interrogations, so that they can repeat the instruction to their children. In the villages it will be enough if catechism is taught after the catechism preaching, in the cities there will be in addition two catechism classes during the week.

The *theologians from Switzerland* explain that there are differences in practice between their republics but that instruction in the catechism is maintained everywhere. On Sundays many sermons are delivered in cities and villages, one of these is the catechism sermon. The catechism will be preached through every year, in order that by repetition it is retained in the memory.

The catechism service on Sundays should be attended by those who no longer go to school and by those who cannot attend school. On a work day during the week the catechism is preached for the students. That means that every member of the church weekly hears the catechism sermon.

The practise of *Geneva* is not included in the report of the theologians from Switzerland, but separately explained. The representatives of Geneva say that a form is needed in which the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments and the doctrine of the sacraments is clearly and briefly explained. Two or three sections of this form, together with a few pertinent Scripture passages are to be explained in the afternoon service on Sundays.

Here, too, the problem seems to be well known that the ministers can hardly get the people to attend the catechism (service). The ministers then should insist that at least the young children and the older children have to be present. A special warning is added against long and oratorical explanations of the catechism. The explanation should discuss the matter in questions, to evoke the agreement of the listeners.

Then follows the advise of the theologians from cities in Germany. Those of *Bremen* begin with a strong statement: catechetical instruction is the foundation for the upbuilding of the church. Three ways to learn the catechism are mentioned and discussed: in the school, in the houses and in the church. About the catechism in the church it is stated that it will be held either instead of the second sermon, or after that. This will then be a rather informal part of the service, for here, too, we find a public interrogation. At the end of their advise these theologians again make a strong statement: If the young people are well instructed in the catechism, then afterwards one need not worry overmuch about the adults.

The explanation of catechetical instruction in *Emden* begins with a

historical remark: Since nothing is more necessary for obtaining a firm knowledge of the saving doctrine than catechizing, and this is as the foundation of the spiritual house, therefore our forebears at the beginning of the reformation of 1520 have done their utmost that the children and the young people, too, would be taught the first principles of the Christian doctrine. This remark shows that the Reformed knew that they were in line with the Lutheran reformation on the point of catechetical instruction.

The report from Emden is also interesting because it shows how a catechism service was organized. The schoolmasters bring their pupils to the church every Sunday afternoon. The ministers in this service first pray, then mention the main parts of the Christian religion: the Ten Commandments, the Creed, the institution of Baptism and of the Lord's Supper, church discipline and the Lord's Prayer. Next they require the children to recite the questions and answers which will be explained during that service. (The children, were supposed to know the whole catechism of Emden by heart by the time they were 10 years old.) Next the ministers explain the recited questions and answers briefly and apply them to the lives of the people, just like a sermon on a passage from Scripture. Within three months they will have repeated the whole catechism.

This northern part of Germany experienced the same problem with establishing catechism preaching that was felt everywhere. But the ministers should not give up. The ministers in the villages, also in those places where only a few people attend the service, give brief catechetical sermons during the Spring, the Fall, and the Winter. For experience teaches that the hearers get an aversion against preaching from long sermons.

Such were the advices from the foreign delegates. All were in favor of the established practice of catechism preaching. Small wonder that the Synod of Dort maintained catechism preaching, next to the teaching of the catechism by parents and schoolmasters. The Synod decided that it is the duty of the ministers to hold catechism sermons that are properly short and as much as possible suitable for the understanding, not only of the adult, but also of the youth.⁴¹ In the Church Order the rule that the catechism should be preached in the afternoon service was maintained, Art. 68.

To return once more to Schaff, he said correctly that catechism preaching has been established particularly in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. But it is also noteworthy that at the time of the Synod of Dort the whole Reformed world agreed with catechism preaching and practised it.

41 *Op. cit.* p. 51.

Catechism Preaching (Part 2)

Dr. N.H. Gootjes

In the first part I have attempted to give some historical background for the custom of catechism preaching. The goal of this historical section was to show that catechism preaching is not an isolated custom. Too often it is seen as limited to a small section of the churches of the Reformation during a very limited period of time. History teaches us, however, that this particular type of preaching is much older than the Reformation, and that it was quite widespread in the churches of the Reformation. Catechism preaching is not an eccentricity.

We have to say more than that, however. History can by itself never justify a practice. I would like to discuss in this second part the more important question whether catechism preaching can justify its existence before the forum of Scripture. Several objections have been brought in against it. I will deal with three important objections, to end with a more general observation.

Preaching from a human text

The most important objection follows from the fact that catechisms are human documents. Doesn't that mean that preaching on the catechism is preaching from a human text? Is preaching on a section from the catechism not a contradiction in terms? For all of us will agree that good preaching is by definition administration of the Word of God.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones has formulated this objection in a straightforward and inoffensive manner:

The function of a catechism, I would have thought, ultimately, is not to provide material for preaching; it is to safeguard the correctness of the preaching, and to safeguard the interpretations of the people as they read their Bibles. As that is the main function of creeds and catechisms, it is surely wrong therefore to just preach constantly year after year on the catechism, instead of preaching the Word directly from the Scripture itself, with the Scriptures always open before you, and the minds of the people directed to that rather than to men's understanding of it.¹

This criticism is based on the conviction that preaching is preaching the Word of God. This leads Lloyd-Jones to reject catechism preaching. This

1 D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972) pp. 187f.

kind of preaching would be preaching on human understanding of that Word, instead of preaching on a text from that Word.

The interesting thing is that defenders of catechism preaching have exactly the same starting point and yet do not come to the conclusion that catechism preaching is impossible. Dr. T. Hoekstra who wrote a Dutch standard text on homiletics defines preaching as the explication and application of the Word of God revealed in Holy Scripture.² Yet Hoekstra does not think that catechism preaching is inappropriate. His book on preaching has a section on catechism preaching, where he says:

In catechism preaching the Lord comes to his people and discloses the mysteries of His covenant of grace for his congregation. Therefore catechism preaching is administration of the Word. Strictly speaking it is not preaching from the catechism but from the Word.³

Defenders of catechism preaching maintain that in these sermons, too, the Word of God is preached.

Using basically the same definition of preaching these theologians come to a radically different conclusion concerning the scriptural justification of catechism preaching. We can, therefore, not easily decide the whole matter on the basis of a definition. We will have to dig deeper and ask the question: What is the character of a creed or confession? What is its relation to Scripture?

Let us begin to answer this question by looking at one of the creeds: the Apostles' Creed. This creed was not bodily taken out of Scripture. There is no passage in either the Old or the New Testament where this creed is given *in extenso*. That does not make this creed unscriptural, however. Its content is taken out of Scripture. Revelations given in different places of Scripture have been collected and brought together in an organized way. The structure of the Apostles' Creed is trinitarian, based on the baptismal command of Matt. 28:19. And the content of God's revelation is

2 T. Hoekstra, *Gereformeerde homiletiek* (Wageningen: Zomer & Keuning, n.d.) p. 157; see also on p. 160: The administration of the Word in the congregation of the believers is the explanation and the application of the Word of God.

3 T. Hoekstra, *Gereformeerde homiletiek*, p. 371. See also C. Trimp, *De preek: Een praktisch verhaal over het maken en houden van preken* (3. ed.; Kampen: Van den Berg, 1986) p. 9.

summarized as the trinitarian God and His work. The Apostles' Creed presents the doctrine of Scripture, a systematical summary of the biblical truth.

The same can be said for the later, more extensive confessions of the Reformation period. These, too, give a summary of Scriptural content. To give an example, it became important in the struggle of the 16th Century to define the basis for our belief in God. Many Reformed Confessions organized and summarized the Scriptural revelation about itself. The summary form as such cannot be found in Scripture, yet these confessions insert lines from Scripture in their formulations and prove their doctrine with texts appended to the articles.

The question which we have to answer in connection with catechism preaching is, what is the character of this doctrine, this summary given in the catechism. There is no doubt that the formulation of the doctrine is made by man. But what about the doctrine itself? Is the doctrine present in Scripture, or is the doctrine man made?

A Reformed theologian like Ch. Hodge sees the doctrines as human products. Scripture contains isolated facts. Those facts cannot be pieced together at random, the relations between them are in the facts. Still, we have to make the connections. This does not mean, however, that the doctrine is of lesser value, according to Hodge. Actually, the doctrine is on a higher level than Scripture:

A much higher kind of knowledge is thus obtained, than by the mere accumulation of isolated facts We cannot know what God has revealed in his Word unless we understand, at least in some good measure, the relation in which the separate truths therein contained stand to each other. It cost the Church centuries of study and controversy to solve the problem concerning the person of Christ; that is, to adjust and bring into harmonious arrangement all the facts which the Bible teaches on that subject.⁴

A similar opinion can be found in A. Kuyper when he describes theology as that science which has the revealed knowledge of God as the object of its

4 Ch. Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (London and Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and sons, 1883) vol. 1, pp. 1-17, the quotation on p. 2. Hodge speaks here about the task of (systematic) theology, but from his reference to Christology it appears that he sees the creeds as standing on the same (high) level.

investigation and raises it to understanding.⁵

Kuyper, who could always find interesting parallels, compares the revealed knowledge of God with ore, which has to be melted to become shining gold, or with grain that has to be turned into bread before it can be eaten.⁶

Both Hodge and Kuyper speak about theology rather than about the creeds. Their view, however, has implications for the creeds. If this is true, then the catechism, summarizing the doctrine of Scripture, may be “a higher kind of knowledge” but this knowledge goes beyond the revelation in Scripture. For Scripture gives only bare facts.

It is at this point that we have to disagree with these theologians.⁷ The Bible does not reveal merely bare facts. It does not give grain that has yet to be worked into edible bread. The Bible itself provides insight into the meaning of the facts. The relations between the truths of Scripture are indicated in that same Scripture. To borrow Hodge's expression: the “higher knowledge” is present in God's Word. Or to use Kuyper: God's Word in Scripture is the bread of life.

To give a few examples in connection with the Apostles' Creed:

- Matth. 28:19f. connects Trinity with baptism and the obligation to keep Christ's commands.
- Eph. 1:3-14 speaks about the many ways in which the Trinity is involved in our salvation.
- Gen. 17:1 shows that God's omnipotence is not a mere fact but is of tremendous importance in the life of Abraham (and of every believer). All that Abraham has to do is walk in uprightness before God, for God is able to take care of Abraham's life.
- Gen. 1 tells us about God's creation work, and how God determined man's place in creation (v. 26).

5 A. Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology* (tr. J.H. De Vries; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980) p. 299.

6 A. Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, p. 296; 597f; see also p. 567 and p. 570.

7 See for criticism on Hodge, J.M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987) pp. 77ff. I agree particularly with Frame's criticism that the facts in Scripture are not brute facts without interpretation. Rather, the Bible describes and interprets its own facts.

See for criticism on A. Kuyper: J. Douma, “Encyclopedie,” in J. Douma, ed., *Oriëntatie in de theologie* (2. ed.; Barneveld: Vuurbaak, 1987) p. 19.

Or, to given examples concerning the doctrine of Scripture:

- 2 Tim. 3:16 connects the inspiration of Scripture with the importance of the Old Testament for teaching, reproof, etc. The goal is also indicated: that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.
- 2 Peter 1:20f. shows that the divine origin of Scripture is important for the interpretation of it.
- Ps. 19:7 does not just mention the fact that the law of the LORD is perfect, but also says what this perfect law is for: it revives the soul.

And so we can go on, but it will be clear by now that Scripture is not a collection of loose thoughts which we somehow have to piece together. The connections between the doctrines are given in Scripture. The church did only two things in making the creeds. 1. It brought together revelations that were spread out over Scripture. And 2. it often expressed these truths in its own words. But it did not construct the doctrine, rather, it read the doctrine as it is present in Scripture. The creeds and confessions bring together and formulate the doctrines that are present in Scripture itself. The doctrine is not the higher understanding of revelation (Hodge) or the finished product of what is given in a raw form in Scripture (Kuyper) but the underlying structure of God's manifold revelation.

At this point the decision has to be made whether catechism preaching is possible in principle. If a catechism is a human system of amorphous elements in Scripture, then preaching the catechism is impossible. As a matter of fact, however, the catechism formulates a doctrine that is present in Scripture. Therefore, preaching the catechism is possible. The wording of the catechism is not infallible, to be sure. But the truths expressed are still those of Scripture, not of theology. Catechism preaching is preaching the word of God.

Actually, catechism preaching is a good way to do justice to what the apostle Paul calls: the whole counsel of God. When he said farewell to the elders of Ephesus he said that he “did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God.” This counsel, or plan⁸ can be identified with what

⁸ The word is *boule*, used in Acts for a human decision or plan in Acts 5:38, 27:12, 42, and for God's plan concerning David in 13:36. The word is used three times for God's plan concerning Jesus Christ, in Acts 2:23, 4:28 and 20:28. The first two of these texts are more limited in scope; they emphasize that Christ's death is according to

Paul in the same speech calls the gospel of the grace of God (v. 24) and the preaching of the kingdom (v. 25). When this is called “counsel” or “plan” it proves that God's work for salvation is not an improvisation but according to His plan and His divine will. Paul in this context emphasizes in particular the word “whole”: he has preached the whole counsel of God. No part of God's work of salvation has been neglected by him in his preaching. Therefore Paul cannot be blamed when a hearer is condemned and punished by God. For Paul did not give a reduced version of the gospel.

This expression of Paul has been used, correctly to my view, as a rule for preaching. No part of the whole plan of God's salvation for sinners should be neglected in the preaching. It is very easy, however, to neglect some part of the full plan of God. When a minister chooses a text he can handle or he has an idea about, he can easily be one-sided in his choice of a text. When a minister has the need of the congregation foremost in his mind he can choose texts he thinks the congregation needs and again be one-sided. The catechism, concentrating on the doctrinal structure of God's revelation contains a survey of the content of Scripture. As such the catechism is helpful for the congregation to grasp the central content of God's revelation. It is helpful for the minister, too, since it can prevent one-sidedness in his preaching. Just as continued text preaching is beneficial to keep catechism preaching fresh, so continued catechism preaching is beneficial to keep text preaching well rounded.

Two practical objections

The main question has now been answered: catechism preaching cannot be rejected for the reason that only Scripture should be preached. More objections, however, have been brought in against catechism preaching. In this section I would like to discuss two objections stating that catechism preaching is not feasible for practical reasons.

It is sometimes thought that catechism preaching is by definition impractical. The doctrines are preached but they are separated from real life. Catechism preaching has no application to the life of the hearers.⁹

God's plan. The third speaks of the comprehensive plan of God.

9 See the second objection to catechism preaching in the article of D. Macleod, “Preaching and Systematic Theology”: “Furthermore, confessions and catechisms present doctrine abstracted from its existential

It is always one of the greatest challenges for the preacher to preach in such a way that the hearers understand the implications of God's Word for their lives. Preaching should be directed to people in their circumstances. It should touch the heart of the listeners so that they realize the importance of the message for themselves and know what they should do with it. This is, however, a general aspect of preaching. The requirement that the sermon should apply to the listeners is not limited to catechism preaching, it is a requirement for all preaching. When a minister preaches a specific text he faces the same requirement. Preachers will, from time to time, fail to show the relevance of the sermon for the listeners. That does not mean, however, that it is in general impossible to apply the text to the lives of the people.

Is it, then, by definition impossible to preach the catechism in such a way that the importance of the doctrine for daily life is highlighted? Everyone who knows the Heidelberg Catechism will say: No. That has to do with the way the doctrine is explained here. In the Heidelberg Catechism the application is given in the explanation of the doctrine.

The Heidelberg Catechism sets the tone in its famous first question and answer: "What is your only comfort in life and death? That I am not my own, but belong with body and soul, both in life and in death, to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ . . ." This is very personal and very applicable. It tells me that I am not left on my own. I need not face life and death all alone. Jesus Christ has bought me with his blood. He takes care of me.

When the Catechism next discusses what I need to know, we do not receive a dry table of contents. I have to know, first, how great *my* sin and misery are; second how *I* am delivered from all *my* sins and misery; third, how *I* am to be thankful to God for such deliverance. This determines the manner in which the doctrine is explained. In all subsequent answers the Catechism discusses how I am personally involved.

To give one more example, the doctrine of the Trinity. That our God is three persons is a reality, a fact, but does it have significance for our lives? The Catechism speaks about the Trinity in connection with the Apostles' Creed. It confesses the fact of the Trinity on the basis of revelation: "Since there is only one God, why do you speak of three persons, Father, Son, and

context—the life-situation of Scripture—and thus obscure its practical relevance or tempts us not to apply it at all,” in S.T. Logan, Jr. *The Preacher and Preaching: Reviving the Art in the Twentieth Century* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1986) p. 269.

Holy Spirit? Because God has so revealed Himself in his Word that these three distinct persons are the one, true, eternal God.” But already before that the catechism has shown the importance of the three persons for us: God the Father and our creation; God the Son and our redemption; God the Holy Spirit and our sanctification (Lord's Day 8). God is as triune God involved in our lives.

Because of the practical character of the Heidelberg Catechism it is easy to preach the doctrine in a way that is directly relevant for the hearers. Many beginning ministers have experienced that the application is easier in the catechism sermon than in the text sermon.

It must be admitted that the tone of the Westminster Shorter Catechism is different. This may well be the reason for the objection related above that preaching the doctrine would be irrelevant. The Shorter Catechism does not bring the doctrine close by speaking about you and me; its goal is to give a crystal clear explanation of the doctrine. Man usually is referred to in the third person. Consider for example the rightly famous first question and answer.¹⁰ “What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.” Here, however, the application is not far away. If it is man's chief end to glorify and to enjoy God, then I have to aim at glorifying God and living close to Him. We are also helped here because the second question and answer, by exception, addresses us: “What rule has God given to direct *us* how *we* may glorify and enjoy Him? The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct *us* how *we* may glorify and enjoy Him.” Taking this into account a sermon that addresses the hearers can easily be made on this doctrine.

It will be more difficult, to be honest, in other instances. Take for example the Trinity, Q & A 6: “How many persons are there in the Godhead? There are three persons in the Godhead: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.” The Catechism does not give any indication why this doctrine is important. Yet the presupposition, also of the Westminster Catechisms, is that these confessed truths are important in the lives of the believers. All the more there is reason to remind the congregation, not only of the fact, but also of the importance of these doctrines. Already the older explanations on

10See on this the article of B.B. Warfield, “The First Question of the Westminster Shorter Catechism” in *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work* (Repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981) pp. 379ff.

the Westminster Shorter Catechism show the practical relevance of the confessed truths.¹¹

It cannot be maintained that catechism preaching is by definition preaching without application.

The second practical objection brought in against catechism preaching is that it is repetitive. The Heidelberg Catechism was, after it had been completed, divided into 52 Lord's Days, with the expressed purpose to be preached through on the 52 Lord's Days of a year. Calvin's catechism was divided in 55 Lord's Days. Unless they had a longer year in Geneva that means that preaching the catechism would stretch out over 13 months. Today the churches that maintain catechism preaching are somewhat more free¹² but I think that in most congregations catechism preaching will have come full circle in a year and a half. Is this repetition not deadening? Most listeners have already heard it over and over again.

11 See e.g. the monumental explanation in two volumes of Th. Boston, *Commentary on the Shorter Catechism* (repr. Edmonton: Still Waters Revival Books, 1993). See for the Trinity: vol. 1, pp. 142ff, with brief indications for the application at the end.

12 The Church Order of the Synod of Dort 1618/19 took over the earlier regulation that the ministers everywhere, according to the rule, must explain briefly the summary of the Christian doctrine contained in the Heidelberg Catechism in the afternoon service “so that it can be concluded yearly,” see the text in Th. L. Haitjema, “De prediking als catechismus-prediking,” p. 291. Synod Utrecht 1905 allowed more freedom by adding: “as much as possible” (can be concluded yearly), see Joh. Jansen, *Korte verklaring van de kerkenordening* (Kampen: Kok, 1923) p. 296. See also W. W. J. Van Oene, *With Common Consent: A Practical guide to the Use of the Church Order of the Canadian Reformed Churches* (Winnipeg: Premier, 1990) pp. 247f. Catechism preaching was assigned to the afternoon service because traditionally the teaching element was more prominent in this service.

The first answer to this objection is that those who made the regulation of catechism preaching thought the repetition an advantage, instead of a disadvantage. They saw a need for repeating the doctrine over and over again, so that the church members would know it thoroughly. And when we think about it we have to agree. The catechism deals with the summary of the doctrine of God and His great works in history: creation, promise of redemption, Christ's work, salvation, sanctification, and renewal of all things. These should be repeated since they are the central tenets of the Christian faith.¹³

It is common experience that a firm grasp on things tends to disappear without constant repetition. You may have learned at school all 50 States of the United States but unless this knowledge is refreshed it will over time become very hazy. Imagine—and it is not an imagined example, things like that have happened—that someone who has a friend in L.A. asks someone going to New York to deliver a parcel to his friend. Or, even worse, someone who goes to India is asked to deliver something in Indonesia. Unless the knowledge acquired in geography class is refreshed things become blurred.

This should not happen to the knowledge of God. When we pray to Him we should know who He is. When we praise Him we should know what He did for us. When we ask things from Him we should know what He promises us. Daily we live before Him, and have to know His will in order to do it. To live with God we need constantly to be reminded of God's revelation.

The things of the faith bear repeating. Paul says it in Phil. 3:1: “To write the same things to you is not irksome to me, and it is safe for you.” Paul had taught these things before. But he knows how easily they are forgotten, snowed under by the many things that happen daily. He therefore puts them in writing so that the congregation can go back to these truths. (See also Phil 3:18.)

In much the same way the basic content of Scripture should be repeated so that we do not lose sight of it. Catechism preaching is an important means to keep fresh the basic knowledge of the mighty works of God. We have to live in Christ “rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith just as we were taught,” Col. 2:7.

13 See also E. G. van Teylingen, “Der Katechismus in der Predigt” in L. Coenen (ed.) *Handbuch zum Heidelberger Katechismus* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1963) pp. 192-194.

Preaching a topic

As a final remark I would like to point to the fact that ministers often feel the need to preach on a topic. I would not be surprised if not a few ministers preach a kind of private catechetical sermon from time to time. I have heard that kind of sermon, but let me give an example that I did not hear. A minister realizes at a certain moment that his congregation needs more instruction on baptism. So he decides to take as his text Matth. 28:19. In his sermon he discusses all the places of the New Testament where the word “baptism” occurs. He deals successively with 1. the baptism of John the Baptist, 2. the baptism instituted by Jesus Christ, and 3. the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

This is, obviously, not an example of a textual sermon. Matth. 28:19 may officially be the text, but it only serves as occasion for the sermon. This can easily be seen. In this text the relation between the Trinity and baptism is central, but this connection does not function in the sermon. The sermon only uses the word “baptism” from the text. Actually, the sermon looks like a sermon on the section on baptism from the catechism. Yet, it is not a catechism sermon, either.

Two differences can be noticed. In the first place, this approach confuses words with concepts. The impression is given that the biblical teaching concerning the sacrament of baptism can be received by collecting all the texts that use the word “baptism.” It can easily be shown, however, that this is not correct. To understand the biblical teaching on the sacrament of baptism the precursor of baptism, circumcision, also has to be considered. Since the material was collected around the *word* “baptism” these texts cannot play a role. The word-method leaves out many texts that should be taken into consideration. On the other hand, too many texts are included. The two texts mentioning baptism with the Spirit contain the word “baptism” but do not speak about the sacrament of baptism. A sermon on baptism based on the word, is on the one side too inclusive, on the other too limited.

The second problem with this type of preaching is that it neglects what the Church has learned about the doctrines during many centuries. The Church has been preaching and teaching baptism for centuries, and in the course of this learned to avoid pitfalls and misleading expressions. The Church has been exposed to heretical teaching and has consciously rejected that on the basis of Scripture. All this is neglected, the minister starts all over again on his own as if we still live at the end of the first century. When a topic is preached it is better to use the wisdom the Church has garnered through centuries of teaching. In other words, when a topic is preached it is better to do so according to the catechism.

Actually, strict textual preaching and catechetical preaching form an ideal

combination, in my opinion. Text preaching teaches the specific meaning of a specific text. It is as varied as the Scripture is varied. It can highlight a detail from God's work that took place thousands of years ago, or an aspect of the law of God. Preaching on texts gives a kaleidoscopic variety. It is always new, and always surprising. In addition, specific needs can easily be addressed by choosing specific texts.

The congregation, however, should not lose sight of the great themes, the underlying structure of the Bible. This prevents unintentional one-sidedness, and gives resistance against false teachings and the vanities of our own time. The faith of the congregation needs a backbone. This is provided by the catechism.

Catechism preaching, then, is a good means for the congregation to remain "obedient to the standard of teaching to which you were committed," Rom. 6:17.

Christology and Mission

Alasdair I. Macleod

Jesus Christ is both gospel and gospeller. He is the heart and glory of our message, the one whom we proclaim as Saviour and Lord. He is also the missionary, the one who proclaimed the good news on earth and who continues to extend his kingdom from heaven. All that we say and do in mission looks back to Him, looks up to Him and looks forward to Him.

1. CHRIST THE EVANGEL

New Testament evangelism was simply obsessed with Christ. A few verses from the book of Acts will recall this. Peter's sermon at Pentecost preached Jesus of Nazareth, crucified and risen, and now Lord and Christ (2:22ff), and later Peter would describe God's message to Israel as "the good news of peace through Jesus Christ" (10:36). Philip proclaimed "the Christ" in Samaria, and told the Ethiopian "the good news about Jesus" (8:5, 35). The missionaries to Antioch went to the Greeks with "the good news about the Lord Jesus" (11:20). The newly converted Saul preached in the synagogues "that Jesus is the Son of God," and told Athens "the good news about Jesus and the resurrection" (9:20; 17:18). His letters confirm that emphasis (e.g. Rom. 1:1-4; 1 Cor. 1:23, 15:1-7; 2 Cor. 4:5). We are called to the same grand obsession.

(a) The Broad Sweep

We must speak the big Christ, the full biblical Christ, into our cultures. Evangelism needs not a weak Christology but a strong one, not a narrow focus but a broad Christological sweep. We may highlight some fundamentals, some non-negotiables.

The Christ of the gospel is the *divine* Christ. The Scriptures describe someone who deserves divine names and titles, who possesses divine attributes, who performs divine functions, and who enjoys divine prerogatives. We fail to do justice to His identity if we portray Him as anyone less than a person to whom the only appropriate response is worship and surrender. We should not keep our high Christology for post conversion teaching. That Christology is essential for evangelism because our message demands commitment of heart and soul. Only God is worth the ultimate commitment.

He is the *human* Christ. We affirm the real and perfect humanity of one who truly came among us, who shared our experiences in our environment. This is the Christ of the human body, mind, will, and emotions. He knew what it was to hunger and thirst, to feel pain and to need sleep, to have to choose, to be angry and afraid, to be joyful and

sorrowful, to be tempted with unique ferocity, and at last to die. Among other things this means that we proclaim the solidarity and understanding of the human Christ to a world of anguish. He has been here, He has walked alongside, He has known human life from the inside.

He became the *crucified* Christ. The suffering of Messiah had been foreshadowed and foretold in Old Testament Scripture, and Jesus died in pursuance of God's plan and in fulfilment of prophecy. He went deliberately and voluntarily to the cross to offer sacrifice, to make atonement, to become propitiation, to win reconciliation, to purchase redemption, to satisfy justice. The only rationale for the death of the sinless is that He died as substitute, made sin for us, became a curse for us (2 Cor. 5:21, Gal. 3:13). We announce good news, offering forgiveness because Jesus offered Himself.

He is the *risen* Christ. The Jesus who was buried rose physically from the dead, with a body which could be seen and touched. That resurrection signified the vindication of His claims and the acceptance of His work. The risen Jesus is the triumphant one, victor over the curse of sin, the powers of evil and the grip of the grave. He ascended to heaven to sit at the right hand, His sin-bearing over, and to rule from the right hand with all things placed under His feet. The earliest Christian preaching throbbed with excitement, because Jesus was alive. Our evangelism too should communicate the wonder of a living and contemporary Lord.

He is the *returning* Christ. Jesus prophesied His own visible, glorious and decisive return, when the Son of Man would raise the dead and judge the world. The gospel promises the glories of the new heavens and new earth to all who believe, but warns also of an alternative sentence and destiny. The parousia gives us a missionary horizon, and underscores the seriousness and urgency of proclamation and response in the age of grace. Paul urged Timothy to preach the word and to do the work of an evangelist, solemnly charging him "in the presence of the one who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of His appearing and His kingdom" (2 Tim. 4:1-5).

And he is the *welcoming* Christ. Gospel proclamation will not only announce what God has done in Christ, but will also call sinners to commit their lives to this Christ. The indicative and the imperative must both be present. We follow the Lord in demanding repentance and faith, and in assuring all who come of full and free acceptance by Him. The Jesus of the gospels still says, "Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). The early church summoned, argued, pleaded, encouraged. Today's church

is preaching a different gospel if the note of open welcome is ever absent.

(b) The Only Name

There is no other Saviour, no other gospel. This is the exclusive Christ who insisted He was the way, the truth, and the life, the only way to the Father (John 14:6). He commissioned His disciples (and clearly also those who followed, “to the end of the age”) to go and disciple all nations (Matthew 28:18-20), to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:47). For the apostle Peter, Jesus was the only one in whom salvation could be found, and he could hardly have been more emphatic when he added “no other name *under heaven*”—there was no other possibility of salvation anywhere on earth (Acts 4:10-12). For the apostle Paul, his Gentile readers had once been “without hope and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:12-13). Peter, Paul, and the other apostles travelled the world, suffering hardship and persecution, to warn of a day of judgment and announce the good news of Christ. They never suggested there was hope in any of the religions which men had devised, and these were denounced as the prophets had rejected their predecessors in the Old Testament. The missionary urgency of the early Christians in response to the great commission is witness to the New Testament's insistence on the saving uniqueness of Jesus Christ.

The twentieth century has seen various attempts to offer new theological interpretations of the relationship between Christianity and other religions. We may note three representative approaches.

Fulfilment theology understands the religions to be bearers of truth which is partial and preparatory, destined to be fulfilled in Christ. A parallel is drawn between the Old Testament and these faiths, and it is argued that as Christ came to fulfil the one so he also fulfils the others. Fulfilment thinking will always be associated with the seminal work of J. N. Farquhar, *The Crown of Hinduism* (1913). For Farquhar the searchings and insights of the Hindu find their completion and crown in Jesus Christ. The theology was developed by R. C. Zaehner in response to a broader range of religions. Frank Whaling sums up the concepts which Zaehner saw as fulfilled in Christ: “Incarnation (the Hindu deities Rama and Krishna, and the Buddhist Bodhisattvas), saintliness and morality (the Hindu hero Yudhisthira), humility (Taoism), mysticism (the Indian religious pole), suffering (Job), dying to self (the Buddha), resurrection (Zoroaster), and the prophetic religious pole (Israel).” (*Christian Theology and World Religions*, p. 86). This view represents a misunderstanding of the revelatory uniqueness of the Old Testament. It is not to be placed alongside the traditions of man striving for God, but it is the religion of the one God,

revealed by Him to His covenant people and promising Christ as its fulfilment. It is Christianity before the historical advent of the Son of God in flesh.

Inclusivist theology takes us further away from the parameters of Scripture, regarding the adherents of other religions as already included within the people of Christ, saved by Him through their own religion. This has been developed by Roman Catholic theologians in the post-Vatican II period. Karl Rahner looks on the member of another faith not as a non-Christian but as an “anonymous Christian,” as one who “lives in a state of Christ's grace through faith, hope, and love, yet who has no explicit knowledge of the fact that his life is oriented in grace-given salvation to Jesus Christ” (A. Richardson, ed., *New Dictionary of Christian Theology*, p. 23). Hans Kung distinguishes between the “ordinary” way of salvation through world religions and the “extraordinary” way through the Roman Catholic Church. For Raymond Pannikar the Christian and the Hindu both share salvation in the cosmic Christ, though he remain unknown to the latter. “When a Hindu is saved, he is saved by the grace of Christ . . . and yet he may know nothing about Christianity” (*The Unknown Christ of Hinduism*, p. 39). He receives this salvation through the sacraments of Hinduism because the unknown Christ is active within them.

Pluralist theology moves away from any insistence on the superiority of Christ toward a full acceptance of the independent validity of other religions. Early this century Ernst Troeltsch advocated a theological relativism which denied any one religious figure could be absolutely true for all mankind. Each way was true for a particular people at that time in their culture, and each was a path leading to the same goal. The most influential contemporary exponent of the approach is John Hick, editor of *The Myth of God Incarnate*, and more recently co-editor of *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, a collection of essays by pluralist theologians. He removes Christ from his central position and replaces Him with an ultimate Reality beyond all the different religious traditions. Each is a valid recognition of this Reality, and there is no place for apologetic debate or missionary proclamation. It is surely passing absurdity that those who claim to be Christian theologians should attempt to be wiser than Christ, denying to Him the status He claimed for Himself, and hoping this will lead to a more harmonious co-existence with other world faiths.

In contrast to the above, we stress the exclusive claims of Jesus Christ, over against the mutually contradictory claims of the religions. That latter point is critical as we confront fulfilment, inclusivist and pluralist stances. The religions are saying such radically different things that no Christian can logically see them as fulfilled in Christ, indwelt by

Christ, or as valid as Christ. Indeed adherents of other faiths often side with evangelicals in their incredulity that liberal theologians can so blithely ignore or relativise the differences between their religions.

Our defence of the uniqueness of the Christian revelation must be focused in terms of the unique claims of Jesus. Amidst all the diversity and complexity of the various traditions He stands out on His own as God come in the flesh. The Jews heard His claims and condemned Him for blasphemy. For Muslims, Muhammad is the greatest of the prophets, but less than Allah, and thus they reject the name Muhammadan while we glory in the name Christian. Siddharta Gautama, who became the Buddha, made no claim to be divine, and when his followers asked the dying teacher how best they could remember him he said it did not matter much whether they remembered him or not—the essential thing was the teaching. Hinduism has its “avatars” or descents, but these are qualitatively distinct from the historical and unrepeatable *incarnation* of the eternal Son. John Hick has recognised the logic of traditional incarnational theology: “For if Jesus was literally God incarnate, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity living a human life, so that the Christian religion was founded by God-on-earth in person, it is then very hard to escape from the traditional view that all mankind must be converted to the Christian faith. However . . .” (*God Has Many Names*, p. 5).

The leaders of other faiths have offered wise sayings, but none was ever qualified to atone for sins. Every prophet and guru returns to the dust until the great day, but Jesus has risen from the grave. The message of salvation by grace through faith in God incarnate, crucified and risen, is incomparable.

It is important to note that our focus on Christ and our critique of other religions is not based on some perception of Western cultural superiority. We received this faith from Asia, its early theological development owed much to North Africa, and it is now a world religion, growing spectacularly in parts of Africa, Latin America, and South East Asia. These non-Western churches are contributing their theological insights as the Bible gives answers to questions raised by their cultures. Indeed the explanatory power of Scripture in such a diverse range of peoples is a powerful testimony to its divine inspiration.

Nor is our position to be taken as a denial of God's common grace. There is good in the lives of those who follow other faiths. We see family love, heroism, art, literature, music, and science, all due to the common grace of God to His own image-bearers. But this is not to recognise their religions as vehicles of saving truth. We call our fellow-sinners to Jesus Christ the only Saviour, that they might come to

dedicate their talents to the Lord who alone is the source of every gift.

(c) The One for All

The unique Christ is also the universal Christ, the one whose gospel must be proclaimed to all, and the one whose gospel can be offered to all.

We will undoubtedly be faced with the question of the unevangelised. What is the fate of those who have not been reached with the good news? There are three positions claimed by evangelicals today, each one assuming that salvation comes only through Jesus Christ.

The first, and least credible on any biblical basis, is that those who have not had the opportunity to hear of Christ in this life will be given that chance after death. The debate has centred around 1 Peter 3:18 to 4:6, perhaps the most obscure passage in the whole of the New Testament. It most probably refers to the pre-existent Christ preaching through Noah to the people of Noah's own day. Whatever it may mean, it should be interpreted in the light of the clearer. We are told that now is the day of salvation (2 Cor. 6:2), and that man is destined to die once and after that to face judgment (Heb. 9:27). The New Testament gives no exegetical credence to any view other than that destiny is fixed at death.

The second option is that some of the unevangelised may be saved in this life without hearing of Christ. This view is becoming very popular, argued in Britain especially by J. N. D. Anderson. He finds light on the subject in the Old Testament, where Jews turned to God in repentance, casting themselves on His mercy. Their repentance and their sacrifices did not save them. God saved them through Christ. "It is true that they had a special divine revelation in which to put their trust. But might it not be true of the follower of some other religion that the God of all mercy had worked in his heart by his Spirit, bringing him in some measure to realise his sin and need for forgiveness, and enabling him, in the twilight as it were, to throw himself on God's mercy?" (*Christianity and World Religions*, pp. 148-9). The position was also held by as orthodox a Calvinist as W. G. T. Shedd, author of the classic work on eternal punishment. In his *Dogmatic Theology* he appealed to the Westminster Confession, X:III: "Elect infants, dying in infancy, are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who worketh when, and where, and how He pleaseth. So also are all other elect persons, who are incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the word." He understood the latter to refer not just to mental incapacity but to "those of the pagan world as God pleases to regenerate without the use of the written revelation" (Vol. II, p. 708). He insisted that the crucial factor was the penitence of the pagan, who threw himself upon

the mercy of God, and whose faith would become an explicit and conscious trust in Christ were Christ to be made known to him. Shedd also argued that this extraordinary work of the Spirit, which illustrated the sovereignty of God in His exercise of mercy, was not to guide the church in ordinary evangelistic labour. The command was to preach the Gospel to every creature and this alone was to direct missionary strategy.

The third option is that those who never hear of Christ are lost. This was the view which held sway among conservative theologians over the centuries. Key passages traditionally cited in its favour are found in Paul's letter to the Romans. Early in the epistle, the apostle discusses the significance of the general revelation to which all have been exposed since creation. From the things which have been made man infers the eternal power and divine nature of the One who lies behind them all (1:18-20). The message is "clearly seen," it gets through, but since the Fall it is suppressed by the sinner who substitutes idolatry of the created for the worship of the Creator (vs. 21-23). In 2:14-15 Paul develops his theme with reference to the conscience. The pagan knows he does wrong, failing to live up even to the light he has. The conclusion must be that the unevangelised are under judgment, not because of failure to believe in a Christ of whom they have never heard, but for rejecting the revelation which they have been given and breaking the law which they have known. Paul declares the insufficiency of general revelation, and gives no hint of the possible salvation of those who only have the light of creation and conscience. The other passage commonly appealed to is Romans 10:9-15, where Paul argues for the absolute necessity of missionary proclamation. To be saved we must confess Jesus as Lord. To call on the Lord we must first believe, to believe we must hear, and to hear there must be a preacher sent. Again there is no suggestion of salvation through Christ without hearing and receiving Him. This third position is the one which accords with the missionary logic of the New Testament. If it is indeed that held by us, then we should be distinguished by missionary passion and urgency. Can we believe in the lostness of multitudes and be evangelistically complacent?

So the gospel of Christ must be heard by all. But can it genuinely be offered to all? The answer is an unequivocal "Yes." We are to proclaim salvation through Christ alone to all who need to hear His gospel. We are to offer Christ Himself to them. He is suitable for all and His gospel is to be made open to all. The preacher has no warrant to withhold the offer from the sinner, and the sinner has every warrant to embrace Christ and be saved. John Murray stressed the free overture of grace in a powerful and persuasive article on "The Atonement and the Free Offer of the Gospel." "It must be said without reserve that there is no

limit or qualification to the *overture* of grace in the gospel proclamation . . . The doctrines of particular election, differentiating love, limited atonement do not erect any fence around the offer in the gospel . . . Any inhibition or reserve in presenting the overtures of grace should no more characterise our proclamation than it characterised the Lord's witness." (*Collected Writings*, Vol. 1, pp. 81-82). The gospel must be preached with freedom.

It must also be presented with relevance. The universal Christ must be spoken into each culture, in a way that is appropriate to that particular culture. On this question of contextualization, David Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen's vocabulary is helpful. They refer to the indispensability of both "faithfulness" and "meaningfulness," the demand to remain authentic to God's revelation at the same time as striving to be relevant to the context of the hearers (*Contextualization*, pp. 199-200). It is important for us to recognise how different another thought-world may be, so that we listen, understand, empathise, try to look through others' eyes, and so be able to translate the gospel. But we must never change the content of that gospel, a tendency most radically illustrated in those who offer a different Christ, a non-supernatural or black or feminine Christ, moulded in the image of the assumptions of preacher or hearer. We have to translate without transforming, demonstrating the relevance of the biblical Christ to this person, this world-view, in language, concepts, parables, meaningful to the other.

2. CHRIST THE EVANGELIST

For Reformed theology God is always sovereign in the accomplishment of redemption and in the extension of his kingdom. R. B. Kuiper was reflecting this emphasis in his *God-Centred Evangelism*. The first chapter, "God the Author of Evangelism," highlighted the importance of seeing salvation and evangelism as both having their roots in eternity. "In short, before the world was, the Triune God formed a plan of salvation to be executed in its several reciprocally distributed parts by the Father as Sender and Principal, by the Son as Sent, Mediator and Sender, and by the Holy Spirit as Sent and Applier. It follows that the Triune God is the author of salvation. And, inasmuch as He has executed in time the eternal plan of salvation, has revealed its execution in the gospel, and has ordained the gospel as the indispensable means of salvation, it is no less clear that the Triune God is the author of evangelism" (p. 14).

Theology more broadly has grown accustomed in recent decades to the use of the term *missio Dei*. The idea is usually traced back to the Willingen Conference of 1952 and its stress on mission as derived from the nature of God. David Bosch saw this use of *missio* as properly bringing together ancient and modern usage. The word was classically employed in connection with the doctrine of the Trinity, the sending of the Son by the

Father, and of the Spirit by the Father and the Son. The more recent language of “mission” in relation to the movement of the church into the world dates from the sixteenth century. So for Bosch the terminology underscored the trinitarian foundation of mission, helping thinking to move from an ecclesiological to a trinitarian perspective on missiology, stressing mission as God's work from first to last. (*Witness to the World*, pp. 238-242).

Bosch's more recent *Transforming Mission* included some criticisms of developments which have resulted in a wider understanding of the *missio Dei*, mission taking place beyond the church, without the church. But he defended the continued usefulness of the term: “On the other hand, it cannot be denied that the *missio Dei* notion has helped to articulate the conviction that neither the church nor any other human agent can ever be considered the author or bearer of mission. Mission is, primarily and ultimately, the work of the Triune God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, for the sake of the world, a ministry in which the church is privileged to participate. Mission has its origin in the heart of God. God is a fountain of sending love” (p. 392).

As we set the ministry of Christ in that context we see Him not only as God come so that there might be a gospel, but also God come to reach out with that gospel. He who is sent by the missionary God is Himself missionary God, and He challenges us to involvement in mission, in His footsteps and under His Lordship.

(a) The Exemplary Christ

Christ is the supreme model for our living. We are to imitate the God Man who both revealed God in a unique way and who lived out the law of God in a perfect human life. The imitation surely includes our following the example of the evangelistic Christ, with His compassionate commitment to seek the lost. John records the sent One commissioning others to follow the pattern set in His mission: “As the Father has sent Me, I am sending you” (20:21). Michael Griffiths notes that Jesus gave His disciples “a model of the missionary life” before they ever went to the nations. “He does not merely command them—His own life and ministry provided them with a pattern and prototype for all subsequent missionary endeavour. It is not enough that missionaries should look for models and heroes in the missionary pioneers of the nineteenth century . . . We should not be content with later missionary biographies—but go back to the first missionary biographies written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John” (*The Example of Jesus*, p. 155).

Of course Jesus Himself did not go to the nations. While His preaching and healing ministries touch Samaritan and Gentile, the primacy of

Israel is evident. The particularism of His earthly ministry is most dramatically expressed in the Gospel of Matthew. In chapter 10 the twelve disciples are instructed, “Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel” (vs. 5-6). And in the encounter with the Canaanite woman who begs for the release of her daughter Jesus insists, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel . . . It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs” (15:24, 26). In His discussion of the latter incident, Peter Cotterell cautions against exaggerating the restriction. “The point of the anecdote is that Jesus' own apparently unqualified statement of an exclusive mission to Israel notwithstanding, and despite the clear indication that the woman is not from Israel, still she is given what she wants: her daughter was healed. Thus we would be wrong to follow slavishly a traditional understanding of an entirely exclusive ministry of Jesus. There was an inevitable primary mission to Israel, but even in the pre-passion period of the life of Jesus the universal salvific task of the Servant of the Lord was not overlooked” (*Mission and Meaninglessness*, pp. 145-6).

The focus on Israel was a temporary phenomenon, for this unique period in redemptive history, preparatory to Pentecost and mission to the world. It is vital to note that the Jesus of the very Jewish Gospel of Matthew is portrayed as pointing unambiguously to the future expansion of His kingdom, well beyond the confines of Israel. He is astonished at the faith of a centurion and declares, “I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith. I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside . . .” (8:10-12; see also 21:43; 24:14; 28:18-20).

(i) Incarnational Model

Before looking at any of the specifics of the ministry of Jesus, we need to see that the incarnation itself functions as a model for mission. The Son moves into our world and becomes profoundly involved with us. It is obvious that there are unique elements in the radical identification of the One who suffers and dies in our place. But He Himself offers the “into” of the incarnation as a paradigm for His disciples' mission: “As You sent Me into the world, I have sent them into the world” (John 17:18).

In his recent book, *The Contemporary Christian*, John Stott includes a call for the church to recognise her “double identity” and practise “incarnational Christianity.” By “double identity” he means that the church is both called out of the world and sent back into the world. He borrows Alec Vidler's phrase “holy

worldliness” to express the importance of being qualitatively different from the world and yet meaningfully immersed in it for the service of Christ. To fulfil its mission the church must neither withdraw from the world nor become conformed to the world. He sees this holy worldliness exhibited supremely in the Christ whose incarnation is its perfect embodiment. Jesus assumed full and involved humanness without ever compromising His own holy identity.

Stott goes on to apply this model to the church. “We have to penetrate other people's worlds, as He penetrated ours—the world of their thinking (as we struggle to understand their misunderstandings of the gospel), the world of their feeling (as we try to empathize with their pain), and the world of their living (as we sense the humiliation of their social situation, whether poverty, homelessness, unemployment, or discrimination)” (p. 244). He appeals for a focus on Sunday as the day when the church gathers for worship, fellowship, and teaching, and for the rest of the week to be devoted to life in the world as we go out in service. “And in that rhythm of Sunday-weekday, gathering-scattering, coming-going and worship-mission the church would express its holy worldliness, and its structure would conform to its double identity” (p. 247).

(ii) Public Proclamation

Our public proclamation of the gospel means that we are following in the Jesus tradition. The Synoptic Gospels introduce us to a Christ whose ministry is full of missionary travel and evangelistic preaching. In the first chapter of Mark we hear of Jesus coming into Galilee, proclaiming the good news, announcing the coming of the time, the nearness of the kingdom, and calling for repentance and faith (vs. 14-15). Later in that chapter, as He insists on moving on through neighbouring villages to preach there also, He says “That is why I have come.” And Mark records that He travelled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons (vs. 38-39). Matthew offers the same pattern (4:12-17; 4:23; 9:35). Lucien Legrand comments on the “coming forth” of Mark 1:38, in the context of Mark's story, rejecting the triviality of the explanation that reduces it to coming forth from Capernaum. “The perspectives are far more immense. Jesus' ‘emergence’ suggests the whole style of His ministry and implies the beginning of the journey upon which he is thrust by the urgency of a proclamation of the gospel. Under the impulse of the Spirit that has consecrated Him to proclaim the Good News, Jesus finds it impossible to remain rooted to one spot . . . the image of

someone on the move, on the road, the bearer of the Good Tidings, Himself carried forward by this Word, 'sent,' 'missioned' by the Spirit as the herald of new times" (*Unity and Plurality*, pp. 45-46).

In Luke's Gospel, (4:16ff) Jesus finds the agenda for His public ministry in the words of Isaiah 61:1-2a. He reads the passage in the Nazareth synagogue, and begins His exposition by saying, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." The messenger of Isaiah is a Messianic figure, anointed by Jehovah, and sent by Him to proclaim good news (see also Is. 40:9). At the end of that chapter, Luke too records Jesus' insistence on gospel preaching as integral to His appointed task: "But, He said, 'I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.' And He kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea" (vs. 43-44).

The early church was following the pattern set by the Lord when they engaged in public proclamation, preaching in synagogues and the open air. Michael Green highlights the importance of these opportunities for the dissemination of the faith in the world of the first century. He describes the synagogue as providing "the seedbed for evangelism among the Jews," and refers to "the superb opportunity which the synagogue system provided for Christian evangelists to exploit: for undoubtedly it was one of the most important factors in the early spread of the faith." Any man in the congregation could be called on to read and expound the Scriptures, and so Paul and others were glad to accept the invitation to do that, just as Jesus of Nazareth Himself had done in His home synagogue. Jesus had also preached regularly in the open air, and such preaching is attested in Acts, from Jerusalem to Athens, in places where groups could be found ready to listen. Green informs us that the approach was no innovation in Judaism, but had long been employed in Palestine and elsewhere in a variety of settings. "So there was nothing particularly novel in the open air work of Christian missionaries. The ancient world was used to it, both in its Jewish form, and as practised by the wandering Cynic missionaries." In both synagogue and open air proclamation then, Green is right to assert that "the disciples followed their Master" (*Evangelism in the Early Church*, pp. 234-237). We too must engage in public evangelism, proclaiming the good news in ways that are appropriate to our own cultures and that exploit the distinctive communication opportunities of our own age.

(iii) **Personal Conversation**

Jesus was also a personal evangelist. He dealt with individuals as well as with groups. In relating to people where they were, and not

according to some stereotyped method with its formulaic summary, he treated them as personally significant and individually unique. Michael Griffiths stresses the point: "He treats each individual differently according to situation and need. Too often personal evangelism is taught as a standardised method as though we were dealing with stereotyped, impersonal 'souls.' Irrespective of their own distinct, individual background and temperament, we endeavour to force people into an identical mould . . . It is as though we have devised a scheme which the Holy Spirit never thought it worth mentioning to any New Testament writer!" (*op. cit.*, p. 149). Griffiths goes on to note two books which develop the theme of the model and challenge given by this dimension of the ministry of Jesus. So C. G. Trumbull, in his *Taking Men Alive*, said that Jesus won people to faith "by His loving, deeply personal, individual evangelism—conversational evangelism, as it has been well called," and George Soltau's *Personal Work for Christ* drew inspiration from the Lord's example, somewhat arbitrarily dividing the gospel stories into those concerning members of the ruling classes, the middle classes and outcasts, (*ibid.*, pp. 149-151).

For just one account of the conversational evangelism of Jesus we may look at John 4:1-42, the encounter with the Samaritan woman. The Lord initiates the conversation by requesting water and goes on to offer living water to this sinner. He is open to the opportunity and grasps it, even though physically drained. Jesus makes contact in friendship, asking a question and encouraging dialogue, beginning where she is and speaking relevantly to her needs. He moves easily, naturally, and skilfully from the trivial to the significant, from the temporal to the eternal. And all this in spite of cultural hindrances, the problems of race and gender. The woman is surprised that He speaks to a Samaritan (v. 9) and the disciples are surprised to find Him in discussion with a woman (v. 27). Such prejudices are irrelevant to Jesus. His example reminds us of the need to see and seize opportunities, to ignore contemporary barriers, and to engage in person-relative witness. It is also instructive to compare the Nicodemus story in the previous chapter. Jesus speaks to both man and woman, Jew and Samaritan, educated and unlearned, rich and poor, upright and immoral, with respect for individuality, with understanding, with honesty, without patronising or speaking down, and in a personally challenging way.

Michael Green illustrates the proper spontaneity of personal witness in the life of the follower of Christ from the first chapter of John's Gospel, when John the Baptist points two of his disciples to

the Lamb of God. They spend time with Jesus, and then one of them, Andrew, finds his brother, Simon Peter, and brings him to Jesus. The next day Jesus calls Philip of Bethsaida to follow Him, and Philip in turn brings Nathanael (vs. 35ff). Personal discovery should issue in personal evangelism. Green goes on to the practice of the early church and the particular instance of Philip the evangelist and the Ethiopian in Acts 8:26-40. The latter was studying Isaiah 53, but he needed someone to explain it to him, and it is through Philip's one-to-one exposition of this prophecy of Jesus that the man is brought to understanding, faith and baptism. "I have no doubt that Luke intended the story of Philip to illustrate the value of this personal evangelism, and the need that those who practise it have for humility and obedient trust in God, for tact and knowledge of the Scriptures, for directness in pointing to Jesus and for bringing the man to the point of decision. It is not only Luke's sermons in Acts which suggest guidelines for future generations" (*op. cit.*, pp. 270-2).

(iv) Mercy Ministry

Words and deeds went together in the earthly career of Jesus. As He engaged in an itinerant ministry of preaching, He was also regularly involved in an extensive ministry of miracle-working, reaching people from a wide geographical area (e.g. Matt. 4:23-25, 9:35-38; Luke 4:17-19; 6:17-19). These signs attested Him and illustrated His gospel, and these deeds of mercy touched many lives with practical compassion. Later Paul testified that his ministry too married gospel preaching and powerful signs (Rom. 15:18-20). That is not our calling today. Such miracles belonged to the Lord and others in a unique and foundational era. But the church is still challenged to a mission which embraces words and works, to a ministry which demonstrates the diaconal compassion of the Christ who once walked this earth. Mercy ministry should accompany our verbal evangelism, authenticating it as the witness of those who truly follow One who went about doing good (Acts 10:38).

John Stott argues for a partnership between evangelism and social action on the basis of the character of God, the ministry and teaching of Jesus, and the communication of the gospel. The second of these is our particular interest here, and Stott expresses his conclusions with customary clarity. "There was in His ministry an indissoluble bond between evangelism and compassionate service. He exhibited in action the love of God He was proclaiming. . . . So then His words explained His works, and His works dramatized His words. Hearing and seeing, voice and

vision, were joined. Each supported the other. For words remain abstract until they are made concrete in deeds of love, while works remain ambiguous until they are interpreted by the proclamation of the gospel. Words without works lack credibility; works without words lack clarity. So Jesus' works made His words visible; His words made His works intelligible" (*op. cit.*, p. 345).

In an essay entitled, "Kingdom Evangelism," Edmund Clowney insists that our evangelism must reflect the pattern of the kingdom as that was revealed in Jesus' words and deeds. He accepts that the miraculous signs of the New Testament, attesting Christ and His first witnesses, are not continued, their purpose fulfilled. "But the pattern of the kingdom that was revealed through those signs must continue in the church. We cannot be faithful to the words of Jesus if our deeds do not reflect the compassion of His ministry. Kingdom evangelism is therefore holistic as it transmits by word and deed the promise of Christ for body and soul as well as the demand of Christ for body and soul . . . We must follow Him who came to seek and to save that which was lost. Our ministry of mercy shows the compassion of Christ: it cannot be limited to words when we meet the world's wounded on the Jericho road" (Roger S. Greenway, ed., *The Pastor-Evangelist*, pp. 22, 31).

We will follow in the footsteps of Christ, engaging in mercy ministry for its own sake, for His sake, because it is the biblical thing to do. But we are also encouraged to such a ministry because it is linked to evangelism, and under God's blessing will prove a powerful instrument in helping to extend His church. Timothy Keller suggests three ways in which ministries of mercy may promote church growth. Firstly, they offer a dynamic witness to the credibility of the message, advertising the compassion of a particular church to its community. Secondly, these ministries bring the church into contact with many non-Christians it would not otherwise meet, building bridges to those outside through diaconal and counselling services. And thirdly, mercy ministry serves as an effective communication channel for the gospel, a visual aid, arresting the world's attention and fleshing out the truth (*Ministries of Mercy*, pp. 211-6).

(b) The Exalted Christ

The risen Jesus commanded His church to go and proclaim His gospel to the whole world (Matt. 28:18-20; Luke 24:45-49), but that never implied that He ceased to be the evangelist. It was in the context of the commission that He assured them of His authority and promised His permanent presence. The rest of the New Testament illustrates the ceaseless activity of the exalted Lord on behalf of His church's mission.

This, after all, is the One who has had all things placed under His feet and been appointed Head over everything for the church (Eph. 1:21).

Luke introduces Acts as follows: “In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach” (1:1). The clear implication is that this second volume records what Jesus *continues* to do and to teach, and so it proves. In this connection, J. H. Bavinck wrote “The book of the Acts of the Apostles is a missions document par excellence . . . It is first of all striking that the work of missions in the book of Acts is portrayed as the work of the glorified Christ. In this respect its name is actually improper: it should be called the Acts of Christ through his Apostles rather than the Acts of the Apostles. For it repeatedly emphasizes that everything that is done is done by Christ” (*An introduction to the Science of Missions*, p. 36). For example, Bavinck points to the fact that it is Jesus who pours out the Holy Spirit (2:33), it is through the power of Jesus' name that people are healed (3:16; 4:10, 30), He is the Lord whom Saul encounters on the Damascus road and who has chosen him to carry His name to the Gentiles (9:5, 15, 17), and He is surely the Lord who appears to Paul in a vision to assure him of His presence and to encourage him in his evangelism (18:9-10). If we include some of the other “Lord” texts in Acts as referring to Jesus then he is portrayed as the one who adds to His church daily (2:47) and who can open hearts as he does in the case of Lydia (16:14).

It is in the power of the Spirit who comes from Christ and points to Christ that the church of Acts moves out in mission. The activity of the ascended Christ on the day of Pentecost is foundational to the whole subsequent story. That outpouring of the Spirit is an event of epochal significance in the history of salvation. It is climactic in the work of One who came as Lamb and Baptiser, testified to by John the Baptist, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! . . . The Man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is He who will baptise with the Holy Spirit” (John 1:29, 33). In John 20:22 Jesus breathes on His disciples, in anticipation of Pentecost, saying, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” When the exalted Lord fulfils His promise they hear breathing from above, “a sound like the blowing of a violent wind from heaven” (Acts 2:2).

As the church receives the gift of the Spirit, it is following in the footsteps of Jesus. Richard Gaffin sees this particularly in the structure of Luke-Acts, where there is a stress on the link between John's water baptism and Holy Spirit baptism (see Acts 1:5), and where “the movement of thought is in the direction of a parallel between Jesus' own baptism by John and Pentecost: At the Jordan the Spirit was bestowed on Jesus (by the Father) as endowment for the messianic task

before Him in order to accomplish the salvation of the church. At Pentecost the Spirit, having been received by Jesus (from the Father, Acts 2:33) as a reward for the redemptive task behind Him, was bestowed by Him on the church as a gift (the promise of the Father, Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4, 2:33)” (“The Holy Spirit and Charismatic Gifts,” *The Holy Spirit Down To Earth*, RES, p. 4).

The exalted Messiah bestows the Spirit of mission on His church, fulfilling what may be seen as the theme verse of Acts: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (1:8). Against that background, the tongues of Acts 2, which are heard as human languages by the crowd (vs. 6, 8, 11), are symbolic of the international significance of the event and of the church's calling to mission. The responsibility is that of the whole people of God. In verse 18 Peter says that Joel foretold that God would pour out his Spirit in the last days and young and old, male and female, would prophesy. The prophetic endowment given to the church now fulfils the longing expressed by Moses so long before: “I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!” (Num. 11:29). The temporary phenomenon of tongues demonstrates that Christians are now prophets, and that all who have the Spirit are to exercise a ministry of declaring the wonderful works of God.

It is important to emphasise the Christ-centred content of Peter's sermon, as he recounts and applies the story of Jesus up to the day of Pentecost. The coming of the Spirit clearly gives Peter special insight into Scripture and new power in communicating the message, and the focus throughout is on Jesus Christ. The Spirit leads the preacher to proclaim Jesus and leads the hearer to accept Him. And so it must always be. The Lord himself promised that the Spirit would glorify Him (John 16:14). Jim Packer calls this “the floodlight ministry” of the Spirit, his distinctive new covenant role in shining on the Saviour and making people aware of His glory. Packer describes the Spirit's message as always: “Look at *Him*, and see His glory; listen to *Him*, and hear His word; go to *Him*, and have life; get to know *Him*, and taste His gift of joy and peace” (*Keep In Step With The Spirit*, pp. 65-66). The self-effacing Spirit of Jesus empowers the church to proclaim a crucified and risen Saviour. It is under the superintendence of the same exalted Jesus that His church engages in mission from the days of Acts until now.

The twin themes of the Christological content of the gospel message and the ongoing involvement of Christ in the spread of that gospel can also be illustrated from two Pauline texts. In Romans 15:18-20 the apostle says that he has “fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ” and that

it has always been his ambition “to preach the gospel where Christ was not known.” He preaches Christ. But any success has been “what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done—by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit.” He gives the glory to a living and active Lord. And then in Ephesians 4:20 Paul speaks to Christians as those who have “learned Christ.” He was evidently the substance of the teaching which they had received. But the next verse says “you heard Him” (there is no need to translate “*about* Him”), thus demonstrating that Christ was the teacher as well as the curriculum. His voice was heard as others spoke His word.

The book of the Revelation concludes our Scriptures with the most vivid portrayal of the triumph of Christ. In the fifth chapter, for example, the Lamb of God is in the midst of the throne, and it is to this Saviour of multitudes that the creatures and elders sing their new song: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because You were slain, and with Your blood You purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation” (v. 9). Their words celebrate the pivotal and international significance of the cross of Jesus, and they acknowledge that He alone is able to break the seals and open this scroll, the book of destiny. History may be a closed book to us, but this Lamb who is also Lion is sovereign over the whole process, and it unfolds under His Lordship until His return. Until that day the Spirit and the bride will continue to say, “Come!” inviting the world to take the free gift of the water of life (22:17).

In his discussion of the Son's place in the Triune authorship of evangelism, R. B. Kuiper helpfully quotes *The Heidelberg Catechism*: “The Son of God, out of the whole human race, from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves for Himself, by His Spirit and Word, in the unity of the faith, a church chosen to everlasting life” (Lord's Day XXI, Answer 54). He then concludes his argument by stressing the uniqueness of the Son of God as missionary or evangelist, “in a class entirely by Himself. He is incomparable. He created the gospel. He Himself is the central theme of the gospel. In the final analysis He is the one and only preacher of the gospel. He applies the gospel efficaciously by the Holy Spirit. And He Himself has no need of the gospel. All that can be said of the Son of God alone.” (*op. cit.*, pp. 18-19).

The sovereignty of our evangelistic Lord will mean our obedient, dependent and optimistic engagement in mission. The doctrine of His sovereignty should never be used as a pretext of inactivity. We go in glad obedience, because He commands us from the throne to be His messengers. We go in prayerful dependence, because it is His work

from first to last and He alone can bless our endeavours. We go in genuine optimism, because He sends us in His name, by His Spirit, and we know that He has the power to transform any individual, any family, any community and any nation.

So we believe that the one who addressed sinners with His gospel in His days on earth still speaks today in compassion and grace. It has been the testimony of Christians throughout the ages that conversion meant hearing the call of Jesus Christ, not the call merely of a human preacher or witness. In the words of a 19th century Free Churchman, Horatius Bonar, in perhaps his most famous hymn: "I heard the voice of Jesus say, 'Come unto Me and rest'." As we proclaim the gospel of Christ, it is our longing that many would hear His voice in power. And our evangelism will always celebrate the truth that Jesus Christ was, is, and continues to be, both evangel and evangelist.

Recent Criticisms of the Westminster Confession of Faith

Rev. Rowland S. Ward

OUTLINE

Introduction

The Confession as adopted by the Church of Scotland in 1647 and adhered to by the Formula of Subscription of 1711 is taken as the standard form of the Confession.

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(B) Peripheral Criticisms Resting on Misunderstanding

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(E) Criticisms Related to the Extent of the Atonement

1. Limited atonement is an oppressive legalism
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(F) God's Law and the Civil Powers

A Christian Church in a Christian state as against both Erastianism and Voluntarism is the Confession's teaching. Theonomy in the last 20 years appears to be an over-reaction to the secularism prevalent today and fails to distinguish correctly the moral, ceremonial, and civil laws given to Israel through Moses.

(G) The Formulation of the Doctrine of the Church

It is claimed a false definition of the Church is made so that it is *defined* (and not merely *described*) in terms of invisibility.

Conclusion

The Westminster Confession is not a perfect document but it is a finely crafted Confession capable of serving the Church still.

INTRODUCTION

The Westminster Confession was not written over a few days in the heat of battle, as was the Scots confession (1560), nor by one man, as was the Belgic Confession (1561), nor to counter new heresy, as were the Canons of the Synod of Dort (1618-19). Rather, it was written by a gathering of eminent British theologians who met at Westminster in London for several years from 1643, assisted by a number of treaty commissioners from the Church of Scotland. Their aim was to effect a thorough reformation of the British church, which already had a Reformed character, “according to the word of God and the example of the best Reformed churches.” Thus, while setting forth a theology at one with the earlier confessions, it does so with a fullness of statement and maturity of expression appropriate to its position at the close of the period of great confessional writing.

The Confession of Faith as drawn up by the Westminster Assembly was qualified by the Adopting Act of the Church of Scotland in 1647:

- a) the Confession was found to be “in nothing contrary to the received doctrine” of the Kirk,
- b) the approval was “as to the truth of the matter,” that is, to the doctrines expressed by the language of the Confession, and
- c) the qualification of 31:2 limited the powers of the civil magistrate to call assemblies to the cases of churches not organised or constituted in government.

In 1694 the Church of Scotland enacted a formula of subscription to “the doctrine” contained in the Confession and rendered this commitment more explicit in 1711 when she spoke of adhering to “the whole doctrine.” In 1846, following the “Disruption” of 1843, the Free Church of Scotland found it appropriate to disavow the view that the Confession, properly interpreted, taught persecuting principles, an action which is to be taken as a rejection of that interpretation of section 20:4 which alleged that the involvement of the civil power in matters concerning religion is *ipso facto* contrary to the right of private judgement and necessarily of a persecuting and coercive character.

It is the intention of this paper to survey criticisms of the WCF on the basis

of the teaching of the Confession as accepted by the Church of Scotland in 1647 and vindicated by the Free Church of Scotland upon her formation in 1843. Most printed texts of the Confession have inaccuracies in punctuation (affecting particularly 20:2) and citation of Scripture texts which sometimes cause confusion (cf. Gordon Clark, *What Do Presbyterians Believe*, 1965, p. 66: the text Clark supposes is beside the point at 5:3 should be Job 34:20 not Job 34:10). The best critical text is that by Dr. S.W. Carruthers published in 1937. Notice will not be taken of the 18th century American modifications nor those which have occurred there since except to the extent that they are relevant in discussion of more recent criticisms. Nevertheless, it will be found that many criticisms of recent times echo criticisms of an earlier period.

Space constraints and the desire to provide an overview helpful to ordinary pastors means this paper will be a somewhat general survey of mostly negative criticisms. They will be grouped so that we move from the peripheral to those at the heart of the Confession. In essence the period of this survey will be 1967 to 1992, a period approximately the same as that marking the resurgence of orthodox Reformed theology. Much of the material in this paper may be gleaned also from my *Westminster Confession for the Church Today* (1992), which provides a modernised text and commentary commemorating the 350th anniversary of the Westminster Assembly.

(A) MINOR BLEMISHES IN STATEMENT OR PHRASEOLOGY

The late Professor John Murray in his valuable 1973 article “The Theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith” [*Works* 4: pp. 241-263] refers to several “blemishes.” Leaving aside a few points of terminology of no great importance for present purposes, Murray suggests that at 5:2 providence is stated (wrongly and contrary to 5:3) to result in *all* things coming to pass by the operation of second causes; notes the lack of precision in 6:3 stating that Adam and Eve were the root of all mankind rather than that Adam was the root of mankind and its representative head; rightly regards as questionable the assertion in 7:4 of the *frequent* description in Scripture of God's covenant as a testament; wishes that the phrase “begotten by the Holy Spirit and conceived by the virgin Mary” appeared in 8:2 rather than “conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost;” finds the expression “the regenerate part doth overcome” in 13:3 less than satisfactory; and questions the *definition* of the church in terms of mere profession of the true religion (25:2) (of which more in Section G below).

However, as Murray himself notes, such blemishes do not affect the doctrinal teaching of the Confession nor are they of particular concern to subscribers since they do not adhere to the words as if they are a perfect

expression of doctrine but to the doctrine as expressed by the words. Their presence is a reminder of the “imperfection which must attach itself to human composition” (p. 263).

(B) PERIPHERAL CRITICISMS RESTING ON MISUNDERSTANDINGS

It is not surprising that a number of well worn criticisms have resurfaced with the revival of interest in the Reformed faith. They are usually advanced by those who take a negative view of the Confession. However, some holding a Reformed theology within the more mainstream Presbyterian churches lean to acceptance of these criticisms and thus urge the necessity of liberty of opinion in “non-essential” matters, a liberty lacking clear definition but which their denomination may have given circa 1900 under the impact of the chill wind of the liberal evangelicalism of that time.

1. Claim: The Confession teaches (4:1) that the world was created in six literal days.

Of course, many subscribers of the Confession believe the creation days were 24 hour periods but the Confession limits itself to Scriptural language and does not further define the nature of the days saying only that all things were made “in the space of six days.” It follows that whatever the days of Genesis mean is what the Confession teaches. So there is no occasion for subscribers to the teaching of the Confession who do not believe that Genesis is referring to ordinary days to plead relief from this phrase as if it commits one to something unbiblical.

2. Claim: The Confession teaches (10:3) that some infants dying thus are damned since it says that “elect infants” dying in infancy, are saved.

The problem here is that the context is ignored. The subject of the Confession in Chapter 10 is Effectual Calling. It is dealing with the way people are saved not the number of such persons. The word *elect* correctly implies the need of redemption for infants but it is not a necessary inference that some are not elect. While infants cannot be called by the word and Spirit in the ordinary way, they can still be saved because of the electing love of the Father, the atonement of Christ and regeneration by the Spirit. It is of interest that the Baptist Confession of 1689 deletes the word *elect* so as to affirm the salvation of all infants dying in infancy. However, this is to affirm what is not explicit in Scripture and to bind the conscience with what at best is a plausible private opinion.

3. Claim: The Confession teaches (25:6) that the Pope is the predicted antichrist thus relief from subscription to the whole doctrine of the

Confession is necessary.

Taking account of the illustrative Scripture texts, the doctrinal positions of the Confession at 25:6 are (1) the Pope is not the head of the Church; (2) he exalts himself as if he were, which (3) proves him to be activated by the anti-Christian spirit which seeks religious veneration (Matt. 23:8-9), persecutes the godly (Rev. 13:6) and illustrates the predicted apostasy in the church (2 Thess. 2:3-4, 8-9). This does not seem unscriptural in any way.

The difficulties arise from erroneous inferences such as that there is no other application of the antichrist concept than to the papacy (contrary to 1 John 2:18; 4:3), or that the man of sin passage which refers to apostasy in the church is totally exhausted in the papacy, or that the Confession binds to details of unfulfilled prophecy. In fact the context is headship in the church not the interpretation of prophecy. The American modification passed by the PCUS (Southern) in 1939 is less liable to misunderstanding and preserves the doctrinal content. It reads: *The Lord Jesus Christ is the only Head of the church, and the claim of any man to be the vicar of Christ and the head of the church, is without warrant in fact or in Scripture, even anti-Christian, an usurpation dishonouring to the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Conclusion

It is not unimportant to understand that these three criticisms rest on misunderstandings since there is a tendency to use them as a kind of Trojan horse. In this way adherence to other and more important features of the Confession's teaching may be qualified and a fluctuating creed substituted for a definite one.

(C) MISREPRESENTATIONS OF THE DOCTRINE OF SCRIPTURE

We will now consider three false claims concerning the doctrine of Scripture in Chapter 1 of the Confession.

1. Claim: The Confession does not teach Scripture is inerrant in all its parts.

The publication of G.C. Berkouwer's *De Heilige Schrift* [The Holy Scripture] in 1966-67 is important as marking a resurgence from within the Reformed camp of a "functional" view of the inerrancy of Scripture. A "formal" view of inerrancy in every part of Scripture is rejected as scholastic, and Scripture is regarded as inerrant only in matters related to its primary purpose of bringing people to a saving relationship with God in Christ. Berkouwer's English translator (1975) was Jack B. Rogers, the same Rogers whose doctoral study under Berkouwer, *Scripture in the Westminster Confession*, was published in Kampen in 1967. Rogers' work

marks a revival of the position argued by C.A. Briggs of New York in the 1880s which affirmed the inspiration of Scripture but rejected its inerrancy as advocated by the Princeton theologians. (Similarly Prof. Wm. Robertson Smith in Scotland just a few years earlier.) The significant point for our purposes is that Rogers, like Briggs before him, asserts that the functional view of inerrancy is the position of Calvin and the Westminster Divines, so that the Princeton position of Alexander, the Hodges, and Warfield is a serious distortion. Ernest Sandeen's study *Roots of Fundamentalism: British and American Millenarianism 1800-1930* (1970) furthers this line while Rogers and Donald K. McKim have elaborated these views in *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible* (1979).

Valid responses to these rather startling claims have not been wanting, as for example in the symposium edited by D.A. Carson & J.D. Woodbridge entitled *Scripture & Truth* (1983; repr. 1992) pp. 225-279, just as Warfield refuted the misuse of the quotations Briggs adduced from 17th century writers in *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work* (1931) pp. 261-333. Rogers is particularly thin, it seems to me, in his examination. No citation of that very influential and learned Puritan, Dr. William Ames (1576-1633), appears in the volume by Rogers and McKim. The 1986 republication in modern English of Ames' classic, *The Marrow of Theology* (1623) and the recent issue (1992) in English of Volume 1 of Francis Turretin's *Institutes* facilitates the rebutting of some of the extravagant and incorrect claims, even though we recognize that every apologist is to some degree influenced in his presentation of Christian doctrine by the circumstances of his age.

In WCF 1:2 the sentence "all of which are given by inspiration of God, to be the rule of faith and life" is *not* a definition of inspiration as if inspiration extends only to matters of faith and life and not to matters of fact and history. Rather, it is an assertion of the inspiration of all the 66 books so that they are "the word of God written" and thus not "human writings" [WCF 1:3] as are uninspired books. Hence also the statement that God is their "author" [WCF 1:4], and that they are "immediately inspired by God" [WCF 1:8], possessing "entire perfection" and "infallible truth" [WCF 1:5]. While the modern term "inerrancy" is not used in the Confession there is no doubt that the church doctrine of the plenary, verbal inspiration of Scripture in all its parts is taught.

Given that 20th century fundamentalism in the American sense is frequently associated with an extreme literalism and a preoccupation with seeking to prove Scripture and to provide a pedantic harmonising, one might understand Rogers' unhappiness with formal inerrancy and entertain the hope that dialogue could bring a meeting of minds. For, as Herman Bavinck reminds us: "If Scripture had used instead [of the language of daily experience] the language of the academy, and had spoken with scientific exactitude, it would have been a hindrance to its own authority." Moreover,

Rogers is well aware of the *Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy* of 1974 with such careful statements as the following (Art. XIII):

We affirm the propriety of using inerrancy as a theological term with reference to the complete truthfulness of Scripture.

We deny that it is proper to evaluate Scripture according to standards of truth and error that are alien to its usage or purpose. We further deny that inerrancy is negated by Biblical phenomena such as lack of modern technical precision, irregularities of grammar or spelling, observational descriptions of nature, the reporting of falsehoods, the use of hyperbole and round numbers, the topical arrangement of material, variant selections of material in parallel accounts, or the use of free citations.

This is a statement which Calvin or the Westminster men would have happily endorsed. But it does not appear that Rogers is listening, for he has his own pseudo-Reformed agenda.

2. Claim: *The Confession does not teach that inerrancy belongs only to the original autographs.*

The debate raised by such as Rogers and McKim regards the limitation of inerrancy to the original autographs as a refinement owed principally to Warfield who, it is claimed, followed a scholastic method. The fact that the available manuscripts have imperfections is not a difficulty for Rogers and McKim, since to them infallibility does not consist in formal correctness or verbal inerrancy but in the saving function of Scripture, and this is not affected by transcriptional errors.

We may agree that the imperfections in textual transmission do not destroy the saving function of Scripture, but because of Scripture's teaching about itself we are not prepared to accept that there may have been such errors in the autographs, or that the Confession does not properly distinguish the authority of the sources. Balmer and Woodbridge have provided valuable excerpts from the writings of William Whitaker (1547-95) and William Ames (1576-1633) in the symposium referred to previously, which make it abundantly clear that these men, who have not been accused of scholasticism, adhered to the complete reliability of Scripture in the originals in all it teaches. John Owen—who *has* been accused of scholasticism—wrote in 1659 what was the common position:

“First then, it is granted that the individual autographs of Moses, the prophets and the apostles, are in all probability, and as to all that we know, utterly perished and lost out of the world. . . . Had those individual writings been preserved, men would have been ready to adore them. . . . Secondly, For the Scriptures of the New Testament, it doth not appear that the autographs of the several writers of it were ever gathered together into one volume. . . . the first transcribers of the original copies, and those who in succeeding ages have done the like work from them, whereby they have been propagated and continued down to us, in a subserviency to the

providence and promise of God, we say not, as is vainly charged by Morinus and Capellus, that they were all or any of them 'infallible and divinely inspired,' so that it was impossible for them in anything to mistake. It is known, it is granted, that failings have been amongst them, and that various lections have from thence arisen. . . . Thirdly, We add that *the whole Scripture*, entire as given out from God, without any loss, is preserved in the copies of the originals yet remaining . . . In them all, we say, is every letter and tittle of the word. These copies we say, are the rule, standard, and touchstone of all translations, ancient or modern, by which they in all things are to be examined, tried, corrected, amended; and themselves only by themselves." [John Owen (1616-1683) in his *Of the Integrity and Purity of the Hebrew and Greek Text of the Scripture in Works*, Vol. 16 pp. 353, 354, 357 in 1968 edition; first edition was 1659; (italics in original).]

3. Claim: *The Confession teaches (1:8) the inerrancy of the "Received Text" and of the Protestant translations based on it.*

This position is not unrelated to the previous one but comes from (shall we say) the right wing rather than the left. Believing in the complete inerrancy of Scripture some conservatives have adopted what might be called the Vulgate error (from the Roman elevation of the Latin text). They hold that God's special providence in preserving the sources "pure in all ages" (1:8) is such as implies a "jot and tittle" view of preservation so that the "Received Text" represents the original without the slightest variation. Many hold in addition that, seeing 1:8 also says that translations enable the word of God to dwell plentifully in believers, the translation employed by the Westminster Divines (taken to be the KJV) must be precisely accurate, otherwise it could not be called "the word of God."

Whatever the superficial attractiveness of the logic of this claim, it is contrary to the plainest facts. It arises from a simplistic logic (not unlike that among some of the Anabaptists of the 17th century) coupled with a reactionary conservatism. Matthew 5:18 (the jot and tittle passage) is not referring to the transmission of the text of Scripture but to the authority of God's claims upon us. The transmission of Scripture is not such that the sources have been preserved with exactness in any particular manuscript but, as Owen noted, in *all* the manuscripts. And we cannot say that providence has preserved only *some* manuscripts since providence extends to *all* events and thus to the preservation of *all* the manuscripts. Nor can we say that providence tells us which manuscripts are the best ones: only manuscript comparison and analysis can do that. In short, "pure" does not mean "without any transcriptional errors" but it means something like "without loss of doctrines and with the text preserved in the variety of manuscripts." Thus, in affirming that "the original texts of the Old and New Testaments come down to us pure and uncorrupted" Francis Turretin (1623-87) states:

“The question is not, Are the sources so pure that no fault has crept into the many sacred manuscripts. . . ? For this is acknowledged on both sides and the various readings . . . clearly prove it. Rather, the question is have the original texts (or the Hebrew and Greek manuscripts) been so corrupted by copyists through carelessness (or by the Jews and heretics through malice) that they can no longer be regarded as the judge of controversies and the rule to which all the versions may be applied? The papists affirm, we deny it . . . for besides being in things of small importance and not pertaining to faith and practice . . . they are not universal in all the manuscripts; or they are not such as cannot be easily corrected from a collation of the Scriptures and the various manuscripts.”
[*Institutes*, II:10: 3, 8 (pp. 106, 108-9 of 1992 edition)]

The “jot and tittle theory” cannot produce the allegedly perfectly preserved text which is the ultimate standard of appeal. Even the “Received Text” is not the best (NT) text that can be constructed from the Byzantine family of manuscripts but, as we all know, is largely the text constructed from a few manuscripts of that family and the ingenuity of Erasmus. In fact, many adherents of this theory canonise the King James Version, even affirm that God's elect always share their faith in its complete inerrancy (pity those who have only the “impure” stream of manuscripts!), and appeal finally to it. Let William Ames express the truth of the matter in his clear and judicious way:

“The Scriptures are not so tied to these first languages that they cannot and ought not to be translated into other languages for common use in the church. But among interpreters, neither the seventy who turned them into Greek, nor Jerome, nor any other such held the office of a prophet; they were not free from errors in interpretation. Hence no versions are fully authentic except as they express the sources, by which they are also to be weighed. Neither is there any authority on earth whereby any version may be made absolutely authentic. God's providence in preserving the sources is notable and glorious, for neither have they wholly perished nor have they been injured by the loss of any book or blemished by any serious defect—though today not one of the earlier versions remains intact. From these human versions all those things may be made known which are absolutely necessary, provided they agree with the sources in essentials. Hence, all the versions accepted by the churches usually agree, although they may differ and be defective at several minor points. We must not rest forever in any accepted version, but faithfully see to it that a pure and faultless interpretation is given to the church.” [William Ames (1576-1633), *The Marrow of Theology*, I xxxiv, 27-33 (first edition, Latin 1623; English translations 1638; 1986).]

It is not possible to give a consistent interpretation of WCF 1:8 other than on the basis set out by such as Ames, Turretin, and Owen. The absence of an English text equivalent in every respect of meaning to the original Scripture is no more an argument against the verbal inspiration of the autographs than is the admitted obscurity and difficulty of interpretation of

certain parts of Scripture. We pass over the subject of the testimony of the Spirit, simply observing that the Confession does not set the objective evidences over against the internal testimony. The testimony of the Spirit is *by* and *with* the word, and saving understanding always requires the Spirit's work.

Given the sharp differences and divisions in even Reformed churches on the subject of text and translation, we do well to instruct our people more adequately in these matters with which our fathers were very familiar. It is somewhat ironic and also disturbing when Roman and Anabaptist arguments against the Protestant and Reformed position in the 17th century are heard in the mouth of earnest 20th century Protestants.

The Australian Presbyterian scholar and liberal-evangelical Andrew Harper acknowledged in 1892 that the change in the doctrine of inspiration was not unimportant for it does not end with itself: "In a system of doctrine so carefully articulated and wrought out as that of the Reformed Churches is, no one doctrine of importance can be modified without insensibly modifying all the others." These are words to take to heart.

(D) ADVERSE CRITICISMS RELATED TO GOD'S COVENANT

1. Claim: The covenant of works is an unscriptural formulation which subverts grace.

Professor James B. Torrance has been an insistent propagandist for the view that the covenant formulation of 17th century federal theology in general and of the Confession in particular is a marked departure from Calvin and results in all manner of evils. This may be seen in his 1970 article *Covenant or Contract?* (Scottish Journal of Theology, 1970, pp. 51-76), in his chapter in that uneven volume *The Westminster Confession in the Church Today* (1981), as well as in public lectures such as one in Melbourne in 1990. Holmes Rolston III also published in the SJT (1970 pp. 129-156) but is best known for his volume *John Calvin versus the Westminster Confession* (1972). The views of these writers reflect their commitment to a Barthian approach. No real distinction is made between a pre-fall and post-fall situation since to them the story of Adam is myth or saga not history. As Prof. J. Douma has said: "However incomprehensible the fall into sin may be, no theologian can properly speak about redemption without taking that catastrophe into account." Their great complaint is that law has priority over grace in the federal scheme whereas they wish to proclaim free and costly grace on a universal basis. This is not the place to refute their presuppositions, nor to trace the undoubted development in thinking on a pre-fall covenant from 1560 [for which see D.A. Weir's excellent study, *The Origins of The Federal Theology in Sixteenth-Century Reformation*

Thought (Oxford 1990)], but some vindication of the Confession is appropriate.

First, as regards terminology, all recognize that the word “covenant” is not used of this relationship in the narrative of Genesis 1-3 or elsewhere unless Hosea 6:7 is an exception. Second, assuming nevertheless that the relationship is covenantal, some variety in preferred phraseology exists. The favoured initial phrase from about 1580 seems to have been covenant of *nature*, while the 1615 Irish Articles' embryonic federalism speaks of the covenant of *the law* (Art. 21). Westminster uses covenant of *works* in the Confession but covenant of *life* in the Shorter Catechism #12. More recent writers suggest covenant of *creation*. The real question is not the precise words but whether the ideas behind them are Biblical.

The Genesis narrative certainly shows the elements of a covenant even if the word is not used, for it describes a sovereign disposition by God involving promises, requiring response and threatening a penalty. However, while some statements (e.g. the *Irish Articles*) give the distinct impression that the covenant was to be kept by man's own strength so that he might merit eternal life, the Westminster Confession (7:1) is very careful in the balance of its statement. The Confession emphasises that there was grace, in the sense of condescension, in the making of the covenant and also implies, I think, that the reward of obedience would not be of debt but of God's free favour. Man was never in a merely legal relationship with his Maker, a position where God owed him something. The relationship was covenantal—one of personal communion in righteousness. In this connection note the compound name in Genesis 2 and 3 [Yahweh Elohim] which combines the name which speaks of creative power with that which is the personal name of God. Further, Adam's original righteousness was God's gift and he was dependent upon God that he might fulfil the covenant demands. Adam could not have praised himself but only glorified God if he had stood the test.

Torrance and Rolston would allow that the arrangements of the first covenant include elements which may be described as gracious (cf. Rolston, p. 142 on Dabney's position in his *Systematic Theology*, p. 302). But they still regard the covenant of life (as I shall call it) as subversive of redemptive grace because they are operating on Barthian principles. But if we accept the biblical record of our first parents we cannot possibly understand redemptive grace except in the context of the prior righteous requirements of God which man has disobeyed. To stigmatise the Westminster formulation as legalistic is to evacuate grace of its redemptive character.

(E) CRITICISMS RELATED TO THE EXTENT OF THE ATONEMENT

1. Claim: Limited atonement in the Confession is part of the oppressive legalism of federal theology.

J.B. Torrance has difficulties with Christ's atonement being for the elect alone. He claims it is to deny the incarnational oneness which Christ has with all men as Head of all creation and to prevent saying to each and all "Christ died for you."

Leaving aside the Scripturalness or otherwise of the last expression, it would be a heavy burden indeed if we could not integrate our humanity and our evangelism. But again, the problem is Torrance's Barthianism, which he cannot possibly read out of the Confession, but which he endeavours to read back into Calvin, so appearing to be a Reformed theologian when he rejects the maturest statement of the Reformed faith.

Even while we affirm that Christ is Head over all things we must add "for the church" (Eph. 1:22). Further, what we have come to term common grace is a reality, while orthodox Calvinism works in practice so far as evangelistic thrust and social transformation is concerned, particularly Scottish evangelical Calvinism. At least Torrance admits that the Confession teaches Christ's atonement was definite.

2. Claim: The Confession does not exclude Amyraldianism

It is well known that there were several members of the Westminster Assembly who adhered to the hypothetical universalism of the Amyraldian school. It has been alleged last century and more recently that this position is not excluded by the Confession.

In 1961 a Calvinistic church was formed in Tasmania from several congregations of former Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians. It is now known as the *Evangelical Presbyterian Church* (EPC). The tendency to reaction from their previous Arminian mysticism led to suspicion of the doctrine of the free offer as if it was based on a universal atonement in the Amyraldian sense. In debate with their near kin, the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, the leaders of the EPC held that the issue was not resolved by the Confession since, while the Confession was accepted in 1647 as in no way contrary to received doctrine, it was claimed by the EPC that before 1647 the Church of Scotland did not hold to any limitation on the extent and intent of the atonement. It was not until the Acts of the Church of Scotland condemning the Marrow teaching in 1720 and 1721 that any such limitation existed, they claimed. The EPC therefore relied on these Acts to reject the related ambiguities and contradictions they saw as inherent in the free offer teaching as expounded, for example, by John Murray and Ned Stonehouse, and they went on to adopt a position on common grace rather similar to that of Herman Hoeksema and the

Protestant Reformed Churches in the USA.

The response to this line of reasoning is to reject the claim that the Confession does not exclude Amyraldian views, to reject the allegations about the pre-1647 teaching of the Church of Scotland, and to regard the Acts condemning the Marrow as making partial and selective use of aspects of the Marrow and as irrelevant. The Acts against the Marrowmen would only be competent if they were true Declaratory Acts, that is, Acts declaring existing law. The force of the Acts, though unrepealed, is exceedingly dubious because of the peculiar circumstances. It is true that they were appealed to in the Macleod Campbell case in 1831. Campbell, unlike the Marrowmen, really did teach universal pardon, and the great historian Thomas McCrie (1772-1835) thereupon published several articles to vindicate the Marrowmen from some of the unjust charges in the Assembly Acts. It is a libel on the Scottish Church to suppose the love of God in the free offer was ever doubted or regarded as inconsistent with a strict Calvinism.

While A.F. Mitchell thought Amyraldianism may not be excluded by the Confession in 3:6, William Cunningham is sure it is and Warfield agrees. The issue really seems settled by the terms of WCF 8:8 which state that *all* for whom Christ purchased redemption have the same applied effectually to them. John Cameron held that the absence of such a statement in the findings of the Synod of Dort 1619 meant his Amyraldianism was not excluded, thus we take it Westminster does exclude it. Christ made satisfaction for those the Father gave to Him, and Christ, through the Spirit, effectively applies this redemption to those for whom He died.

The seeming inconsistency in the Confession excluding views which were held by several of its members perhaps may be explained on the supposition that the Confession was going to be the public Confession of the British church, but would not be imposed by a tight subscription. While such an idea would not have been acceptable in Scotland it was a position some of the English divines held. On this supposition the Amyraldians would not have been able to teach against the Confession but might have held their own views as private opinions. At any rate, the terms of the Adopting Act in Scotland leave no doubt that Amyraldianism is excluded as an option for strict subscribers.

(F) GOD'S LAW AND THE CIVIL POWERS

When R.J. Rushdoony's massive work *The Institutes of Biblical Law* was published in 1973 it became the spearhead of what is now known as theonomy (from Greg Bahnsen's *Theonomy in Christian Ethics*, 1977), dominion theology or the movement for Christian reconstruction. The burden of this teaching is that the law of God, insofar as it is not expressly

repealed, fully binds modern states and societies.

Such a statement does not sound as shocking in ears attuned to the Scottish Reformed understanding of Church and State as it does in American ears. The American modification of WCF 23:3 in 1788 affirmed that the duty of the state in reference to religion was (1) to protect the church; (2) to protect citizens; (3) to ensure freedom of assembly. However, the duty of the state to encourage the unity of the church and the maintenance of the truth was not asserted and all denominations of Christians were placed on an equal basis. The underlying principle is at best that the state's duty does not extend to anything but the encouragement of a lowest common denominator Christianity, and at worst that the state has nothing to do with religion but to protect people in the free exercise of it—the actual current practice in the United States. In other words, the vision of a thoroughly Christian state was somewhat dimmed by a pragmatic acceptance of the denominational ideal, and secularising influences since 1788 have contributed to a pluralistic view of the state with law derived from the will of the people. In addition, much evangelicalism is dispensational and antinomian.

In 19th century Scotland the Voluntary controversy at root was concerned with the same issue: the sovereignty of God over the nation was downplayed or rejected and the modern secular state foreshadowed. I suppose the orthodox Reformed position in the Netherlands in the 19th century shared a similar concern to the orthodox in Scotland—one recalls Groen Van Prinsterer and the Anti Revolutionary Party.

The Confession in the form adopted in Scotland recognised the distinct government in the church but held that the nation living in the light of special revelation was accountable to God and had certain particular responsibilities in reference to the encouragement of the truth, and the provision of a framework of law, education and welfare agreeable to Scripture. Christian reconstruction differs from the classic Scottish position in that it appears to believe that the non-ceremonial laws of the Old Testament Israel together with the prescribed penalties are binding today unless specifically repealed in Scripture. But reconstructionists differ much among themselves on details.

The Confession makes the classic distinction between the moral, ceremonial and judicial laws. This oft-criticised distinction is entirely justified by the data: while the Mosaic law is a unit and different kinds of law are found in the one context, the unique position of the moral law is seen in the facts that only the ten commandments were spoken by God's voice, they alone were accompanied by the shaking of Mount Sinai, they alone were written on stone in addition to being written in a book (Deut. 4:10-14; Ex. 24:4), and they alone of all the laws were placed in the ark of the covenant. The subservience of the ceremonial to the ethical is also evident, as in the words of the prophets (e.g. Ps. 51:16-19; Jer. 7; Amos 5).

Note also Matt. 7:12 cf. Lev. 19:18.

Apart from classical dispensationalists, all admit that the ceremonial laws have been abrogated by the ratification of the new covenant by Christ (WCF 19:3). The Confession further affirms (19:4) that the sundry judicial laws God gave Israel as a nation “expired together with the State of that people; not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require.” Israel was a theocratic nation and was to reflect the requirement that she be a holy people. At any rate, the civil law of Israel does not bind any other people now since no earthly nation today is in the same covenant position as ancient Israel.

The New Testament church is the proper continuation of Israel. From this viewpoint the church must take the Old Testament laws seriously, particularly those marked by the death penalty or exclusion (“cutting off”) from the nation. If professing believers who commit similar offenses do not repent they are subject to the equivalent penalty—spiritual death, that is, excommunication (compare the position of the incestuous man at Corinth, 1 Cor. 5:1ff & Lev. 18:8, 29).

So far as the civil authorities today are concerned, those living in the light of special revelation need to take the Old Testament judicial laws seriously too. However, and this is the point theonomy seems to stumble at, the civil ruler today will not apply Mosaic laws and penalties because they are prescribed by the Mosaic law, but because he discerns that the law or the penalty reflects a basic principle of justice and right that ought always to be observed, that is, that it is an application of the moral law. However, while some of the case laws are applications of the moral law, one may also speak of the judicial laws in their nature and penalties having an aspect of prefiguring righteousness in Christ and destruction of sin through Christ. On this view the law given to the *race* through Noah would justify the death penalty for murder, but death penalties for other offenses prescribed for *Israel* would not necessarily be justified today. Indeed, they were not always carried out in Israel (cf. David's adultery and murder). Obvious examples of general equity include the law of incest and the law of negligence, but it should be noted that Israel's law did not punish everything recognised as a crime (e.g. visiting a prostitute). It does not appear that the civil authority is to punish those who hold false beliefs, but only those whose views have disruptive consequences in the good order of church or society (cf. WCF 20:4).

Those who accept the Confession's teaching will find areas of difference, as has always been the case, but they will also reject the wholesale application of the judicial laws. Theonomists can take heart from the fact that an optimistic eschatology was the general outlook of the Westminster Divines, and pre-millennialism as we know it in modern times was rejected. If they would be a little less arrogant and somewhat more patient, the debate could

draw the extremes together.

I have more than a suspicion that the American interest in theonomy arises from an over-reaction to the practical secularism of American life. One notes with some dismay the modernisation of the WCF issued by Summertown Texts in Tennessee (2nd edition 1984): "These expired with the State of Israel and make no further obligation on God's people than seems appropriate in contemporary legal codes." This is imprecise and fails to highlight the particular point by which continuing obligation is to be assessed. Those who speak in this way are certainly going to ruffle the feathers of those who advocate Christian reconstruction. A useful recent treatment of the theonomic issues by staff of Westminster seminary, reflecting some diversity of approach, is *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique* (1990).

(G) THE FORMULATION OF THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH

Claim: 1. *A false distinction is made in WCF 25 between the visible and invisible church.*

The way the Confession expresses the doctrine of the church has been criticised by a number of staunch advocates of the Reformed Faith. Indeed, John Murray [*Works* 1: 231-236] has an excellent article in which he shows that while the church as visible and as invisible may be distinguished in theology, there are dangers with this terminology since it has been misapplied to escape the obligations of unity or as an excuse for failure to address doctrinal or moral error within a particular denomination. Indeed, Murray points out that the church in Scripture may have invisible aspects but it cannot be *defined* in terms of invisibility. Dr. Jelle Faber made the same point in his address to the first ICRC in 1985. Referring to WCF 25:1, 2 he asked: "Is it right to divide the Scriptural epithets of the church so that the invisible church is called the *spouse* and the *body* of Christ, and the visible church his *kingdom*, the house and family of God?"

I think most thoughtful exponents of Reformed theology would agree with Murray and Faber's understanding of the church at this point. However, it is not so clear that the Confession is committing the sin of false *definition* suggested even if its *description* has infelicities. At any rate, we know that the Confession was not accepted as in any way contrary to the received doctrine of the Church of Scotland, and *that* doctrine was a very catholic one which abhorred schism. The Reformers, and here we include Calvin, Ursinus and the rest, employed the idea of the church as visible to emphasize that the church's life depends on divine election and the operation of the Spirit which are not infallibly discerned by men. It does not mean that there are two churches, but that the one church may be viewed in two ways, and that the church as we see it is not to be thought of apart from

its nature as a congregation of true Christian believers. The Confession states (25:3) that “there is no ordinary possibility of salvation” outside the visible church to which, of course, it connects the means of grace. N.H. Gootjes reminds us that its reference to the invisible church is not in the interests of a casual approach to these means [*Clarion*, 28 March 1991, pp. 155-158].

Churches like my own have not been free from the influences of a non-reformed evangelicalism, but our separate stand does not arise from the idea that the church is ours to order as we see fit. We would reject indignantly the concept of pluriformity as known by the Dutch churches. We do not regard every church as equally valid. It is precisely because we regard the church as bound to maintain the *whole* counsel of God that we remain separate. But we are not prepared to deny that the term “church” may properly apply to other Christian bodies which have errors of various kinds. It is a novel, unbalanced, and really sectarian approach that says otherwise.

The reality is that nothing in the Scottish Reformed fathers of the Westminster period suggests that their doctrine of the church was any different from the doctrine held on the Continent except perhaps for the greater rigour in which ceremonies of human devising were opposed. Yet even allowing for such greater rigour there was the balancing consideration of the unity of the church, which meant Anglican and Lutheran churches were recognised except in cases of persecution. The English church was represented at Dort. Even Rome was reckoned, following Calvin, as in some senses a church so that its baptism was not as such invalid. The common Reformed doctrine was and is that the presence of some errors or abuses will not be sufficient to cause withdrawal from a church. The nature of the errors, the insistence with which they are advocated, and the freedom or otherwise from compliance, will be relevant in deciding whether or not we can remain in the body.

The true/false distinction in the Belgic Confession (with its principal application to the Church of Rome) is common to the Scottish heritage too. But it is not helpful to historical understanding (or present relationships) to suggest that the pure/less distinction of Westminster cannot be harmonised with the Belgic, Art. 29, for what church manages all things according to the pure word of God as she should? The Reformed and Presbyterian world has little enough of the passion for unity in the truth. But that desire for unity in the truth must recognize the relative importance (or unimportance) of our differences. Too often we seem to be concerned to avoid offending the traditional in our pews or church assemblies. We look for reasons not to accept one another rather than joyfully embracing one another and growing together, being enriched by a sharing of what the Lord has taught us through our various histories.

CONCLUSION

We have reviewed some of the major criticisms of the teaching of the Westminster Confession, principally those of negative character. They come from a variety of quarters but are not such as should cause any great concern to subscribers to the Confession in this closing decade of the 20th century. It is not that one is unwilling to admit any criticisms or that there is no room for improvement. Rather, we have to acknowledge that those who drew up this noble document nearly 350 years ago had the great advantage of drawing on voluminous materials from the previous century of confessional drafting, and did their work very well. In principle one is no more against changes in the Confession to make it more clear or balanced than was the 1847 Free Church of Scotland which sanctioned a *Constitutional Catechism* which recognises the freedom and duty of the church to do just that, but a demonstrated need is not particularly evident at present, nor is the resurgent Reformed movement yet at a level of maturity and consensus to offer the hope of significant confessional advance.

What would appear a wise course today is that careful editions be provided. I find it a great shame that an accurate edition of the Confession with its illustrative Scripture texts (secondary though they be) is not available from any of the Scottish churches. Surely this is not a right state of affairs. In addition, if I may express a suggestion made to me by a member of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland (John Greir of *The Evangelical Bookshop* in Belfast), the ICRC could surely do something to co-ordinate the preparation of standard texts of our symbolic documents (and perhaps the Psalter) in modern English. Such modernised texts may not become the legally binding texts in our churches but they have an immense practical role in ensuring intelligent propagation of the faith. Inactivity by the churches will not stop these editions because there is a need and their issue creates further demand: my scarcely advertised edition of the Shorter Catechism [*Learning the Christian Faith*: 1981] has sold more than 8,000 copies in Australia. Yet it would be in the interests of the Reformed community if effort was expended to attain generally agreed modernisations. Perhaps this is another of the many positive things the ICRC can do to further the Biblical faith. And why not a volume containing the Westminster Standards *and* the Three Forms of Unity with relevant terms of subscription?

Redemptive Historical Preaching

Prof. H.M. Ohmann

1. Characteristics of Biblical Religion

In this conference where representatives of Reformed Churches from all over the globe are present, it is the countries they live in, the nations they belong to and the cultural life they share that attracts our attention. It goes without saying that I should like to focus first and foremost on the respective religions of those areas. I proceed in this way because it is of interest for the present topic.

Against the background of pagan religions our Christian religion stands out in bold, sharp relief and is brought into relief. The difference is not just a matter of names. For example, if you profess Islam, you call God “Allah,” or the religion of ancient Korea you call your ancestor and predecessor Tan-gun, or when you are a Hindu his name is Vishnu or Shiwa, or when you are a Buddhist you cling to Buddha, so that you are wrong just because it is the wrong name, while for the rest your god boils down to the same as the God and Father of Jesus Christ. On the contrary, it is not just the name, but the character and nature of these gods and redeemers that it is at stake, and consequently the view of these religions on creation and the world, heaven and earth, sin and grace, redemption and righteousness and holiness, etc. Any religion you mention is a closed complex all by itself, where every facet is linked with all the others. You simply cannot single out one point, their view on “grace” to say, “That is nice. That comes in handy for my preaching” for all the aspects within those pagan religions are interrelated.

What characterizes our Christian religion overagainst all paganism is:

- 1) There is a basic difference between God, the Creator and His creatures. And that the latter are totally dependent on the Former. How often Scripture refers to our God as having complete disposal of nature, (cf. all the elements in a theophany). Compare also the image of the Potter and the clay.
- 2) God acts in history. As soon as the world had been created, we see things develop in the course of time. “Time,” what is it? Augustine once said: “If people do not ask me, I know. But questioned to explain, I do not know.” Time is always the same, namely the time of the clock and the calendar. Yet, we also speak of “times,” “eras,” “periods” and they are different. Further we speak of times in the sense of chances and opportunities.

In the century in which somebody appears on the stage of history, special opportunities arise that may or may not be seized, that are denied to people who live in another century.

Now that we have hit upon the word “history,” the God who acts in history is significant for the Christian religion. This is the way He presents himself to us in the Bible. Instead of “Bible” I can just as well say: “history of the Bible.” Every part of the Bible—be it Law, Psalms, Wisdom, or Prophecy—all are embedded in history, up to and including that particular part of history that is called in the Bible: the fullness of the time (Galatians 4:4). Jesus Christ, the Son of God, appeared on earth just once: “when the time had fully come.”

- 3) A characteristic feature of our Christian religion is also the unique character of each man living in this or that particular time. I mean: Man, every man or woman in the Bible, is rated at his/her true value in the time he lives. Any man is irreplaceable. That is why the sixth word of the Law reads: “Thou shalt not kill.” And we read in the Psalms: “Keep me as the apple of the eye” (17:8). The LORD God has everybody lead his life in a particular time, century, or period of a century. Every man is a child of his time; his habits bear the stamp of that time. It sounds like a truism but, please, do not overlook it. Just as it is appointed for men to be born once, so it is to die once, and after that comes judgment.

In the Christian religion there is no room for the idea of reincarnation that is ingrained in a great many natives, aboriginals, and primitive people. I mention especially people in India with their remarkable brand of paganism, remarkable in this respect that primitive ideas are elaborated here into a dogmatic, philosophical system.

In Biblical times we often come across pagan religions bearing the stamp of the Ancient Near East. Religions, man-made religions, were oriented toward nature, especially the cycle of the seasons, with its ups and downs; where not only the vegetation (how important) and animals (livestock), or mankind, but even the gods had to submit to the laws of nature. Gods are like men. Canaanite gods, according to their believers, were periodically given the opportunity to show their power in engendering new life, rising but also going down in the cycle of the seasons. Men are supposed to cooperate with their beloved gods and goddesses, easily overstepping the boundary between religion and superstition or magic.

2. God in his relation with world, time, and man

The religion of the Bible has its origin in the revelation of God, the Living God, the Eternal and Immutable One, who was pleased to reveal Himself to man in this world.

The question whether 1) God and His creation, 2) God, the Eternal One, and time, and 3) God and a particular man, living in a certain time, can be bracketed together, we answer in the affirmative, taking into account the way He does it, namely that He accommodates Himself to man in his particular circumstances in ages past. He adapts Himself to time, keeping up with time in a manner of speaking. He really enters history and works out His plan in the course of history. Being transcendent, that is far above His creation, He simultaneously condescended to man, His creature, especially His chosen people, to become the Covenant God of this people (Israel in Old Testament times, the church in the New Testament era). For one thing, the incarnation of the Son of God, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, follows from this line. Just as the history of Israel, the great mystery of our religion, so also the Son of God manifested in the flesh, occurred in time—normal time. Take for example the phrase in the Apostles' Creed, "He suffered *under Pontius Pilate*."

So, for his communication with man, God does not suspend time, as if it were something far beneath Him (the idea of gnosticism), neither are there the two levels into which G. Barth divided history (German *Historie* and *Geschichte*), nor does the LORD snatch man away from time as something not befitting Him (the idea of mysticism). No, from the very outset God sets out to seek man in the place where man finds himself at that very moment (Paradise, the land of Shinar, Canaan, Egypt, etc.).

Salvation-history is part and parcel of history. We may even go so far as to say (with K. Schilder) that all history is sacred history; history unfolds in the course of events on the earth which is the LORD's and the fullness thereof.

3. One should pay due heed to the historical moment and circumstances

In reading and studying the Bible we ought to take into consideration—nay more, we ought to do full justice to—the historical moment in which an event came to pass. It is no accident that we meet a certain person in a certain time, at this or that juncture. The LORD our God provided Himself with the people "He was in need of," if I may say so. For example, only Noah, in the days before the flood, was entrusted with the building of the ark. Only Abram, and nobody else was called to leave Ur of the Chaldees; only Jacob was privileged to meet God in Bethel and Peniel; only Moses was summoned to come up to God and climb the mountain; only David was chosen to mount the throne of the kingdom and so on and so forth. It just happened to them and not to any other Israelite, let alone to us. Their contemporaries of course, were eye-witnesses, and we today rely on their testimony, written down in the Bible. So, in preaching we are to distinguish carefully what the LORD has done to the fathers in their times, *and what He is doing to his people today*. We are to take into account the specific

circumstances in order to assimilate what the LORD has promised in this particular text and to determine the way we are put under obligation by the text preached on, as well as the impact the text has on our Christian life in general, always viewed from the angle of the text or the pericope at stake.

We should not lose sight of the demands God made and still makes on man, that is to say, man as stamped by the time they live(d) in. We ought to notice “the amount” or “size” of the revelation made available to them. (Though in their times they may have known things not known to us anymore since they were revealed but are not mentioned in the Bible.) If we do not take into account the historical factor and circumstances, we fail to grasp an essential element, and we are really in danger of drawing the wrong conclusion for ourselves.

4. Redemptive History is a Unity

Are we not, however, in this way deprived or depriving ourselves of any connection with this glorious past? Is there any line of communication left between us and Abraham, Moses, David, Isaiah?

Yes, of course, there are:

- 1) The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is our God (1 Kings 18:36; Matthew 22:32).
- 2) His promises to the fathers, promises in regard to the seed, the posterity, their vicissitudes and above all the LORD's guidance, the land and the kingdom of God, basically all pivoting on the redemption in Jesus Christ, are meant for the church today. At present, we, just as well as they in their times, are and were thrown back on the very same resources. For example I point at 1 Corinthians 10:4, “For they drank from the supernatural Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ.”
- 3) Faith is one and the same in all centuries. In this respect Scripture makes an example of a previous generation to a later generation. 1 Corinthians 10 sounds a note of warning against unbelief. We should like to point here at Hebrews 3:6, 12, 14, and 4:2, and especially Hebrews 11.
- 4) Since every covenant contains two parts, a promise and an obligation, we may draw the conclusion from promise (2) and faith (3) that the covenant in principle is one and the same in the Old and New Testament. Though forms may differ and change, the essence remains. Please compare John Calvin's *Institutes* on this item (Book II chapters 9, 10, 11).
- 5) Basically the Old and New Testament speak of one and the same church which is a holy congregation and assembly of the true Christian believers, who expect their entire salvation in Jesus Christ, washed by

His blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit (Belgic Confession, Art. 27). This article implies a stance against premillennialism.

In conclusion we posit: redemptive history is a unity.

5. Redemptive History means progression

If, with respect to these five items, the history of salvation is a unity, how do we explain the differences? Whence all those differences in times, “dispensations,” even statutes and ordinances (ceremonial law)? Is it that way because in history not even two periods are each other's exact replica? Does the LORD adapt Himself to this or that state of affairs, just to try out various possibilities of communication with His people? So, was it just for variety's sake?

No, but since time is moving from a certain point of departure to a certain end, or goal, our God is leading the things He created, up to and including man, in the course of time as a scheme in which things develop towards a certain, definite end He has set in His good pleasure. In redemptive history, just as in all history, we see things moving toward their destination, according to God's eternal counsel. It is He who makes things happen the way they do.

For example, in Gen. 1:26 it is He who says: “Let Us make man in Our image, after Our likeness (N.B. man being the target of a special counsel of the Triune God and not the final haphazard product of evolution) and let them have dominion. . . . So God created man in His own image.”

In Gen. 3:15 (immediately after the fall into sin) it is God who spoke: “I will put enmity. . . .”

In Gen. 6:7 it is the LORD who says: “I will blot out man, whom I have created, from the face of the ground. . . .”

In Gen. 8:21 it is again the LORD who declared: “I will never again curse the ground because of man. . . .”

In Gen. 12:1f. it is He who spoke to Abram: “Go from your country . . .” adding the promise: “I will make of you a great nation. . . .”

Progression in time does not imply that mankind is improving all the time, learning from the mistakes of the past. (Though a great many people think so. Let me point at scholars in the Age of Reason, also called the Enlightenment.) We see the church, the people of God, lapse back into sin over and over again, sometimes even going from bad to worse. Compare, for example, the period of the Judges, or the monarchy that ended in disaster: the exile. I can also mention the Early Christian Church, with its prominent Church Fathers and well-known ecumenical councils, which was followed by the “dark” Medieval period of the church.

Rather than men it is the LORD and His revelation that was progressing

from the one stage to the next.

The history of God's people closely resembles that of a man or a woman, a comparison also made in the Old Testament (Isaiah 1:2f; Jeremiah 2; Ezekiel 16; Hosea 11; Hebrews 6). Just as in real life man grows up and develops from childhood to adulthood, and one single man, married to a wife, develops successively to a family, a clan, a tribe, a people, so our God and Father once, in the beginning, started with Adam, the first man and his wife, with whom we stand at the cradle of mankind. Later on, God limits Himself to two very special people, Abram and Sarai, to make them ancestors of a great nation, and spiritual ancestors of all the nations of the earth, specifically, the believers among them. That is why the promised seed came in a supernatural way, highlighting the wondrous power of God. This is the clue to the revelation in the first book of the Bible: Genesis.

6. The LORD's counsel

That the end, the destination of this progression is reached is to be ascribed to God's counsel. It is His counsel, His plan, His infinite wisdom and providence that should be credited in the first place.

It is the plan of God who is free to choose His means and ways in executing His plan, especially with man, His creature, bound (by sinful nature) yet free to make his choice over and over again. Man is held responsible by his God. Even the enemies of God have to be subservient to the execution of His counsel. It is the counsel of God who causes His plan to materialize, that is, come true in every respect.

In all this we see His divine virtues: His sovereign will, His almighty power, His tender mercies and His steadfast love which endures forever. He does not forsake the work of His hands. Redemptive historical preaching which deserves its name is the unfolding of the LORD's counsel unto salvation, to the praise of His glorious name.

7. The counsel of God pivots on Christ

The counsel of the LORD pivots around Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the WORD of GOD. So redemptive-historical preaching is Christocentric preaching.

To take away a common misconception, this does not mean that the preacher has to draw a line from any given text in the Old Testament to, for example, Christ in the manger or Christ on the cross or Christ in His resurrection or ascension.

I do not deny that there are lines in Holy Writ (e.g. John 3:14; Ephesians 4:8-10). What I mean is that we should see Jesus Christ standing at the beginning of the history of redemption and working in the world ever since. He is the Word who was at the beginning (John 1), so consequently, He is the Person by whom God uttered His words in Genesis 1. Eventually He is

the promised Seed of Gen. 3:15. We recognize Him time and again “working salvation for His people” (Psalm 111:9). It was He who rescued Noah from the wicked antediluvian population on earth (1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:5; Hebrews 11:7). It was He who redeemed Abraham and the patriarchs from so many awkward predicaments and delicate situations, but most of all it is His work that the promise is fulfilled in making the promised seed appear on the stage of history. This fulfilment directly pertains to the salvation in Jesus Christ. He is the acme of the long list of generations. So it is He whom we see bringing Israel forth out of Egypt, leading the people all the way through the wilderness, making them enter the Holy Land and fighting the battles in the time of Joshua, the Judges, and the monarchy.

The wars in the Old Testament that Israel had to fight on behalf of God were holy wars. They do not put a slur on the name or reputation of the LORD.

In spite of the many weaknesses on the part of many a judge and king, and in spite of people exposing themselves to serious dangers, it is actually the LORD who fights and wins the battle, which is in principle always the battle waged against the arch-enemy Satan. (Please do not make examples of these people, be they worthy of imitation or not, since we are not and will never be in the position to imitate them!) By gaining the victory it was and is the LORD who sends salvation to His people in Jesus Christ.

Even throughout the exile and afterwards, the all-time low in Israel's history as the severest punishment ever suffered, the people of God have come around. As Isaiah and others had prophesied: “A remnant will return, the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God” (Is. 10:21-23; Rom. 9:27, 28). God has purified His people. In this way the contours of the New Testament congregation become visible (Is. 56:1-8). Gradually the history of Israel through its successive stages is leading up to this end.

8. The position of man in this counsel

In the framework of this counsel man receives his place: a place which is always significant, since it is always subservient to God's counsel. In dealing with redemptive history, this aspect should not to be ignored. God deals with His people by means of a large variety of people, and long ago, foreign peoples.

Every man or woman, young man or maiden and the grey-haired, master and servant, mistress and slave-girl, civilian and military officials, occupy their particular place, be it in honour, be it in shame; the righteous and the workers of evil, the honourable and the detestable, the courageous and the coward, the generous and the miser, the proud and the humble, the rich and the poor, the bruiser and the delicately bred lady of Deut. 28:56, the industrious and the lazy man, all play *and have to play* their specific role in

the course of this history, each in his or her turn. In Scripture we come into contact with real life. Everyone has to play his part, not for his own sake and glory, but in the frame of God's counsel—to the praise of His glory. He who created the world is able to govern a world full of sinners. Once more we ask: What is the use of examples? Often we cannot follow them, be it for the good or for the worse since their situation is not ours. At best, you can draw a comparison, as far as it is allowed by the respective situations. But keep in mind that no comparison will hold water. There are points of comparison of course, people in biblical times were of like nature with ourselves (James 5:17).

In this respect the wisdom of the Book of Proverbs renders a good service in judging situations and people. And the godliness of the Book of Psalms serves as a yardstick for the piety which God demands from us.

What we should avoid is cutting a sector out of Biblical peoples' lives that we deem of interest, but which actually is not of interest then and there, or only marginally. Ehud, the woman Jael, Samson, and Jephtha, all had to do their work, but can we follow them in all their ways? I do not think so. If we would call them up as an example somehow, we have to call up their family, their tribe, their nation, the whole environment of that particular century with its civilization to give them their due.

What matters are the acts of the LORD, the carrying out or implementation of His divine decree, which applies to anything necessary to effect the end. So all man's acts and ways—be they just or wicked, be they wise or silly, be they splendid or not so splendid—are included. Even the righteous can do silly things and show themselves to be men of little faith. So we do not claim that the acts of man, his behaviour, are of no consequence at all in redemptive historical preaching.

No, his appearance (Elijah's mantle), his outfit, food and drink, his occupation, his relations, and, last but not least, his office (that means his responsibility in the church of God) are of consequence. Also his psychic life—as far as we are able to fathom it!—or his inner life plays a part, on the *proviso* that it is seen within the frame of God's revelation at that particular time and place, and so of the entire revelation. Let us not overlook that God's Word throughout the centuries is addressed to the heart of man, the very centre of man's life.

None of these items or aspects is by itself sufficient to draw a line to our lives today. *We* need not bridge the gap. The “bridge” is already there since in one and the same history, one and the same God, in the only Mediator Jesus Christ, gathers for Himself a church chosen to everlasting life, of which I whether man or woman, of like nature with all those people, am and forever shall remain a living member (cf. Lord's Day 21, Heidelberg Catechism).

9. Redemptive History and the New Testament

Redemptive historical preaching applies not only to the Old Testament with its extensive history covering millennia, but also to the New Testament era. Here we meet Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate. This implies that even here it is not Zacharias or Joseph or Mary, or Levi or Zacheus, or Peter or John or Thomas or Judas Iscariot, but time and again our Saviour who occupies the central place. Just as the gospels deal with all that Jesus began to do and to teach, so the book of Acts tells us how He continues to work on this basis.

10. Conclusion

The history of salvation as described in the Bible continues in what is called the history of the church. It is the history of revelation that has come to an end in chapter 22 of the book of Revelation.

During the history of the church, the ensuing history of the church, from the second century up to the twentieth, it is the ministers who are charged to preach the good tidings.

In view of this they have to become acquainted with God's Word. For one thing: they have to get the message before they are ready to preach the message. They ought to know the text thoroughly before they can administer it in their sermons. They ought to know, for example, the world of the past, unearthed by the finds of archaeology and to be up-to-date as far as the present time is concerned, to discover what is the place and the task of the church in the world today.

Remarks on Church and Tolerance

Prof. J. Kamphuis

1. Introduction

The subject that we are now dealing with at this conference has been announced as “Tolerance.” From the nature of this meeting as delegates and observers of *churches* it is more or less a matter of course that we confine ourselves to tolerance as an *ecclesiastical* issue.

But the subject also has a broader meaning. We cannot confine ourselves to a strictly ecclesiastical field. That will be proved again and again in the remainder of these remarks. Tolerance becomes a topic as soon as we are confronted with various convictions in society. Thus there is also the fascinating and important issue of tolerance in political life with its central question about the limits of what is permissible for a government that rules a “mixed” population. In the Netherlands the Dutch Reformed dogmatician of the theological faculty of the Utrecht university, A.A. van Ruler, aired provocative views that give insight. [On this, compare the two essays from 1956 and 1966 respectively about *Theocratie en tolerantie* (*Theocracy and Tolerance*), in his *Theologisch werk* I and III. Compare also for the history of tolerance in the Netherlands in church and state the big work written by R.B. Evenhuis, *Ook dat was Amsterdam*, VII, 1974, 237-279. Evenhuis approvingly refers to the views of A.A. van Ruler.] Although I have learned a lot from Van Ruler's studies, I thought I had to draw different lines and seek a closer alliance with the Reformed of the seventeenth century. [I published about this in *Lux Mundi*, Vol. II no. 4 of December 1992, page 3-9 in an article entitled, “An Appraisal of Tolerance.” May I refer to that article here and I will return to it under point four.]

We have no time to deal with the issue of tolerance in order to come to a satisfying conclusion of the argument and that is why we only give a number of remarks.

1.1.

Tolerance (“verdraagzaamheid” in Dutch, “forbearance” in English) functions as a key word, and as a central idea in present-day (Western) society and culture. It has gradually acquired the meaning of: the willingness to respect the complete freedom of any conviction and of the attitude to life that originates from it and is connected to it, no matter how deviating this practical attitude to life may be from traditional convictions and moral maxims as they may still be found among the majority of the people.

1.2.

Thus the idea of tolerance became much broader compared to the term that was most current until recently. In spite of all the difference the central point of tolerance always was tolerating all deviant conviction and behaviour. This tolerance was always limited and bound to certain conditions e.g. in view of publicly propagating it. This tolerance had its starting point in an authority which decided, for reasons moving him or her to tolerate what in itself could not receive positive approval. In this regard, compare the insightful survey article written by W.F. Adeney in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* XII, 1921, 360 ff. (Unfortunately, the article is not fully accurate in some historical details). We quote the extensive description of “tolerance” given by Adeney on page 360:

“The word ‘toleration’ in its legal, ecclesiastical, and doctrinal application has a peculiar limited signification. It connotes a refraining from prohibition and persecution. Nevertheless, it suggests a latent disapproval and it usually refers to a condition in which the freedom which it permits is both limited and conditional. Toleration is not equivalent to religious liberty, and it falls far short of religious equality. It assumes the existence of an authority which might have been coercive, but which for reasons of its own is not pushed to extremes. It implies a voluntary inaction, a politic leniency. The motives that induce a policy of toleration are various, such as mere weakness and inability to enforce prohibitory measures, lazy indifference, the desire to secure conciliation by concessions, the wisdom to perceive that ‘force is not remedy,’ the intellectual breadth and humility that shrink from a claim to infallibility, the charity that endures the objectionable, respect for the right of private judgment.”

But at the end of his article Adeney points out (and he did so at the beginning of our century!) that great change that takes place in our time:

“The champions of liberty now resent the use of the term as representing a gracious concession on the part of the privileged, and claim to go far beyond it in their demand for the abolition of all theological and ecclesiastical privileges and the establishment of absolute religious equality.”

You might say that the *present* use of this term has been bent towards this equality!

1.3.

The *present-day* idea of tolerance and the use of words that agree with it means a definite breakthrough of the basic convictions of the sixteenth-century humanism that saw the measure of all things *in man*.

Together with the Reformation of the sixteenth century this humanism opposed the claims of the authority of the hierarchical Roman Catholic church. Humanism, however, was in favour of human autonomy and that is why it opposed the Reformation, which looked for the deliverance of life in the obedience to the Word of God.

It is important to bear in mind that the Reformation also took its stand against humanism, often being connected with numerous Christian convictions at that time. It stood against the so-called Christian of biblical humanism that had a spokesman in Desiderius Erasmus (1469-1536), elder contemporary of Luther. Erasmus opposed Luther at the point of man's "free will." In spite of all the criticism on all kinds of evils, he sided with Rome here. From the dispute between Luther and Erasmus it becomes clear that they also went different ways at the point of *certainty* as to the doctrine that God had revealed in His Word. Erasmus thinks that little can be said *with certainty* at the points that were in discussion between Luther and Rome. Luther on the contrary vigorously maintains the clearness of God's revelation ("the Holy Spirit is not a sceptic"!). On the basis of this the believer and the church can confess *with certainty*.

Erasmus' biblical humanism has had great influence on the people's minds, especially in the Netherlands. To a great extent his views make up the background of the Remonstrants (Arminians) in the Reformed churches, who dogmatically pleaded in favour of "man's free will" and in ecclesiastical practice wanted to see a broad tolerance observed. In the time that followed humanism a real threat remained for the church, although, together with the help of foreign Reformed churches Remonstrantism was condemned at the Synod of Dort 1618-1619, many foreign delegates being present as members of the meeting, who were entitled to vote. In the course of the eighteenth century humanism more and more rejected the "biblical" character, which was still present with Erasmus. In the so-called Enlightenment (*Aufklärung* in German) this humanism more and more set its stamp on society. Already John Locke in England (1632-1704) and later Voltaire in France (1694-1778) vigorously pleaded in favour of tolerance, which got a broader and broader sense. Voltaire, in turn, had a great influence on King Frederick the Great of Prussia (1740-1786), who by his unscrupulous policies made his country into a great power.

The *Christelijke Encyclopedie* writes about him: "He belongs to the enlightened dictators, who, with maintenance of royal absolutism in government and administration applied the ideas of the *Aufklärung*." As a rationalist he was indifferent towards Christianity. Denying the Protestant tradition of the house of Hohenzollern and of Prussia his policies aimed at the principle secularization of the state. One of his first measures of government was the *tolerance* edict of 1740, the elaboration of his famous statement: "Hier muss jeder nach seiner Fassung selig werden." ("Everybody has to be saved here in his own way.") Tolerance and absolutism here go together! Here is one of the historical backgrounds of the totalitarian national-socialism of our age. [Compare Ben Knapen, *Het duitse onbehagen, Een land op zoek naar identiteit* (*The German discomfort, A country in search of identity*), 1983, 105.] A plain indication that the term "toleration" has real significance only from the context!

1.4.

During the nineteenth century humanism developed into an aggressive atheism with the German philosopher Fr. Nietzsche (1844-1900). In our time his influence is very strong in France and in the whole western world and in the Netherlands in particular. Many who have broken with the Christian faith have been marked by his nihilism and atheism. [Compare my *Nietzsche in Nederland* 1987.] Apart from direct influence of one certain philosopher, the influence of humanism is becoming stronger and broader in all cultural and public life. The acceptance of the autonomy of man (connected with a strong individualism) makes present-day society very atheistic. Especially in ethical questions autonomy strongly throws its weight around (the right of self-determination in case of termination of life, the legalization of induced abortion, the acceptance of homosexual practice are strongly examples). In all these things an appeal is always made to tolerance being the comprehensive, fundamental human attitude, which has to be protected, propagated, and established by the state. The equality of all people is sought in the greatest possible freedom to organize life according to one's own will and insight and to give public evidence of it.

1.5.

For the church which wants to live in obedience to the Word of the living God and which also wants to preach this Word, *in principle* there is no place left for her in this society, although freedom of religion will still be reserved for the “churches” by the state.

But when the church preaches the salvation and the will of God outside its walls she is felt to be an illegal nuisance. According to the feeling of many people who form “public opinion” (in particular, by means of modern mass media) the church is considered to be the centre of *intolerance*. This applies to both the Roman Catholic church when her spokesmen wish to adhere to the official Roman Catholic ideas regarding the great ethical questions of our time and also to the orthodox Protestant and Reformed churches. Whereas freedom of religion applies to the strictly ecclesiastical field the modern thought of tolerance clearer and clearer turns out to be at odds with this freedom of religion. If no restraining factors come into action the present, absolute tolerance will more and more turn out to be intolerant towards confessing Christians and towards the church that only wants to live according to the Word of God in everything. Then tolerance will change into intolerance! This shows a remarkable similarity with the experience of the church at the beginning of our era in the Roman empire. Great tolerance towards many religions prevailed here. But when young Christianity openly confessed the name of the only God, the Father of Jesus Christ, and when the church opposed customs which were condemned by the Gospel and refused to join in the cult of the emperor, there was no

tolerance left for that church.

2.1.

Present-day tolerance easily infects the climate in the church. In many respects the history of the church of the past centuries has been dominated by the struggle against penetrating humanism. People often try, especially in theology, to achieve a synthesis with philosophical ideas which dominate the minds. Then the confession of the church is resisted. The confession of the church of the Reformation especially becomes the target of criticism. The accusation of intolerance often goes hand in hand with the accusation of fossilized confessionalism. It was said to be an obstacle to the sound development of theology and of ecclesiastical life and to make it impossible for a church to become really up to date. In the sixteenth and at the beginning of the seventeenth century Christian humanism often addressed the complaint of intolerance and confessionalism to the Reformed. This complaint was raised by the Remonstrants in their struggle against the Reformed confession although they emphatically claimed the name "Reformed" and a place in the church for themselves.

This was also the case when in the eighteenth century the Enlightenment penetrated the church. This led to separations in the nineteenth century (Scotland, the Netherlands). The modernism in the nineteenth century found its strongest resistance in the churches of the Separation (Secession of 1834), but the reproach of confessional intolerance was continuously addressed to these churches.

In our century we see the spirit of modernism become victorious in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (synodical) which have rejected the Liberation. An unlimited tolerance has conquered these churches. Professor K. Runia of the theological university of these churches recently wrote (*Centraal Weekblad* 9 July 1993), "If the members of these churches are asked to choose between discipline and tolerance the great majority will undoubtedly choose tolerance even if they personally do not agree with the concepts defended." Here the "concepts" refer to the theologians Dr. H. Wiersinga in his *Geloven bij daglicht (Faith by daylight)*, in which he radically breaks with the entire "Reformed inheritance" and especially to Prof. Dr. H.M. Kuitert with his notorious book *Het algemeen betwijfeld christelijk geloof (The catholic doubted christian Faith)*, translated into English by the characteristic title *I doubt.*) Kuitert breaks with the traditional doctrine of inspiration of the Scriptures' vigorously exclaiming: "away with it" and he breaks with the whole substance of Christian and Reformed belief. But "tolerance" *remains* the key word even in the case of these denials! A line can be drawn *from* the doubt, uttered by Erasmus, towards speaking from the certainty of Christian belief by Luther to *this* scepticism, with which Christian belief had developed into no more than a

“design of search” for God.

2.2.

How the humanist idea of tolerance gives a completely different course to ecclesiastical life is very clear from the fact that names and ideas which have always been used are put aside as being aged and having too intolerant a sound. Thus there is more and more objection against the contents and also the name of mission being the preaching by and from the church of Christ to the heathens, and to the followers of Islam as well. For a long time now the preaching of the Gospel among the Jews has had to make room for “the *discussion* with Israel” in which openness and tolerance are the key words. And the rest of “mission” changes into a dialogue with the world religions. There is no room left for preaching the invitation to salvation, revealed in Christ, with the authority of the gospel. That would discredit tolerance, belonging to a society in an ideological pluralism.

3.

It appears to be self-evident, that we have to opt for intolerance if we reject the humanist idea of tolerance! And we need not avoid these words, “intolerance” and “inforbearance,” although we do have to choose our words with carefulness and wisdom, because they may have a different shade of meaning especially for English speaking people.

3.1.

In the first place, we need not *avoid* the word: intolerance. It cannot be helped that the contrasts are sharp, since the light shines in the darkness. Here we give the floor to the Scriptures themselves.

3.1.1.

The LORD calls Himself the one God (Deut. 6:4, also compare Zech. 9:14)¹. He is supposed to be confessed and lauded as the only-Living *opposed* to all dead idols (compare Ps. 115). Idolatry warrants intolerance! A radical choice is also required without a compromise. “If the Lord is God, follow Him, but if Baal is God, follow him” (1 Kings 18:21). The New Testament is equally antithetical and without a compromise, and if you like, intolerant. The triune God is preached as the only, true, living One: “For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many gods and many lords—yet for us there is but one God, the Father from Whom all things came and for Whom we live, and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through Whom all things came and from Whom we live” (1

1 Scripture quotations in this paper have been taken from the Revised Standard Version.

Corinthians 8:5, 6). This is also relevant for a Godfearing life: “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other; you cannot serve both God and Money” (Matthew 6:24).

3.1.2.

As there is in the confession of the living God no tolerance for the denial of His name, thus it is also the case in the confession of Jesus Christ, His Son Who has come in the flesh: “God appeared in the flesh.” John draws intolerant lines: “Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is the Christ! Such a man is the anti-christ—he denies the Father and the Son” (1 John 2:22). And John has learned this from the Master Himself: “Whoever acknowledges Me before men, I will also acknowledge Him before My Father in heaven. But whoever disowns Me before men, I also will disown him before My Father in heaven” (Matthew 10:32, 33).

That is why the disciple also summarizes the gospel of His Lord and His God in the powerful message regarding Jesus of Nazareth: “He is the true God and eternal life” (1 John 5:20). And again there is the sharpest antithesis possible with all idolatry: “Dear children, keep yourselves from idols” (verse 21).

3.1.3.

That is why the congregation of the living God and especially the office-bearers in the congregation are called to follow the pattern of the sound words as opposed to all errors (2 Tim. 1:13, 4:3; Tit. 1:9, 13; 2:1) and that in view of “the times of stress” that will come in “the last days” (2 Tim. 3:1 compare 1 John 2:18 and following). Thus the apostle Paul warns the elders of Ephesus in view of the congregation of God of “savage wolves, who will not spare the flock (Acts 20:29) and he calls to the congregation of Rome: “watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned” (Rom 16:17). Therefore doctrine and life are under the discipline of God's holiness (Deut. 19:19; 1 Cor. 5:7). That is why the congregation is praised if she (in spite of a lot of shortcomings that are found with her) “cannot tolerate wicked men” (Rev. 2:2). “Not tolerate”—with as many words intolerance is mentioned here!—which was approved by Christ Himself! He even speaks about hating the works of the heretics (Nicolaitans). He hates those works Himself and the congregation is with Him her Lord, in agreement! (Rev. 2:6). Notice how radically the apostle Peter in his second letter and Jude contrast the doctrine of truth and the life from it with “the destructive heresies” of “false teachers” who have their forerunners in the false prophets of the Old Covenant (2 Peter 2:1 and following, Jude 3 and following). There is the penetrating admonition “to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3). No doubt is permitted

here, as if there might be place for it in the church. Even if so-called Reformed theologians publish books with the challenging title *Het algemeen betwijfeld christelijk geloof* (*The catholic doubted Christian faith*), the Christian church continues to say this received faith is “without a doubt” and undoubted among us no matter how much it may be challenged and doubted in our time. And in doing so the church has not become narrow minded and limited and not careless and ignorant as to the realities of all those challenges, but through faith she speaks the firm language of “we know,” making it sound as the refrain (1 John 5:18, 19, 20) with which John concludes his first letter.

3.2.

However obvious it seems to be to opt for “intolerance” as a term that might represent the struggle of Christ's church very well, as opposed to a humanist concept of tolerance, yet great caution is required here! I mention some reasons for it, all of which mutually correlate.

3.2.1.

We must always take care not to live from *reaction*, having the other, the opponent, label us. If we are blamed for being intolerant we need not avoid that term out of fear, but we must not have ourselves labelled either. For our opponents do this being inspired by their own background and convictions which we fundamentally reject, do we not? That is why it is a good thing to realize that in contrast with the humanist concept of tolerance it is not a matter of *tolerance* opposed to *intolerance*, but of *true* tolerance opposed to *false* tolerance, of *Reformed*, *Scriptural* tolerance opposed to *humanist* tolerance.

3.2.2.

Add to this that we have to be as understanding as possible both inside and outside the church. There is indeed an intolerance that originates from narrow-mindedness and ecclesiastical insularity. In the Netherlands we know how truly Reformed people were suspended from the exercise of their offices by a synod which wanted to oblige everybody to subscribe to a private (and always controversial view) of the covenant of grace, namely that of Dr. A. Kuyper. The Liberation of 1944 and following years became necessary because of that! Only in this way could we keep *the room* that is really characteristic of Reformed churches!

We find essentially the same problem with “The Reformed Congregations in the Netherlands and in North America” with their Doctrinal decision of 1931 and also with the Protestant Reformed Churches in the USA with their Declaration of Principles of 1951. [Compare W.W.J. VanOene, *Inheritance Preserved: The Canadian Reformed Churches in Historical Perspective*, 1975, pp. 64-67.] It is notable that in these cases we are confronted with a

theological opinion, namely, the identification—basically—of the eternal election with the covenant of grace. This *seems* to be a logical solution of a theological difficulty. The *logical* system probably has a great attraction in theology and the church. Nevertheless, there are decisive arguments from Holy Scripture against this solution, especially against the thesis that the promise of the Gospel is unconditional only for the elect. This runs up against important Biblical and pastoral objections. But in all these cases the logical system is imposed on the church as if it is *Scriptural* truth. And then the really catholic room of the church disappears.

3.2.3.

Narrow-mindedness does not suit the church of God, does it? The Lord Himself is not like that: “as a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him. For He knows how we are formed, He remembers that we are dust” (Ps. 103:13, 14). Neither is the Saviour narrow-minded: He had compassion with the hosts in Israel, who were like sheep without a shepherd. Then He patiently took His time to teach them many things (Mark 6:34). And the apostles did not lead us in such a way either. According to his own testimony Paul had a wide heart for the difficult congregation of Corinth (2 Cor. 6:11) and that is why the congregation—and the “strong within the congregation”—are also urged by him to be tolerant and to bear each other's failings in the community of saints (Rom. 15:1; Gal. 6:2) to fulfil the law of Christ in this way. That is something different from making quick work of each other!

3.2.4.

Now we must ask ourselves: what may be the cause of the fact that the God who takes such an intolerant position towards idols and all idolatry and also teaches His people to do so is at the same time full of patience and steadfast love and teaches us regarding our attitude in the community of saints: “bearing with one another in love” (Eph. 4:2 compare Col. 3:15)? There is only one answer here. *Our God is the God of history*. In the history of salvation He goes “a way” with His people. How full is the Bible of it! God's way is perfect (Ps. 18:30) in saving holiness for His people (Ps. 77:14). In the New Testament the Saviour calls Himself “the *Way* and the Truth and the Life” (John 14:6). Therefore the congregation is called the meeting of men and women, who “belong to the *Way*” (Acts 9:2). God came to a world which had sinned: “Adam, where are you?” He has given His promises and has gone *the way* of the fulfilment of those promises. He *is* still going that way! At the beginning of His dealing with us He did not proclaim a philosophical world view, a religious system, but He revealed *Himself* as the Living and as the God who works salvation. If He had been the God of a system, then He would have been as intolerant as everybody who builds a philosophical and world view system and then asks submission to it. But He makes *Himself* known in the way of grace and

justice. On that way He shows quite a lot of patience and lenience in enduring the conduct of a troublesome and obstinate people (Acts 13:18), although He undoubtedly maintains Himself also in the way of His judgments of those who take counsel against Him and His anointed (Psalm 2). He is the truth in the fullness of His virtues and of His actions. He is so in His Son, the Beloved. And on the way of salvation He has made His Name known to Moses: “the LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished; He punishes the children and their children for the sins of the fathers to the third and fourth generation” (Ex. 34:6, 7). That Name reverberates throughout the history of the Covenant (compare Num. 14:18; 2 Chron. 30:9; Nehem. 9:17, 31; Jonah 4:2; Joel 2:13; Nahum 1:3). In the course of the times Israel praises this Name on its way with this God (Ps. 86:15, 103:8, 145: 8).

Early and late in the history of the Old Covenant the Lord sent prophets and taught the people in His ways. This is not patience because of weakness or indifference! For there is a limit! History knows His just judgments and it knows the exile of His people for 70 years. And from heaven the glorified Christ threatens congregations which leave His service and His way with the revenge of the Covenant. He made known to the congregations of Sardis and Laodicea, setting an example to us, that we may not despise “the richness of the kindness of God’s tolerance and patience” (compare Rom. 2:4). On the way that He goes with His people of the Covenant in the Old and in the New Testament He makes Himself more and more known. History of salvation is at the same time history of *revelation*. The name of the LORD has opened gloriously for us in the name of the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, into which the congregation is baptized. Thus *the doctrine* of the truth has been made known to us, not as an abstract and timeless system, but as “the revealed mystery of godliness” (1 Tim. 3:16). That is why there is an inseparable coherence between doctrine and life in the congregation, a deep unity. That is why in view of the reconciliation by Christ in the fullness of times in the preceding centuries God was slow to anger both with His people and with the heathens, who were then not called yet.

For the sake of hardness of hearts He admitted practices of marriage in the Old Covenant as it had not been from the beginning and therefore our Saviour does not teach His disciples in this way, (Matthew 19:3 and following) and He passed the sins done “in His forbearance” because the bloodshed of Calvary and the revelation of His righteousness still had to come (Rom. 3:25). That is why in his preaching at the Areopagus in Athens, Paul says that God overlooked “the times of ignorance” if “today” He commands all people to repent and receive forgiveness of sins (Acts 17:30). Since God is the God of history in the lives of His people and of His

children He weighs sins in equity and one is blamed heavier because of ignorance than the other. We are judged according to the light we receive. We are not examined in theology by Him at a certain moment, or alternatively in philosophy with a positive or a negative result, but He asks us to know *Him* and to live Godfearing for Him according to the old rule which He impresses already on Abraham in the Covenant and on the *way* of the Covenant: “walk before Me and be blameless” (Gen. 17:1).

4.

From the above it may become clear to us now what *Christian* and *Reformed* tolerance means. It is essential for the church! But it is also essentially distinguished from humanist tolerance! It is opposed to it! The *humanist* thought of tolerance aims at a free margin for man, for his ideas and behaviour. Consequently, the doctrine of the Scriptures confessed by the church is in fact always a heavy yoke. But the starting-point of Reformed tolerance is the fact that Christian doctrine is not a yoke of compulsion, limiting human freedom, but it is *the condition* for human freedom!

True tolerance does not aim at making human margins as wide as possible, but it aims at *the good progress* of the Word of God and of Christian doctrine, both in life of the church as a community and in the life of the individual believers. And here is the blessed work of the Holy Spirit. Christian tolerance is only possible through confidence in the progress of this work!

In a fair study about *The doctrinal discipline in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands between 1570 and 1620*, published at the beginning of this century (by H. Schokking, as a theological dissertation at the University of Amsterdam) it is made clear that the Reformed church of that time also took a firm stand against the humanist idea of tolerance, which the Remonstrants wanted to see practised, but that at the same time Reformed tolerance was not forgotten! At that time tolerance among the Reformed meant “the possibility that in good faith and by lack of insight, temporary prejudice objections were felt against dogmas, which were as a matter of fact generally recognized in the church; they did describe these cases well” (H. Schokking, 253).

That is why practising tolerance was never *timeless* or an *abstract* problem. Whether they dealt with just a member of the congregation or with a pastor was a very important question. What could be tolerated by one, could not be permitted by the other. Which is rather obvious: with the pastor the question of *the good progress of truth* is at stake! The pastor has to lead the flock in the “right ways of the Lord” and is not permitted to pervert them (compare Acts 13:10 and Hos. 14:10). It also depends on the circumstances, if and in how far tolerance can be practised: it is not permitted to cause confusion in

the congregation neither may evil be spoken of the way of God (Acts 19:9). There has to be an openness for the Word of God in the life of him with whom tolerance is exercised; he must be willing to be taught and not be eager to propagate his private problem as a doctrine in the congregation. Then the limit has been reached for this tolerance; it lies in the Word of God and in sound doctrine.

Neither is this tolerance left to one's own discretion. It is the church that has to decide here in obedience to the Word of God, being "the pillar and foundation of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:14). The office-bearers and the ecclesiastical meetings have a responsibility of their own here. That is why the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century were *both* intolerant *and* tolerant in a Scriptural sense when with the help of the foreign churches they definitely resisted the errors of Remonstrantism and did not want to accept any compromise. But at the same time they were prepared to exercise patience with simple people who had been thrown into confusion and who were willing to be instructed. This intolerance and tolerance is set aglow with the respect for the Word of God and the love for the church of God. So far the Reformed churches have desired to continue this way, even today when they have been obliged to resist errors which occur in the congregation and for which room of propaganda was asked and made both in book and magazine. I mean the schisms of 1926 (Dr. J.G. Geelkerken) and of 1967 and the following years (the Netherlands Reformed Churches).

For that matter we witness with sadness in our hearts, how the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (synodical) as a confessing community sank into *autonomous* tolerance and how this, also on world scale, on the level of the REC destroyed the fraternity of believers and continues to destroy it! So if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! (1 Cor. 10:12 can also be applied here).

5.

Practising true tolerance and contending to one's utmost for the belief that was once delivered to the saints (Jude 3) are not *opposed* to each other, but the first is a consequence of the second and inseparably coheres with it. Within the context of the ICRC we as Christian churches can help and support and encourage each other in a rich sense, urging each other always to look for the good progress of the Word of grace. Contact with each other as churches from all over the world is of great importance in this! Although we are moving a little bit from our subject that deals with tolerance in a strict sense, yet there is a clear link. When we see that the Lord God goes *a way* with His people in the world, the way of His Word and Spirit, then we may also see that in all unity there is and there may be distinction as well. There is unity. For there is one God and one Lord Jesus Christ. There is one belief and there is one baptism (compare Eph. 4:4). We can speak about the

one way of the Word in the world. We meet each other on that way.

At the same time we may see that God leads His church in every country on a way of her own. Rome only knows of world church with one centre on earth and one and the same confession of faith. We, Reformed people, have our centre in heaven, where Christ is at the right hand of His Father. Scattered all over the world we are united in the same Spirit of faith.

Reformed churches have in the past not been diligent to possess one communal confession, that would have to replace the existing confessions. The *Harmonia Confessionum Evangelicarum* of 1581 also was not a *new* communal confession but would only demonstrate the harmony of the existing confessions. That the Lord goes different ways with His people has always been respected in the fact of *pluralism* of confessions with the *unity* of belief. Error has always been resisted unanimously. Again I think of the help, received by the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands at the Synod of Dort 1618-1619 from the sister churches abroad. But the community was not broken because one confession was formulated different from the other. We are not always confronted with the same problems. Then we often choose our formulations according to the problems we are confronted with and also within the possibilities of the language we have at our disposal. That is why within a young community of churches as the ICRC the question of critical importance for each of the participating churches is: *how do we meet each other?* How do we associate? In an atmosphere of mistrust? Because we do not have the same confessions and we have a different historical background and we sometimes speak a somewhat different language than we are used to in our own environment? Or in gladness, because, in spite of all the variety of ways we do see that God goes the *one way of His pleasure and His grace*? Then we can also learn the determination *and* the patience of belief from each other, and encourage and urge each other to Scriptural tolerance while not bearing error. For decisiveness in belief and decisiveness towards error go hand in hand with tolerance *within* the one community of belief—a patience that we want to exercise mutually in a spirit of gentleness. Now that we see in our time so much belief destroyed and secularization making quick progress, the ICRC can be a priceless means, a good instrument, a striking symbol of the community of saints, which does not bear error, but within which there is a communal life from Christ's peace—that peace which surpasses all understanding and which can keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. If one word of the Saviour can direct our community of churches, it is what Christ said to His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount:

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

Section IV

Miscellaneous

Constitution and Regulations

of the
International Conference of Reformed Churches
(Revised, 1989)

CONSTITUTION

ARTICLE I — NAME

The name shall be The International Conference of Reformed Churches.

ARTICLE II — BASIS

The basis of the Conference shall be the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as confessed in the Three Forms of Unity (the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Canons of Dort) and the Westminster Standards (the Westminster confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms).

ARTICLE III — PURPOSE

The purpose of the Conference shall be:

1. to express and promote the unity of faith that the member churches have in Christ;
2. to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the member churches;
3. to encourage cooperation among the member churches in the fulfillment of the missionary and other mandates;
4. to study the common problems and issues that confront the member churches and to aim for recommendations with respect to these matters;
5. to present a Reformed testimony to the world.

ARTICLE IV — MEMBERSHIP

1. Those churches shall be admitted as members which:
 - a. adhere and are faithful to the confessional standards stated in the Basis;
 - b. furnish
 - i. their confessional standards;
 - ii. their form of government;
 - iii. their form of subscription;
 - iv. their declaratory acts (if applicable);
 - c. are accepted by a two-thirds majority vote of the member churches, every member church having one vote;
 - d. are not members of the World Council of Churches or any other organization whose aims and practices are deemed to be in conflict

with the Basis.

2. Termination of membership shall be by a two-thirds majority whenever the Conference is of the opinion that the member church in its doctrine and/or practice is no longer in agreement with the Basis.

ARTICLE V — AUTHORITY

The conclusions of the Conference shall be advisory in character. Member churches are to be informed of these conclusions and are recommended to work towards their implementation.

ARTICLE VI — AMENDMENTS TO THE CONSTITUTION

The Constitution may be amended by a two-thirds majority vote of the member churches.

The proposed amendment(s) shall be sent to the Corresponding Secretary two years before the meeting of the Conference. He shall send it to the member churches immediately.

REGULATIONS

ARTICLE I — MEETINGS OF THE CONFERENCE

1. The Conference shall convene every four years.
2. Each meeting of the conference shall determine the time, place and convening church of the next Conference.

ARTICLE II — EXECUTIVE OFFICERS

Each meeting of the Conference shall elect the following officers: a Chairman, a Vice-Chairman, a Recording Secretary and a Corresponding Secretary.

1. The Chairman shall:
 - a. call the meeting to order at the appointed time and see to it that each session is properly opened and closed;
 - b. insure that the matters on the agenda are dealt with as expeditiously as possible;
 - c. put to the meeting every motion that is made and duly seconded, as well as take the vote;
 - d. rule on all points of order, subject always to an appeal from two voting delegates.
2. The Vice-Chairman shall:
 - a. take the chair when the Chairman desires to express himself on any question before the meeting;
 - b. assume the duties and privileges of the Chairman in his absence;

- c. render all possible assistance to the Chairman.
- 3. The Recording Secretary shall:
 - a. call the roll every day once the devotions have concluded;
 - b. keep an accurate record of all the proceedings of the meeting;
 - c. insure that all documents are properly cared for;
 - d. forward three copies of the proceedings to the member churches as soon as possible after compilation;
- 4. The Corresponding Secretary shall:
 - a. during the meeting of the Conference, assist the Recording Secretary whenever and wherever possible;
 - b. in between the meeting of the Conference:
 - i. attend to all correspondence;
 - ii. receive all reports from committees of the Conference and distribute them to the member churches;
 - iii. assist the convening church;
 - iv. publish materials, reports or other publications as authorized by the Conference;
 - v. report to the next meeting of the Conference on his activities and in the interim be responsible to the Interim Committee.
- 5. The Executive shall manage the proceedings of the meetings, arrange and propose the business to be transacted in every session and make recommendations concerning committees.

ARTICLE III — INTERIM COMMITTEE

The Interim Committee shall consist of the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman and the Recording Secretary.

It shall:

- 1. oversee the work of the Corresponding Secretary;
- 2. invite one of the alternate committee members to serve when necessary;
- 3. report to the next meeting of the Conference;
- 4. be dismissed subsequent to its report to the next meeting of the Conference.

ARTICLE IV — COMMITTEES

- 1. The Conference may appoint a committee to study any matter that is deemed to be of mutual concern to the member churches.
- 2. Every attempt shall be made to make the members of these committees as representative as possible. The Conference shall also appoint members who can serve as substitute members should original appointees no longer be able to serve.
- 3. Committee reports shall be in the hands of the Corresponding Secretary at least one year prior to the next meeting of the Conference.

ARTICLE V — PARTICIPANTS

The following are to be seated at the meetings of the Conference:

1. Voting delegates from the member churches.
Each member church shall be entitled to send two voting delegates to the meeting.
2. Advisory delegates from the member churches.
Each member church may appoint two advisors, but they shall have no vote.
3. Observer delegates from churches that have made application for membership in the Conference.
They may be invited to take part in all discussion but will not be accorded the right to vote nor be present at closed sessions.
4. Visiting delegates from churches which have not yet applied for membership.
They shall be granted the right to attend the open meetings of the Conference and have extended to them the usual courtesies for such occasions.

ARTICLE VI — CONVOCATION OF THE CONFERENCE

1. The convening church shall organize a prayer service prior to the opening session of the Conference.
2. The convening church shall appoint one of its members to preside at the opening of the Conference.
3. The convener shall designate three delegates who will collect, examine and report on the credentials of each delegation.
4. The convener shall supervise the election of the Executive Officers.

ARTICLE VII — AGENDA MATERIAL

1. The Conference shall place on its agenda:
 - a. correspondence from member churches;
 - b. applications for membership from other churches;
 - c. reports from its special committees and Corresponding Secretary;
 - d. reports from its Interim Committee;
 - e. recommendations from any two member churches to extend an invitation to another church to send observers to the Conference.
2. Materials for the agenda should be received by the Corresponding Secretary one year in advance. Recommendations should also be in the hands of the Corresponding Secretary one year in advance and be circulated as soon as possible thereafter. Amendments to Committee proposals can be received by the Corresponding Secretary up to the opening session of the next meeting of the Conference. Other agenda material received less than one year before the opening of the next meeting of the Conference shall only be considered if the Conference so decides.
3. The agenda must be finalized three months in advance and a copy sent to all member churches.

4. Additional subjects for the agenda introduced by a delegate of a member church shall be restricted to those matters which are important and urgent and which could not have been placed on the agenda in a regular way. In such cases the meeting of the Conference shall decide by a two-thirds majority whether to place these matters on the agenda.

ARTICLE VIII — RULES OF ORDER

1. To obtain the floor each speaker must be recognized by the chair. He shall address himself to the Chairman with decorum and respect.
2. If a delegates fails to adhere to the point under discussion or becomes unnecessarily lengthy in his remarks, the Chairman shall call him to order.
3. If any delegate has spoken twice on a given issue, others who have not yet spoken shall be given priority by the Chairman.
4. When the Chairman believes that a motion has been sufficiently discussed, he may propose that debate be drawn to a close. Any delegate convinced of the same may move to close the discussion.
5. Decisions shall be taken on the basis of a simple majority of votes cast, with the exception of Article IV, 1, c., IV, 2., VI of the Constitution and Article X of the Regulations.

ARTICLE IX — FINANCES

(cf. Minute 28 of ICRC, 1993)

ARTICLE X — AMENDMENTS TO THE REGULATIONS

These Regulations may be amended by a two-thirds majority of the votes cast.

The proposed amendment(s) shall be sent to the Corresponding Secretary one year prior to the meeting of the Conference.

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Press Release

of the International Conference of Reformed Churches
meeting in Zwolle, the Netherlands, September 1 - 9, 1993

This Conference held a preliminary meeting in 1982 with the Free Church of Scotland and the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated) taking leading roles. Subsequent regular meetings were held in Scotland in 1985, and in Canada in 1989.

The third meeting at Zwolle was hosted by the congregation of the Zwolle South Reformed Church, and delegates received most generous hospitality from local Reformed churches.

The Conference received four new members, bringing its total membership to 15 churches. The new members are: Orthodox Presbyterian Church (USA), Reformed Church in the United States, Free Reformed Churches of North America, and the Free Church of Central India. Observers representing more than 20 churches were also present. An excellent spirit of fellowship was characteristic of the entire meeting, which indeed reflected a pronounced international flavour.

The Mission Committee reported to the Conference on the missionary activities of the member churches and suggested areas for mutual co-operation. Member churches were urged to organize regional missionary conferences in various parts of the world.

The Theological Affirmation Committee report drew the attention of the Conference to the consensus on the doctrine of the church in the various Reformed confessions which form the constitutional basis of the Conference. It pointed out the consequences that this holds for admission to the pulpit and to the Lord's table.

The most prominent themes of the Conference had to do with mission and preaching. Papers were submitted and discussed affirming very clearly the teaching of the Bible on the centrality of Christ in mission, and on the righteous wrath of God. Papers on preaching covered the areas of catechetical preaching and redemptive-historical preaching. Three further papers addressed the subjects of the claim to the gift of prophecy in the church today, the extent of doctrinal tolerance permissible in the church, and recent criticisms of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

All of the papers submitted led to considerable and profitable discussion which, while facing differences honestly, served to promote greater mutual understanding between participating churches.

Note was taken of the problems experienced in different parts of the world, particularly the difficult situation in Southern Africa.

The Conference accepted the invitation of the Presbyterian Church in Korea (Kosin) to host the next meeting of the Conference, scheduled to be held in Seoul, Korea in August of 1997. The program for this meeting will attempt to take into account the diverse situations encountered by the member churches.

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