



The Outlook
Devoted to the Exposition and Defense of the Reformed Faith

Special Synod Issue

***The Christian's Joy***Rev. Derrick Vander Meulen**..... 2**
 Rev. Derrick Vander Meulen looks at the fruit of the Spirit "joy" and applies it to the life that Christians should experience.

***Thoughts on Pentecost***Rev. Ken Kok** 4**
 Rev. Ken Kok explains the New Testament celebration of Pentecost in light of the Old Testament Feast.

***The Requisite for Membership***Dr. R. B. Kuiper** 8**
 Reprinted from the June/July 1952 issue of the *Torch and Trumpet*, this article looks at the requirements of church membership.

***The CRC and Rev. Herman Hoeksema; An Apology 75 Years Too Late?*
**Dr. John Bolt**11**
 Dr. John Bolt reflects on events that lead up to the forming of the Protestant Reformed Church in light of an overture sent to the Christian Reformed Church's 2001 Synod.

***What's Coming Up for Synod*.....14**
Rev. Harlan Vanden Einde previews the 2001 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church of North America..... 14
Rev. Peter Kloosterman looks at what lies ahead for delegates to the 2001 Synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America..... 16
Mr. Peter De Boer reports on the heavy agenda of the 2001 Synod of the Canadian American Reformed Churches 19
Mr. Philip A. Barker summarizes the Spring 2001 meeting of the North American Fellowship of Reformed Churches.....21

***Sound Bites - 1952*..... 22**
 Quotes from the second year of the *Torch and Trumpet's* publication that still speak to us today.

***Who's Who Inside This Issue* 24**

The Christian's Joy

"These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full." (John 15:11).

But these things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

"Tribulation" is a strong term and in our present-day, North American prosperity. It may seem distant to us. The 10 plagues of Egypt - *that* was tribulation; lions eating Christians for breakfast - *that* was tribulation; martyrs burning at the stake - *that* was tribulation. But can we say that today in our world, with all our comforts and prosperity, WE have tribulation? The answer, of course, is "yes."

Webster's dictionary defines tribulation as "great misery or distress, as from oppression; deep sorrow; affliction; trial." In one degree or another we all experience tribulation. It may be the deep sorrow of a father and mother who's infant child just died. It may be the chronic pain of disease that is slowly eating away your strength and health. It may be the marginal treatment you receive at school or work because you are living out your faith and don't join in certain activities. It may be the pain of a broken home or marriage. It may be the continued temptation of a "besetting sin" and your weariness of fighting. Oh yes, in this world we DO have tribulation. And yet, knowing this will be the case, Jesus says, "Be of good cheer."

Joy is the second fruit of the Spirit listed in Galatians 5:22, 23 and the

verses above indicate that one purpose, at least, of Jesus' coming is that we might have this joy. What is this "good cheer," this joy that Jesus gives? On what basis can the Christian have joy, especially considering the troubles of life? Some may even ask, "Why don't I have this joy?"

The Definition of Christian Joy

Jesus' words in John 16:33 give us a glimpse of true joy - it is "good cheer." It is a disposition of well-being and cheerfulness. John Calvin directly applies this when, commenting on the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5, he defines joy as "that cheerful behavior towards our fellow-men which is the opposite of moroseness." When the fruit of joy is produced in the Christian's life, he knows delight, pleasure and cheer.

Those who portray Christianity as only dark and gloomy, whether movie producers with an agenda or pro-



Volume 51, No. 6 (ISSN 8750-5754) (USPS 633-980) "And the three companies blew the trumpets...and held THE TORCHES in their left hands, and THE TRUMPETS in their right hands...and they cried, 'The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon'" (Judges 7:20).

Journal of Reformed Fellowship, Inc.

Send all copy to:
Editor, Rev. Wybren Oord
12191 Polk
Holland, MI 49424
Phone: (616) 875-4654 Fax: (616) 875-4310
Email: wyb.kath@juno.com

Board of Trustees

Steve De Boer, *Vice President*; Casey Freswick; Marion Groenendyk, *Vice Secretary/Treasurer*; Ted Howerzyl, *Treasurer*; William Hutt; Ed Knott, *President*; Charles Krahe; Don Langerak; Tim Perkins; Fred Rozema; Herman Sjoerdsma; Brian Vos, *Secretary*; Claude Wierenga *Honorary members*: John Piersma, Peter Wobbema

Editor: Wybren Oord

Contributing Editor: Dr. Cornelis P. Venema

Production Manager: Peter Wobbema

Business Manager: Mary Kaiser

Design & Production: AVP

Cover Logo: Peter Hoekema

This periodical is owned and published by Reformed Fellowship, Inc., a religious and strictly non-profit organization composed of a group of Christian believers who hold to the Biblical Reformed faith. Its purpose is to advocate and propagate this faith, to nurture those who seek to live in obedience to it, to give sharpened expression to it, to stimulate the doctrinal sensitivities of those who profess it, to promote the spiritual welfare and purity of the Reformed churches and to encourage Christian action.

The publishers of this journal express their adherence to the Calvinistic creeds as formulated in the *Belgic Confession*, the *Heidelberg Catechism*, the *Canons of Dort*, and the *Westminster Confession and Catechisms*.

All contributions represent the personal views of the writers and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the members of Reformed Fellowship, Inc.

Subscription Policy

The Outlook (USPS 633-980) is published monthly by Reformed Fellowship, Inc. (except July-August combined) for \$19.00 per year; (foreign rates: \$23.00 per year; Canadian rates: \$23.00 per year plus 7% GST Tax (I.61)). Unless a definite request for discontinuance is received, it is assumed that the subscriber wishes the subscription to continue without the formality of a renewal order and he will be billed for renewal. Anyone desiring a change of address should notify the business office as early as possible in order to avoid the inconvenience of delayed delivery. Zip Code should be included. Periodicals postage paid at Grandville, MI and an additional office. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *The Outlook*, 2930 Chicago Drive S.W., Grandville, MI 49418-1176; OR in Canada to *The Outlook*, P.O. Box 39, Norwich, Ontario NOJ1P0. Registered as Periodicals mail under permit #0055786 at Norwich, Ontario.

Advertising Policy

1. *The Outlook* cannot accept announcements or advertising copy inconsistent with the stated purpose of the Reformed Fellowship, Inc.
2. *The Outlook* reserves the right to reject, edit or request

resubmission of announcement text or advertising copy.

3. All advertisements or announcements are to be submitted to the business office at 2930 Chicago Drive S.W., Grandville, MI 49418-1176, and must be received at least one month before the publication date.
4. Books, pamphlets or tapes to be advertised are to be screened as to author and content prior to publication of the advertisement, and such material should not conflict with the stated purpose of the Reformed Fellowship, Inc.
5. *The Outlook* reserves the right to limit the size of all announcements and advertisements, and to limit the number of issues in which they appear.
6. All advertisements and announcements must be approved by the board of the Reformed Fellowship, Inc prior to publication in *The Outlook*.
7. All announcements and/or advertisements approved by the Board of the Reformed Fellowship, Inc. for publication in *The Outlook* shall appear free of charge; however, a gift would be greatly appreciated.
8. This Advertising Policy supersedes all prior policies, resolutions or other statements.

Editorial Office

12191 Polk
Holland, MI 49424
(616) 875-4654 Phone
(616) 875-4310 Fax
wyb.kath@juno.com Email

Circulation Office

2930 Chicago Drive S.W.
Grandville, MI 49418-1176
(616) 532-8510 Phone

Circulation Office Hours

Monday, Wednesday, 9:00-11:00 AM
After Office Hours please call: (616) 455-1827

Business Mailing Address

2930 Chicago Drive S.W.
Grandville, MI 49418-1176

fessed Christians, are telling a lie about Jesus and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not the Grinch who stole away joy! He is the great and loving God who gives and produces joy in the hearts of His people.

I have heard the criticism that in our "traditional" style of worship there is no joy. How ought we to evaluate this? Possibly the one making the remark has misunderstood true, spiritual joy. They may have wrongly identified quiet, subdued, reverent worship as joyless while thinking that loud, boisterous worship is joyful. In this case the fault would be with the critic since a style of worship is not necessarily a criterion to measure the level of joy in the worshippers' hearts.

But there is another possibility. Maybe the critic has identified an actual problem. Maybe as he observed congregation singing "My Heart was Glad to Hear the Welcome Sound," he saw no change from when they sang, "O Lord, Regard Me When I Cry." It is possible that the problem was not the style of worship but rather the obvious disengagement of the congregation in worship. Where there should have been cheerful voices singing with gusto, there was only emotionless hum-drum. Maybe he recognized the incongruity (hypocrisy?) of those who sing praise to God in worship, but then complain and nit-pick with a sour face in the fellowship room immediately following. In this case the fault is with those who profess Christ and are joyless at the same time. Their passionless apathy has told a lie about Christ and His Spirit.

The joy that is produced by the Holy Spirit is not a façade that is only skin deep, it is the disposition of one's personality toward cheerfulness.

The Basis for Christian Joy

What is it that makes the Christian have such joy? How can he, while enduring hardship and the trials of life, be of good cheer? Jesus' answer is quite simple: "I have overcome the world." The world may kick and fight but the battle is over. Christ has conquered. Those who are in Christ know the joy of victory, the joy of celebration.

The victory of Christ over the world and Satan is not as transient as an Olympic gold or the Super Bowl. Christ has overcome the world.

Every year there is joyful celebration by the winners of the Super Bowl and their fans. I recall the joy of victory when the U.S. Olympic hockey team beat the USSR's team for the gold medal in 1980. The Christian's joy is like that, but so much more. The victory of Christ over the world and Satan is not as transient as an Olympic gold or the Super Bowl. Christ has *overcome* the world - this is a cosmic victory. It is a lasting victory. It is a victory that has won our salvation, confirming in our hearts the words of Paul: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us." (Romans 8:18)

The Hindrance to Christian Joy

You might ask why you are not experiencing this joy. There are two possible answers to this question. It might be that you are focusing and thinking too much about the tribulation of this world, and too little about

the victory of Christ. This is easy to do, but you must resist it. God encourages us this way:

"For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin. And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: 'my son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives.'" (Hebrews 12:3-6)

Even in the hardship of life, the Christian can be assured that God is producing a harvest of righteousness and peace, giving him the capacity to be joyful in the midst of difficult circumstances.

Another answer to why you are not experiencing spiritual joy may be sin and guilt. David clearly understood this:

"When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me, my vitality was turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and You forgave the iniquity of my sin" (Psalm 32:3-5)

"There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your anger, nor any health in my bones because of my sin. For my iniquities have gone over my head; like a heavy burden they

Thoughts on Pentecost

are too heavy for me. . . I am troubled, I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long.” (Psalm 38:3,4,6)

“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Make me hear joy and gladness, that the bones You have broken may rejoice. Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities... Restore to me the joy of Your salvation. . .” (Psalm 52:7-9,12a)

To confess your sins and trust in God’s forgiveness through the atoning death of Christ restores joy to the Christian’s heart.

In Luke 10 we read of Christ sending out the 70 disciples into the cities. “Then the seventy returned with joy, saying, ‘Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.’” (v. 17) Jesus’ responded, “Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.” (v. 20) That is the Christian’s joy. Jesus came in the flesh to take away our sin, to overcome the world and Satan, and to redeem a people for Himself. That, as the angels said, is “good tidings of great joy!”

Rev. Derrick J. Vander Meulen

The last of the days for commemoration listed in the Reformed Church Order is Pentecost. It is a day with which Reformed people sometimes seem to be ill at ease. Pentecost prompts articles on “The Holy Spirit: The Forgotten Person of the Trinity?” (a question sometimes answered positively and sometimes negatively) or “John Calvin: Theologian of the Holy Spirit.” In some places, depending on the year, the commemoration of Pentecost even has to share time with the high holy day of the greeting card industry: Mother’s Day.

Interestingly enough, in the early church, “Pentecost” designated the entire fifty day period following Easter. It was a period of great rejoicing during which neither fasting nor kneeling was allowed, and during which baptisms regularly took place.¹

The period of Pentecost was seen as displaying the significance of Easter. Gradually, the fiftieth day of this period became the feast commemorating the giving of the Holy Spirit to the church by the ascended Christ. In the Reformed churches, with their more restrained view of days of commemoration, the 50 day period of Pentecost was replaced by the celebration of a single day.

The choice of the fiftieth day corresponded to the Old Testament feast called the Feast of Harvest (Ex. 23:16), or the Feast of Weeks (Deut. 16:9-12), or Pentecost (Acts 2:1). The feast took place 50 days after the day after the sabbath which fell during the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev. 23:15-21).

Why is it dated in this way? On the day after the sabbath during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, a sheaf of the first fruits was waved before the LORD (Lev. 23:9 ff.). That is, the priest would elevate it to the LORD. The idea was that the sheaf of the first fruits was given to the LORD and then received back from Him.

The first fruits were only acceptable when they were received back from the LORD. Along with the first fruits, an ascension offering was brought to show the total dedication of the worshipper to the LORD. With that offering also came a tribute offering that was twice the size of the normal tribute offering. The offering of grain on top of the ascension offering was a presentation of Israel’s work to the LORD. It acknowledged that the LORD was the real author of the land’s produce. Thus, a double portion of the previous year’s harvest was brought to Him. None of the early harvest could be eaten until the first fruits were given to the LORD. He is the owner of the land. For Israel to eat first would be a shocking lack of gratitude.

Pentecost built off of this waving of the first fruit. It came seven weeks later reminding Israel of what the LORD had done. Israel was to live out of the LORD’s provisions. The feasts showed that the LORD was Israel’s King and that by His blessing, she was His new creation.

This new creation aspect is highlighted when we consider the connection between the Feast of Unleavened Bread (Passover) and Pentecost. Passover commemorated God’s deliverance.



With Passover, the old leaven was cut off and Israel received new life from God. This new life grew for seven weeks. Then, at Pentecost, the leavened loaves were brought to the Tabernacle. God had given new growth and new life. The Pentecost Feast celebrated the gracious founding and consummation of the covenant.

Leaven could not be placed on the altar (Lev. 2:11) because Israel was not to give new life to God, they could only receive it from him. Symbolically, Israel had seven weeks of righteous growth and then they presented to the LORD what He first gave to them.

The old leaven of sin and death had been purged. The new life had grown to be a tribute offering of two leavened loaves. This was the double portion, the portion of the firstborn. God grew His kingdom from the sacrifice of the lamb (representing the firstborn son), to the waving of the first sheaf of new grain, to the waving of two leavened loaves after a sabbath of weeks. We could, without much difficulty, relate this to the Year of Jubilee which celebrated the LORD's release of captives and His provision of life for His people (Lev. 25:8-17).

This is closely linked to Israel's life as the people of God. The loaves were for the priests. In Leviticus 23:22 we find a repetition of the law about gleaning (Lev. 19:9-10). As Israel gave the gifts of the harvest to the LORD, they also had to express compassion toward the poor. The

care for the priests and for the poor illustrated how Israel must live as the communion of the LORD's holy ones.

We must, however, go one step further. Pentecost was closely linked with the harvest and, therefore, with the LORD's mighty act of bringing Israel into the land. Pentecost also commemorated the giving of the Law at Sinai.² Sinai was the goal of the exodus (Ex. 3:12). At Sinai, the LORD dwelt in the midst of Israel, spoke to them, and renewed the covenant. Pentecost, then, celebrated the gracious founding and consummation of the covenant. It celebrated the LORD taking Israel as His Bride. Indeed, the language of Exodus 19:4 is marriage-type language. At Sinai, Israel was recreated and renewed as the LORD provisionally dwelt in their midst.³

With this background, it is not difficult to see the fulfillment of these themes in Jesus Christ. The great act of deliverance in the Old Testament was the exodus from Egypt which was memorialized in the Passover and fulfilled on Pentecost. The great act of deliverance in the New Testament is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Passover (I Cor. 5:7), and is fulfilled in Pentecost. In His death, the old leaven was definitively, once-for-all cut off. He was raised on the day after the sabbath during the Feast of Unleavened bread. That is, He was raised as the First Fruits, offered to God, and received back from Him. This marks the beginning of new life.

Jesus was raised on the first day of the week. If we look at it in terms of His completing Adam's defiled week, He was raised on the eighth day, the day of new creation.⁴ Fifty days later there is the recreation of God's people with the full and final outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In both the Old and the New Covenants, Pentecost is the Feast of the Word and the Spirit.

Here we need to remember that Old Testament history is, essentially, the history of exile from the LORD. Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden-Sanctuary of God. From that time until the building of the Tabernacle, there was no central sanctuary on earth. Even with the Tabernacle, and later the Temple, there are all sorts of degrees of access, of who could draw near and how close one could come. The High Priest was permitted to enter the Most Holy Place, but only once a year on the Day of Atonement, and then only for a brief time. The priests could enter the Holy Place. They were allowed to eat the showbread, and were given portions of certain sacrifices, but they only served in the sanctuary and had to leave the Holy Place when their work was done. The Levites were allowed to serve in the Tabernacle courtyard as guards and servants, but they could not enter the sanctuary. Israelites, who conformed to the laws of cleanness, could come up to the altar in the courtyard of the Tabernacle and offer sacrifices, but they could not go any further. Unclean Israelites were not allowed enter the Tabernacle at all, nor could they bring sacrifices until they had been cleansed. Beyond this were the unbelieving nations who had no access at all. The people were basically exiled from God. The whole Old Testament says, "Come close, but not too close."

***Pentecost, then, celebrates
the gracious founding and
consummation of the covenant.***

Of course, the Holy Spirit was active among God's people. And, of course, people were saved the same way under the Old Covenant that they are under the New Covenant: by grace through faith - in the Old Covenant, faith in the promise of God of the coming Seed of the Woman. There are not different ways of salvation in the Old and New Covenants. That being said, however, the outpouring of the Spirit was limited in the Old Covenant. Yes, individual Israelites could pray, but they prayed on the basis of the work of the priests in the central sanctuary. They drew near through the priesthood and the sacrificial system. In the Old Covenant, God's people were "slaves," in the sense that they did not know what their Master was doing; in the New Covenant, we are called "friends" for we have greater access (John 15:14, 15).

(Because of the sentimentality surrounding this verse in the minds of many, we ought to be clear what "friend" means in this context. "Friend," here, is an official position. Pilate, for example, was called "Friend of Caesar." This did not mean that he and Tiberius shared a bond of friendship. It meant that he was part of Caesar's court, that he could advise Caesar and would be heard by him, that Caesar would consult him in matters pertaining to Judea - in short that he had access. The disciples, and the church built on them, are "Friends of Christ" in this sense. This explains why, while Jesus calls the disciples "friends," they are not given leave to call Him "friend.")

Christ recreated and renewed His people, and He now dwells with us. This is what Pentecost speaks of and commemorates. With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the church is united to Christ and is seated in the



heavenly places. All this explains the Sinai imagery in Acts 2. They are gathered in the upper room.⁵ As we saw last month, mountains, high places, rooftops, and upper rooms are meeting places of heaven and earth. The company of 120 "ascends" and we find Sinai-like phenomena. Sinai was covered with wind, fire, and thunder. Acts 2 has these same things and they fill the whole house just as the Glory-Cloud filled the Tabernacle and the Temple.

God lights the fire of the altar in both the Tabernacle and Temple. Here we find flames of fire on the heads of the members of the church. They are now the altar. Just as the fire on the altar represented the presence of God, here the tongues of fire represent God's presence. And, *mirabile dictu*, they are not consumed, nor are they driven out for they are living sacrifices. When the Glory of God filled the Tabernacle and the Temple in the Old Testament, the priests could not enter in (Ex. 40:35; I Kgs. 8:10, 11). The whole book of Leviticus addresses this problem: how can an unholy people enter in before the holy God? In Acts 2, the church is marked out as the Temple of God, as His dwelling place.

On Pentecost, God's Glory - His Spirit - comes on the church and consecrates her as the place where He is enthroned. And, immediately, they begin to proclaim God's Word,

the Gospel of Jesus Christ, just as God coming to Sinai led to His proclamation of His Torah to His people. By His Word and Spirit, Jesus Christ marks out a people as His true temple. The Holy Spirit is the coronation gift of Christ to His people. Through Christ and His Spirit, we have access to the Father (Eph. 2:18). The church enters the heavenly sanctuary. The church, especially as she is gathered for public worship on the Lord's Day, is the heavenly sanctuary on earth. The Holy Spirit is the foretaste of all our gifts in Christ.

What is the great promise of the covenant? That God will be our God and we shall be His people. So what is promised in salvation? Union and communion with God and to partake of the divine nature (II Peter 1:4). In short, what is promised in salvation is God Himself. In the giving of the Holy Spirit, we receive God Himself as our Guarantee; at the consummation, we will receive more of what we already have - we will receive "more" of God Himself. All members of the church receive the Holy Spirit; they all share in the fullness of this union and communion, which begins with their baptism.

(While a detailed discussion of the speaking with "other tongues" would lead us far afield, we should note the following: this proclamation in tongues is in known languages and it is proclamation to Jews. If we compare this with I Corinthians 14:20 and Isaiah 28:11, we must conclude that "tongues" were a sign to the apostate people of Israel that the focus of God's saving activity was moving from them to the nations. That is, the Jews were in the process of having their lampstand removed and would have to come out of national/ethnic Israel into the church to be considered God's people. "Tongues" were

a sign of judgment against the faithless people of Israel and, thus, ceased when the Canon closed and judgment was meted out to Israel in A.D. 70. Biblical tongues have nothing to do with modern “speaking in tongues.”)

The giving of the Holy Spirit is not an individual, ineffable, inner matter, but is for and in the context of the church - and by “church” here is not meant some phantasmagorical “invisible” church, but the visible gathering of God’s people under His office-bearers that is marked out by the preaching and hearing of His Word, the use of His sacraments, and the exercise of His discipline. This is the only church the Bible knows of. Sometimes we hear people talk about the “experience” of the Holy Spirit as a warm, gooey feeling. They sound, as Luther once said, as though they had “swallowed the Holy Spirit, feathers and all.” The Spirit is poured out for our living together as Church, as the communion of the saints. Just as the Old Testament Pentecost was marked out by care for the priests and the poor. The New Testament Pentecost is also marked by the communion of the saints.

The life of the Spirit is found in being baptized, confessing the truth, living obediently, worshipping, and taking the Lord’s Supper. There is nothing, at least nothing biblical, over and above this. The Holy Spirit works faith in us through the proclamation of the Word and strengthens us through the sacraments. The church is the product of the Holy Spirit. The local, visible church is where God’s Presence is. This is the seriousness

of this - only this church, known clearly by the marks (*Belgic Confession*, art. 29), is the obligatory church, the place where we must be. The Holy Spirit works very publicly and corporately.

Augustine, in *The Trinity*, points out the trinitarian structure of Pentecost. With reference to Galatians 4:4-5, he notes that there is a sending of the Son by the Father for our salvation and a sending of the Spirit by the Father.⁶ The sending of the Son accomplished certain things in the history of God’s people; the sending of the Spirit also, then, accomplishes things. By the Lord and Giver of Life, we are united to Christ and share in His anointing. His work brings us, as God’s congregation, into the presence of the Father through the Son. We are filled with the Spirit, beginning, in our baptism, to serve God and one another. The gift of the Spirit is not to induce a private “Sweet Hour of Prayer” so that we can leave this “world of care.” The Spirit is poured out on us so that we would live peacefully and righteously, confessing the truth in Christ’s church.

Rev. Ken Kok

Endnotes

¹ For the history of the celebration of Pentecost see Peter G. Cobb, “The History of the Church Year,” *The Study Liturgy*, edited by Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold (London: SPCK, 1978) pp.411-412. Also see Robert Louis Wilken, “Is Pentecost a Peer of Easter? Scripture, Liturgy, and the Prodrum of the Holy Spirit,” *Trinity, Time, and Church: A Response Theology of Robert Jenson*, edited by Colin E. Gunton (Grand Rapids:

William B. Eerdmans, 2000), pp.159-160.

² Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple: Its Ministry Services as They Were at the Time of Christ* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1983; reprint of 1874 edition), p. 261. Also see James B. Jordan, *A Chronological and Calendrical Commentary on the Pentateuch* (Niceville, FL: Biblical Horizons, 1995), pp. 48-49.

³ The Tabernacle may be seen as a portable Sinai, the LORD’s dwelling with His people. See Angel Manuel Rodriguez, “Sanctuary Theology in the Book of Exodus” *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, Summer 1986, vol 24, No. 2, pp. 127-145. See, especially, p. 133.

⁴ On the eighth day, see Alexander Schemann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology* (Portland, ME: American Orthodox Press, 1966), translated by Ashleigh B. Moorhouse, pp. 61-63; Jean Danielou, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956), pp. 262-286.

⁵ Without further detail, we may safely assume that the “one place” of Acts 2:1 is the upper room of 1:13. See James D.G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), p. 24.

⁶ Augustine, *The Trinity* (Brooklyn, City Press, 1991), translated by Edmund Hill, pp. 102f (Bk. 2.8-11).

Christ recreated and renewed His people, and He now dwells with us. This is what Pentecost speaks of and commemorates.

The Requisite for Membership

Almost all churches are intent on numerical growth. Most ministers in particular are eager to see the membership of their churches increase by leaps and bounds. That attitude is not necessarily wrong. Provided those who are added to the church are saved, additions most certainly are cause for warm gratitude. But not infrequently the desire for numerical growth is motivated by vain-glory. Then the danger is great that by means of high-powered drives and sensational attractions many will be brought into the church who are not of it. And that is an enormous evil. People are left with the impression that they do the church a favor when they unite with it. Consequently it forfeits the respect of the world, and even its self-respect is impaired. Worse than that, the church is corrupted by the influx of such as are Christians only in name. It is in process of being transformed from a manifestation of the body of Christ into a synagogue of Satan.

Insistence on Saving Faith

Insistence upon the Scriptural requisite for membership in the organized church is of utmost moment. And for adults that requisite is active faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. So clearly and emphatically is this taught in Holy Writ that the Citation of chapter and verse is well nigh superfluous. The familiar story of the Phillipian jailer affords one of numerous instances. Paul and Silas told him that, in order to be saved, he would have to believe on Christ; and when he did that, he was at once baptized into the body of Christ (Acts 16:29-88).

Right here, however, a problem arises. Who is going to decide whether an applicant for church membership is a believer? On that question two extreme views are held. On the one hand, it has been said that, nothing doubting, the church must take the applicant's word for it that he believes in Christ. On the other hand, it has been insisted that the church, represented by its officers, has both the ability and the duty to determine conclusively whether or not the applicant has saving faith. Now it is evident that both of these positions are so extreme as to be quite untenable. As for the former, many who claim to be believers know neither who Christ is nor what is faith in Christ. Almost any Modernist, while denying the deity of Christ and admittedly trusting for salvation in his own works and character, will yet assert that he believes in the Man of Nazareth. And, as for the latter position, the most saintly ministers and elders remain exceedingly fallible. The old saying is correct, that the church should not presume to pass judgment on men's hearts, the simple reason being that it cannot. Only God omniscient can.

Then how must the church deal with applicants for membership? In this matter there is a golden mean. Without taking their word for it that they are believers and without laying claim to infallibility for themselves, the officers of the church are to examine applicants in order to ascertain so far as that is humanly possible whether or not they possess saving faith. That such procedure is Biblical permits of no doubt, for Scripture

enjoins the church to guard its purity. Paul instructed Titus to reject from membership a heretic after the first and second admonition (Titus 8:10), and he commanded the church at Corinth to put away from its midst a certain wicked member (I Corinthians 5:13).

In its examination of applicants the church should have regard to three matters especially: whether the prerequisites of saving faith are present, whether the essence of saving faith appears to be present, and whether the fruit of saving faith is in evidence.

Prerequisites of Saving Faith

Without foolishly attempting to state precisely how much knowledge is necessary for salvation or how little will suffice, it may be asserted without hesitation that faith presupposes knowledge. Both the Phillipian jailer and the Ethiopian eunuch had to be instructed before they could believe. The same truth is explicit in Paul's rhetorical questions: "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:14).

Today anti-intellectualism is rampant in religious circles. Not infrequently an actual premium is placed on ignorance. The notion is widely held that faith begins where knowledge ends and that knowledge can hardly end too soon. We are told that, the less theological knowledge one has, the simpler and stronger one's faith will be. Faith is said to be a gamble.

Those who hold that view are fond of an old illustration. The basement of a certain house had no windows. The only light that ever fell into that basement came through a trapdoor when it stood open, and even then but little light entered. One day the father of the family occupying the house was busy in the basement. Near the open



trap-door his little daughter was playing. He could see her in the light, but she could not see him in the darkness. He called to her: "jump down, and daddy will catch you." Without a moment's hesitation she obeyed and, of course, was caught in her father's strong embrace. As that little girl made a leap in the dark, so, it is said, sinners make a leap in the dark when they cast themselves upon Jesus Christ for salvation. But how obvious that this illustration is far better than it is intended to be! Did the little girl make a leap in the dark? Literally, yes. But in a most real sense she did nothing of the kind. She recognized her father's voice. She was sure that her father was reliable. She was positive that her father loved her. She knew a great many things about her father. And it was precisely because of her knowledge of him that she jumped. So also the Christian believes on the Lord Jesus Christ because of what he knows about Him.

To be somewhat more specific, no one can believe in Christ, in the Scriptural sense of that term who does not know that He is God. One does not even have the right to entrust oneself to Christ for eternal life unless He is God. Thus to trust a mere man would amount to giving divine honor to a human being and would be tantamount to idolatry. It is no less clear that one cannot trust Jesus Christ for salvation from the guilt and the penalty of sin without some understanding of His atoning death. The substitutionary atonement is the very heart of the Scriptural doctrine of salvation. He who is ignorant of it simply cannot believe that the Son of God died on Calvary's tree in his stead.

Another prerequisite of saving faith is conviction of sin. It is unlikely that one who feels perfectly well both

physically and mentally will summon a physician. It is not only unlikely, but inconceivable, that one who is not burdened by his sins will come to the great Physician of souls for deliverance. Only he of a broken heart and a contrite spirit will smite his breast and sigh: "God, be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:15). Only he who has been terrified by the thunders of Sinai will run for peace to Calvary. Only he who knows himself to be a hell-deserving sinner will kneel at the foot of the cross, embrace the bleeding feet of the crucified One, and pray:

"Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress,
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Saviour, or I die."

The Essence of Saving Faith

Strange to say, there is much vagueness and even misunderstanding among Christians — among Christian ministers too — as to just what saving faith is. Yet it is obviously necessary that both those who would unite with the church and the officers who must judge of their fitness or membership have a clear insight into this matter.

Saving faith is not merely assent to the teaching of Holy Scripture, but also a consequent trust in the Christ of Scripture for salvation. It is not merely subscription to the *propositions* concerning Christ which are contained in the Bible, but also a committing of oneself to the *person* of Christ for life eternal. To be sure, one cannot do the latter without first doing the former, but one might conceivably do the former and leave the latter undone. Said Paul to King Agrippa: "Believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest" (Acts 26:27). But Agrippa himself

disclaimed being a Christian, and by his life he proved that he was a pagan. Some one might possibly believe that Jesus was born of the virgin Mary, that He wrought miracles during His public ministry, that He died for sinners on Golgotha, that on the third day He was raised from the dead, and a hundred other Biblical propositions concerning Christ, and yet not cast himself upon the person of Christ for salvation.

It is necessary for a member of the Christian church to know what the Bible teaches concerning Christ and to assent to that teaching as true. Yet that is not enough. Abandoning every attempt to save himself, he must commit himself wholly to Christ for eternal life. For that is the very essence of saving faith.

Often the essence of faith is confused with the assurance of salvation. Faith itself is indeed certain, not a whit less certain than knowledge. Yet it cannot be denied that, due to sinful confusion, one may have faith without at every moment being fully assured that one has it and therefore is saved. Assurance has been described correctly as the reflex action of faith. Wherever faith is present that reflex action is also found, but it is not in every instance equally strong. Sin often weakens it. Not every Christian enjoys at all times the full measure of assurance which Job possessed when he exulted: "I know that my Redeemer liveth" (Job 19:25) and to which Paul gave expression when he gloried: "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day" (2 Tim. 1: 12). For good cause Peter admonished believers "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure" (2 Pet. 1:10). Calvin comments: "Purity of life is not improperly called the evi-

dence and proof of election, by which the faithful may not only testify to others that they are the children of God, but also confirm themselves in this confidence.” It is clear that, although believers ought to be fully assured of their salvation, as a matter of fact not nearly all of them always are.

For membership in the Christian church the essence of saving faith is indeed requisite, but not the full assurance of salvation. The New Testament throughout teaches that only believers are to be received into the church, but nowhere is it said that the church must close its doors upon such as are not completely certain of having been saved. For him who has not abandoned himself to Christ for salvation there is no room in the church, but for him who has so abandoned himself yet is not always certain that he is on the road to heaven and will arrive there when he breathes his last, there is an abundance of room. The church must welcome with open arms him who sings plaintively:

“Just as I am,
though tossed about
By many a conflict,
many a doubt,
Fightings and fears within,
without,
O Lamb of God, I come.”

Let not the church be more severe than is its divine Head, who has promised that He will not break a bruised reed nor quench smoking flax (Matt. 12:20).

The Fruit of Saving Faith

Scripture teaches most emphatically that sinners are saved not by works, but by grace through faith. But nowhere does it teach that salvation is by faith that does not work. Contrariwise, it states forcefully that such faith is as dead as a soulless body

(Jas. 2:26). Paul and James were in perfect agreement that men are saved only by living, active faith, manifesting itself in a life of holiness. And the Lord Jesus put great stress on that truth when He declared: “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 7:20, 21), and when He taught that, on His coming in glory, He will judge men according to their works (Matt. 25:31-46). In brief, good works are the test of saving faith. Each professing Christian must apply that test to himself, and the church must apply it to its members.

Throughout the history of the Christian church there has been great need of that emphasis, and this day is no exception. By divorcing the Christian life from the Christian faith liberal churches are undermining both. They say that it matters little what one believes or disbelieves, so long as one leads the right kind of life, epitomized in the golden rule. But they slight Jesus’ words: “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:32). And in some conservative churches the notion is abroad that one can receive Christ as Saviour without acknowledging Him as Lord; that one can be forgiven of his sins without forsaking them; that one can have the blessing of justification without the grace of sanctification. It is difficult to conceive of a more pernicious heresy. The church must refuse to recognize as members those who carelessly transgress Christ’s commandments, no matter how lustily they may sing of Him as their Saviour, for they prove themselves to be hypocrites. It must proclaim uncompromisingly that without holiness no man shall see the Lord (Heb. 12:14).

Does it follow that the church is only for perfectionists? No and yes.

Those who claim to have reached the goal of moral perfection hold either an exceedingly low view of sin or an exceedingly high opinion of themselves, and much more than likely they hold both. Scripture teaches that all believers offend in many things (Jas. 3:2). On the other hand, if he who strives for perfection with might and main, albeit in complete dependence on the grace of the Holy Spirit, and continues to loathe himself so long as he has not attained to the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus may be called a perfectionist, then perfectionism is requisite for membership in the church of Christ.

He who is truly a believer not only must have, but actually does have, the beginning of perfect obedience to the law of God. And the church must demand of its members that they show their faith by such obedience.

In doing that, the church must be exceedingly careful neither to add to the divine law nor to subtract from it. The facts must be reckoned with that, on the one hand, things which every member of a given church does may be condemned by God’s law, and that on the other hand, practices which are taboo among members of a certain church may be innocent by that standard.

Again, it must be remembered that the Christian life, while it has its negative aspects, is essentially, positive. It is not merely a life of separation from sin, but also, and emphatically, a life of devotion to God. One might conceivably abstain from almost every form of worldliness and at the same time neglect practically every activity of godliness. And, never to be forgotten, just not to do the good is one of the most heinous of sins. On the final day of reckoning the goats will be sentenced to perdition because they did not give food to Jesus’ dis-



principles when they were hungry, did not give them drink when they were thirsty, did not clothe them when they were naked, did not visit them when they were sick or in prison (Matt. 25:41-46)

Most important of all, obedience to the letter of the law becomes disobedience when it is divorced from obedience to the spirit of the law. And the spirit of the law is summed up in the one word *love*. “Love is the fulfilling of the law” (Rom.13:10). Strictness without love is not Christianity, but legalism.

In short, he who trusts in Christ for salvation is bound to lead a life of gratitude for that salvation. As he beholds his dying Saviour, he cannot help exclaiming:

“Were the whole realm of
nature mine,
That were a present far too
small.
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my
all”

For faith engenders gratitude. And gratitude evinces faith.

Dr. R. B. Kuiper

Reprinted from the Torch and Trumpet Vol. 2 No. 2, June - July 1952.

The CRC and Rev. Herman Hoeksema; An Apology 75 Years Too Late?

The agenda of Synod 2001 includes an item that could easily be overlooked though it is potentially one of the more emotionally-charged issues the CRC has faced in the last seventy-five years. Overture 1 (*Agenda*, p. 305) from Classis Grand Rapids East notes that 1999 was the 75th anniversary of the “common grace” conflict leading to the departure of Rev. Herman Hoeksema and formation of the Protestant Reformed Churches. The overture requests synod to instruct its standing Interchurch Relations Committee to start a process of healing history’s wounds by actively pursuing better relations with the Protestant Reformed Church.

There are undoubtedly many members of the CRC who are not familiar with this history or may judge it to be low on the list of the CRC’s priorities. I believe this issue is one of the more important matters synod has to consider this summer. I readily acknowledge that this is hardly an unbiased judgment since I am personally responsible for getting the ball rolling on this proposal. My involvement began with research for an editorial I was to write for a commemorative issue of the *Calvin Theological Journal* on the common grace issue. The research became increasingly fascinating for me and culminated in two full-length essays that appeared in the April 2000 and November 2000 issues of *CTJ*. In this article I shall briefly spell out my reasons for asking my church’s council, classis, and synod to support the proposal for the CRC to reconsider its relationship to the PRC. For those who desire a more

complete explanation I recommend my extended discussion of this matter in the two essays indicated earlier in this paragraph.

What happened in 1924? Rev. Herman Hoeksema, minister of Eastern Avenue CRC, Grand Rapids, Michigan, publicly renounced the doctrine of common grace which had played such a significant role in the Dutch neo-Calvinist revival led by Abraham Kuyper. According to Hoeksema, God’s grace does not extend to the reprobate and therefore the expression “common grace” misleads Reformed Christians and softens their resolve not to live sinful worldly lives. Since Rev. Hoeksema and his collaborator, Rev. Henry Danhof, had an extensive track record of publications that elaborated their position, the doctrine of common grace became a matter of serious debate and conflict in the CRC during the early 1920s. Church papers were filled with the debate and a pamphlet war was furiously waged between supporters and deniers of the doctrine.

When the 1924 CRC Synod met in Kalamazoo, starting on June 18, it had before it four overtures that called for a synodical study committee “to make a thorough study of the matter and enlighten the churches” (*Agenda for Synod 1924*, xxvi-xxviii). This would have been a wise thing to do indeed especially considering the counsel synod received from its own advisory committee:

“That synod make no declaration at present concerning the standpoint of the church regarding the doctrine of

common grace and also of its ramifications. Such a declaration would assume that this matter had been thought through and had been developed in all its particulars, which certainly is not the case. This necessary prior study is entirely lacking. As a result there is no *communis opinio* in the Reformed churches on this matter.” (*Acta 1924*, p. 134).

Thus, in its 24th Session, Thursday evening, July 3, 1924, synod was discussing just such a motion to appoint a study committee in which all viewpoints were to be represented. The committee was to be instructed by Synod to work in a “spirit of brotherly love and genuine appreciation of each other’s viewpoints” (*Acta 1924*, 143-44). However, time ran out on this discussion and synod adjourned until Monday, July 7, at 1:30 p.m.

Alas, the proposal to appoint a study committee was defeated. Over the Sabbath weekend, Hoeksema’s opponents had apparently prepared a lengthy substitute motion (6 pages in the *Acta*), including the three points on Common Grace to which Hoeksema and Danhof objected. Synod approved all parts of this extended statement in one evening session (July 7) paving the way for a church judicatory body such as Classis Grand Rapids East to discipline Hoeksema for not acceding to a synodical statement. There was not doubt that this would be the outcome since Hoeksema and Danhof had stated their intentions publicly.

With that at stake, synod still acted quickly in coming to its decision.

This decision to go forward with a declaration on an issue about which synod itself had said that there was no consensus, is doubly tragic. In addition to the haste with which synod disposed of the matter, it made the disputed three points a matter of future possible ecclesiastical discipline. This eventual action, however, contradicted the relative clean bill of doctrinal health given to Hoeksema and Danhof by synod on their basic Reformed stance. At worst, so said synod, they were tolerably one-sided:

“Synod itself declared that though there are certain expressions in the writings of the Revs. H. Danhof and H. Hoeksema which do not harmonize well with . . . Scripture and the confession . . . [on the three points] nonetheless synod declares that the above-mentioned ministers . . . have no intent or desire other than to teach the Reformed teaching . . . and to defend it. Also, it cannot be denied that, in the basic truths of the Reformed faith as set forth in our confessions, they are Reformed, albeit with a tendency to be one-sided.” (*Acta 1924*, 147).

On the point of one-sidedness, synod observed that the respective tendencies toward either a one-sided objective or subjective preaching had always been present in the Reformed tradition. With respect to the allegations of an “exclusively objective exposition of misery, deliverance and gratitude” on the part of Hoeksema,

synod noted that “this phenomenon is nothing new in Reformed circles and has always been tolerated” (*Acta 1924*, 123)

With the advantage of a 75-year historical perspective we can’t help wondering, why? Why the haste to come to a definite conclusion in two weeks on such a contentious matter and with full knowledge that the decision would most likely lead to conflict, discipline, and division? While it is impossible for historians to determine exact and absolutely decisive reasons, we do get some clues from the flurry of protests and appeals sent to Synod 1924 aimed at Revs. Hoeksema and Danhof and their “unReformed” teaching on common grace. When we see the quantity, the similarity, and the linkage of important leaders in the CRC reflected by these submissions, it is fair to conclude that there was significant concerted and determined opposition at work.

What is also troubling is the frequency with which CRC assemblies violated good and due process even when staying technically within the rules. Many of the protests and appeals had been rushed through classical gatherings at the last minute (in the case of Classis Grand Rapids West, June 10, 1924, eight days before Synod was to meet), failed to meet the deadline for the synodical agenda, and represented unfinished work at the lesser assemblies. In most of the cases synod had just cause to reject the submission as not legally before the assembly. While an assembly such as synod can declare as legally before it whatever it wishes, accepting the volume of protests and appeals against Hoeksema and Danhof was both prejudicial and, in my judgement, imprudent.

... the 1924 decision on common grace was hasty and in many respects irregular.



The story of the events post-synod, leading finally to Rev. Hoeksema's forced departure along with others, needs to be told another time. What I have tried to summarize in this brief article is an argument that the 1924 decision on common grace was hasty and in many respects irregular. Though it is rather lengthy I shall reproduce here the eloquent protest of Rev. Daniel Zwier, the first clerk of the 1924 Synod. I do so in the hope that it will lend credence to the conclusions I have made on the basis of historical research. Rev. Zwier was there. He agreed with the three points, yet thought that synod had made a serious mistake.

The undersigned protests against the decision of synod in declaring itself at this early time re the contested points which are related to the doctrine of common grace, namely, the favorable disposition of God to mankind in general, the restraint of sin and the so-called doing of civil good.

This protest is not directed against the content of these synodical declarations, with which the undersigned is in total agreement. Rather this protest is directed against the fact that synod took this action at this time in making these declarations, an action which the undersigned is convinced was both unnecessary and hasty.

Grounds:

1. The doctrine of common grace, according to this judgment, has not been sufficiently thought through, and the dispute which has arisen in our churches concerning the above-mentioned three points, which are connected to it, have not come to a sufficient ripeness to warrant an enticement for a decision through

which, in principle, the standpoint of brothers Danhof and Hoeksema stands condemned.

2. The points, with which it is concerned, do not belong to the fundamental truths which are formulated in our confessions, and as synod itself has acknowledged, in these fundamental truths the brothers Danhof and Hoeksema are Reformed, even though there is a tendency to be one-sided.

3. Thus these too hastily made declarations, according to the conviction of the undersigned, will not be conducive to advance the peace and well-being of our churches. Experience has taught us that undue haste in such weighty matters, when emotions run high because of the battle being waged, are seldom good.

4. There was according to the judgment of the undersigned a better way, namely, that a committee be appointed to investigate the dispute which has arisen, and that the truths be further studied, which have become a point of controversy. However, synod was not willing to move in this direction.

D. Zwier

After wrestling for some time with this matter, I came to the conclusion that we, the Christian Reformed Church, owe our brothers and sisters in the Protestant Reformed Churches an apology. I requested the council of my church, the Plymouth Heights CRC of Grand Rapids to forward an overture via Classis Grand Rapids East to the CRC Synod 2001. The overture asked synod to adopt the following resolution:

“The Christian Reformed Synod 2001, recognizing that 1999-2000 marked the seventy-fifth anniversary of the 1924 Synod's affirmation of the three points on common grace and the formation of the Protestant Reformed Churches as a principled protest against this synodical decision, declares the following:

‘Synod expresses profound sorrow and regret to our brothers and sisters in the Protestant Reformed Churches for the actions of CRC assemblies in 1924 that led to the forced departure from the CRC of Revs. Herman Hoeksema, Henry Danhof, G.M. Ophoff and the majorities of their councils. Synod acknowledges that many of the actions were hasty, did not always follow due and just process, and forced objectors to submit to a synodical declaration on which synod itself had observed that there was no common opinion and that it was not essential to Reformed doctrine.’”

Classis Grand Rapids East, at its meeting on January 17, 2001, did not endorse the overture as submitted but instead sent the substitute overture referred to at the beginning of this essay. I was disappointed by this decision, particularly in view of the significant encouragement I received from members of the CRC and PRC alike in response to my earlier two *Calvin Theological Journal* articles. In addition, the symbolism of having such a strong overture come from the classis which deposed Hoeksema was, in my judgment, too good an opportunity to waste. I do, however, understand the reluctance of Classis Grand Rapids East to com-

What's Coming Up for Synod

mit itself on short notice to such a major move and a more deliberate approach to this matter through the agency of the CRC's Interchurch Relations Committee is an appropriate way of handling the concerns I have raised.

I have written this article because I believe that this issue should not be at the bottom of our list of ecumenical priorities. I do not expect nor even plead here for restoration of full ecclesiastical fellowship with our brothers and sisters in the PRC much as I hope and pray for it. However, with the CRC becoming serious about reconciliation in a broader arena (eg., racism) I believe that our church's message of reconciliation to the world is hollow if we are unable to open ourselves to reconciliation with close church family members because we cannot acknowledge our own sins and faults. There is still an ecclesiastical Berlin Wall of hostility between the CRC and the PRC. Christ requires of us that we take down the bricks we put there to build the wall in the first place. Yes, seventy-five years is a long time, but if you think a few more years will make reconciliation easier, look at Belfast, Beirut, Bethlehem, or Bosnia. To late? Better late than never. The time is now.

Dr. John Bolt

Preview of CRC Synod

Rev. Halan Vanden Einde

The 2001 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church is scheduled to begin on Saturday, June 9, 9:00 A.M. at the Fine Arts Center on the campus of Calvin College, Grand Rapids, MI. Election of officers, finalizing committee assignments, and advisory committee meetings will occupy the delegates time on Saturday. A Service of Prayer and Praise will be held on Sunday at 3:00 P.M. at the Church of The Servant in Grand Rapids, with Dr. John Timmer officiating. Regular sessions are scheduled to begin at 8:15 A.M. on Monday, though a good part of the day and evening will be devoted to meetings of the advisory committees.

A brief look at The Agenda would seem to indicate that there are few if any major issues coming before this synod. Though page numbers do not tell the whole story, there are some 340 pages of reports, overtures, etc. There is only one study committee report, along with fifteen overtures covering a variety of subjects.

Board of Trustees Report

All of the agencies and service committees of the CRC now report under the heading of the Board of Trustees of the Christian Reformed Church of North America. Let me highlight a few items here.

The CRCNA will be observing its sesquicentennial in 2007, the Lord willing. The BOT is recommending for approval a yearly budget (\$3500

for 2001-2004) and an eleven person committee whose duty it will be to present to Synod 2004 a set of plans for a church-wide celebration of this event. It is with gratitude and praise to God that we anticipate celebrating that historic occasion!

In view of the planned retirement of Dr. James De Jonge as President of Calvin Theological Seminary, the BOT has interviewed and endorsed the nomination of Dr. Cornelius Plantinga as the next President of the seminary. Synod will be asked to approve that appointment.

Classis Illiana submitted an overture (20) to Synod 2000 relative to suggested changes in the Ministers' Pension Fund. The BOT and pension trustees have reviewed that material and have basically decided to stay the course. Specific recommendations, involving some changes, are being made in the report of the Pension & Insurance Committee, referred to later in this report.

One other matter worth noting is the recommendation for an additional staff member for the Pastor-Church Relations Office. This recommendation originally came from the advisory committee for pastoral ministries at Synod 2000, because the current staff could not meet the increased demand for services. Without formally endorsing that recommendation, the BOT has approved and made provision in the budget for an additional staff person for the Pastor-Church Relations Office during the next fiscal year.



Agency & Service Committee Reports

There are ten separate agencies of the denomination and several service committees which report their activities at each synod. These reports generally contain a brief review of their work during the past year, along with the joys and challenges of their unique ministries. I would note just a few items from these reports.

Mr. John Kuyers, who served as Executive Director of the Back To God Hour, concluded seven years of service at the end of 2000. The board of the Back To God Hour has nominated Dr. Calvin Bremer to fill that position. We express gratitude to God for the faithful service of Mr. Kuyers, and pray for God's blessings on Dr. Bremer as he takes up the challenge of his new assignment.

From the report of CRC Publications we find a recommendation asking synod to approve a \$5 ministry share for four years for the development of a new curriculum for children. Though about 90 percent of CRC churches are on their customer list, it appears that the percentage of CRC churches that use their present curriculum has declined in recent years. Thus the need for developing a new curriculum.

Home Missions, World Missions and the CRWRC all report that the continued faithful support of the membership of the CRC has enabled them to carry on their respective ministries with God's blessings. It is always with grateful hearts that synod acknowledges the people who represent our denomination in bringing the gospel of salvation in Jesus to a lost world.

From the Pension & Insurance Board comes a recommendation that will impact the amount of pension

dollars paid to our retired pastors. The plan has recently been under review on the recommendation of recent synods. Among the changes being recommended, and if adopted, to go into effect on July 1, 2001, is a change in the multiplier used in the formula for figuring the pension amount (presently 1.1 percent of average salary times years of credited service through 12-31-99, and 1.46 percent for service thereafter). The change, if adopted, will involve making the 1.46 percent retroactive to January 1, 1985. This will benefit all current and future retirees since the final average salary for the year 2001 will be used to adjust the pension benefits. In addition to that, future retirees will be able to choose from several alternate benefit forms.

Committee to study Ordination and "Official Acts of Ministry"

Earlier in this report, reference was made to a study committee report coming before this synod. The committee was originally appointed by Synod 1995 with this mandate:

That synod appoint a study committee to consider the matter of ordination and "official acts of ministry" (C.O. Art. 53-b) as these apply to youth pastors and persons in other specialized ministries who attain their positions by pathways other than the M. Div. degree". (*Acts of Synod 1995*, p. 744).

This committee reported to Synod 1999, but, influenced by a number of overtures on this subject, synod referred the matter back to the committee with a broadened mandate, including

...exploring the relationship between "official acts of ministry" and the nature and function of office and ordination, identifying practical implications for church ministry today,

providing guidelines to help the church deal with matters of ordination and office, and being sensitive to the various cultural and ethnic communities in which our churches minister. (*Acts of Synod 1999*, p. 626).

Covering the subjects of the history of this issue and the meaning of ordination and office, the committee takes the next thirty pages of the agenda to report its study in a very thorough fashion. At the end of their report, they present a series of conclusions and guidelines which are recommended for adoption by Synod 2001, covering the subjects of mission, leadership, "official acts of ministry", ordination and office. The most significant new material comes under the heading of "office", where it is recommended that "the office of evangelist" be designated as the office to cover "a variety of ministries, provided that these ministries fit the definitions for ordination" recommended earlier in the report (where the church recognized that a person has 1. the appropriate excellencies for ministry; 2. the callings of Christ and the people of God; 3. a call to a role of pastoral responsibilities). Practically speaking, that means that, assuming that all these conditions are met, the office of evangelist would include the ministries of education, evangelism, and music and ministries to children, youth, adults and other within and outside of the congregation. By this broader application of the office of evangelist, the church would avoid the multiplication of offices and allows us to recognize a variety of pastoral positions in the church.

One other recommendation comes out of their study. It is recommended that the following changes in Article 55 of the Church Order be presented to Synod 2002 (additions underlined; sub-

tractions struck through):

The sacraments shall be administered upon the authority of the consistory in the public worship service by a ~~the~~ minister of the Word or an ordained evangelist, with the use of the prescribed forms or adaptations of them which conform to synodical guidelines. If a congregation is financially unable to support a minister of the Word or an evangelist, the elders may request authority from classis to administer the sacraments and perform the other "official acts of ministry".

The committee argues that the gifts of leadership, and particularly the gifts of the "official acts of ministry" are an integral part of the relationship between Christ and the church and thus ought not be denied to a congregation because it is unable to support clergy. This would be a relatively significant change, and our churches would do well to study this matter and its implications carefully before Synod 2002.

Concluding Matters

Finally, among the fifteen overtures being presented to synod, three of them are calling synod to form a special committee to study the issue of Christian Day school education, to solicit input from the churches and report to Synod 2002. In view of the continually rising cost of education, and the unique challenges that face us in the area of education today, such a study and re-affirmation to this cause would seem very valuable for our churches and membership.

Your prayers are certainly coveted for all the delegates to Synod 2001. Jointly our prayer must be that God will lead by His Spirit so that His will is accomplished through the deliberations and decisions of synod, and the Kingdom of Christ be advanced through the ministries of the denomination we know as the Christian Reformed Church.

Anticipation of the URCNA Synod 2001

Rev. Peter Kloosterman

As I write this article, the latest excitement buzzing around our household is that our youngest child has taken his first two steps. What a delight this past year has been, not only for us as parents but for our other children, as we watched him grow and develop from a helpless baby to a crawling bulldozer.

The anticipation of his walking thrills my family and we all take our turn to encourage and coax him to take those brave new steps. Yet, there is the reality that with this growth there will be bumps and bruises. We know that these first teetering steps will develop into a stable gait, and soon the slowness of walking will hasten to a run. This matured mobilization will mean skinned knees and scraped palms through the summer.

I have been asked to write about the upcoming Synod of the United Reformed Churches in North America and I see much that is analogous between the growth of my son and the upcoming Synod. Like a sibling holding his breath when his brother lets go of the furniture, I await the Synod with eager anticipation. I look forward to witnessing first-hand the development and growth of the churches of the Federation through the upcoming Synod. I pray that God may further unite and build our churches so that our federative unity may testify to His guidance and oversight.

After I read the agenda, I wondered, will the Federation take a step forward or will she stand with a hand placed on the furniture for security? Will the steps taken lead to a tumble or give further strength and stability

for future steps? And while these questions flood my mind, I am comforted by the assurance of God's word, that the Federation of churches will mature "not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit..." (Zech. 4:6).

Comparatively speaking, the United Reformed Churches in North America is a young Federation. The Synod of 2001 which is meeting in Escondido, June 5 – 7 is only the fourth Synod in the Federation's six year history. This year's agenda for Synod demonstrates the maturing of the Federation. The churches that comprise the Federation (and I trust churches of other denominations) watch with anticipation as the Federation begins to walk on her own. The number and substance of the overtures and the reports of the various committees evidence the maturing of the Federation. To convey the different points of the Agenda I will address the overtures first and then the reports.

THE OVERTURES

As the Federation grows there has been a steady decline in the number of overtures. At the Synod of 1997 there were 82 overtures the majority of which addressed matters of the Church Order. At the Synod of 1999 there were 19 overtures which dealt mostly with organizational matters. According to the Agenda for Synod 2001 there are 12 overtures. These overtures display the maturing of the Federation in the substance of the items that they address. In saying this, I must add one clarification. I am not suggesting that the matters addressed at previous Synods were unimportant. On the contrary, they were fundamental to the character of the Federation. They put the feet under the Federation on which we as churches must now learn to walk.



The overtures coming to Synod 2001 can be divided into the following matters: practice, procedure, and doctrine.

Matters of Practice

These overtures petition the Synod to adopt practices that will be helpful to the churches in the Federation. They include publishing the agenda and the minutes in a bound format, publishing news information in a quarterly report, and the rotation of synodical meetings among the classes.

Matters of Procedure

These overtures address items pertaining to the Church Order. One asks that the subject of Reformed Apologetics (the defense of the faith) be added to the examinations found in Appendices 2-4. Another asks that Synod not adopt a recommendation of the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (CERCU hereafter). Another overture asks that Article 4 of the Church Order be amended to account for the difficulty of having the entire consistory present at a candidate's examination.

One other item that the Synod is asked to address is not an overture but a request for advice. Classis Michigan is seeking the advice of the assembly about the permissibility and/or procedure for examining a man for ordination who doesn't have a formal seminary education.

Matters of Doctrine

The remaining overtures for the upcoming Synod address matters of teaching or doctrine and the tolerance of those teachings within the boundaries of the confessions. Though the previously mentioned overtures are also important, those that I will deal with under this heading will be the ones where the Federation will feel

the bumps and scrapes of learning to walk within the fence of the Three Forms of Unity.

The overtures that I consider to be matters of doctrine concern the interpretation of Scripture, especially the creation account of Genesis, and the teaching of Scripture about the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. The *way* Synod handles these overtures will be indicative of the future direction of the Federation.

The overtures that deal with creation focus on the definition of the word "day" in Genesis 1. They petition Synod to affirm that the days of creation must be interpreted as ordinary days. These overtures arise from a desire to address the teaching of the framework hypothesis. The framework hypothesis interprets Genesis 1 as literary or poetic framework rather than a strict chronological succession of days.

Another overture, brought by Classis Southwest U.S., deals with the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. The overture is asking Synod to pastorally admonish the CERCU regarding some of the things it wrote in pursuing ecumenical relations with other denominations. There is a lengthy explanation attached to this overture that addresses areas where the Classis believes the CERCU to be misrepresenting the Federation's position and at points in error regarding its statements on the covenant of grace and the covenant of works.

In these matters of doctrine, communication of what the Synod does with the overtures and *why* it rules the way it does will be critical. These overtures are dealing with matters that seek to narrow the confessions to a particular understanding. The question that faces Synod is twofold: Is this the right *time* and is this the right *way* to narrow the teachings of Scrip-

ture found in the confessions? That the overtures have come to Synod suggests that many believe it to be the right time. But as a Federation we must also deal with the second question, is this the right way to narrow the teachings of Scripture that unite us?

Think of the Three Forms of Unity like a fence on a playground. A fence on a playground provides security but it also provides freedom. If I, as a parent, know the fence is sound and there is only one gate for my child to go in and out, as long as I stand by the gate, I can allow my child to run freely within the fence. I trust the fence to do its work. So too, the Three Forms of Unity and the Church Order are a fence for the Federation which is designed (following the teachings of Scripture) to keep those who subscribe to them within the boundaries of Biblical orthodoxy.

These overtures see doctrinal matters that threaten our Federation. They petition Synod to make our confessional fence smaller as a means to protect the churches from these threatening issues. So the question is this: Is a Synodical affirmation or rejection which makes the confessional fence smaller the right way to remove the threat?

This is the matter of extra-confessional binding. It's a matter that the church has wrestled with throughout her history. The results have not always been positive and we must honestly assess, carefully and with foresight, where we are walking as a Federation. Living as confessional churches within the Federation requires a commitment to the Word of God, an understanding of the role of our confessions and Church Order, and a willingness to trust one another to do our tasks. Mutual trust, like walking, takes practice and patience

and an endurance of bumps and bruises. May God sustain us as a Federation so that our churches may be a witness of God's glory to the world.

THE REPORTS

There are ten reports from the Advisory Committees. Some deal with various financial considerations of the churches in the U.S. and Canada. The reports that stood out for me were the ecumenical reports and the reports on missions. If the overtures show the fact that the Federation is maturing, the reports offered by the Advisory Committees show the Federation's maturity. The tenor of these reports show the committees' reflection on the teaching of God's word and their commitment to the confessions in their approach to the various subjects.

Of the three committees that dealt with ecumenical matters the report of CERCU is the lengthiest. This committee has approached her task with diligence and persistence. It has pursued, in varying degrees, ecumenical relations with many other denominations. One helpful aspect of the CERCU report was the supplemental report offered as a response to the overture of Classis Southwest. This report should alleviate some of the misunderstanding and answer the concerns raised by this Classis. The interaction shows the precariousness of the pursuit of ecumenical relations. The CERCU has been asked to relate positions on theological subjects, from a Federation that has not taken formal positions on certain theological subjects. The wisdom of the CERCU is shown in its recommendation that the Synod approve its work without ruling on the positions it publishes. In this manner, the committee tries to avoid an extra-confessional position.

The most noteworthy item reported by the CERCU is the continued progress that is being made with the Canadian Reformed Churches. In a three-phase process that culminates in complete church unity, the committee has completed the first phase and recommends that the URCNA proceed to the second phase. Proceeding to the second phase, known as Ecclesiastical Fellowship, requires ratification by a majority of the consistories according to Church Order Article 36.

The URCNA-OPC Study Committee gives another helpful report. This committee was charged with comparing the confessions and polities of the URCNA with the OPC. The committee offers a helpful comparison of both standards. This comparison shows the high degree of similarity that can be found between these two bodies. It should serve to further unity at a local level and open the way for dialogue on some of the differences.

Last of the reports that should be noted is the report of the committee charged with developing a Biblical and confessional view of missions. The report of this committee shows a hardy commitment to follow the calling of God's word for the churches and their missionary outreach. In an age that thrives on programs and follows fads, it was refreshing to read an articulation of the Biblical and confessional call to missions. This is a call that the Federation must heed, for it is the call of the Lord, and demands a whole-hearted and urgent commitment.

Conclusion

It may be a summer of bumps and scrapes not only in the Kloosterman household, but also at Synod. We need not fear this. We must learn to walk together, in a manner that glo-

rifies God. God has blessed our Federation with wise pastors and elders and a rich heritage. We should listen and learn from our history and the history of others, to avoid our natural proclivity to walk in harm's way. But more importantly we must learn to listen to each other and grow in truth and trust. As churches, may we recognize and assist each other in our task of preaching, our love for others, our desire to follow God's word, and our calling to live as the Bride of Christ. May we be united in these, even as we are united in name.

MID-AMERICA **Reformed Seminary**

"... hold out the Word of life ..."

— Phillipians 2:16

Discover the riches of

- Worldview Calvinism
- Reformational theology
- Presuppositional apologetics
- Pastoral apprenticeship training
- Spiritual formation

Come and study with us!

—*Where ministry is more than a degree, it's a calling—*

Call toll free: (888)440-MARS

229 Seminary Drive

Dyer, IN 46311 (near Chicago)

E-mail: mars@jorsm.com

Website: www.midamerica.edu



Synod Neerlandia 2001 Canadian/ American Reformed Churches

Mr. Pete De Boer

A prayer service will be held in the Canadian Reformed Church at Neerlandia, Alberta, Canada on April 30 at 8:00 PM. Rev. R. Aasman of Edmonton, AB will conduct the service in which the Lord will be implored for a blessing over the work of Synod 2001. It is not unusual to ask the Lord for a blessing over work in the Church. It is the expected address for all our help. Every Lord's Day we are reminded of and confess together that "our help is in the Name of the Lord Who made heaven and earth."

As a delegate to Synod and an avidly interested church member one soon comes to the realization that without that very 'help' of our heavenly Father the Church and its members are busy with a losing proposition. The sin and its effect have taken a toll in all aspects of life. The Evil One surely attacks throughout the battlefield of mankind, but he definitely does not leave the covenant people of God alone. Where defense of the truth is desperately pursued, the devil is bound to be near by.

The agenda of Synod speaks clearly about the hopes, dreams and struggles of the Church and its members. Based on the clear injunction of Scripture that all God's people must be one in faith, the Church continues to struggle for unity with all that show a sincere desire and effort to worship the one true God according to His Word. There is likely no one among the believers in Church who does not hope for a unity with so many who have the Reformed understanding of God's Word. Surely there are also many that visualize the

effect that, according to human standards, unity of believers can have on the work of the Church.

But there is also a great struggle that accompanies the pursuit of unity. No one will agree that unity must be attained even at the cost of compromising the truth. At the same time many will explain that numerous differences are not of an essential nature. One must expect that the work of the Lord that has taken place in various countries and on different continents will have some differences. In the pursuit of unity the struggle of the Canadian Reformed Churches has been to unite in an approach toward other federations. This struggle is obvious when the agenda of the upcoming Synod is scrutinized.

Since the establishment of the Canadian/American Reformed Churches (CanRC) in the 1950's unity with others has been a matter of the agenda of Synods. Throughout the years committees have been established to approach other federations and their committees for discussions and interaction. At Synod 2001 in Neerlandia an extensive report will be tabled from the Committee for Contact with Churches in the Americas (CCCA). This committee will report on discussions with the committees for contact of the Eglise Reformee du Quebec (ERQ), the Reformed Church in the United States (RCUS) as well as the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC). With all of these federations contact has been ongoing for numbers of years. New contact has also been established with the Independent Church of Mexico.

A variety of appeals and overtures from churches and individuals regarding the CCCA report and decisions of the last Synod (Fergus, 1998) will have to be dealt with.

Most of these deal with issues that are seen as hurdles to some and obstacles to others. The fencing of the Lord's Supper table has become a pivotal issue in many of the discussions with Presbyterian churches. It appears that many of the issues would fall away if agreement could be reached about what the Church really is, according to God's Word. The matter of pluriformity of the Church has not been in focus during the discussions but does appear to be the fundamental theme that lies behind the difficulties in coming to grips with the matters that are to be dealt with. Concerning the RCUS the discussions include the fencing of the Lord's Supper table as well as some other differences in practice. Synod could well establish Ecclesiastic Fellowship with both or either the OPC and/or the RCUS. On the other hand, the number of appeals and overtures regarding the recommendations of committees and subcommittees does indicate an active disagreement within the federation. The struggle of unity seems to include disunity within the CanRC.

At the same time the Committee for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity (CPEU) will report on discussions they have had with the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA), the Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches (OCRC) and the Free Reformed Churches in North America (FRCNA). This committee has also had contact with churches within the CanRC to give guidance and conformity with regard to local contacts with these three church federations.

The CPEU has come to the point of agreeing to a specific agenda for full federative unity with the URCNA committee for contact. Both committees have addressed their respective Synods for approval of the timetable

they have agreed to. Such approval would mean that the CanRC and the URCNA would unite into one federation in the year of our Lord 2004. Who would not rejoice at such an occasion? Yet, there are voices that question the speed of this agreement. Discussions and public meetings have also been held with the FRCNA. Also in the discussions of the CPEU the matter of pluriformity lies at the background.

Another committee that has brought an extensive report is the Committee on Relations with Churches Abroad (CRCA). Their report deals with Church federations that the CanRC already have sister-church (Ecclesiastic Fellowship) with. They are the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland – Vrijgemaakt (GKN), the Presbyterian Churches of Korea – Kosin (PCK), the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA), the Free Church of Scotland (FCS) and the Free Reformed Churches of Australia (FRCA). This committee also deals with the membership of the CanRC in the International Council of Reformed Churches (ICRC).

With regard to the GKN the committee has reported on a number of decisions made at the recent Dutch synods that have raised some question about the direction being taken. As many of the members of the CanRC have a common heritage in the GKN, developments in her midst are not only of an ecclesiastic concern but also touch the human emotion. Many expressions of surprise and sadness have been heard when word of the various decisions has come to the churches whose members have their roots in those churches. Issues of concern in the report of the committee include a change in understanding of the fourth commandment. A change in the marriage form has also taken place.

The number of hymns for the worship services has increased dramatically. Women as well as the men are voting for officers of the church. In some cases Synod did not follow the accepted practice for receiving material and recommendations for change via the churches (the concern of hierarchy has been expressed). Concern has also been expressed about the lack of communication and cooperation in the establishment of relationships between the GKN and churches where the GKN already has sister churches. One of the adopted rules for Ecclesiastic Fellowship states that such communication and discussion is to take place before further relationships are established.

The reports concerning the Australian and South African churches are heart-warming. Even though the South African churches have gone through difficult times in the past years it appears that the Lord has given them a period of relative peace.

Developments in the relationship with the Scottish and Korean churches are a bit more troublesome. In Scotland the FCS has suffered a terrible split. At present there are two separate groups that claim to be the continuation of the original Free Church. At the same time the lack of correspondence with the Korean churches brings up questions about the purpose, function and benefits of ecclesiastic fellowship with this federation.

As mentioned the CRCA has membership in the ICRC as part of its mandate as well. There has been some discussion about our involvement in recommending new members to this organization. Some argue for a restricted involvement while others would like to see a broader involvement. This will also

have the attention of the delegates at Synod.

The only standing committee in the CanRC is the Committee for the Book of Praise (CBOP). This is because the CanRC consciously strive to prevent hierarchy. All committees are reappointed and mandated at Synod. The exception for the Book of Praise committee is because of the legal requirement to have an entity to address and be responsible for the patents and other legal issues that surround such a book. It was mandated by the previous Synod to aspire to a book with musical notations on all pages. Although this mandate has not been fulfilled, work towards this goal is ongoing.

Synod will have to deal with a request from the eastern regional synod that asks for an increased mandate for the CBOP to cover the handling of proposed changes that may come from a variety of sources. At present the committee does not have such a mandate and those who wish to propose changes are left with no other alternative but to address Synods. Some changes are also suggested for the Church Order. (This has to do with accepting ministers from other federations when they come without a congregation.) Amendments have also been suggested for the language in the Heidelberg Catechism.

A suggestion has been made to standardize the Subscription Form. At present there is no uniformity in this matter, although the gist of all the subscription forms in the federation is the same.

The Board of Governors regularly reports to the Synods. The College belongs to the Churches and as such the Board of Governors is appointed by the various Synods, as needed. At this Synod a new appointment will have to be made for

professor in the New Testament department. Prof. Geertsema will be retiring.

Regional Synod East has asked Synod to appoint a committee to once more study the matter of women voting for officers in the Church. One of the reasons they express is the fact that the GKN has recently adopted this practice. Synod will have to decide if this is sufficient ground to reconsider the issue as it has been dealt with at several Synods in the past.

The Committee on Bible Translations reported to Synod that they have had no correspondence from the Churches. They feel their mandate has been fulfilled and see no need to be reappointed.

Some correspondence and private appeals round out the balance of the agenda for Synod.

One can hardly disagree that the foregoing is a formidable task for any group of sixteen men, no matter how learned they may be. Only in the strength of the Head of the Church can this task be undertaken. As the brothers study and prepare, discuss and debate may our Father and the Lord of heaven and earth strengthen and encourage them. May they be blessed with wisdom from above, basing all their decisions on the Word of God and to the glory of His name.

[By the time this issue goes to print, Synod 2001 of the Canadian American Reformed Churches will be finished. We hope to have the results of some of the above discussions in our next issue. - The Editor]

North American Fellowship of Reformed Churches - Spring 2001 Meeting

(Formerly Lake Michigan Regional Fellowship of Reformed Churches)

Philip A. Barker, N.A.F.R.C. Clerk

The Spring 2001 meeting of the North American Fellowship of Reformed Churches, was hosted by Reformed Heritage Community Church of Holland, Michigan on Thursday, April 12. The 6:30 p.m. business meeting of delegates from member churches was followed at 7:30 p.m. by a previously announced and advertised open-to-the-public meeting having Michigan State Senator William VanRegenmorter as its guest speaker.

Councils of the member churches, subsequent to the Fall 2000 meeting, had ratified proposed revisions to the Fellowship's *Articles of Fellowship* including a name change from Lake Michigan Regional Fellowship of Reformed Churches to North American Fellowship of Reformed Churches. The name change reflects the participation and interest of churches beyond the Lake Michigan geographical area.

The elders of Messiah's Independent Reformed Church of Holland, Michigan, in a motion presented by Rev. Ken Anema, recommended a wording amendment of an in-progress draft revision of the Articles of Fellowship Supplement defining procedures for the Fellowship's advisory-only mediation of properly appealed council rulings by members of individual churches. The wording recommendation, supporting the principle that oversight of a congregation rests ultimately with its own body of elders, was supported and approved by the

delegates. The proposed Supplement, thus amended, was subsequently mailed to member church councils for ratification.

With sorrow, the Fellowship received a March 11, 2001 letter from Rev. Richard J. Miller reporting the dissolution of the Independent Reformed Church of Cutlerville (Michigan), a member church.

Following prayer and business meeting adjournment, the Fellowship-moderated public meeting commenced in the sanctuary of the church. Moderator Peter Yonker introduced State Senator William VanRegenmorter who spoke on the topic of casino gambling in Michigan. Senator VanRegenmorter, who bears an effective Christian witness and perspective in the conduct of his office, specifically addressed the prognosis for defeat by the state senate of a new compact that would authorize establishment of such a casino south of Grand Rapids in West Michigan. He also assessed prospects for support of such state action at the federal level. He encouraged the prayers of all on this matter, and suggested letters commending Michigan Governor John Engler for his previously stated stand in opposition to any new casino compacts. After receiving and answering questions from the audience, the senator also gave brief updates on other issues of state concern including the state lottery, gay activism, hate crimes penalties, pornography, teaching of creationism in public schools, abortion rights, euthanasia, and the problem of violence among young children - in which children are killing children.

Refreshments served afterwards by the women of the church afforded opportunities for many to interact personally with senator VanRegenmorter.

Sound Bites

Torch and Trumpet 1952

Webster's Dictionary defines a *sound bite* as "a brief recorded statement [as by a public figure] broadcast esp. on a television news program." Those "sound bites" refer to audible statements. Webster also defines *sound* as "free from error, fallacy, or misrepresentation", "logically valid and having true premises", and "showing good judgment or sense". In celebration of 50 years of publication, we look back to some sound bites of 1952.

February - March 1952

"True piety is concerned, therefore, in the first place with what a man *is*, not with what he *does*. It must come forth out of the heart that desires to express itself through the rest of the man as godly, pious, devoted, [and] consecrated."

"Cigarettes, wine verses grape juice at communion services, movies, Rook verses Canasta, these are the issues that arouse many Christians today. Meanwhile, the church is languishing because of the ineffectiveness of a half-hearted discipline, our members are unconcerned for the truth of the Reformed faith, and a dying world without is unimpressed with the measure of our consecration and sincerity."

Out of the Heart
John H. Piersma

"[I]t must be asserted and insisted upon without apology that Christianity is first of all a body of doctrine. It is indeed more than that, but it is that first of all. The Bible is the special revelation of God to mankind, and the Bible is essentially a message of truth. It answers two basic questions, 'What is true?' and 'What is right?'"

Christianity Without Creed
Johannes G. Vos

April - May 1952

"Basically, tolerance as every other virtue has its origin in religion. This

may sound paradoxical since much intolerance has flourished also in the religious soil. However, true tolerance is not indifference to the truth. Nor is it a willingness to water down one's convictions in order to be acceptable to others. It is a false tolerance to suppose that we must depreciate or repress our own positive witness."

"Let it be said without hesitation, there is something more important than man's salvation. It is God's glorification."

*The Importance
of the Organized Church*
R. B. Kuiper

"If we desire our children to be nurtured in the fear and admonition of the Lord, they must be able to see the power of the gospel in our lives."

"Today our problem is not first of all with delinquent juveniles but rather with delinquent adults. They set the pattern which is aped by the youth of the land."

*Living the Covenant Life
in Our Families*
Peter Y. De Jong

"Liberalism has suffered some tremendous shocks through the upheavals of the last decades. Its Social Gospel, proclaiming man's inherent goodness and promising heaven on earth, staggered under the impact of two world wars. But not even such blows were fatal to liberalism. It reinterpreted and restated its position; at heart it remained the same. The

clothes changed; the voice is still Esau's."

Review of *Aspects of Liberalism*
by L. Berkhof
Bernard Pekelder

June - July 1952

"By holding at least in practice that all churches are about equally good, we betray an even worse weakness. It is that of a lack of love for what is Reformed because of our ignorance."

Where are the Ten Thousand?
Peter Y. De Jong

"Reformed theology holds that Scripture speaks for itself. The sort of God of which the Bible speaks cannot speak otherwise than with absolute authority."

"Unconditional surrender to the absolute authority of Scripture is your only hope for eternity. It is also the only hope for your scientific and philosophic endeavor in this life."

Special and General Revelation
Cornelius Van Til

"Our Lord confronts us in the natural as well as the spiritual with his call to consecration. It may be more comfortable for the moment to withdraw, but it certainly isn't more godly. The genuine child of God swims in the currents of life."

Running Away Isn't Pious
A.C. De Jong, Edward Heerema,
John H. Piersma

"The great work of the church is preaching the Gospel, offering Christ and His salvation to lost sinners. All other church activities are either subordinate to this, or actually improper for the Church to engage in. The church is to concentrate on proclaiming Christ to sinners."

The Parable of the Net Full of Fish
Johannes G. Vos

August - September 1952

“[W]hile Arminianism clearly stresses man’s responsibility at the expense of God’s sovereignty, Calvinism refuses to do the reverse. ... Calvinism stresses human responsibility not less strongly, but more strongly, than does Arminianism. The Reformed theology insists on perfect obedience to the law of God. ... Man is responsible to God precisely because God is sovereign.”

Choosing One’s Church
R. B. Kuiper

“[P]rogress in civilization does not necessarily imply any positive advance of the Kingdom of God.”

“It is a great and grievous error to mistake the products of common grace for those of saving grace, to confuse civilization with Christianity, to suppose that ordinary human decency is the same thing as salvation, to regard human progress as a token of the coming of the Kingdom of God.”

Betterment By Human Progress
Johannes G. Vos

“The goal of [Adam’s] life was to develop this creation to perfection in order that God might see, as it were, his own reflection in this earth.”

“The doctrine of the pluriformity of the church has, almost imperceptibly, become the prevailing view in our churches, with the result that people are not even aware of its being contradictory to the confessions.”

Estranged From the World
S. Wolters

October - November 1952

“[T]he ‘Reformed’ man whose spiritual Geiger counter refuses to tick even in the presence of crackling, radio-active heresies, is fast becoming an everyday phenomenon.”

The Knock on the Door
John Vriend

“[T]he authority of the special offices is restricted in various ways. It is only *declarative*. All that the officers are to do is interpret, announce and apply the laws of Christ for his church; never may they impose laws of their own devising.”

The Church’s Offices
R. B. Kuiper

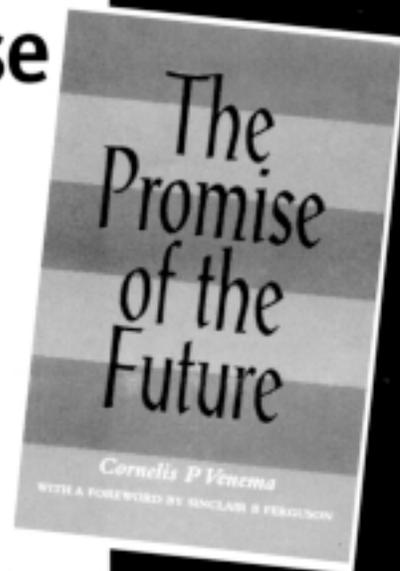
“To attempt to preach Christ without theology is to leave everything in meaningless vagueness; it is to deal with mere words instead of realities.”

Contempt for Theology
Johannes G. Vos

New Study of Biblical Eschatology

The Promise of the Future

By: *Cornelis P. Venema*,
Professor of Doctrinal Studies,
Mid-America Reformed Seminary



“Venema’s fine study is both comprehensive and careful. He is thoroughly biblical; he is also honest and fair in dealing with the variety of eschatological positions that are current in the Christian church. . . . His commitment to serve the church, coupled with his background in pastoral ministry, guarantees that his exposition even of complex issues is expressed in a way that the average Christian should be able to follow.”

From the Foreword
by *Sinclair B. Ferguson*

ISBN 0 85151 793 5 • 538pp. / Cloth—\$26.00

Published by The Banner of Truth Trust;
available from Mid-America at
1-888-440-MARS or www.midamerica.edu

**Mid-America
Reformed
Seminary**

**229 Seminary Drive
Dyer, Indiana 46311**

**219-864-2400
888-440-6277
Fax 219-864-2410**

www.midamerica.edu

The Reformed Fellowship, Inc.
 2930 Chicago Drive, SW
 Grandville, MI 49418-1176

Reformed Fellowship, Inc.
2930 Chicago Drive, SW
Grandville, MI 49418-1176
(616) 532-8510

Who's Who in this Issue

Bible Study Materials

(\$4.00 each plus *\$2.00 postage)

Nelson Klosterman

Walking About Zion,
Singing of Christ's Church in the Psalms
 Gospel Power Magnified through
 Human Weakness
(II Corinthians)
 The Law of the Lord as Our Delight
(Deuteronomy)
 Pilgrims Among Pagans
(I Peter)

John Piersma

Daniel

Henry Vander Kam

Sermon on the Mount
 Ephesians
 I & II Thessalonians
 II Timothy/Titus
 I Peter
 I John
 Parables
 Acts (Chapters 1-13)
 Acts (Chapters 14-28)
 Amos

Mark Vander Hart

Genesis 1 - 11
 (\$8.00 plus *\$2.00 postage)

Catechism Materials

Learning to Know the Lord
*by P. Y. De Jong (\$1.50 plus *\$ 2.00 postage)*
 First Book of Christian Doctrine
*by Hylkema & Tuuk (\$2.50 plus *\$2.00 postage)*
 A Beginning Course in Christian Doctrine
*by P. Y. De Jong & John R. Sittema (\$2.00 plus *\$2.00 postage)*

Other Materials

Cornelis P. Venema

But for the Grace of God
 An Exposition of the Canons of Dort
*(\$6.00 plus *\$2.00 postage)*
 What We Believe
 An Exposition of the Apostles' Creed
*(\$6.00 plus *\$2.00 postage)*

John R. Sittema

With a Shepherd's Heart
 Reclaiming the Office of the Elder
*(\$10.00 plus *\$3.00 postage)*

Norman Shepherd

Women in the Service of Christ
*(\$2.00 plus *\$1.00 postage)*

Philip A. Barker served as Clerk for the 2001 meeting of the North American Fellowship of Reformed Churches.

Dr. John Bolt teaches Systematic Theology at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Mr. Peter De Boer is the publisher of *Reformed Polemics* and was a delegate to the 2001 Synod of the Canadian American Reformed Churches

Rev. Ken Kok is the pastor of the Blue Bell Canadian and American Reformed Church in Blue Bell, Pennsylvania.

Rev. Peter Kloosterman is the pastor of the Grace United Reformed Church in Waupun, Wisconsin.

Dr. R. B. Kuiper [1886-1966] was serving as President of Calvin Theological Seminary when this article was published.

Rev. Harlan Vanden Einde serves as the pastor of the Borculo Christian Reformed Church in Borculo, Michigan.

Rev. Derrick Vander Meulen is the pastor of the Betel United Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan.

Subscription Form

One year \$19.00
 (Canadian \$23.00) Two years \$38.00
 (Canadian \$46.00)

Name _____

Street _____

City _____

State _____

Zip _____

Denominational Affiliation _____

Mail to: *Reformed Fellowship, Inc.*
 2930 Chicago Drive, SW
 Grandville, MI 49418-1176

U.S. Funds. Canada add 7% GST