



The Outlook

Devoted to the Exposition and Defense of the Reformed Faith

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Peace from the Holy Spirit

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace...”
[Galatians 5:22a]

War is horrible!!! If you have seen either of the movies, *The Patriot* or *The Saving of Private Ryan*, you have a visual reminder that wars are truly awful. I remember rather vividly yet, some 44 years ago, having a close friend come back from Korea. He had served there with the U.S. Army as a medical corpsman. Many nights he could not sleep because of the flashbacks to those nightly trips into the mountains with a “six by six”, inching toward the front lines and loading up the bodies of fallen comrades. Looking for a sympathetic ear, he used to talk the night away, hoping to expunge his memory of those terrible

experiences. Most of us, thankfully, have never had to experience that kind of warfare.

Warfare is a fact of history, but it is also a prelude to peace. As one scans the pages of history, one is struck by the succession of wars. There were frequent wars between David’s armies and the Philistines, between Israel and Judah, between Assyria and Israel, between Persia and Greece, between Rome and Carthage, between Rome and the Gauls.

After the wars of Roman conquest, there was a prolonged era of peace

called the *Pax Romana*, i.e., the peace of Rome. Jesus lived during that time of peace, but He reminds us that there would be “wars and rumors of wars” (Matthew 24:6). The omniscient Son of God knew that warfare would be a staple of history, as long as this world was allowed to exist. Our Savior knew that warfare was endemic to human nature. He knew that all of us, by virtue of our sinful character, were inclined to hate our fellow man, those in authority over us, and the God who had made us.

Paul also lived during that era of peace called the *Pax Romana*, yet he talks repeatedly about warfare. Paul is not so concerned about political wars, or military engagements, but about “spiritual battles” about the warfare that goes on within individual souls.



Volume 51, No. 7 (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).”

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In order to understand our text, we need to take note of the fact that it begins with a “But”. “*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace.*” Paul is not proceeding from a vacuum, but is contrasting the fruits of the Spirit with the “works of the flesh” [v. 19]. Nothing can be properly understood in isolation, and no text can be correctly deciphered without reference to its context. The “fruit of the Spirit” has to be seen in sharp contrast to the “works of the flesh”.

The opposites of peace are the “hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, and dissensions” that characterize us in our natural, fleshly state. Apart from the grace of God, and before the Holy Spirit begins to sanctify us, we are inclined (prone) to hate our parents, our brothers, our sisters, our neighbors, our supervisors, our employees, and everyone else we can possibly hate. Before the Holy Spirit begins to radically alter our characters, we are tempted to shoot up the local high school just as much as those who have hogged our headlines for the past few years. We are just as inclined to murder the boss who fired us, or the girl that jilted us. All of that, says Paul, is the carnal nature that, thankfully, is curbed by the power and grace of God,

When I was growing up, I had a better than average relationship with my father, but it was a long ways from peaceful and far from perfect. We never fought with fists, or guns, or stones, but there was often a nasty tension between us. I didn’t like his rules and many of his decisions. I could hardly wait to get out of the house at the ripe old age

of 17 and go off to Calvin College. Dad felt the same way, I think, because he offered me the *whole* \$50 I had saved up from summer jobs at the neighbors, and told me to be on my way. It wasn’t long, thankfully, before I came to realize that he had been right all along, and that I had been seriously mistaken. Before four months had passed, I found a ride back home and confessed to him how stubborn and rebellious I had been. I acknowledged that he was right, and that I was wrong.

Dad accepted my apologies with as much grace and emotion as a Dutch farmer dared to display in those days, which wasn’t much. But I knew that it was genuine, just as he knew my confession was. From that day forward, we enjoyed a wonderful peace. The warfare was over. The battle of the wills was past. He continued to accept his divinely ordained role, and I was willing to submit. My youthful rebellion was finished, and our relationship was recreated at a new, higher, more enjoyable level than either of us had ever dreamed.

That experience, in some small way, has taught me to understand what Paul is saying to the church at Galatia and to us today. Once the Holy Spirit exerts control over our lives, the warfare between us and our Father in Heaven is over. Instead of the anger, the rebellion, the air of superiority, the selfish ambitions, and all the other works of the flesh, we can now enjoy a peace that passes all understanding. Before we are called out of the world, and before we are adopted as Sons and daughters, we are naturally inclined to hate God. We dislike His Word, and we despise His Law.

We rebel against His discipline, and even deny His existence. The physical clash of swords may never be heard, and the roar of cannons may never blast our ears, but the anger seethes within our souls.

Then the Holy Spirit takes control. He roots out the weeds and plants His seeds. In time, as those seeds grow and ripen, fruit begins to appear. On the branches of our lives we begin to see love where hatred had previously been. We begin to see joy where sadness had occupied a place. But, best of all, we begin to experience peace where warfare had shortly before left us wounded. Then healing begins to occur, and life becomes not only worth living, but a foretaste of heaven.

Dr. Norm De Jong is the interim pastor of Mill Creek Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Sound Bites

Torch and Trumpet 1953

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" from our third year of publication.

February - March 1953 **Volume 2 No. 6**

"In an age in which the picture-magazine and television are the most popular instruments of entertainment and agents for the instructing the general public, the study of doctrine is most unpopular."

* * * * *

"When the truth of God is no longer revered and loved and cherished then the untruths - which men hold for truths - of the devil make their way into our minds and we swear by them and prize them instead of the doctrine of the Word."

* * * * *

"[T]his tendency to let councils and synods do the deciding and to sit back supinely without exercising one's own prophetic office as it applies to the matter, has been growing apace among us. The assumption is fast settling like a shroud over the church that it is wicked for an elder or a layman to question the official programs of the church in public speech or print."

Doctrinal Indifference
Henry R. Van Til

"Faithful ignorance is better than presumptive knowledge."

We Live By Faith
Alexander C. De Jong

"One of the cardinal achievements of the Reformation was...that an entire congregation, without special training, could participate in praise."

The Need for Constant Improvement
Henry A. Bruinsma

April - May 1953 **Volume 3 No. 1**

"As soon as men no longer recognize the divine law as their norm, they also experience discord."

* * * * *

[R]ationalism is an apostate faith and man is no 'rational being.' Even in his thought functions a man either recognizes the law of God as the norm for human existence or he rises up in revolt against it."

Het Roer Om!
H. Evan Runner

"Calvin had seen enough of the dangers of doctrinal error which could creep in through the subjectivity of hymns based on human experience to realize that the songs

of his church should be based upon actual scriptural texts."

The Beauty of Simplicity
Henry A. Bruinsma

[H]istory furnishes a warning that unless a close cooperation exists between Church and school - so that the Church has a real voice in the matter - serious consequences doctrinally and morally more readily arise."

Organization and Administration
Bernard J. Haan

June - July 1953 **Volume 3 No. 2**

"People remember the date of their 'decision' to 'accept Christ.' They vainly suppose that a *mere decision* will save them, and that a *mere mental assent to doctrines* is the same thing as saving faith in Christ. They believe that Jesus saves sinners just as they believe that Abraham Lincoln was President of the United States. They have a formal decision, but no real change in their life. They are like the fireplaces in some ships' staterooms: a 25 watt electric bulb under some red cellophane, which provides an illusion of fire, but has only a little light and practically no heat."

* * * * *

"When a person is really saved, he will love what he formerly did not love. He will love God, God's Book, God's Day, God's House, God's children."

Are You Sure You Are Saved?
Johannes G. Vos

"History is not infallible. It too must be tested by Scripture. It is from Scripture that one must determine



whether the church today maintains biblical doctrine.”

The Development of Christian Doctrine in History
Fred H. Klooster

“There are many in the Christian Church today who no longer understand the intolerant character of Christianity.”

* * * * *

There are many in the Church today who would make the virtue of charity toward the brethren the only and highest good. But we may never sacrifice the purity of the faith, we may never give up the truth even for the sake of loving the brethren, thereby covering up such error that would defame our God and dishonor him”

False Tolerance
Henry R. Van Til

August - September 1951
Volume 3 No. 3

“[I]t is not political life or our labor relations that must be Christian, but our whole life, we as persons, and all spheres in which we function must be permeated with the Christian life principle.”

Does Christian Social Action Demand an Absolute Break?
H. Evan Runner

“Can there be a greater exhibition of unmerited love than that which is seen when the King of Heaven follows his guilty people into every scene of vanity, striving with them, warring with their lusts, alarming their consciences, never leaving off his gracious quest until he has laid them as suppliant penitents at his feet, and then rejoicing over them as

the shepherd who has found the long lost sheep?”

The Condescension of God
Leonard Greenway

“The divine revelation, both as to content and effect, always stand in direct antithesis with the products of human thought, insofar as the latter has been guided by the principles of man’s would-be autonomous reason.”

* * * * *

[W]e must recognize the truth that God’s revelation was indeed challenging the existing systems of thought the very moment this revelation was uttered. Whenever God’s Word and the Life Situation were found to be in conflict, the former would seek to challenge the latter.”

When Kingship Was Lowered From Heaven
Martin H. Woudstra

October - November 1953
Volume 3 No. 4

“We in America are especially inclined to think too excessively in terms of single individuals. God does not. Individualism is not a Scriptural view of human life. *Our* God is Jehovah, God of the covenant.”

* * * * *

“[O]ne of the most fundamental characteristics of Americans generally is their inability to think principally, out of a principle or starting point. It is no accident that America produced the philosophy of pragmatism; for all Americans really think pragmatically instead of principally.”

Cui Bono?
H. Evan Runner

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REFORMED FELLOWSHIP

God's People, My Parish

Lubert was a retired farmer. Every time I would drop in, he and his wife would be listening to Christian music. Next to Lubert's favorite chair there was always a large stack of religious magazines because Lubert loved to read. I enjoyed my visits with Lubert and his wife because each visit left me spiritually enriched.

Lubert was in his late seventies when the doctors told him he was going blind. We began enlarging the church bulletin for him. I would also enlarge the songs because Lubert loved to sing.

We did this for about two years and then one day Lubert told me I could stop printing the large bulletins. He could only see shadows and couldn't read anymore. I felt bad about that because I knew how much he loved to sing. He would miss it and I would miss his enthusiastic singing on Sundays.

That Sunday I was thankful that the first song in the worship service was a familiar one. At least Lubert could sing along on the first stanza. As we were singing the first stanza, I looked up to see Lubert, holding the book for his wife, never looking down but singing as loudly and joyfully as ever. I looked up during the second stanza. There was Lubert singing as loudly and as joyfully as ever. It was the same for the third and the fourth stanzas. The next song was not as familiar. Yet at each verse, there was Lubert, holding the book for his wife, never

looking down, but singing as loudly and as joyfully as ever. That was true of every song we sang at both the morning and evening worship services.

When I visited with Lubert and his wife that week, I commented on his singing and how thankful I was that I had picked songs he knew. He smiled and began talking about something else. The next Sunday, the same thing happened: holding the book for his wife and never looking down, he sang every verse with joy. The next Sunday was the same.

The next month when I visited with him, he told me his secret. "You know, dominie," he said, "I love to sing. I grew up with these songs. I've sung them all my life. When the doctor told me I was going blind I knew I needed to do something if I wanted to keep on singing. So every day and every night I would go through the hymnal, song by song, until I had it memorized."

Lubert is in heaven now, singing with the saints in glory. His body has been perfected, his vision restored. But even with 20/20 vision, he doesn't need a song book because he sings every song from the heart; a heart that has been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Rev. W. H. Oord

Dr. Cornelis P. Venema Appointed President of Mid- America Reformed Seminary

The Board of Mid-America Reformed Seminary is pleased to announce the appointment of Dr. Cornelis P. Venema as Mid-America's first seminary president. Venema has been a professor of Doctrinal Studies at Mid-America for twelve years. He received his Ph.D., magna cum laude, from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1985.

Before joining Mid-America's faculty in 1988, Venema served the Ontario Christian Reformed Church in Ontario, California for six years. Venema has authored several books, including a comprehensive volume on the doctrine of the last things: *The Promise of the Future* (Banner of Truth, 2000). He also recently completed a study of the sixteenth-century Reformer Heinrich Bullinger and serves as contributing editor for *The Outlook*.

Venema said he is both delighted and humbled by the appointment. In addition to his new administrative responsibilities, Dr. Venema will continue to teach in the area of Doctrinal Studies.

Dr. Venema and his wife Nancy reside in Dyer, Indiana with their four children, Joseph, Charissa, Rachel, and Carolyn.



scious'? Quite the opposite! We see this as a singular duty, a common mutual recognition of the blessings of a faithful covenant God who has taken this special road with this branch of His church and as such calls us to honour His way with us through the heritage He has granted.

In the second place, I have also heard voices that suggest that you need to develop your own identity. That is precisely the type of statement that we as your fraternal delegates have quite frankly strongly discouraged at every meeting that we have been at since your federation began. The very prayer of Christ for the unity of the church led us, at the inception of our history on this continent to ask the question: is Christ, who calls us to unity, pleased with the proliferation of federations with the name Reformed in them? Does this continent really need yet another denomination with the name Reformed? We felt that this was not acting in a proper ecumenical spirit. So we sought unity with the CRC and PRC in our early years. And only when those avenues proved to be unworkable because of imposed binding beyond Scripture from the side of both groups, only then did we, -- with some reluctance, I might add -- proceed with the formation of our own federation. Initially it was not desired or sought, but we did so as those called by God. And still today our view is: faithful Reformed believers need to work diligently to reduce, rather than uncritically increase the number of Reformed church bodies for the sake of anyone's personal or collective "identity". We don't have that sort of an identity problem and that is

why we're promoting merger. Our only requirement is: merger cannot come at the cost of losing precious gains received in our own reformational history. Therefore our aim is: continued reformation for us as well as you through the process of a return to our common roots!

Finally, -- and at the risk of repetition -- let me reiterate our will to ecumenism in the most concrete terms possible for you. The committees have agreed to it, our synod has endorsed it. We are looking at the concretizing of a plan of union that will result in one continental federation, or two cooperating federations in two countries that have full sister church relations, with all the rights, privileges and obligations of full ecclesiastical fellowship. However that will be made concrete, you have our commitment that we are ready to embark with you on this road so that within five or six years the process can be completed. By the time we reach our next synod, the detailed plan of union should be able to be adopted and implemented. Further arrangements for merger can be worked out in the following period.

I don't mean to suggest that it will be an easy road. But in the context of our time, it is the road to which Christ points us. The challenge before us is clear: to stand united in recovering, upholding and maintaining the principles of the continental reformation as they were passed on in the secessionist tradition on this continent. From that position of strength and unity on the basis of Scripture and our common confessions, we can develop our contacts and relationships with churches of different traditions. But if we are

finding our way with other traditions, and are exploring avenues of fellowship with them, should that not impel us all the more to seek greater ties of fellowship and cooperation closer to home? If we recognize the spirit of unity and fellowship among our Presbyterian neighbours, should we not first solidify that brotherhood as brothers and sisters of one house, children of common parents?

I hope the call of the hour is clear to you all! I know it will not be easy for anyone of us, or both of us together. But is not that the way to which Christ calls? The way of self-denial, and self sacrifice? If that willingness is found here in Escondido, as it was found in Neerlandia last month, then there may be times of pain and tears, tensions, uncertainties, even some internal strife -- but there is laid up a crown of righteousness for those who here act in response to the call of a heavenly Master. He has shown us the way and He promises: I am with you always to the close of the age. May that promise drive us forward in service and self-denial from this day forward. May God bless all your deliberations!

Dr. Jack De Jong is professor of diaconology and ecclesiology in Hamilton, Ontario at the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches.



with whom you are close. He or she can help pray for you, study the word of God with you, and make you accountable so you will no longer be two-faced.

When temptation comes you can be ready like other Christians who rely on the strength of the Holy Spirit and not themselves. Also, when you do stumble, you can know that you can repent to a loving Father in heaven. He will accept you because of what His Son has done for you on the cross!

Mr. Dave Vander Meer is the Youth Director of the Cornerstone United Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan

Having been examined by Classis Southern Ontario of the URCs, Mr. Martin Overgaauw has been declared a candidate for the ministry of the Word and Sacraments by the Covenant Christian Church of Wyoming On. He can be reached at 241 Stone Church St., Hamilton On. L9B 1B1 [905] 574-9823, FAX [905] 575-6840, E-mail: martinover@look.ca

~Peace at Any Price~

Road to Modernism

Signposts!

Modernism is not full-blown when it first appears in the church, but it is rather like the mustard seed of which Scripture speaks. From a small unnoticed beginning it has a phenomenal development until it comes suddenly to fruition in open apostasy and an indifferent, dead church. Modernism might properly be compared to a cancerous growth in the tissues of the human body, which, if not dealt with forthwith, will bring certain death. That is the reason why we are urged these days to learn to distinguish the common symptoms of cancer and to take heroic measures to eradicate this evil disease. Likewise, when the first symptoms of the anti-Christian, semi-pagan religion of Modernism appear in the church, men of God ought to be properly disturbed. Woe unto them that are at ease in Zion!

For Modernism, let us remind ourselves, is not principally an open denial of basic Christian doctrines (although many modernists ultimately come to such open denial), it is rather an attitude to the Word, an approach to the facts, a way of life.

One symptom of Modernism which is found almost everywhere in the American church world today is *an abhorrence of all controversy on doctrinal issues, a desire to maintain the peace at any price.*

Personality above Principle

Common in the church today is the symptom of *false tolerance*. False tolerance elevates personality above principle. Simply because a man is a fine Christian gentleman or a pious soul, his heretical tendencies are to be overlooked or minimized. In fact, there is a mentality abroad in the church today that is indifferent to the very words and beliefs of a man as long as he is a fine fellow.

We must, of course, admit that many modernists are worthy and pleasant people. So much so that many an unguarded soul is easily taken in by flowery phrases, the suave manner, and the kindly smile of the perverter of the Gospel. In fact, I have heard people with a Reformed background argue that such fine, brotherly individuals must be right—at least they must be men of God, for how otherwise could they have such outstanding Christian graces. And at the same time the conclusion is made that the defenders of the faith must be wrong because they so often appear contentious about things today considered to be minor matters.

However, the words of the Lord Jesus to the Sadducees ought to be a warning and are applicable here: “Ye do greatly err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God.” For the Bible tells us plainly that the Devil is able to transform himself



into an angel of light. In addition, Paul had this to say: “Therefore, it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness” (cf. II Cor. 11:14,15). The net result of thinking more highly of persons than of the principles of faith and the express revelation of God is always compromise on doctrinal issues.

This reminds us of the man who was so well-treated in a Catholic hospital during his illness that he vowed never to say anything against Catholicism again; or the brother who, when he heard his minister expounding the Roman Catholic mass as “an accursed idolatry” (cf. Heidelberg Catechism Lord’s Day 30) came out of church protesting angrily that preachers were always running down some other religious group. As a matter of fact the irate brother had a Roman Catholic boss and his fine personality together with good employer-employee relations blinded the offended brother to the principles involved in our age-old opposition to Rome. Such people confuse earnest convictions and the earnest contending for the truth with personal animosity. For no matter how fine it may sound to hold that we ought only to talk about principles, alas, people are always attached to issues, and we cannot talk in a vacuum.

The assumption, then, is that one who debates or argues for the truth must have a personal prejudice against a brother who holds the opposite view. This is wrong and indicates something of that indifference to doctrine which is so prevalent today. For today we find people getting very excited about personalities involved in the debate, but the

question of the truth as tested by the Word seems to be of no concern to many.

As a result we see a host of “neutrals” in the Church, who are merely amused by these “high and ghostly matters” to use a phrase from Mencken as applied to the Machen trial. Irreparable damage is done to the cause of Christ since the spiritual warfare to which we have been called in this world is either minimized or represented as a witch-hunt. Subtly the insinuation

Today we find people getting very excited about personalities involved in the debate, but the question of the truth as tested by the Word seems to be of no concern to many.”

of fanaticism is introduced, thus discrediting those who are actually contending for the faith. Since the whole modern mind is one of appeasement and compromise, it becomes rather easy in ecclesiastical affairs to discredit those who still think of the Christian life as warfare for the truth.

Positive versus Negative Testimony

One of the favorite distinctions that one hears repeatedly from the middle-of-the-road, neutral churchmen is this: “Be positive in your Christian testimony and in your preaching. Do not criticize and do not become negative.” That was

the favorite riding horse of the modernist Post-Chaplain, who was my superior for about two years in the service. He had himself emptied headquarters chapel by that type of lifeless preaching. The idea of these namby-pamby peddlers of man’s goodness is that if we say that we love the Lord all is well, and there is no need to condemn the world. We are told to accept the truth, but the condemnation of untruth and falsehood and heresy must simply be left to the imagination, since that attitude of condemnation is unChristian, and since one can never be really sure of having the truth anyway, one must never be censorious of others.

There is a Barthian dart here aimed at the doctrine of the “blessed possessors” — a certain imitation of Lessing who said the search was the thing, not the having. And if we are all searching we may not pretend that we have a monopoly on the truth. In short, this false tolerance for persons tends to keep one silent about error and heresy.

The Word of God is very clear on this matter. It is the duty of true prophets to signalize heresy and false prophets. Even the people themselves were commanded by the Lord in the Old Testament as well as in the New to learn to recognize those who came in sheeps clothing in the name of the Lord who were at the same time servants of Satan (cf. Deut, 13:18, 20; Is. 9:15; Jer. 29:21; 1 John 4:14; etc.)

Controversy versus Compromise

In the entire New Testament as well as in the preaching of Noah, Elijah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah we find

this negative or controversial tone. John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus set the style when they condemned not only the sins of their day but also the people who held to these sins. Paul and Peter in their famous sermons and addresses take the same approach

The Christian is called, then, not merely to take a negative position against sin in his own soul — as if the antithesis existed only on that level — but every Christian and especially every minister of the Gospel has the solemn duty to preach and speak controversially. And by controversial, I understand the setting of truth over against error and heresy in a concrete situation. What I have in mind is very aptly illustrated in the Heidelberg Catechism when the popish mass is called “an accursed idolatry” (cf. above) and when the articles against the Remonstrants (Canons of Dordt) not merely set forth the positive doctrine concerning the five points of Calvinism, but in no uncertain terms the errors of the opposition are also condemned.

The Word itself calls us to this militancy. Paul says “our warfare is not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual forces,” and “the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the casting down of strongholds.” James urges us to strive earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints. War the good warfare and suffer hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ, thus Paul admonished

It is to be feared ... that there is a great deal of weak religion in the world, and I am afraid that matters are not improved by the unmanly way in which we sometimes talk about the subject. It is a pity that we accustom ourselves to this effeminate mode of regarding Christian faith: when instead of being a shield which protects us from assaults, instead of being a stout club with which we knock temptation on the head, instead of being a sword wherewith we slay our spiritual enemies, it is regarded rather as a very weak companion that we must nurse tenderly and that cannot go out at night. I wish there were more robust piety in the world and less of the sickly kind.

- Francis L. Patton

Timothy. The term “militant” comes from the Latin word for soldier. So one who is militant is either training for or actively engaged in warfare, he is aggressively active in the service of the King.

Certainly we ought to be aggressive — as well as defensive — in the maintaining of the truth. We are not to merely react when under attack, or rally to the defense to vindicate the faith only when it is unjustly attacked. We must take the sword of the Spirit and wage war against the world in a spiritual manner.

Militancy does not mean pugnacious or belligerent in an offensive sense, neither need controversy degenerate into name-calling, quarreling and bickering. It all depends on the na-

ture of the controversy and whether people can see issues rather than men. If our concern is only for men and not for the truth then, indeed, controversy is sure to degenerate in to contention in the Church. The sad fact is that in the history of the church men have not always been free from quibbling and quarrelling, but that in itself is no argument against controversy and polemics for the truth, or for the pacifism we see about us today.

Controversy and History

Historically we find that John Calvin was one of the greatest defenders of the faith. Of him B. B. Warfield claims that no greater controversialist ever wrote. Calvin was not content to sit in an ivory tower with his contemplations of the truth. He entered the arena of life and joined battle with those who opposed the truth of God as he understood it. But today the acid of Modernism has so corroded the thinking of God’s people in many quarters that it is often considered presumptuous for us to contend with Catholics, Lutherans or Arminians, since we do not actually know who has the truth, and there can certainly be no infallible interpretation of the truth, don’t you know! God, they say, will take care of the truth — a very plausible and pious thought, indeed! God will also save the elect, but he does it through the preaching of the Word.

It is in the fires of controversy that the dogmas of the church throughout the ages have been hammered

“False tolerance for persons tends to keep one silent about error and heresy.”



out. Today, however, there is an attitude that seems to believe that we have arrived, that we can live by tradition and need not develop the doctrines of Scripture any further. There are those who are now saying that it is not the business of Christian ministers to controvert publicly. That ought to be done only in private. This means, of course, that if one expresses himself first and delivers himself of an opinion which to the mind of others is contrary to the Word, those who disagree must refrain from speaking publicly. Otherwise they are guilty of the grave sin of schism — for, it is said, controversy leads to schism — but in the meanwhile anyone who speaks first has free play. What a travesty on the office of the minister and the prophetic office of the believer! If this suggestion were rigidly carried out no one would ever have the right to express his opinion lest someone would be found to have expressed a contrary opinion.

The opposition to controversy, then, in the history of the church, has usually led to compromise. For behind this unwillingness to defend the truth and to be militant in its proclamation there is a certain lackadaisical attitude, a worldly-wise sophistication, a spiritual hauteur, which looks down with disdain upon the quasi-comical antics of people who take themselves too seriously. Such people are out of place in the modern world of appeasement. They are quite ready for institutionalization for they think of themselves as Napoleon - or maybe Machen or Kuyper! That's the verdict of the modern mind - and it can be backed with modern psychological analyses. It is the attitude of

neutrality toward doctrinal issues which borders on a cynical indifference.

Conclusion

As members of the Church of Christ in these latter days we ought, then, to be on our guard and stand in the freedom with which Christ has set us free. For to succumb to the evil of modern religious liberalism is to be entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Especially we ought to be on guard lest this octopus strangle the orthodox

Today, however, there is an attitude that seems to believe that we have arrived, that we can live by tradition, and need not develop the doctrines of Scripture any further.

remnant of the Church unawares. In warfare one of the standard procedures is to outflank the enemy — to get behind his position and attack from the rear. Today the same effect is achieved by the more subtle maneuver of infiltration - often under cover of darkness or inclement weather. Another effective weapon is psychological warfare in which the morale of the enemy is first destroyed by various suggestions and bits of news. All of these tactics are also being employed by the Devil, who is a deceiver from the beginning.

When a frontal attack is ineffective, Satan often shifts to the flank by suggesting that our defense of the faith is hopelessly provincial and

narrow-minded; we take ourselves too seriously, and people can only laugh at us. Or again he suggests that we must overcome our intolerance, we must become more appreciative of the opinions of others — until we are finally so indifferent to the Truth that there is nothing worth contending for. Then we are ripe for the fall!

Rev. Henry R. Van Til [1906-1961] was serving as Associate Professor at Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan when this article was published.

Reformed Fellowship Announces its Annual Meeting

The date for the Annual Meeting of the Reformed Fellowship will be held at the Bethany United Reformed Church in Wyoming, Michigan on September 20. More details to follow next month.

or narrowly nationalistic spirit. The covenant Lord of Israel is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, who created the first human beings, Adam and Eve, in His own image and likeness (Gen. 1). The unity of the human race is based upon God's creation of Adam and Eve, the progenitors of the whole human family, and is expressed in terms of Adam's ordination to the position of head and representative of all his posterity. The unity and diversity of all the peoples of the earth are, therefore, joined to the person of Adam. In the book of Genesis, the theme of the Lord's blessing creation is especially linked to the filling of the earth with a multitude of peoples and nations — some seventy in number by the end of the opening chapters.

The implications of the Lord's creation of and rule over all things for the missionary calling of the church are patent. What we commonly call the "Great Commission" of Matthew 28 ("Go, therefore, and make disciples of *all* the nations") only makes sense within the framework of a worldview that teaches that the earth and all of its peoples are the Lord's. Unlike many of the gods of the nations, who are tribal deities of restricted people groups, the God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ is the One in whom all peoples live and move and have their being (Acts 17:28). To think that the true and living God could be narrowly interested in only one people, to the exclusion of all others, is incompatible with His status as Creator of all. Moreover, because human sin is an expression of a spirit of rebellion and idolatry, the true and living God, the Almighty Creator of all things, can neither tolerate nor

fail to overrule such sinful rebellion. Consequently, the saving work of the Creator King not only embraces all peoples, but aims to realize a *kingdom* purpose, namely, that all things be subjected to His rule and blessed dominion.

Throughout the Old Testament, this theme of the Lord's kingship over all creation is celebrated, often in striking ways on the occasion of the Lord's mighty acts of salvation and judgment. When Moses and Israel

As the great Creator and Lord over all, God will settle for nothing less than the worship of all the peoples, and the praise of the whole creation."

celebrate the Lord's deliverance of His people through the Red Sea, they announce that this feat of the Lord's power and grace was witnessed by the peoples of the earth, and represents the Lord's victory among the nations. Indeed, Israel's deliverance is itself a sign that "the Lord shall reign forever and ever" (Ex. 15:18). The story of the conquest and entrance into the promised land that is told in the book of Joshua, accordingly, is one that declares the Lord's sovereign power and right of disposal over the nations and the whole of creation. After Israel crosses the Jordan on dry land, Joshua reminds the people that this makes known to "all the peoples of the earth ... that the hand of the Lord is mighty" (Josh. 4:24). Thus, when the people of the

Lord rejoice in His saving works, one of the chief notes sounded in their psalms of praise is the note of the Lord's eternal lordship and kingship (compare Pss. 93; 95-100; 102:12). "The Lord is King forever and ever; nations have perished from His land" (Ps. 10:16). The works of the Lord are "awesome" and confirm that He "rules by His might forever" and "His eyes keep watch on the nations; let not the rebellious exalt themselves" (Ps. 66:5-7). By means of His mighty acts of salvation, the Lord makes known to the sons of men "the glory of the majesty" of His kingdom, a kingdom that is everlasting, enduring throughout all generations (Ps. 145:8-13).²

The story told in the Old Testament, therefore, is not that of a tribal deity whose interests are narrowly fixed upon one people and its particular location in the earth. As the great Creator and Lord over all, God will settle for nothing less than the worship of all the peoples, and the praise of the whole of creation. No false gods, particularly the powerless and lifeless idols of the nations, can withstand His kingdom or rule. Every attempt to resist the Lord's dominion will ultimately be vanquished. The Lord God aims to be acknowledged again as the lord of the nations. He is not satisfied with the worship of one nation, nor to dwell only among that nation in a small corner of the earth. Nothing less than the praise of all the nations, and the restoration of the creation as a creation-dwelling, will answer to the dictates of His lordship.

A Mission for the Nations Through One Nation

A second and closely related theme

of the Old Testament is that God's purpose of salvation, though realized through the calling of a special people into covenant with Himself, includes within its design all the families of the earth. One reason many people regard the Old Testament with suspicion, especially on the subject of missions and evangelism, is that they profoundly misinterpret the Lord's concentration of His saving work upon the nation or people of Israel. Here the Old Testament is often viewed in an unfavorable light, and a sharp contrast is drawn with the international scope and vision of the New Testament with its emphasis upon the gospel going out to all the nations. What this approach misses is the realization that God's purposes for Israel never terminated upon her alone, but always aimed at the salvation of all the families of the earth. Though the gospel may be "to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile" (Rom. 1:16), it was never a restricted gospel whose reach was bounded by the narrow borders of Israel.³

The story of God's gracious purpose for the nations is announced already in Genesis 3:15, often called the *protevangelium* or the first announcement of the gospel promise. In the face of human sin and rebellion, the Lord God does not simply come to pronounce judgment and the curse upon the human race. Rather, He announces good news (He authors the evangel!); the seed of the woman will ultimately crush the head of the serpent. The Lord declares that He will place enmity between the woman and her seed on the one hand, and the serpent and his seed on the other. There will, therefore, be two lines in the story of the human family, the one

being the line of promise leading to the birth of a Savior who will bring blessing to His people. Though the promise is terse, and its richness awaits the further progress of revelation and redemption, the heart of the gospel is already announced: God will come through the seed of promise to bring redemption for His people. The beginnings of the fulfillment of this promised blessing are recorded in the subsequent history of the emergence of the various peoples of the earth, the confusion of languages at Babel when God judges human pride and rebellion, and the great flood, which simultaneously represents God's judgment upon human sinfulness and deliverance of believing Noah and his family (the nucleus of the people of God in the line of promise).

However, it is especially in the calling of Abram that the Lord's saving purpose is revealed, and the covenant of grace commences in its more particular administration. After each of the preceding events of the fall into sin, the incident of the Tower of Babel, and the great flood, the Lord had come in grace to bless and to save. Now in the calling of Abram He comes with a Word of grace to Abram, promising to bless him, his seed, and (through him) all the families of the earth (Gen. 12:1-3). Abram is not blessed simply that he alone might enjoy God's favor and grace. No, he is blessed *in order that he might be a blessing to the nations!* What is especially noteworthy is the explicit way in which the promise of blessing includes all the peoples: "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (v. 3). This promise, which is repeated and elaborated upon in

Genesis 18:18, 22:18, 26:4, and 28:14, means that the Lord's saving purpose is not a narrow and constricted one. He is not interested only in Abram and his descendants. Rather, He wishes through Abram to bless all the nations and peoples.⁴ Thus, Abram will be known henceforth as "Abraham, for I will make you the father of a multitude of nations" (Gen. 17:5).

It is this promise of blessing to all the families and peoples of the earth that undergirds the subsequent history of the Lord's dealings with Israel, and that constitutes the larger background to the New Testament fulfillment in Christ. It is also confirmed throughout the history of the Lord's dealings with Israel. In this history, the people of Israel are never defined solely in ethnic or racial terms. Among the number of the children of Israel, there are always strangers and sojourners, people from other families and nations. Explicit provision in the law is made for their inclusion among the people of God (Ex. 12:48; 22:21; Lev. 19:33; Num. 9:14; 1 Kings 8:41-43). Thus, when the apostle Paul describes the blessings that come to all believers in Christ, Jew as well as Gentile, he is at pains to emphasize that this represents the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham. All who through faith are members of Christ's church are children of Abraham, heirs with him of the covenant promises and blessings.⁵

The Promise for the Nations in the Prophets

In addition to the two themes we have considered — that the Lord is King over all creation, and that His redemptive blessing includes all the



nations of the earth — there is a third and final theme in the Old Testament of special importance to the subject of missions and evangelism. And that theme is the promise of *future salvation for the nations*, a promise that is particularly prominent in the testimony of some of the Old Testament prophets. Not only is this theme prominent in their preaching, but in one noteworthy instance, the preaching of Jonah to the Ninevites, it comes to expression in what might almost be termed a “missionary journey” to them. There emerges throughout the preaching of the prophets, before and after the exile to Babylon, a message of a future age in which the Lord will come in blessing and judgment. This coming of the Lord is associated with the advent of the promised Messiah, the Son of David, who will inherit the throne of His father and receive the nations as His rightful inheritance (compare Psalm 2).

Some of the most well-known instances of this promise are found in the prophecy of Isaiah. For example, in Isaiah 2 we read:

Now it will come about that in the last days, the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established as the chief of the mountains, and will be raised above the hills; and all the nations will stream to it. And many peoples will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us concerning His ways, and that we may walk in His paths, for the

law will go forth from Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. (Vv. 2-3)

When the Prince of Peace, the shoot from the stem of Jesse, comes, He will reign in righteousness so that “the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea” (11:9). When Israel is redeemed, she will be a “witness” among the nations that the Lord alone is God and there is no Savior besides Him (Isa. 43:9-10). The glory and joy of Jerusalem

What we commonly call the “Great Commission” of Matthew 28 only makes sense within the framework of a worldview that teaches that the earth and all of its people are the Lord’s.

in the future will include the gathering of the nations to her, a gathering which will issue in the nations declaring the Lord’s glory and bowing down before Him (Isa. 66:18-24).

Similar prophecies of salvation for the nations, however, are also found in the other prophets (compare Amos 9:11-15; Mic. 4:1-4; Hab. 2:14; Jer. 16:19-21; Dan. 2:44; Zech. 8:18-23; Mal. 3:12). Among these the prophecy of Jonah is particularly striking. For the prophecy of Jonah reveals not only that God’s mercy extends to the nations, including one of Israel’s most despised enemies, the Ninevites, but also that He is terribly displeased

with Israel’s sinfully constricted and chauvinistic attitude toward the nations. The prophet Jonah embodies something of Israel’s unwillingness that the Lord should show to other nations the kind of covenant blessing and grace He has extended to her. By means of the book of Jonah, the Lord makes known that He is a God who is “gracious and compassionate . . . , slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness,” and that He wishes to show mercy, not only to Israel, but also to the great city Nineveh with its many inhabitants (Jon. 4:2,11).

Conclusion

So much more could be written about each of these several themes of the Old Testament, which have far-reaching implications for the subject of missions and evangelism. We will have occasion to explore further some of these implications in forthcoming articles, especially when we consider the doctrines of election and the covenant of grace. However, this brief survey will have to suffice at this point.

Nonetheless, one thing should be clear from this survey, and that is the Old Testament’s teaching that the living God, who is the Creator of all the peoples and families of the earth, seeks to redeem and gather the nations to Himself. His gracious deeds toward Israel have, as their larger focus and interest, the bringing of the blessings of salvation and favor to all the families of the earth. The New Testament fulfillment of this Old Testament story is, therefore, one that is in substantial continuity with what went before it. Indeed, the coming of Christ in the fullness of time is for the express purpose of realizing the promise of

God's blessing to all the nations, which He originally revealed to Abraham, the father of all believers.

Admittedly, the Old Testament views the role of Israel in bringing God's blessing to the nations, not so much in an "active" missionary way, but rather as a "passive" witness among the nations. There is no "Great Commission" mandate to "go" with the gospel to the nations in the Old Testament. Israel lives as a light among the nations, reminding them of God's kingdom and grace, but she does not actively go out to reach the nations. Typically, the language of the Old Testament suggests that the nations must and will come to Israel in response to the Lord's saving acts on her behalf. For this reason, some missiologists speak of the "centripetal" emphasis of the Old Testament, in contrast with the "centrifugal" emphasis of the New.⁶ This contrast must not be overstated, however. For the Old Testament makes it quite clear that it is God's saving design and purpose to restore the nations to fellowship with Himself, to bring the peoples once more into subjection under His feet. That He should subsequently come in the Person of His Son, the great Apostle or Sent One of the Father, to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10; Heb. 3:1) — this not only fits with the message of the Old Testament, but also realizes its promise.

Endnotes

¹For a critical evaluation of this pragmatic spirit and its consequences, see John E. MacArthur, Jr., *Ashamed of the Gospel: When the Church Becomes Like the World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1993).

²For a summary of the role of the Old Testament Psalms in revealing God's missionary purpose for the nations, see

Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), pp. 29-38. Kaiser's study is an excellent survey of the subject of mission in the Old Testament. In addition to Kaiser's study, the following offer fine surveys of this subject: J. H. Bavinck, *An Introduction to the Science of Missions* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1960), pp. 11-24; and Johannes Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), pp. 15-54.

³See Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament*, pp. 75-82, for a chapter-length defense of the thesis that "God's Call to the Missionary Paul [was] Based on the Old Testament."

⁴There is some debate regarding the meaning of the Hebrew term translated in these passages as "families" or "nations." It can be used to refer to smaller people groups like "households" (e.g. Josh. 7:14), or larger groupings like "tribes" or even nations. It is not equivalent in meaning to our English term, "nation," at least not to the extent that it has come to be used almost exclusively for modern nation-states. See Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament*, p. 19.

⁵This inclusion of Gentiles among the people of God in the Old Testament is remarkably attested in the genealogy of the gospel of Matthew (Matt. 1:1-17).

⁶Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church*, pp. 40-41, uses this language to distinguish the theme of the nations coming to Israel, in response to the Lord's saving acts (centripetal), and Israel's going through the Messiah to the nations to bring them the message of salvation (centrifugal).

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Bethany URC is planning to host the **3rd Annual United Reformed Men's Conference** on Sept. 28 and 29. The theme of the Conference, "*Understanding the Times and Knowing What to Do*", comes from I Chron. 12:32 where the unique description is given of the sons of Issachar as they are prepared to respond to David's call for service in the king's army.

On Friday evening

Rev. Casey Freswick "*Understanding the Face of Liberalism.*"

Rev. Richard Kuiken "*Understanding Three Needs which Our Wives Need Met at Home.*" Followed by a round table discussion.

On Saturday

Dr. Mark Campbell "*Understanding Medical Situations - Considerations.*"

Rev. Andrew Cammenga "*Understanding Worship and Worship Wars.*"

Rev. Mark Vander Hart "*Understanding: Creating God's Kingdom, Genesis 1 as Gospel.*"

Rev. Bill Green "*Understanding Missions and the Local Church.*"

Rev. Art Besteman "*Understanding the Blessed Fruit of Zealous Bible Study.*" Followed by a round table discussion.

The Conference fee is \$35 and includes a continental breakfast, catered lunch, and study guides for the lectures. Checks should be made out to Bethany URC and sent to the church address: 5401 Byron Center Ave. SW, Wyoming, MI 49509. For lodging information, call the conference chairman, Frank Jones at (616) 531-7285.



What Happened at Synod?

United Reformed Churches in North America 2001 Synod Report

Three o'clock in the morning the alarm rang. It was time to get ready for the URC Synod in Escondido, California. The forecast for flying was sunny. The forecast for Synod was not as promising. Different parts of the Agenda for Synod had been greatly debated ever since they had been made public. Pre-synod discussions proved that views on creation and covenant greatly varied within the federation. Synod promised to be a hostile environment. Some feared that the URC would witness a split after this synod was over.

Bored with the in-flight movie, I decided to read the Agenda once again, highlighting points of interest. I woke up to the sound of the highlighter hitting the floor. Another minister on the same flight was also trying to read the Agenda. I could hear him whisper under his breath, "That's not right!" and "This will never do." I couldn't help but think that the next three days would seem very long.

We arrived in Escondido just as synod was convening. The Rev. Phil Vos, chairman pro-tem, led the delegates in singing and prayer. One of the first items on the agenda was the admission of four congregations into the federation: Covenant in Byron Center, Michigan; Dutton, Michigan; Grace in Kennewick, Washington; and Wellsburg, Iowa. Synod also noted with joy the addition of two former OCRC congregations, one in Abbotsford, the other in Surrey, British Columbia. In addition, Synod was informed of two new congregations in California, one in Fresno and the other in Pasadena, formed under the supervision of our churches.

The body elected the Rev. Ralph Pontier as chairman and Rev. Dennis Royall as vice chairman. The chairman read from Ephesians 4 and encouraged the delegates to "make every effort to the keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" and to "consider others better than yourselves." The desire of the delegates to adhere to this passage became clear throughout the discussions on the floor of synod. Most debates were polite and courteous, keeping the feelings of others in mind. The very capable chairman and vice chairman kept things moving.

A moment of thanksgiving and praise came as synod approved entering into Phase 2 of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Canadian Reformed Churches. Three joint committees were appointed to look at a Song Book, Church Order, and Minister Training. Upon approving this new phase of fellowship, the brothers at synod paused to give thanks and sing a rendition of

Psalm 133 from the Psalter Hymnal.

In addition to moving into closer relationship with the CanRC, the synod also approved entering into Phase -1 Corresponding Relations with the RCUS.

Two overtures asked synod to caution the Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity [CERCU]. These overtures came from classes that felt the CERCU had overstepped its bounds in explaining some of the theological stands of the URC. One of the overtures sent a lengthy supplement that questioned some of the theological formulations presented by the CERCU concerning the covenant. That supplement and the CERCU report were greatly debated on the URC email list and in some reformed publications.

A committee of twenty-six delegates, led by Rev. R. Scheuers, was given the task to present to synod an equitable solution. Instead of debating the theological concerns expressed, the committee decided that the heart of the overtures was the role of the CERCU. This led the committee to propose the following statements which synod adopted:

1. The committee recommends that without bias synod remind CERCU to remain faithful to the mandate of the committee "to correspond and dialogue on significant factors in the two federations' history, theology, and ecclesiology."
2. The committee recommends that synod note that the

Statements of Agreement published in the 2001 Agenda for Synod by the CERCU do not exhaustively reflect the full spectrum of theological (doctrinal) positions of URC congregations in some of its formulations, and that these Statements of Agreement have no official status in the URCNA.

Another committee struggled with statements concerning Genesis. After meeting for a day and a half, one committee member was asked privately how things were progressing. He replied: "So far we are in agreement that there was a creation and that God did it." After meeting a bit longer, the committee presented their report.

Synod went on to affirm the following concerning Biblical Interpretation and Genesis:

1. The authority and perspicuity of Scripture (B.C. V; H.C. VII).
2. The necessity and sufficiency of Scripture (B.C. VII and H.C. VII).
3. God the Father almighty created the heavens and the earth and all things visible and invisible (Apostles' and Nicene Creed).
4. The Father created the heavens and the earth out of nothing (H.C. LD IX).
5. God gave every creature its shape and being (B.C. XII).
6. The creation and fall of man. "God made man of the dust of the earth; man gave ear to the devil" (B.C. XIV).
7. The historicity of Adam (L.D. VII.20; C.O.D. III/IV.1).

8. Man was created good, in a garden, and tempted by the devil, committed reckless disobedience (H.C. III and IV).
9. God's words to the serpent in Paradise are noted as the first revelation of the Gospel (H.C. L.D. VI).
10. Adam plunged himself and his offspring by his first transgression into perdition (B.C. XVI).
11. Adam's fall into sin and our connection to it (C.O.D. 1.1)
12. God came seeking man when he, trembling, fled from Him (B.C. XVII).
13. God created all things good in six days defined as evenings and mornings (Genesis 1 & 2 and Exodus 20:11). This means that we reject any evolutionary teaching, including theistic evolution, concerning the origin of the earth and all creatures (L.D. IX).

As expected, this matter was the most debated item on the floor of synod. Throughout the debate, however, two things became very clear. The first was that, for the most part, we are pretty much agreed as a federation.

Most of the debate centered around whether or not synod had the right to make pronouncements like the ones listed above. Some felt that synod was overstepping its bounds because, by affirming *any* statements, synod would be saying something beyond the creeds and confessions adopted by the federation. Others felt that the federation needed to make the above statements in order to explain our interpretation of the confessions.

The second thing that was very clear at synod was the body's desire to promote the Kingdom of God. While there was much debate, sometimes lengthy, sometimes repetitive, it was wonderful to see the Christian brotherhood among the delegates and the desire to work together for the glory of God. Instead of a "my way or the highway" attitude there was a wonderful effort to be the body of Christ, making "*every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*"

It was an enriching experience to see the body work together to express the federation's commitment to the historicity of Creation as recorded in the Scriptures and confessed in our Three Forms of Unity, without attempting to go beyond the confessions which bind our churches together. The statements adopted by synod illustrate a Spirit led wisdom that should be good for the churches because they reaffirm and strengthen the positions already adopted by the churches.

Not all of Synod 2001 was work. Delegates were invited to spend an evening on the beautiful campus of Westminster Seminary. Dr. Michael Scott Horton and Dr. Heywel Jones, both members of the URC and seminary faculty, gave inspirational messages from the Word of God.

I traveled home with three other delegates. We marveled over the way God had worked at Synod 2001 taking some divisive issues and, instead of separating us, drawing us together. Psalm 133 begins with the words "*How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity.*" Delegates to Synod 2001 got to see this verse exemplified in two



very different ways. First, by moving into a new phase of fellowship with the CanRC and the RCUS. Second, by working through some very difficult issues, the federation was drawn closer together as a group of churches.

May the Lord of the Church be praised through the events that took place at Synod 2001.

Rev. W. H. Oord

CanRC Ecclesiastical Fellowship - The Theme of General Synod 2001

Four times during the ten days of General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) in Neerlandia, the chairman, Rev. Cl. Stam of Hamilton, Ontario rose and led the body and attending audience in prayer and thanksgiving for a decision about the establishment of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with a church federation.

Having been a member of this synod it is impossible to report about it objectively. At the same time as a member of synod who has expressed hesitancy about the establishment of Ecclesiastical Fellowship, it seems appropriate to give some explanation of what Synod considered. It is no secret that all the decisions to enter into Ecclesiastical Fellowship were (eventually) unanimous.

IRB

I am sure that most, if not all, of our readers can rejoice together when they hear that the Canadian Reformed Churches have established Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the Igreja Reformadas do Brazil. This very young church federation was established on July 5, 2000. At its constituent synod it was decided to offer the relationship of Ecclesiastical Fellowship to the Canadian Reformed Churches. Such a decision seems very natural when we remember that the Lord used missionaries from the CanRC to spread the seed of the gospel in Brazil. Still it is wonderful to receive the offer to

enter into this relationship as one of the first decisions of these very young churches. In our prayer we commended them to the Lord as they will have to continue to deal with oppression, lack of knowledge and poverty. At the same time it is wonderful to see and hear the Reformed sounds that come from such a relatively young federation. May our Lord grant them abundant blessings and the indwelling of His Holy Spirit as they continue to travel the road of faith with all the struggles and triumphs that will undoubtedly come across that path.

RCUS

It was a wonderful moment at Synod Neerlandia when the CanRC's accepted the offer of Ecclesiastical Fellowship, made in 1997, by the Reformed Churches in the United States (RCUS). It was good to have Rev. G. Syms and elder D. Stelpstra representing those churches in our midst. They have been at our synodical meetings before. They begin to know and appreciate the CanRC. The contact committee report, as well as the personal discussions for about a week at synod, confirm that there is also good appreciation for the RCUS among the CanRC. Although some significantly different practices remain between the federations, the report as well as discussions with the delegates make it very clear that the principles in those areas are the same. It can and must be said that the RCUS is a federation experiencing ongoing reformation (*doorgaande reformatie*). The Canadian Reformed Churches can learn from the dedication and humility displayed by the RCUS in some of the areas of difference.

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Of particular note was the fact that in the RCUS not all the congregations meet in worship twice on the Lord's Day. At the same time it became clear that in the RCUS there is great emphasis on keeping the whole Lord's Day holy. It is not unusual to have a worship service followed by some time of fellowship, catechism instruction and Bible study. In many cases there is also the participation in a meal together. It appears that the practice of one service is a hold-over of the impracticality of the long distances some had to travel to church. At the same time it can not be denied that there are still some instances of Sunday work and going to restaurants for meals. Something that may also need some attention in the CanRC. It is interesting to note that the report of the Comm. for Contact with the Churches in the Americas (CCCA) indicates "The RCUS has an article against the profanation of the Sunday in its constitution" (p. 53). A part of one of the considerations of Synod reads as follows: "The introduction of a second formal worship service is considered desirable, but having one formal worship service does not preclude the RCUS churches from keeping the Lord's Day holy. The report indicates that the Biblical principles of worship, teaching and fellowship are alive and well in the RCUS." (Acts, art. 59, 4.3)

Rev. G. Syms addressed Synod after the decision to accept the offer Ecclesiastical Fellowship had been made. Elder B. Gortemaker, a member of the Committee for Contact with the RCUS responded to the words of Rev. G. Syms. Both speeches can be found in the ap-

pendices of the Acts of Synod, soon to be available.

URCNA

The contact and discussions with the United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA) have come to the point that both committees appointed for detailed discussions have reported progress to their respective synods this year. They have decided on a proposed plan of action and have suggested a strict time frame. Synod Neerlandia decided to accept the proposed plan, but has taken the strict time frame away from the agreement. Although Synod did consider time of the essence it also reckoned with the very real possibility that three years might be too constrictive in coming to final federative unity proposals.

The suggested rules for Phase II, called Ecclesiastical Fellowship by the URCNA, were adopted. Synod failed to adopt the term Ecclesiastical Fellowship for this phase even though the rules for Phase II are remarkably similar to our rules for such a relationship and the term is used by the URCNA. In order to deal with some particular areas that need discussion before federative unity, Synod decided to appoint a committee to discuss theological education. A separate committee will deal with discussions toward a mutual church order, while the Standing Committee for the Publication of the Book of Praise will serve as our committee to deal with discussions about the song book.

After the decisions regarding the URCNA had been approved Rev. Stienstra retired minister of the URCNA and member of their com-

mittee for contact spoke words of thankfulness and encouragement. Rev. R. Aasman responded on behalf of Synod.

OPC

With regard to relations with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) Synod decided, once more to offer Ecclesiastical Fellowship. According to the report of the CCCA "there is no need to address again the person, the statements, and the status of Rev. Hofford. In the meantime it would be helpful and much appreciated if our next General Synod would declare unambiguously to reject the disqualification of office bearers of the OPC as false shepherds, and to distance itself from such labelling..." (page 18 of the report). Synod 1998 had understood there to be an agreement on the matters of fencing the Lord's Table and Confessional Membership between the Committee for Contact with the OPC (CCOPC) and the Committee for Establishment of International Relations (CEIR). However it added some wording to ensure that it was truly understood that a verbal warning was not sufficient fencing of the Lord's Supper Table. At the same time they added a small word to the agreement on Confessional Membership to indicate that the Confessional Membership means accountability of the church member to all the confessions of the church.

Synod Neerlandia did not stray far from the work of Synod Fergus. Rather than alter the words of the agreement between the two committees it went back to the original wording. But it did clarify in its Considerations, which form part of the decision, that the agreement

includes the following statement, “The eldership has a responsibility in supervising the admission to the Lord’s Supper.” The Consideration continues, “There is therefore agreement on the principle, while admittedly there is a difference in practice. Our concern is that both keys of the kingdom be exercised in connection with all participants at the Lord’s Table, members as well as guests.”

With regard to Confessional Membership Synod considered, in part, “The office bearers of the OPC have a responsibility in dealing with the members of the Church to uphold the doctrine of the Church, and the members, according to this fourth vow [of the OPC Form for Public Profession of Faith - PdB], are accountable to that authority.”

In addition to the foregoing the decision to extend Ecclesiastical Fellowship to the OPC also contains the following statement regarding the Church: “Both the CanRC and the OPC reject the legitimacy of the pluriformity of the church (see Biblical Principles of the Unity of the Church @ www.opc.org/relations/unity.html).”

Member of the CEIR and retired minister of the OPC, Rev. G.I. Williamson addressed Synod after the decisions regarding the OPC had been made. Rev.J.deGelder, member of the CCOPC responded on behalf of Synod.

OTHER

Other highlights of synod include the following:

- Rev. L.Bilkes of the Free Reformed Churches of North America stopped by for an after-

noon and addressed Synod on behalf of his church federation. Rev. B.Slomp, advisory member of Synod (being chairman of the Consistory of the hosting church), responded on behalf of Synod.

- Regional Synod East overtured Synod to establish a study committee about whether women should vote for office bearers in the local congregations. The main new ground they brought forward was that the Liberated Churches in the Netherlands had recently decided to allow such a practice. It was also pointed out that women have been voting for a long time in the Free Church of Scotland. This overture, thus, falls in line with the Ecclesiastical Fellowship theme. It appears that some in the CanRC want to introduce new practices on the basis that they are present in church federations with which they have that fellowship. Synod decided not to establish such a committee.

- Synod mandated all the contact committees with federations who maintain the Westminster Standards to re-introduce the discussions of the “divergencies” between those Standards and the Three Forms of Unity. A listing of those divergences can be found in the Acts of Synod 1971, Appendix, pp. 64-71 and Acts of Synod 1986, p.151.

- Synod appointed Rev. G. H. Visscher of Burlington, ON as professor in New Testament Studies to replace the retiring Prof. J.Geerstsema.

- In response to an appeal from a brother and sister with regard to the use of juice at the Lord’s Supper Table, Synod decided “that Re-

gional Synod was incorrect in not interacting more closely with the clear and consistent language of our confessions, which indicate that the *norm* is to use wine at the Lord’s Supper.

Synod lasted ten days in total. A brotherly spirit was maintained throughout. And no amount of praise could sufficiently describe the wonderful care that was taken by the ladies of the Church of Neerlandia to provide for the delegates. May the work of Synod Neerlandia be used by God to further the coming of the kingdom of His Son through the working of the Holy Spirit.

Mr. Pete De Boer is a member of Canadian/American Reformed Church in Abbotsford, B.C, and editor of *Reformed Polemics*, and delegate to the CanRC Synod.

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