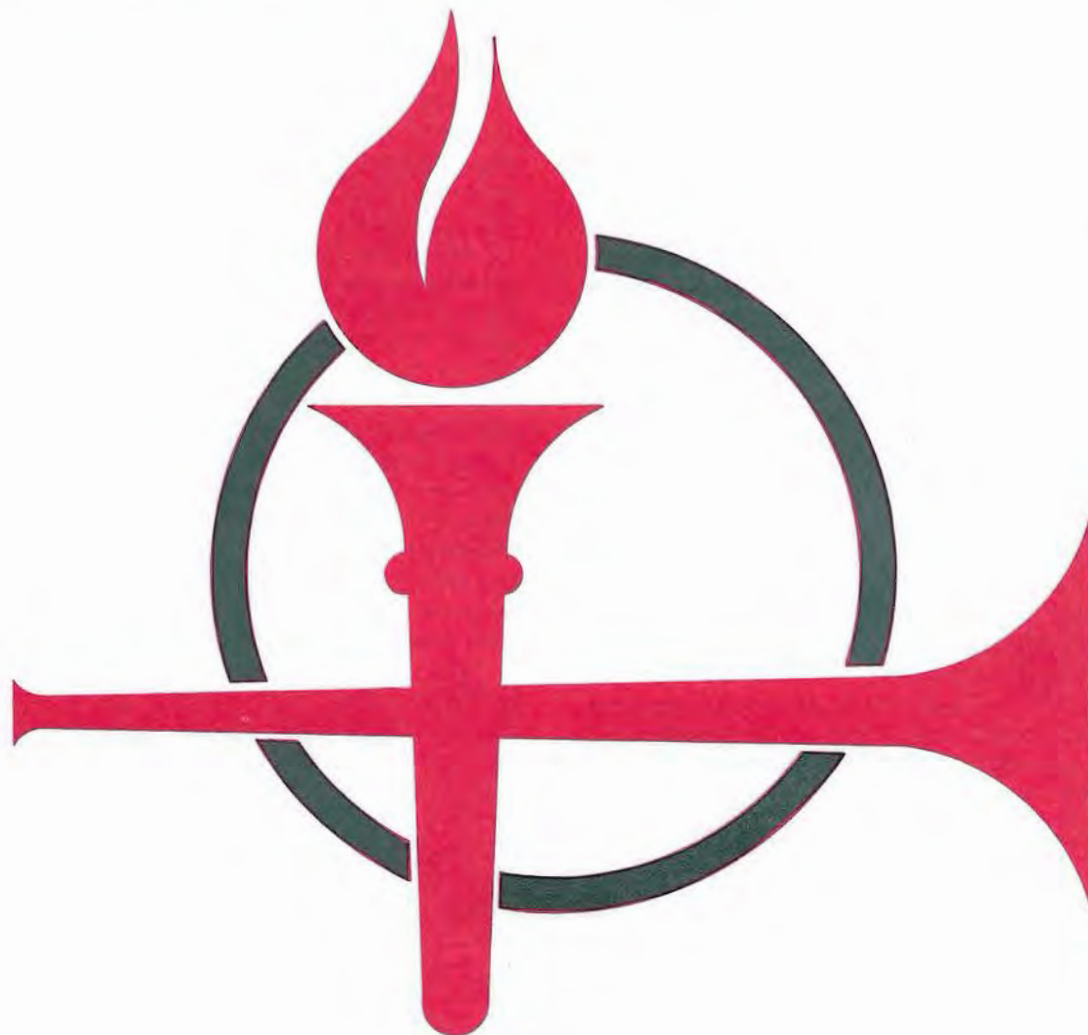


THE OUTLOOK

DEVOTED TO THE EXPOSITION AND DEFENSE OF THE REFORMED FAITH

DECEMBER 1981



**AN ELDER'S VIEW OF SYNOD
KOREAN CHURCH GROWTH
REFORMED ECUMENCIAL SYNOD**

why YOU need mid-america reformed seminary

Nelson D. Kloosterman

This article is an adaptation of a speech delivered on October 1, 1981, at the annual Reformed Fellowship Meeting in the Kelloggsville CRC. Its author, Rev. Nelson D. Kloosterman, is pastor of the Immanuel CRC of Sheldon, IA, and is secretary of the Board of the Mid-America Reformed Seminary.

It is no overstatement to say that the subject of my address has aroused members within the Christian Reformed Churches as nothing else has in the past number of years. Some are enthusiastic about it, many are nervous about it. Far too many are in the dark about it, and we are trying to remedy that. Far too many are indifferent about it, and for that we see no remedy at hand.

The subject of my address is, of course, the new seminary, the Mid-America Reformed Seminary. I am dividing my remarks according to two questions: 1) Is the new seminary needed for the Christian Reformed Churches? and 2) Is the new seminary wise for the Christian Reformed Churches? Because I want my remarks to be personal, I will rephrase the questions: 1) Is the new seminary necessary for you? and 2) Is the entire movement a wise effort, deserving your participation?

The Churches' Spiritual Climate

As a context for proper answer to these questions, it would be helpful to provide a brief description of the spiritual climate in which the Christian Reformed Churches live in the early 1980's. I would describe this global cultural climate as being heated by the friction of light with darkness, being clouded by the subtleties generated as the Truth meets the Lie. Within this climate the church of Jesus Christ, called to be a city set on a hill, faces momentous choices. Ours is a time of crisis. To be sure, this is not new. My point is this: the crisis faced today by the church in the world is of such intense proportions that, unless this is recognized, not only will the

Christian Reformed Church's voice be muted — she won't even be able to clear her throat. Not only will her light be dimmed — her candle won't even flicker. As death vainly tries to swallow life, the church is surrounded with persistent attempts to seduce her into moral and ideological companionship with the world. The world, rather than the Word, comes to set the agenda for the church.

And we are not left untouched. It is now trite to say that among us the rate of divorce is increasing; rather, the depressing admission must now be made that among us the sin of divorce is becoming tolerable. Furthermore, I have been told by one who teaches at a church-owned college that, whereas in the 1950's, administrators and counselors dealt with frequent alcohol misuse on campus, and in the 1960's with frequent drug abuse, in the late 1970's and early '80's a frequent counseling problem is homosexuality. Both faithful worship attendance and faithful church discipline appear to be relics of a past age, at most optional for the Christian church. And complaints about preaching abound on various levels within the Christian Reformed Churches — at classical exams, in consistory rooms, and around kitchen tables. There is economic and social movement within the churches; the lunch bucket has been replaced by the attaché case, and the blue collar is being traded in for a white collar. Affluence has impaired our ability and willingness to suffer for the sake of principles and loyalties.

Our Positive Answer

What then is needed for the Christian Reformed Churches? The answer depends, of course, on whom you ask. My purpose in this address is to provide you with the answer that a certain identifiable segment of believers within the Christian Reformed Churches is giving — a new seminary.

Who Are We?

First, let me describe this segment of believers. These people — and I count you among them — are

enthusiastically committed to the church's God-blessed past. We seek to practice confessional integrity, whereby that which has been historically understood and proclaimed as the Biblical faith of the church is still so understood and proclaimed today. This segment of believers strives toward Biblical godliness through the maintenance of a lifestyle which is antithetical to the world. These folks are militant proponents of moral righteousness wherein the priority rests upon personal uprightness as the prerequisite for social morality.

What Are We For?

Allow me to state briefly some of our crucial confessional positions. We are *for* an infallible, inerrant Bible which is the Word of God, whose authority inheres in its divinely inspired text rather than in the human author's inaccessible intention and meaning. We possess an enthusiastic loyalty to the Christian Reformed Churches' historic confessional identity, unity, style and practice, and seek to address today's culture by means of that loyalty practiced in life. We are for the faithful exercise of church office according to the authority of Christ Himself in service to the Word of God in the midst of the obedient congregation. We therefore bow to the clear testimony of Scripture and refuse to *modify* Scripture by Scripture, but rather wish to *interpret* Scripture with Scripture, as a result of which we stand opposed to the practice of opening these offices to women. Finally, we stand committed to a certain kind of preaching which is God's authoritative address to the congregation whereby Christ gathers His church and the saints are equipped for obedience in the world.

The Churches' Present Division

I wish to say more about this kind of preaching, but I must first admit that we who compose this segment of believers in the Christian Reformed Churches live among others who have opposing commitments. We sit in the same pews with them; we serve on the same consistories with them; and, saddest of all perhaps, we live in the same families with them. These opponents are against what we are for. They hold to a Bible whose authority is limited by the human author's intentions, intentions which can presumably be exposed and defended by a certain kind of theological scholarship. We stand opposed to the methods used by Allen Verhey and Clayton Libolt in Bible interpretation; they stand with them, either vocally, or, as in Libolt's case, silently.

We live in the churches among those who are committed to an ecclesiastical identity, style and practice which are free of constraints embedded in revealed, propositional Truth, committed to a Holy Spirit who leads immediately, sometimes contrary to the revealed Word of God which that Spirit is supposed to have inspired.

We live among those who are desperately committed to the opening of offices in the church to women, who seek to justify their pursuits by removing from the concept of office Christ-centered authority and

THE OUTLOOK

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"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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EDITORIAL COMMITTEE: Arthur Besteman, John Blankespoor, John Piersma, Harlan Vanden Einde, Henry Vanden Heuvel, Syburn Voortman, Clarence Werkema.

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Production Manager: Peter Wobbema.

Business Manager: Mrs. Mary Kaiser.

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EDITORIAL AND CIRCULATION OFFICES

THE OUTLOOK

4855 Starr Street, S.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506. Telephone 949-5421

Office Hours: Monday, Wednesday, Friday 9-11 a.m.

After Office Hours please call: 452-9519

Mailing Address: 4855 Starr Street, S.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49506

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replacing that with humanitarian service. Our opponents follow a practice of public worship that abolishes form in favor of spontaneity, reduces God to a co-celebrant, and identifies the value of "going to church" merely in terms of the benefits we get out of it.

Three Observations

In this connection, please notice three things. First, that which I have carefully described as a difference of commitment is just that — difference of commitment. Not merely a difference of opinion, of upbringing, of geography, of culture, of environment. But a difference of belief and practice. For example, those Calvin Seminary professors who participated in ordaining Mrs. Rienstra to the office of Minister of the Word by laying their hands on her head, have done so, in my judgment, intelligently, intentionally and willingly — before the face of the Most High God, as their response to His will. We have, I'm saying, a difference of commitment within the Christian Reformed Churches.

Notice secondly, that we who are the promoters of the new seminary did not originate or generate this difference of commitment. The new doctrines of the church, the Bible, the nature of office, of preaching, of public worship, of mission work — these have not been born out of the womb of the confessional conservatives within the churches. And so to the oft-heard question asked of the conservative, "At what point would you actually leave the denomination?", we reply, "We shall remain. When will the *real* dissidents be leaving?"

Please recognize, thirdly, that any solution to the spiritual crisis in our churches today must be *fully* serviceable to our commitment. Any solution which is eclectic, picking up good ideas from here, there and everywhere, will have the same result as sewing a new patch on an old garment.

The Answer: A Certain Kind of Preaching

We return to the main question: Why do the Christian Reformed Churches need a new *SEMINARY*? The answer: Because this segment of the churches believes with all its collective heart that the seed of revival, restoration and rebuilding within the church is a certain kind of preaching. Not *programs* (Key 73, church growth, discover your gifts); not new liturgical *forms*; not synodical *committees* to stamp out sin. None of these provides the cure. Only a certain kind of preaching.

We have said that in light of the current spiritual climate within the Christian Reformed Churches today, a certain segment of believers finds the solution for the church's dilemma in providing a certain kind of preaching.

This kind of preaching has, in my judgment, been clearly described by a Dutch professor, Dr. C. Veenhof, in his book *Prediking en Uitverkiezing*. Although he is describing the nature and power of the Word of God in the light of popular misunderstandings, the following applies equally well to the proclamation of that Word.

... That Word is often viewed as nothing more than a completely reliable communication about creation, fall, redemption, in short, regarding God and His works. In addition, it is perhaps a *rule* according to which one ought to live. But that the primary function of the Word is that God in Christ through the Spirit *gives therein* the forgiveness of sins, eternal life, yes, even *His very self*; ... that is rarely understood. And yet it is this view, this perspective with respect to the Word which belongs to the very essence of the Reformation. In the Reformation that which was primarily in question was *the manner* in which God grants His grace: *sola fide* which is correlative to *solo verbo Spiritus Sancti...*" The Word that God by means of the Scriptures sends to men is the Word *by which God Himself addresses us*. Undoubtedly it comes to us in human language, but nevertheless it is the Word by which and wherein the Lord Himself directs His speech to us. The Scriptures, Calvin says, come to us out of heaven as if God's own living voice were heard (Inst. I, VII, 1).

Summarizing, we may describe the Gospel ... as a *word* — a word *spoken* — that has Jesus Christ and the salvation completed, merited by Him as its content. It is a word spoken by the Holy Spirit, and as such is a living power of God unto salvation. It is a word that not only talks about a previously realized central moment in the history of redemption, but as the word about that event is itself a saving event (*heilsgebeuren*). It is never empty or ineffectual. On the contrary, it produces fellowship with Christ, and in Him with God, and is as such an instrument in the realization of our salvation and the formation of the church. It is and it *grants* God's grace. Or, in the case of rejection, it works everlasting judgment. ... The preaching of the gospel is the central moment in the work of Jesus Christ, of the apostles, of the church. ..."

(emphasis).

To help us identify that which we will endeavor to produce at Mid-America Reformed Seminary, I would describe this preaching as confessional, covenantal, textual/thematic and Christo-centric preaching. *Confessional preaching* is something far more than mere repetition of the church's belief; it consists of the personal, life-related setting forth of the apostolic tradition, summarized in our creeds, which once gripped Augustine, Calvin, Herman Bavinck and others. To *preach covenantally* is to proclaim that sovereign, intimate, gracious summons of God to His people, that they live before His face in a world that rejects Him, that they live antithetically to the world's principles and idols. This segment in the church is for preaching which is *textual/thematic*, that is to say, which opens the *text* by means of the reproduction and development of the *text's content* in an identifiable, thematic proclamation of the truth of the text. *Christo-centric preaching* is the kind which views the text as part of a coherent

whole, which views all of the promises and commands of God's covenant as fulfilled in Christ, so that all of life proceeds unto Him and derives from Him.

It is this kind of preaching which has given birth to our commitment, nourished and sustained it, and continues to energize it. We need Mid-America Reformed Seminary to provide total instruction and training intended and tailored to make our enthusiastic commitment fruitful. We need the new seminary to prepare men to preach the Word of God with uncompromising integrity and unfailing competence, so that the church is once again the center of the believer's life as the spiritual "mother of believers."

We contend that there is within the Christian Reformed Churches a potentially fatal schizophrenia of conviction, and that we confessional Calvinists who compose the core, the backbone, the majority of the church, have the solemn obligation to apply the vision for Reformed life to the pulpit. To rebuild life, we must rebuild the church. And to rebuild the church, we must rebuild the pulpit.

But Why a NEW Seminary?

The question remains answered only in part at this point. If it is granted that we need a seminary to accomplish our objectives, why do we need a *new* seminary? Why not, instead of a new seminary, put our representative on the faculty of Calvin Seminary? Perhaps endow a Chair of Conservative Theology? Or, why not erect a satellite of Calvin Seminary, move a couple of professors out there to north-west Iowa, to meet the needs of "those people out there"?

Given the description of the conditions within the churches and the composition of the confessional conservatives, it is obvious that no education which is true to that term can succeed if it proceeds according to opposing commitments and points of view. Our desire could not possibly be simply to have ministerial students get a *taste* of our principles, a *sample* of our ideals, and a *glimpse* of our vision. They must get the whole thing!

Furthermore, it should be obvious that in this case the concept of a satellite seminary has been bred out of an attitude which is both paternalistic and provincial. Paternalistic, because it says to us, "Here, you noisy children; here's something to keep you quiet." Provincial, because the underlying premise is that "Northwest Iowa must want what we have here in Grand Rapids, else why the fuss?" The whole problem, you see, is reduced to our need for attention.

No, we want a NEW seminary to shape that vision to which we're committed, to solidify and strengthen its inner vitality, to communicate it to trustworthy men who themselves will proclaim it to God's people.

It May Be Needed, But Is It Wise?

After all the arguments are heard, the question persists: what will this new seminary do to the

Christian Reformed Churches? Some are afraid that we are starting another church; others wish we were. Both are mistaken. By God's grace, out of our enthusiastic commitment, we must direct our efforts by *this* question: what will Mid-America Reformed Seminary do *for* the denomination?

It will give us a choice. Those who are opposed to our ideals have long been fond of giving us choices — a choice in liturgical forms, in catechism curricula, in evangelism methods, in hermeneutical methods. Now, for the first time in years, the Christian Reformed Churches can have within their own ranks a choice in ministerial training. Such competition, we believe, will produce better quality all around. It will provide checks and supervision, a need to excel in seminary education.

To Each His Own, Then?

Some charge us with advocating pluralism within the church, saying that if everyone followed our example, each segment or interest group within the churches would build its own seminary. Two things must be said in reply. First, we do not advocate pluralism of faith, doctrine or belief. But plural institutions and agencies which serve the churches is not that. Second, our arguments for the new seminary are in terms of the present situation in the church — a situation that is divided, disunited and fractured, a situation with which we are not pleased. To argue *in terms of* the situation is not necessarily to *agree with* that situation. We don't regard it as sin for a doctor to diagnose a fatal disease and make prescriptions for radical treatment of the disease. That which is sin, and also fatal, is not diagnosis and treatment, but cover-up and silence.

And What about YOU?

Do you, with us, favor the unity of the church? Do you, with us, love harmony, peace and brotherhood? Then work with us to restore it in line with the Biblical teaching that unity is found in the Truth, first of all in the Faith, not in the institutional system of schools and agencies.

Climb with us the mountain of faithfulness to God and His Word. For there is no price too high, no relationship too precious, no family too dear, so that we will again be seduced into waiting, and watching, and hoping that something somewhere will change in the church to stop her accelerating slide into the sea of formless participation and powerless identification with the world's preoccupations.

The world is preoccupied with feminism, liberation, adaptation and accommodation. If those are our concerns, and the concerns of the Christian Reformed Churches, then I grant you, we don't need or want this new seminary. But if those are our concerns, by the same token, neither do we want or need Calvin Seminary to research, promote and integrate them into the life of the church. There are many other seminaries that are doing and can do that for us.

As the late Dr. Machen used to say, "I'm going up the mountain. I'd like you to go along. But if you won't, I'm going anyway."

What about you?

RAPID GROWTH OF THE KOREAN CHURCH

Its Contributing Factors

John Eui Whan Kim

The rise and growth of the Christian church in Korea has been one of the great success stories of missionary history. Samuel Moffatt, writing in the October 2 Christianity Today, informs us that Korea's Christian grow four times as fast as the population, that six out of seven of them are Protestants and half of those are Presbyterians. He observes that under God's blessing one of the important reasons for that growth was the conviction of the pioneer missionaries that they must build Christian leadership by training the whole body of believers in the study of the Bible. Dr. John Kim, pastor of the Korean Christian Reformed Church of Los Angeles, California, provides The Outlook with this study of some of the reasons for Korean church growth.

The spectacular growth of the Christian church in Korea has prompted many to inquire about the reasons for it. First of all, it must be answered that God gave the growth through the operation of the Holy Spirit. God used and directed human agents and circumstances for the growth of His church.

What are these human factors which contribute to this rapid growth? In order to explain it, both the socio-political conditions of the country and the activities within the church enterprise must be taken into consideration.

A. The External Factors

(1) The Weakening of the People's Faith in Their Traditional Religions

Both Confucianism and Buddhism had their day in Korea, but their influence had waned at the time of the entry of Protestant Christianity. Buddhism in Korea was disestablished in 1392, and since then, Buddhist temples retreated deep into the mountains and the Buddhist priesthood had degenerated and become despised. Even Confucianism, as state cult, was disestablished when the Yi dynasty collapsed at the turn of the century. Shamanism also, in the wake of increasing scientific knowledge among the

Koreans after the opening of the country to outside influence, became impotent and gradually disappeared.

Thus the Korean church never had to contend with any militant religion such as Islam in Arabic countries and Buddhism in Japan. The absence of native and national religions that could hold the people's confidence, and the lack of any satisfying spiritual experience among the people left them with an inner craving in a spiritual vacuum. The minds of the people, therefore, were the more receptive to the Christian message. The scientific knowledge introduced through Western missionaries made their Christian message more attractive to the nation which was just opening up to the rest of the world.

(2) The External Difficulties

The history of the Korean people is troubled by constant foreign invasions. Humiliated by repeated political failures and by the impotence of their country in dealing with other nations, suffering from incompetence and corruption of their own officials, the distraught Koreans experienced a sense of external hopelessness which smoothed the road to the internal hope which Christianity promised. Prolonged Japanese occupation and exploitation before the Second World War, partitioning of the country by the great powers, and the subsequent devastating Korean War between North and South from 1950 to 1955 — all of this contributed to a realization of the helplessness of human beings apart from God's special blessing. The prolonged tragedy of a divided nation, a constant threat of invasion from North Korea and chronic internal political unrest caused the Korean to be humble. People's hearts, bruised by the external miseries of the country, found the consolation and comfort of the Gospel in the church.

(3) The Emancipation of Woman

The Christian Gospel has been a large factor in liberating women in Korea. By joining the church their circle of social contacts was immediately widened and enriched. Traditionally, the Korean

woman was similar to the Moslem woman in her status and home life. She was regarded as inferior to man and almost considered to be a possession of her husband. She must be confined to her home and must not be much seen, if at all, by any man outside of her immediate family.

To such a down-trodden woman, the Gospel meant liberty and love. The Christian church gave an opportunity to the woman to come into her own as an individual person. Christianity taught a higher status for woman than what she had known. If her husband became a Christian, he must give up his drinking and other bad habits, and his attitude to his wife changed from that of an absolute master to that of a loving partner. Korean women were greatly blessed in this, as many gladly accepted Christianity. It is not surprising that there have been far more women than men in attendance in the Korean church. Presently most of the women's movements in the country are led by church women.

(4) The Strong Desire for Western Education

Koreans had witnessed from afar the transformation that was taking place in China and Japan through the introduction of Christianity, and already gleams of the new light had filtered into the darkness of their own country. Many early national leaders including Syngman Rhee, the first president of the Republic of Korea, and Yoon Bo Sun, the second president, entered Christian schools in order to obtain a Western education and then later were converted to Christianity.

Thus the leaders of the people became champions of the West and identified themselves with the Christian causes. The introduction of Western education by the church not only tended to give the nation a new mental outlook, but made an opening for wide acceptance of the Gospel among the intellectuals. Christian influence in every sector of the society far exceeds that of any other religions in the country.

B. The Ecclesiastical Enterprise

So far we have sought some possible explanations for the rapid growth of the church in the socio-politico-religious aspects of the nation. Certainly no one who knows Korea will deny that these factors are helpful to account for the amazing receptivity of the Korean people to the Christian Gospel. However, any theory of the miracle of the Korean church that leaves the Holy Spirit out of account utterly fails to explain the real cause and result. Unmistakably, God Himself has been at work through His own church. In order to understand the underlying causes, therefore, it is necessary to search one step further than the subjective desire of the Korean people or the objective circumstance surrounding them.

There have been three main factors within the ecclesiastical enterprise which should not be overlooked in uncovering the cause of this signal triumph of Christianity.

(1) The Great Revival

The occurrence of a great revival at a critical time in the growth of the church and its permeating influence throughout the later history of the Korean church require special consideration. This "Spirit-outpouring" event was so explosive and powerful, sweeping not only through the Korea peninsula, but even to Manchuria from 1903 to 1907, that the Korean church has ever since been characterized by revivalistic fervor and ardor. This revival began in 1903 when a group of missionaries met for a week of prayer and Bible study in Wonsan. One of the leaders of this movement was R.A. Hardie. In the course of his sincere Bible study and prayer, he felt compelled to go to the missionary group and later to the Korean congregation to confess his past failure. Without delaying, the next Sunday morning he went before the Korean congregation and, to use his own word, "with shame and confusion of face confessed my pride, hardness of heart and lack of faith and also much these had led to."

Being greatly impressed with the radical change that happened to Dr. Hardie, Koreans soon held daily meetings for Bible study and prayer and they were also by the Spirit compelled to make confessions. The first confession was made by a young man who stood up and "read from a sheet of paper a list of sins, on account of which he said he had for several days been so troubled that he could no longer keep the matter to himself."

Following this, confession of sins in public continued to be the outstanding feature of the meeting! During these revival meetings Bible study was conducted during the daytime. Out of this week-long Bible study, quite often the need of a Bible school was envisioned.

As a result, many Bible Institutes were established in many towns, thus paving the way for the mass provision of full-time evangelists and ministers. Theological conservatism prevailed in these institutions and the authority of the Bible as the Word of God was firmly maintained. This beginning of revivalism soon began to spread from Wonsan and finally reached its climax at a great evening meeting in Pyeng Yang, in 1907.

The public confession of sins characterized the intensity of the revival and the fervor of the prayer in unison indicated the depth of the spiritual experience. The revival spread like an inflaming storm to Seoul and all other parts of the land. The experience of the revival among the Korean Christians remained as a moral and spiritual force. Surely it marked "the spiritual rebirth" and "gave to the Christian church in Korea a character which is its own." Since then Korean Christians go to the church for pre-dawn prayer meetings and emphasize the power of prayer along with fasting.

(2) Evangelistic Campaigns

1. The Million Movement

The spiritual awakening which was brought about by the revival gave to the Korean church a more

zealous and passionate driving power for winning new converts. A new vision of a nation-wide evangelistic campaign began to grip the hearts of the Korean Christians. A daring step toward the realization of the vision was launched in the name of "Million Movement" in 1909 and 1910.

A special revival song, "A million souls for Jesus," was composed and used throughout the country. Thus the campaign for the million souls was launched on a high tide of enthusiasm and with vigorous determination. The whole Korean Christian church joined in this campaign of personal evangelism. This first national-scale evangelistic campaign shook the whole nation.

Although there were no complete statistics made of the result of this movement, no one claimed that during the campaign a million converts were made. However, it goes without saying that the Million Movement was tremendously beneficial. No doubt the church was strengthened by the active members who had the experience of witnessing, and it increased numerically through the new converts.

2. The Post-War Campaigns

Soon after the "Million Movement" Korea was annexed to Japan. During the Japanese occupation the Korean church underwent severe persecution. It was only after the Second World War that the Korean church was able to launch evangelistic campaigns again. This time the means of most effective evangelism was, first, through multiplication of seminaries.

During the Korean War 600 pastors and 10,000 leaders of the church had been killed.

Because of this loss, the church for a short while was handicapped by a lack of strong indigenous leadership. Before the war there were only four seminaries in the country. But soon after the war, many seminaries were established in many cities and the seminaries became crowded with students. Now there are more than 120 seminaries in Korea. We now have more than two thousand seminary graduates each year and all go out to plant churches. In the capital city of Seoul alone there are more than 2,500 churches. Before the World War II, there were less than 50 churches. Thus rapidity of church growth in Korea is phenomenal.

Secondly, several nation-wide Evangelistic Crusades culminating in the Yoido Mass meeting helped to boost the evangelistic zeal to the Christians and to show the power of the Gospel to the non-Christians. In May, 1973, at the Billy Graham Gospel Crusade in Seoul, more than a million Christians crowded one meeting. In the Aug., 1974, "Explo 74" more than a million and a half, in 1977, close to two million, and in 1980, more than two million. Never before in church history has this kind of mass meeting taken place as a single event.

(3) The Nevius Method

In the spring of 1890, Dr. Nevius paid a visit to Korea and proposed a new system of mission work, the so-called "Nevius Plan." This method of mission

work was adopted by missionaries in Korea for the planting of the Korean church "after careful and prayerful consideration."

According to this plan, "the old method" which depends largely on a paid native agency and strives by the use of foreign funds to foster and stimulate the growth of the native churches was to be replaced by the "new method" which depreciates and seeks to minimize the use of such an agency and believes in the principle of independence and self-reliance from the beginning with the aim of establishing a self-reliant and aggressive native church.

Applying the principle of self-support taught the Korean Christians the spirit of independence and the habit of systematic and sacrificial giving, and thus made self-propagation of the faith possible. This spirit of independence, strengthened by practicing the principle of self-support, not only helped the rapid naturalization of Christianity, but also hastened self-government. By becoming a self-supporting and self-governing church, the Korean church was not only able to prevent in part the impression that the Christian church was a mere foreign institution, but also to implant a sense of responsibility for its growth in the minds of the Korean Christians. Thus the Nevius Plan produced wholesome effects in the establishment of the Christian church in Korea.

(4) The Army-Evangelization Program

The Korean army now has the policy of "Chun-goon Shinja Wha," "Faith Planting Movement," to combat the ideological assault of communism. All soldiers are urged to have faith at their own choice. Even though this is done to equip all soldiers out of military necessity, the chaplains are taking full advantage of this offered opportunity for evangelization. Being supported by the civilian churches, the chaplains' effort to evangelize the army proved to be a great success. Statistically, more than 38% of the soldiers are registered as Christians. The prospect for further increase is brighter than ever.

After discharge from the army most of the soldier converts join their home churches, thus providing new flesh and blood to the local body of Christ. Through this "Faith Planting Movement" every soldier is exposed to and urged to hear the Gospel at government expense. In a country where every youth is required to spend at least three years in military service, this means that there is eventually an opportunity to preach the Gospel to the whole nation of South Korea.

The rapid development of the church today — eight new churches per day — is not entirely due to the causes which have just been summarized. It is to be attributed also, in part, to the martyr blood of unknown saints and the countless sacrifices of pastors and committed lay Christians. The story of Christian expansion in Korea is nothing but the story of one nation, battered by wars and oppressions, through the work of the Holy Spirit, determined to share with neighbors the new-found faith in Christ. ●

The Angels' Song

John Blankespoor

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among men with whom he is pleased!"

Luke 2:13, 14.

How utterly amazed these shepherds must have been by the appearance of the angels on that first Christmas night! Who were these men to be so highly privileged? How many were there? We know little about them. We do know they were Christians, waiting for the promise of the comfort of Israel. Possibly they were tending sheep destined to be used for sacrifices in the temple. Bethlehem was quite close to Jerusalem.

There had been no special revelation for several centuries. Bibles like we have were unknown at that time. But with their limited revelation of the various Old Testament Scriptures they obviously did cling to the promises of the Christ to come. Tending sheep was their work, night after night, perhaps year after year. This was to them just another night. Was it "pitch" dark, or was the moon shining? We don't know. Then suddenly . . . first one angel (in a dazzling light) with that wonderful message and then with him a multitude of these heavenly messengers. Possibly they saw them, but surely they heard them. I can be envious of this part of their experience. Who ever heard a choir like this from heaven?

A song in the night, literally. Spiritually and figuratively it was night in the church. In general, spiritual conditions were at a very low ebb. Of those who were church people many were Pharisees and Sadducees, formalists and liberals. The number of true Christians was comparatively small, as became plain during the ministry of Christ some thirty years later. Nevertheless, as David had long before this spoken of a song in the night, the children of David can really sing that night, and from then on. There can be and is joy in the hearts of those who know

and understand what the angels are singing about, and what will be the song in heaven forever.

• •

The angels are the first ones who sing on Christmas day. Theirs is the first choir. And aren't angels ministering (serving) spirits of the Lord used by God and sent out for the welfare and benefit of the church? Job calls them morning stars, who evidently were already singing upon the marvelous work of God in creation (Job 38). How they evidently rejoiced in it! Obviously they are always keenly interested in the work of the Lord.

Throughout Old Testament history we read of their appearances, sometimes as messengers of wrath as with Adam and Eve at the gate of Paradise, and with Hezekiah, killing 185,000 enemies in one night. Notice the strength of one angel. Again and again they are heavenly helpers in various ways, to Abraham, Gideon, Manoah and many other saints.

Obviously they didn't understand all of God's way in the Old Testament, often not grasping the main line of God's method of working and His wisdom of operation. God's ways were incomprehensible to them. Peter tells us that they were eager to look into, to understand these ways of the Lord in the Old Testament (I Peter 1:12). How would God's promise be fulfilled?

Usually in the work of God the angels came one at a time. But here, there was a multitude. Who can say how many constitute a multitude? Ten thousand? I want to believe that there were more than that. The Bible often uses the word hosts, which could refer to thousands, or even a million or more.

Imagine what a choir this must have been, of so many heavenly voices! Singing in perfect harmony, each one "his own part" and with heavenly enthusiasm. How privileged these shepherds were. Surely they never forgot it.

What did they sing about? What was the content of their song?

Let God be glorified, let the heavens be full of His glory. The angels had seen the work of creation, with all its marvels. They had witnessed the Old Testament history. God again and again sent them to earth for the benefit of the militant church as a whole, but also for struggling individual Christians. They remembered Jacob's dream of the ladder extending from earth to heaven. Contact was made between heaven and earth. They were aware of the glories of God's throne. They witnessed throughout the ages the majesty of His sovereignty as they were singing, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty" (Isaiah 6). But they had also witnessed the strife, distress, grief and tears of the church on earth when it often appeared that the old rival, the devil, would be triumphant. They saw also the sins of God's people, even the most holy. And if later we read that they rejoice at the repentance of one sinner, how they must have been grieved when Israel as a people repeatedly went astray. Often it also appeared that the line of David from which the promised Christ was to come would be broken. What would become of it?

In all of these milleniums (and a millenium, a thousand years, is a long time) they had also seen and learned to be amazed at the Lord's patience and faithfulness to His covenant promises. But now, . . . here . . . they see something unseen before, unheard of before, something that had not even arisen in their minds or hearts, *God born in a manger*. Incredible! What a miracle! Here is the fulfillment of the ladder in Jacob's dream, perfect contact between men on earth and God in heaven. This baby, the Son of God, will establish peace on earth. Without doubt, the angels are also ignorant of how this will be achieved. They are assured that somehow God will through this child, His Son, establish permanent peace with worthless sinners. Also that God alone will do this, because of His grace and faithful love. They sing "Glory to God in the highest."



What kind of audience did they have for this memorable "concert"? In what kind of auditorium did they sing? Did all the earth hear and see? The answer is, they sang to only a few humble shepherds in the fields of Ephratah, in the darkness of the night. The angels sang about this grace of God that comes to save sinners in the darkness of sin.

In time the people who are the recipients of this grace begin to form the second choir that sings of God's grace. Already in the Old Testament the church was a singing church. David, the great musician, had a choir of some three thousand voices. This church sang in hope. Now, when the Christ has come, the church has a new song to sing. This church sees the wonders of Calvary, the open tomb, the exalted Lord and the peace there is for sinners who know this wonderful Savior.

Soon the New Testament church becomes a singing church. This choir grows rapidly, from a few hundred to three thousand, then to five thousand and more. It keeps on growing. What are the requirements for membership in this choir? Who can

sing in it about this glory to God in the highest? And about this God-given peace? Those who know themselves as lost sinners and believe, by the grace of God, in this God-given Savior, Jesus Christ. They are the people who see and learn on the one hand the hopelessness of man and on the other hand the amazing grace, faithfulness, patience and persevering love of God. Only those who learn these truths from the heart and experience their reality as a growing process can sing in this choir. Here, all singing is from the heart.

The songs of angels are beautiful, in exalted, heavenly language. But really the voices of saved sinners are more beautiful. They are the objects of this grace; they possess it and have tasted it. Who else can really sing like one who has been dead, but by grace alone has been made alive and has peace in his heart? Who can sing like those who due to their own willful disobedience were on the way to eternal desolation, but are rescued by grace, are a new creation now, and are promised everlasting glory which no human language can begin to describe?

The church therefore really becomes the second choir to sing of this peace and glory to God.



God's work is not yet complete. Things can't remain as they are. In heaven are the angels and the saved souls of those who died in the Lord. But their bodies are still in the dust. On earth there is the militant church which is usually a struggling church, also a church which is still imperfect and sinful. Think also of all that makes for the very opposite of peace, namely persecution, division, and many trials. Heaven and earth cannot remain separated. One of the old Dutch Christmas hymns has it, "Die hemel en aarde vereenigt te zaam." Christ is the One who brings heaven and earth together.

The apostle John already heard the echoes of that full choir: "And I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb. . ."

The choir will include the hosts of angels, and the millions of redeemed saints. Already now we can begin to sing, "That will be glory for me." Not because I will be the center of attention, but because it will be so exhilarating to join those countless others in singing glory to the Lord's name forever and ever.

The apostle John tells us that in that full choir the angels will stand and the saved sinners will be sitting. What does this tell us? When we eat in a restaurant, those who serve stand, but those who are served sit down. These unselfish angels, who have never sinned will be serving us by singing for and with us and joining the full redeemed church of which every member has learned experientially the meaning of being saved by the marvelous grace, love, patience and power of God, and having peace with God. It was this great truth that the angels anticipated in the fields of Ephratah. And how they sang!!

NIMES 1980

the reformed ecumenical synod

Bassam M. Madany

It was about a year ago that I was asked to write a report on the RES meeting in Nimes, France. At that Synod, I had served as a non-voting delegate of the Christian Reformed Church. I had deferred the writing of the report until I had in my hands a copy of the RES Acts. This did not materialize until very recently. Hence, the long delay in the preparation of the report.

At the outset, I would like to say that this is not a comprehensive report of the 1980 meeting of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod. What I am sharing with you are some impressions of this assembly of Reformed churches as well as some quotations from the Acts of the RES which deal with certain issues which concern many of us.

Thirty three delegations from Africa, Asia, Europe, North and South America and Australasia came to Nimes in southern France for two weeks of meetings. The Prayer Service for Synod was held at the church of the Independent Evangelical Reformed congregation in Nimes on the 14th of July. This is Bastille Day in France. After the worship service, most of the delegates watched the fireworks in a nearby park marking the French Revolution of 1789 and the birth of the French Republic!

A Multi-National Fellowship

Synodical business began in earnest the following day. I was moved by the various nationalities which were represented at Synod. I was overjoyed to meet brothers in the Lord from the young churches of the Third World. We stayed at the state university in Nimes where all the meetings took place. Our meals were provided for us in the dining hall of the university. In order to reach it, we had to take a ten minute walk. This gave us the opportunity to meet some of the local residents who lived in "high rises." Many of them came originally from North Africa and one could read on their faces the hardships which accompany immigrant living in new and difficult surroundings.

As with all synodical meetings, the RES 1980 had been in preparation for a few years. This ecumenical gathering takes place once every four years. The

delegates had an ample opportunity to study the Agenda and the various documents which would be considered at the meeting in Nimes.

One of the first reports to come to the attention of RES was the report of the Mission Committee. The Reformed Ecumenical Synod adopted several recommendations dealing with the mission of the church in the world today. One of these important recommendations states:

"That the RES Study Committee on Missions be constituted so as to embrace representations of both word and deed ministries in view of the desperate needs of millions of people in our world."

July 18 was set aside as Broadcast Day. This highlighted the recognition of the special role of broadcasting in the mission of the church in the second half of the 20th century. It was very encouraging to hear reports from various parts of the world telling us of the use of broadcasting in telling the multitudes of the claims of our sovereign God and the Good News of redemption and grace.

During the times of fellowship, it was heartwarming to discuss with various delegates what the Lord was performing through their ministries at home and in other parts of the world. This left a lasting impression on me. Churches of the Reformed heritage were living all over the world. In other words, they are ecumenical. The Reformed Faith does not simply belong to the white man. It is for the whole world!

True Versus False Ecumenicity

The subject of dual membership in the Reformed Ecumenical Synod and the World Council of Churches occupied a good deal of time and occasioned some heated debates. As early as the second meeting of the RES (1949), this Synod expressed serious objections "against uniting with this (WCC) organization" and advised member churches "not to join it in the present stage."

Even though the 1968 meeting of the RES reaffirmed the incompatibility of dual membership in the RES and the WCC, the GKN (Reformed Churches in the Netherlands) chose to join the World Council of Churches the following year. This has caused much dissension within the body of the RES churches. At the outset of the 1980 meetings, we were in-

Rev. Bassam M. Madany is the Back-to-God Hour's Minister of Arabic Broadcasting. He lives at South Holland, Illinois.

formed that the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Northern Ireland was withdrawing from the RES mainly on account of this unresolved problem. Other churches within the RES and which belong to the Presbyterian family of churches were extremely reluctant to allow this matter to continue unresolved until the 1984 meeting of the RES. Their delegates spoke with great feeling about the incongruity of simultaneous membership in these two ecumenical organizations. RES of 1980 reaffirmed "the advice given by every meeting of the RES from 1953 onwards to member churches not to join the WCC." Furthermore, it adopted the following recommendation:

"That the Synod (a) instruct the IC (Interim Committee) to appoint a Study Committee on the RES and Ecclesiastical Relationships, to make a comprehensive study, from Scripture and our confessions, of the Reformed concept of the church and its implications for current and future ecumenical relationships; and (b) that this committee be instructed to include in its study the question of the membership of RES Churches in the WCC."

The Dutch Homosexuality Scandal

Another problem which agitated the 1980 meeting of the RES was the GKN's attitude on the problem of "Homophilical (Homosexual) Members."

The Synod of the GKN was studying the matter for some time. In 1979 that Synod was not unanimous in its interpretation of the Scriptural data relating to the subject. So, the hermeneutical questions were referred to the Committee on Church and Theology. But that same Synod did not wait for the report of this committee but went ahead and acted in a pastoral way against what it considered discrimination and on behalf of the "homophilic" (homosexual) persons within the local congregations. The churches of the GKN were asked "to accept the "homophilical" neighbor, to organize dialogue between "homophilical and heterophilical" members of the congregations and to further the communion of the saints *inter alia* by means of participation in the Lord's Supper and by service in ecclesiastical office."

Naturally, this subject was debated in a very heated way since several delegates from various parts of the world were shocked and dismayed by the attitude of the Synod of the GKN (1979) to the problem of homosexuals and homosexuality. Some questioned the use of words "homophilic" and "homophilical" and maintained that this nomenclature was used only in the Netherlands. A medical doctor objected to the use of these words on the basis that they have not been accepted as part of the medical parlance in the world at large. The GKN delegates "explained that the word "homophilical" was intended to mean the whole person and not only sexual attitude, as over against the English word "homosexual" which can refer to sexual attitude alone."

In order to give an objective view of the decisions of the 1980 RES meeting, I quote the following from

pages 109 to 111 of the Acts of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, Nimes 1980:

1. The RES recognizes the intention of the GKN in their pastoral concern in drawing attention to suffering, despair and experience of rejection to which "homophilic" (homosexual) persons in many cases are being subjected.
2. In accordance with the traditional Reformed understanding of Scripture the RES states that all homosexual practice is sin (Lev. 20:13, Rom. 1:26, 27, I Cor. 6:9, I Tim. 1:10).
3. The RES further states that any advice or counsel that weakens the resistance to sin does not help but actually harms both the struggling person himself and others who might be affected through him (Matt. 18:6).

Returning to the Committee recommendations, Synod decided:

4. The RES requests the GKN to give clarification of their initial pastoral word . . . and its ethical implications, in order to make clear that their view on homosexual practice is in accordance with Scripture.
5. The RES expresses its grave concern about the ambiguous nature of the 1979 decision of the GKN in the matter of "homophility" (homosexuality).
6. The RES instructs the Interim Committee to convey these decisions as fraternal advice to the GKN and to request them on behalf of the RES fellowship to give the assurance that no known practicing homosexuals shall be allowed to partake of the Lord's Supper or hold ecclesiastical office.
7. The Interim Committee is instructed to report to the churches on this matter at the earliest possible time.
8. On request of the delegates of the GKN and to be of further assistance to the GKN, Synod instructs the Interim Committee to appoint a study committee with the following mandate:
 - a. to study the biblical data and hermeneutical questions related to the problems of homophility" (homosexuality);
 - b. to include in their study the decisions of member churches on this matter;
 - c. to ask the member churches for their advice, views and experience in dealing with "homophilical" (homosexual) persons;
 - d. to report to the member churches as soon as possible and to the 1984 RES.

Study of Human Rights

I certainly do not wish to give the impression that the two weeks of RES in Nimes were primarily spent discussing the dual membership problem and homosexuality. There were some very important subjects which were assigned for future study and some

studies already accomplished, commended to the member churches. For example, the burning issue of the plight of minorities and human rights was assigned to an international committee "to undertake a Biblical/historical/contextual study on human rights."

The mandate of the Committee to study human rights was adopted as presented by the Advisory Committee. It is as follows:

1. The Study Committee shall study the biblical view of man, particularly his place and task in the world.

2. Set forth a comprehensive Christian perspective in which to view man in his multi-dimensional life-relationships, such as family, church, state, industry and education.

3. In accord with this Christian perspective, deal with such basic issues as:

- a. *freedom* rights — freedom from oppression in its various forms,

- b. *participation* rights — in the decision-making processes in various spheres of life,

- c. *benefit* rights — to food, work, medical care, education, etc.

4. Make a critical evaluation from a Scriptural perspective of the United Nations documents on human rights, viz., the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the Covenants on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and on Civil and Political Rights (1966 and 1967).

5. Summarize in simple language the main points of the Report, so that it can be understood by ordinary church members. Such a summary could also be used as the basis for a message on human rights from the RES to the member churches.

In this study the committee shall consider such ecclesiastical documents as may be available to it, and shall invite member churches to contribute material for consideration and/or inclusion.

There was a good and rewarding discussion of the booklet, "The Church and its Social Calling" which had been previously sent to all the delegates. Anyone who is interested in studying this subject may order a copy from the RES Secretariat, 1677 Gantian Drive, S.E., Grand Rapids, MI 49508.

The Road Ahead

I make my closing remarks in a strictly personal way and from the standpoint of a Christian whose roots are from the Third World and who finds in the Reformed Tradition the best way for the proclamation of Jesus Christ as the unique Savior and only Lord. I felt very joyful and profoundly grateful to see, during the meetings of Synod, how truly ecumenical the Reformed Faith is. I had a tremendous time fellowshiping with brothers from all over the world during those two weeks in Nimes, and especially with those from Africa. Certainly God has

blessed the mission work of the Christian Reformed Church and other Reformed churches in Africa, as I observed the mature and solid witness of the African delegations to RES.

On the other hand I felt sad and extremely concerned about certain attitudes and tendencies which were quite obvious in the discussions of problems relating to the WCC and homosexuality. Often I found myself wondering why was it necessary to resort to more study committees regarding these issues which appear (at least to some of us) rather simple and clear-cut! Is it manifesting the wrong type of naivety to ask such questions? How could churches which claim to be attached to the Confessions of the Reformation era be at the same time members of the amorphous World Council of Churches? When I became a United States citizen, I had to renounce my allegiance to my country of birth. The judge representing the Federal Government explained to us new Americans that we could not hold two citizenships. Is this type of logic inapplicable to ecclesiastical matters?

And has the Christian tradition, Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Protestant, been wrong all these 1900 years vis-a-vis irregular sexual behavior and preference? I am sure that this type of approach will be regarded as too simplistic. Still I cannot shake off the feeling, even the conviction that quite often we do not seem to be inclined to take seriously the accumulated wisdom of the Christian heritage. We have been almost hypnotized by modern ideologies which seek to parade under the guise of new theological and Biblical insights!

These remarks do not imply that there is nothing left for us Christians living in the closing years of this century to study and reflect on. But where doctrines and ethical subjects have been adequately treated in the past and where the simple testimony of the Bible is obvious, why do we still have to look for some new light which will break through the work of a study committee? Why not spend our intellectual and scholarly energies in fields that cry for our attention? For example, why have we, Reformed people and churches, left the setting forth of the place of modern Israel in the total Biblical perspective to be expounded so horrendously by the radicals of the Dispensational school of hermeneutics? Are we spending enough time and energy on Biblically meeting the challenge of Marxism and radical Islam in the Third World?

It is my prayer that the next RES meeting which is to be held in the USA in the summer of 1984 will be decisive in settling many of the problems which have been with this body for so many years. Reformed ecumenicity should not be the hobby of the few. It is the best way in which we can, in the present stage of history, practice what we confess in the words of the Nicene Creed: I BELIEVE A HOLY CATHOLIC AND APOSTOLIC CHURCH. Let us all uphold the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, its General Secretary and its officers and study committees in our prayers so that its witness and work may continue to be to the Glory of our God and the coming of His great and glorious Kingdom.

An Elder's View of Synod

John Vander Ploeg, Jr.

Mr. John Vander Ploeg, Jr., President of Ship-Pac Corporation of Kalamazoo, and former President of the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee, is the son of Rev. John Vander Ploeg, the former editor of THE OUTLOOK. This is his afternoon address at the Oct. 1, 1981, annual meeting of the Reformed Fellowship in the Kelloggsville Church.

It is a special privilege to address this group regarding the Synod of 1981 and my feelings about it. Synod was interesting, frustrating and eye-opening.

It will be my purpose today to give some impressions of Synod and, I suppose, of our denomination and its present situation. In addition, I will be presumptuous enough to suggest some new approaches for the future, especially in relation to the role of elders in our denomination.

First of all then, some impressions that made an impact on me might be of some interest to you.

A Very Political Body

Synod and the participants constitute a very "political" body at work. Perhaps some examples would be of interest. The advisory committee on Interchurch Relations which I was privileged to chair had as its main concern the relationship of the CRC with the GKN church in the Netherlands, of particular concern to the committee was the matter of their permitting "practicing" homosexuals to take Communion in their churches.

We spent many hours listening to two official representatives from the GKN and to our seminary advisor, Dr. John Kromminga. One of the men from the Netherlands admitted that it was "possible" that two homosexuals had been "married" in one of their churches and it was also "possible" that at least one of those two was preaching in their church.

The committee decided to recommend quite a strong stand including the discontinuance of granting permission to GKN pastors to preach in the CRC

and to no longer permit free participation in communion on the part of GKN members coming to a CRC. So much for background.

Rev. Clarence Boomsma, chairman of our Denominational Interchurch Relations Committee arranged for the two delegates from the GKN to speak on the floor of Synod on Saturday morning. They both made emotional pleas for tolerance and delay. A brief debate was held but we soon adjourned for the weekend.

Our committee planned to have several members speak on Monday morning in support of our position. Monday arrived and the Chair called on Rev. Boomsma to present the recommendations of the standing committee, claiming precedence over our advisory committee. He spoke eloquently, not from the traditional side of the auditorium but rather, from the special podium reserved for committee repartees. (The reason for the move, he said, was to give all present a better chance to hear.)

Almost immediately after he finished, a delegate moved to "call the question." That move was successful and only one of our many speakers had the opportunity to speak in support of the advisory committee. It was a brilliant move on the part of Rev. Boomsma and his supporters but it had the effect of blunting the many hours of work done by a fine committee.

At the next break, I told Rev. Boomsma that he was the ablest politician I had ever faced. I went on to say that I thought he had done a disservice to the denomination. His response was, "I don't consider myself a politician. I prefer to think of myself as a statesman."

Influence of the Seminary

The second major impression made on me was that our seminary exerts a very big influence on the synod, often on the wrong side of the issues. Elders especially, are intimidated by seminary professors. My observation was that they not only supported bad positions but they also lacked real ability and leadership.

Minimizing Elders

Thirdly, elders, on the other hand, are a very small influence. They often would speak-up in our committee with what seemed to be very sound and well thought out positions, yet, on the floor of synod, with a few good exceptions, they seemed to prefer to let the clergy do the debating.

I believe more elders should be offered leadership roles in the synod. They should be given the opportunity to hold an equal number of officer positions and committee chairmanships. We had many qualified elders at the Synod of 1981 but they were not given the chance to lead.

I was also impressed by the fact that we do have many talented people in our denomination, especially in our major denominational agencies. The top administrators and middle managers of our mission boards, The Back to God Hour, CRWRC and our colleges are among the most able men I have ever met and we should thank God for them.

Increasing Polarization

Finally, one gets an impression that our denomination is continuing to polarize around two sets of positions that seem to drift ever farther apart. Our synod seemed to be unable to make any firm decisions. We seem preoccupied with the status quo — forever patching a leaking ship. That sounds like a lot of bad news. Much of it is. If it is true, what will the future bring for the CRC? I would like to suggest two possible courses.

Two Possible Courses

1. We could *maintain our present course* and keep on patching. If we do, the results will be most unpleasant.

We will continue to compromise. We will continue to be unhappy and frustrated.

We will see a further erosion of our beliefs, positions, our creeds and our church order.

Individual congregations will rebel by not paying quotas or by leaving our denomination. At the very least, they will not implement synodical decisions.

Potential conservative leaders will no longer be willing to get involved.

Pressure will continue to build for division. Already we see a movement beginning to have another seminary.

Mediocrity will be the accepted standard in our pulpits.

Finally, the ultimate calamity will arrive when God and His Holy Spirit decide to leave us.

2. Is there any other course? I believe there is. A *new course* that will glorify God and preserve our church will require several things:

First of all we will need alert, courageous, and well informed elders. That will require a commitment on the part of those elders and training for them to provide the knowledge.

Secondly, we will need ministers that we trained in leadership and schooled in appropriate interpretation of Scripture and how to preach it. We will

need a strong organization in our church made up of ministers and lay people that will be:

1. Courageous.
2. Vocal on issues.
3. Positive (not negative) in its approach to the future.
4. Able to use the very best public relations to get the message out.
5. Be self-regenerating by attracting members of each new generation.

Finally, we will need ministers who are willing to make decisions and then be able to convince others of the rightness of those decisions.

What would the result be if we were able to follow this brave new course? The results would most certainly include the following:

We would have a renewal in the CRC that would be the most exciting thing we have ever experienced.

We would then attract talent into the ministry that would compound the renewal.

We would attract talented lay people to positions of leadership in the church.

We would experience both spiritual growth and numerical growth.

Above all, we would know the real and unlimited blessings of God — that can only come when we do what is right.

Will it be easy? Nothing that is truly worthwhile is ever easy. It will be difficult, but to exert such leadership will be the most rewarding thing we could do. To follow our present course can only lead to calamity. ●

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Letter to the Ephesians

Henry Vander Kam

PAUL'S PRAYER FOR THE EPHESIAN CHURCH

Lesson 7

Ephesians 3:14-21

The main task which the Lord has given the apostles to do is to teach and proclaim the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. However, there was also a priestly work to be done to build up the church which the Lord had established. It is clear from all his writings that Paul engages in prayer for the church constantly. His prayers are found throughout his writings. Many times when he is in the midst of an important point of doctrine he suddenly offers his thanksgiving to the God Whom he serves, for the wonders of His revelation. He also assures his readers again and again that he is remembering them before the throne of God.

The thought introduced in verse 1 of this chapter is now, finally, taken up in verse 14 and following verses. At the beginning of this chapter he says: "For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus in behalf of you gentiles," but the thought is not completed! How typically Pauline! There were other things he had to make clear to them, namely, that there was no longer a separation between Jew and gentile, but that they had been brought together in Christ. Now, in verse 14 he takes up that which he had begun to say in verse 1. He bows his knees before God the Father, for this cause. What is the cause? **That Jew and gentile have been brought together!** The marvel of the gospel! Because of that he bows his knees before the Father. He is awed by the great responsibility and the great blessing which has been given him that he has been made a minister of such a gospel. Notice that "the Father" is always the One to Whom he prays.

To the Father of the Family

The whole family in heaven and on earth is named after Him. By this whole family he means the household of God, the church of Jesus Christ. This is a family which is not only found here on earth but is found in heaven too. Those who have fallen asleep in Jesus belong to the church which we usually call "the church triumphant." It is that part of the church which is beyond the strife and suffering of the church here. It (the church) includes, of course,

Jew and gentile. Not only the church militant and the church triumphant, but he even seems to include the angel host in this "whole family." It is true that the angels are not recipients of salvation through the blood of Christ and that they are not bound together with bonds of blood as men are. Yet, these also are part of the family of God. They are servants who have been taken into the household. We should pay far more attention to the things the Scriptures teach us about the angels than we usually do.

For the Spirit's Powers

Now he reveals the content of his prayer. He prays that God the Father may give them this blessing that they may be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inward man. He prays that all the powers of God (riches of His glory) may be given the believer for the strengthening of his faith. He prays that all the attributes of God may be applied to his spiritual progress. So often men speak only of such things as the grace, mercy and love of God which are to be given for our spiritual well-being. Paul speaks of all the riches of God to be used for this end. The Spirit of God uses all the attributes of God to strengthen faith within us. For that strengthening we need His Almighty power as well as His grace. We need His changelessness as well as His love. Then we are truly strengthened! Then the inward man, i.e., the heart is made strong. This fact is spoken of by the Apostle time and again in his epistles. He does not "play off" the one attribute of God against another. All of them are to be honored in our salvation. Consequently, we will speak of more than the love or the grace of God when we praise Him for our redemption. All of His powers are at our disposal, and we impoverish ourselves when we do not recognize this fact.

For Christ's Indwelling

The above is necessary to recognize and believe in order that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. He makes His abode within the believer through the Spirit. Then we are strong in the faith. The Spirit of God dispenses the power of God. So do we lay hold of it. As a result you will be rooted and grounded in love. Here Paul is using a double figure of speech. That faith of the believer is like a tree having roots into the true nourishment for the life

they must feed. It is also like a building which is standing on a foundation of solid rock so that it will always be a safe refuge. This is the picture of that true faith in God wrought by the Spirit and founded on the work of Christ! No one shall ever be able to overthrow that faith. It is not dependent on the one who is exercising it, no, it has its roots, it has its foundation in the love of God! All His attributes stand guard over the faith He has instilled!

Grasping What Is Beyond Knowledge

In this way the believers will also be strong to grasp, together with all other believers, what is the breadth and length and height and depth. . . . Of what? He doesn't say. The context makes it clear, however, what he has in mind. It is the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ! Then we naturally ask the question: Who will ever be able to grasp the fulness of the love of Christ? It is limitless, isn't it? The Apostle is fully aware of this too and therefore uses these four terms. He also states that it cannot be grasped by the individual believer, but must be done in the union of all believers. The love of Christ cannot be measured in breadth or length or height or depth. It certainly cannot be grasped by the mind of man. If it is to be grasped at all it will be by faith, by a heart knowledge. But, there is that faith given to man so that he *begins* to grasp something of that limitless love of Christ! He cannot describe it. He cannot fathom it. But, he experiences it! Only when a person has been so strengthened by the power of the Spirit of God is there the possibility that he will be able, in a measure, to grasp the beauty and glory of the heart of his redemption. It is indeed a love which passes knowledge. No unbeliever can understand even the smallest part of it.

Filled to God's Fulness

At the conclusion of this prayer Paul asks that they may be filled unto all the fulness of God. The Bible speaks in many ways of our relationship to God. We are to walk with Him. We are to believe on Him. We are to obey Him. We are to approach to Him in prayer. We are to live for Him, etc. Here the Apostle speaks of being filled to all the fulness of God. So that we may be like Him. We are so to grasp the broad extent of the love of Christ that we may be filled unto all the fulness of God. In other words, we are to be filled to that fulness only through our relationship to Jesus Christ. As we increase in the knowledge of the love of Christ, we are being filled to the fulness of God. This is the way in which the author speaks of true spiritual growth in the believer. It is a growth which is never complete. This is true because the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ shall never be fully grasped and because the fulness of God is limitless! Physical growth is limited to a certain amount of time. Perhaps this is also true of the growth of intellect. However, spiritual growth goes on. Nor is it limited to this life! We are going to grow spiritually throughout all eternity! Man, even the one who is redeemed by the blood of Christ, is and remains a

creature and no creature shall ever be able to comprehend the love of Christ or the fulness of God! Shall such a redeemed person then not be complete and perfect? When a man is filled with the fulness of God — is there room for more? When a container is full — how can it be made to hold more? Yet, this is precisely what the Bible teaches — we will go on from perfection to perfection. We will have to think of a container which is able to stretch to receive more. Not as a container made of wood or steel, but as a container made of rubber! It has to hold more even though it is full.

To God's Eternal Glory

When the Apostle has come to the close of this beautiful and very significant prayer, he ends with a doxology. This is also typically Pauline. He ends with a doxology after a deep and penetrating analysis of glorious truth (Romans 11) and he frequently ends prayers and thanksgivings with a doxology. In fact, one is able to say that Paul's whole life is a doxology. He has understanding in the mystery which has now been revealed, as he says earlier in this chapter. He knows his Lord and his God and this leads him to the highest level of praise.

To the God of Whom he has spoken, be the glory. To the One of Whom the whole family in heaven and on earth is named. To the One who is to fill His people. This is the One Who is able to do all things; is able to do far more than our puny minds are able to ask or think. We have so many requests. Our minds too are filled with all the things we desire — which seem to be endless. Yet, He is able to do so much more — one is not even able to compare what we can ask or think with the ability He has of giving to His people. Paul again coins words to make it possible for him to express himself in such a way that men will understand the power of their God to care for them. He is able to answer the prayers of those in whom He has begun His work of grace. Besides, that grace which they have received will also encourage them to expect all things from Him, even the things which are humanly impossible.

To this God must the glory be given. The church of Jesus Christ shows the glory of its God. Christ Himself, the Head of that church shows the glory of God. Everything must give praise to Him. He is now, through the redeeming work of Christ, acknowledged as God. Those who have not tasted of redemption do not bring homage to Him, but the church must and does do so. This glorifying of the God Who has accomplished all that He decided to do, must go on throughout all the ages of men here on earth, and must go on forever! Never will we have completed our praise of God. We go from strength to strength — from glory to glory — from victory to victory, always praising and glorifying the God Who has revealed Himself to us. Upon this doxology Paul now pronounces his Amen!

Questions for discussion:

1. How are preaching and prayer related? Can there be the one without the other?

2. What is the place of angels in the redemption of man? Why is there no salvation for fallen angels?
3. There would be no salvation if God were not the God of love and of grace. Would there be salvation for us if He were not the Almighty or the Eternal?
4. How great is the love of Christ? If it could be measured would it be enough?
5. What is perfection for the redeemed?
6. We would willingly agree that God can do all things. Do we recognize this sufficiently in our prayers?

THE UNITY AND GROWTH OF THE CHURCH

Lesson 8

Ephesians 4:1-16

The end of the previous chapter marks the end of the first part of this epistle, in which the Apostle has given his teaching. Beginning at chapter four he applies the things he has taught. This is Paul's usual mode of procedure.

He who is writing is a prisoner in the Lord and because of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Let these Ephesians and the whole church of Christ of later times realize that he has given everything for the church and for the gospel. He does not bring up his present situation in order to elicit sympathy, but that the people may realize that he is not speaking for his own advantage but that he is driven by his relationship to his Savior. He calls them to walk according to the calling which they have received. They are called to be believers — it is then not too much to ask that they behave themselves as believers. It is only logical to do so. This is really the heart of the application of the gospel! Do what the gospel requires! Who sins unknowingly today? People know the way — it is only a question whether or not they will walk the way they profess.

Call to Christian Unity

The way in which the members of the church of Christ must walk has been spoken of in virtually every New Testament book. Here the Apostle sums up some of the things which are necessary for any believer. There must be a spirit of lowliness and meekness. There must be longsuffering, forbearing one another in love. They must do everything to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. Many will then go into an explanation of each of these terms. This is permissible, but there are many other terms which he uses in the other epistles. One can go into these various terms and then forget what they are used for! These are the things which must be observed to gain the unity and peace of the church. One has to remember that in the church at Ephesus, Jew and gentile were brought together. Now all the haughtiness which characterized the Jew in relation to others must be abolished! Otherwise there will be no peace, and surely, no unity! Besides, the church, by itself, is made up of all kinds of people. Here rich and poor meet — the wise and

simple sit at the same table. Everyone, at all times, must observe the various virtues he has mentioned to further the cause of peace and to promote unity.

What Unites?

As I have mentioned in a previous Lesson in this series, the one, holy, catholic church is an article of faith. There is a unity and the members must seek the unity of the church. So the Apostle speaks of this matter in this chapter. There is one body — the church. There are not many churches nor two, there is only one. Christ, of course, has only one body. This is difficult to understand especially in our day when the number of denominations in our country exceeds 250! Many are loath to speak of the true church but would rather work with a different concept of the church. One of the churches in the Netherlands (by no means a splinter group) speaks boldly of the *address* of the church! Many find this far too exclusive. If the church has no address it will be difficult to speak of the true and false church. Then it doesn't make much difference where you go to church. Then the sacraments have no address either. Then the Lord's Supper can be celebrated at a retreat! If the church has no address, no one will be able to say much about the church. This is some of the confusion of today.

There is, therefore, only one body. There is also but one Spirit. Of course. The call of the gospel has come to these Ephesians and the Spirit of God applied that call, or gave the inner call. But, this was one call. Therein is their hope made complete because that call was the earnest of their inheritance. They have thereby been set on the road that leads to glory. There is only one Lord; there is only one faith; there is only one baptism. Anyone who would dare to claim that there is more than one Lord would be guilty of idolatry. There is but one way to be bound to that Lord — by faith. There is only that faith which has been wrought in the heart by the Spirit through the word. There is only one baptism. He mentions baptism because that is the sacrament whereby the people are brought into the fellowship of the church. It is that sacrament which symbolizes the washing away of sin through the blood of Christ and which symbolizes the union with Him and His body. There is also only one God, one Father. He is the one of Whom and through Whom and unto Whom are all things. Seeing there are only one Lord, only one God and Father, only one Spirit, one hope, one faith, and one call — how can there be more than one church? No, the unity of the church, though an article of faith, is a fact. Everything must be done to reveal and keep that unity. Not by means of a false ecumenicity, but by the true ecumenicity shown us in the Scriptures. God's people should do all in their power to bring together those who belong together, and should clearly brand as false church those who do not believe the teachings of Scripture. Our Confessions show us the way to do this.

An Individual Gift

In the unity of the church lies its strength. That unity must be displayed before men. However, the

individual members of the church are by no means all alike. Each one has received different gifts from his Lord to be used for the benefit of the church. Out of this diversity of gifts the unity of the church comes to expression. This is the theme Paul stresses in Corinthians when he speaks of all the members of the human body having different functions (gifts) and all of them together forming one body. So it is in the church.

Given By the Ascended Christ

That the gifts which each individual believer has have come from the Lord Himself is made clear in the following verses. Paul refers to Psalm 68:18. This text deals with the ascension of Christ. He now tells the Ephesian church that through this ascension they have received so much. When He ascended, He came with the spoils of His victory. He has an abundance of gifts to bestow. Now this fact, He ascended, means that He must also have descended before this. Why should that be so? It is not true that anyone who ascends must first have descended? But this is true concerning the Christ because He had been above before, which was His natural station. Through His ascension He has filled all things with the multitude of His gifts and favor.

Gifts of Church Offices

Christ is the Source of all the spiritual gifts which have been bestowed on the individual believer. He also gives His gifts to the entire church. Some of these he now mentions. He gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers. The emphasis lies on the fact that these are gifts of Christ. The apostles were found only in the early church. The prophets too, through whom new revelations came. Evangelists will always be in the church as well as pastors and teachers. Seeing they are His gifts, the church must acknowledge them as such — he who rejects you rejects me!

Purpose of the Gifts

Paul now shows that the purpose of the gifts which He has given the church is to equip the membership of the church to reach its full potential so that each one is used for the perfecting and building up of the body of Christ, the church. This is, of course, the stimulation of the office of all believers. This is, and always has been necessary in the life of the church. Just so no one concludes that the church here below is ever able to do without the special gifts of Christ — the offices of which Paul has spoken. Nor may we conclude that that is the only purpose of the special offices, i.e., to enliven the offices of all believers. There is more! Christ wants His church fed! He wants His church led!

A Unity of Faith and Knowing Christ

Where a unity of the body is obtained there growth will also be found. On the other hand, where there is no unity, there can be no growth. If the church gratefully accepts the gifts the ascended Christ bestows

upon it and finds itself equipped to the task to which the church is called, it will attain to a unity of faith and grow in the knowledge of the Son of God and become a full-grown, a mature man in Christ. Christians will not remain babes in Christ. Maturity must come. The writer to the Hebrews (Ch. 5, 6) urges his people to strive for the same goal. So only will they be strong in the faith. Then they will not always and forever have to go back to the elementary things, but will be able to press on to perfection. The author even speaks of attaining unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. No, we will not reach that goal here, but we should strive for it.

This growth in the faith is necessary for the unity of the church. There are examples enough in the New Testament of those who knew the way, and then were led astray like unstable children. Even one of the apostles, Peter, does not escape this evil. How often it is seen today that a congregation is instructed in the right way for several years, and another minister comes, and in a few years everything is turned upside down. How can people be so fickle? The antidote? Speak the truth! Let your yea be yea and your nay nay! How little of this is found today. But, let truth also be spoken in love. The truth separated from love is of no value. Only when we follow our Lord in His manner of living will we in all things grow up into Him. So we become like Him. So we begin to measure up to the stature of the fulness of Christ. You could depend on Him! He spoke the truth and did so in love.

A Growing Body

Coming to the conclusion of this section, the Apostle emphasizes the intimate relationship between Christ and the church. As so often in this epistle, he refers to Christ as the Head of the body. Here he means it in a strictly organic sense. That body is so beautifully "put together," it is a marvel. That is due to the fact that the head supplies all the things necessary for the proper functioning of every part of the body. Then each part of the body, doing that which is required of it, will help the whole body grow and answer to its purpose. To separate the body from its Head would be fatal and to separate any part of the body from the rest brings illness. Only as a harmonious whole can the body prosper and receive His blessing upon it.

Questions for discussion:

1. How must we seek the unity of the church? What is ecumenism? Is it proper?
2. What should be our first concern in seeking closer relations with other churches?
3. Is there only one baptism? Is there no difference between the baptism of Baptists and of Reformed?
4. How many offices are there in the church? May there be more or less?
5. What is meant by the office of all believers? This matter was not stressed prior to the Reformation and the great Reformation restored its recognition. Is there a danger today that we make too much of it?
6. How can you recognize the true church? ●

The Imprecatory Psalms

Frederika Pronk

Although the Psalms were written many years ago, in an age and culture very different from ours, they still speak to Christians today. The Psalms are timeless, for they express the whole range of human feelings and experiences — from dark doubts and deep depression to exuberant joy and thankful praise. Today, Christians experience the same emotions. They are puzzled by the same problems of life, cry out in great need, and delight in praise and worship to the same God. We can identify with the poets of the Psalms in many ways. Yet, there are certain themes in the Psalms which cause many people, even sincere Christians, great problems. The imprecatory character of some of the Psalms, where the author requests God to punish and pour out His wrath against evildoers, poses problems which are not easily solved.

Problem Psalms

Of the one hundred and fifty Psalms, six are commonly classified as "imprecatory" Psalms. These are the 55th, 59th, 69th, 79th, 109th and 137th Psalms. Besides these Psalms, there are portions of other Psalms which include statements, calling for God's wrath and punishment to be executed upon the wicked. Some examples are Ps. 17:13-14, 35:4-6,

24-26, 58:6-11, 68:1, 71:13, 83:13-17, 94:1-7, 129:5-8, 140:9-11, 143:12, etc. How can we account for the petitions raised to God in regard for curses upon the wicked? "Let death seize upon them, and let them go down quick into hell" (Ps. 55:15), or "Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth" (Ps. 58:6), "Let them be blotted out of the book of the living?" (Ps. 69:28), "Pour out thy wrath upon the heathen" (Ps. 79:6), are some of the awesome curses the Psalmists wish upon their enemies. There are curses for God's wrath to come upon widows and children: "Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow" (Ps. 109:9f), and speaking about the Babylonians, the Psalmist says: "Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones" (Ps. 137:9).

Unsatisfactory Explanations

Various explanations have been given to explain these terrible imprecations of the Psalms. It simply will not do, however, to blame one particular author, for the Psalms quoted are composed by various authors: David, Asaph, and other unknown composers. The Psalmists are united in their desires for the execution of God's judgment upon the wicked.

Neither can we excuse the authors on the ground that they did not possess the teaching of Christ, which was to "love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matt. 5:44; Cf. 5:43-48). Perhaps not as clearly

Note: Mrs. Pronk is the wife of Rev. Cornelis Pronk, pastor of the Free Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, Mich. The editor of this department is Mrs. L. Vanden Heuvel, 207 Kansas, N.W., Orange City, Iowa 51041.

as in the New Testament, but the Old Testament people of God were taught to show love and kindness to their neighbors (Cf. Lev. 19:17-18), and even to their enemies (Ex. 23:4-5; Prov. 20:22; 24:17).

One solution offered to explain the problem of the imprecatory Psalms is the assertion that they do not express a desire for the doom of the wicked, but merely predict their doom. It is possible that some of the Psalms are predictions, but this can hardly be supported when one reads that these desires are in the form of prayers. "Destroy, O Lord, and divide their tongues" (Ps. 55:9), David prays as he addresses himself to God. At the beginning of the Psalm he indicates he is praying: "Give ear to my prayer, O God; and hide not thyself from my supplication" (vs. 1). That the Psalmists are praying is true to a greater or lesser extent of other imprecatory Psalms as well (Cf. Ps. 59, 69, 79, 94, 109, etc.). We are therefore forced to conclude that the imprecatory Psalms are desires for the doom of the wicked, and not merely predictive of their doom.

Dispensationalists, who divide history into seven distinct periods, offer a solution by relegating the Psalms to the dispensation of law, and not to the dispensation of grace. They hold that the ethical concepts in the dispensation of law cannot be transferred or applied to the dispensation of grace. Therefore, while it was right for the Old Testament saints, living under the dispensation of law, to invoke divine judgment upon their enemies, as they do in the imprecatory Psalms, it would be wrong for Christians, living under the dispensation of grace, to do the same.

The dispensational treatment of the Psalms must be rejected for several reasons. There is no evidence in the Bible for the scheme of interpretation which divides history into seven distinct periods. By saying that what is right for David is wrong for us today, makes Scripture contradict Scripture. Furthermore, imprecations are not confined to the Psalms, but are to be found throughout the Scriptures. Moses, who was a very patient man in dealing with the rebelliousness of his people (Num. 12:3), at the rebellion of Dathan and Abiram prays, "respect not thou their offerings" (Num. 16:15). The writings of the prophets show they are personally involved when they prophesy God's punishment and vengeance upon evil and evildoers. "I am full of the fury of the Lord; I am weary with holding in: I will pour it out," Jeremiah cries (Jer. 6:11; cf. 7:20; 11:11; Ezek. 5:16; Mal. 3:9, etc.).

Moreover, God's judgment and curses upon the wicked is not a typically Old Testament phenomenon. Some of the most fearsome of the imprecatory Psalms are quoted in the New Testament. In Acts 1:20 reference is made to Psalm 69:26 and Psalm 109:8 in alluding to the terrible punishment of Judas (Cf. Matt. 26:24). Romans 11:9 refers to Psalm 69:22f. in connection with the judgment upon the unbelief of the Jews in Jesus as the Messiah. Peter's words to Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11), to Simon the magician (Acts 8:20-22), and Paul's words to Elymas (Acts 13:10) and to Alexander the coppersmith (2 Tim. 4:14) are of an imprecatory nature. Most awe-

some are the imprecations upon those who reject the Gospel. "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema" (or accursed) (1 Cor. 16:22; cf. Gal. 1:8-9; 2 Tim. 4:14; Acts 23:3, etc.). Although not used as imprecations, the references to imprecatory Psalms in the New Testament show the authority of these Psalms as a whole. Rom. 13:3a refers to Ps. 5:10; Rom. 13b refers to Ps. 140:4; and Rom. 3:14 refers to Ps. 10:7, all of which contain imprecations. Rom. 15:3 refers to Ps. 69:9, one of the most awesome of the imprecatory Psalms.

The suggestion of C. S. Lewis that the imprecations of the Psalms are due to "human qualities" because Scripture merely "carries the Word of God" (C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, pp. 87 and 112), contradicts New Testament teaching and also is contrary to the doctrine of inspiration (2 Tim. 3:16). It also refutes David's own claim for inspiration. In 2 Samuel 23:1 and 2 he claims divine inspiration for the Psalms when he says: "Now these be the last words of David, David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet Psalmist of Israel, said, The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue."

That David to whom most of the imprecatory Psalms are attributed, would seek personal revenge and show vindictiveness is contrary to everything we know of him. In the Psalms we also find him praying for his enemies (Ps. 35:13); he seeks their conversion (Ps. 2:10-12); and desires that they should fear God (Ps. 64:9, 10). Consider also how David twice saved the life of Saul, his most relentless enemy, when he was delivered into his hands (1 Sam. 24 and 26). Also note the charitable tone of the elegy upon the death of Saul (2 Sam. 1:17-27). See also his attitude towards Shimei (2 Sam. 16:5-14) and his mourning over Absalom (2 Sam. 18:33). Also, we find David inquiring, "Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God unto him?" (2 Sam. 9:3f). It does not do justice to David to ascribe a vengeful side to his character, as some do.

While David was not without sin, the explanation that David's imprecations upon his enemies are out of a desire for personal revenge, must be rejected. Rather, as a prophet of the Lord and a type of Christ, personal revenge was alien to the spirit of David and all God's servants in both the Old and the New Testament. Rather, David prays to be kept from being vengeful and vindictive. "O Lord my God," he prays:

*If I have done this; if there be iniquity
in my hands;*

*If I have rewarded evil unto him that was at
peace with me; (yea, I have delivered him
that without cause is mine enemy:)*

*Let the enemy persecute my soul, and take it;
yea, let him tread down my life upon the
earth and lay mine honour in the dust.*

(Ps. 7:3-5)

A suggestion that the Psalmists' outbursts are typical of the moral feelings of humanity in response to the unusually brutal and inhumane crimes committed, is not satisfactory either. It is true, the im-

precatory prayers are to the all-just God to judge and condemn the wicked. But it is not true that the imprecatory Psalms proceed wholly, or even primarily, from the outraged moral feelings of humanity at wickedness. To assert that is to overlook their divine inspiration and authority and to regard them as merely human compositions, the product of human religious experience and moral life. The words, "Neither let there be any to favour his fatherless children" (Ps. 109:12), and "Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones" (Ps. 137:9), can hardly be justified on the basis of the outraged moral feelings of humanity. Moreover, it is difficult to see how these words can be reconciled with Deuteronomy 24:16, which commands that "the fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers." The prayer for the destruction of infants can hardly be justified upon the basis of moral feelings of indignation of mankind against evil. We must look for a solution which recognizes the divine character of the imprecatory Psalms and which justifies their terrible language.

Two Wrong Assumptions

The fundamental objection raised against the imprecatory Psalms is that it is immoral to wish or pray for the doom or destruction of another. Unconsciously perhaps, this objection is founded on two suppositions. The *first* is that *the welfare of man is the chief end of man*, and *second*, that *God is only merciful and not also righteous* and just to punish the guilty.

The presupposition that the welfare of man is the chief end of man is essentially humanistic and contrary to theism and the sovereignty of God as Creator. If man is created by God, then it follows that the chief end of man is to glorify God. Only by denying that man is required to worship Him in true obedience, can it be maintained that the chief end is the welfare of man. No doubt, many who have problems with the imprecatory Psalms do believe in God's sovereignty. Yet, Christians in another age seemingly had no problems with the imprecatory nature of the Psalms. Calvin, in his exposition of Psalm 55:15, "Let death seize upon them," says: "In imprecating this curse he was not influenced by any bad feeling towards them, and must be understood as speaking not in his own cause but in that of God, and under the immediate guidance of His Spirit." (*Commentary on the Psalms*, Volume 2, p. 337). Commenting on the controversial curse upon Edomite and Babylonian infants (Ps. 137:7-9), Calvin reminds us that Edom and Babylon had done much harm to Israel throughout many generations of their offspring. There was good reason to suppose that future generations, yet in infancy, would continue to do so.

It is God's attribute of justice which demands punishment, not only upon sin, but also of the sinner. "The day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," God told Adam (Gen. 2:17). If it is right for God to destroy evil and evil men in His universe, or to com-

mand His servants to effect that destruction, it was right for the Psalmists to pray for the destruction of the wicked. The imprecatory Psalms were uttered under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and were therefore in harmony with God's will. The total destruction of evil, including the judicial destruction of evil men, is the prerogative of God. *The imprecatory prayers offered by the Psalmists were therefore not prayers for personal revenge, but prayers for God to execute His justice and vindicate His righteousness.* Therefore David says, "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee?" (Ps. 139:21).

Prophecies of Christ

God's enemies were David's enemies. It was "against the Lord, and against his anointed" that the enemies raged (Ps. 2:1-2). Behind David's fierce enemies who were out to destroy him and the nation of Israel, was Satan. In David and in the nation of Israel was contained the Promised Seed. In David's loins was the Promised Seed which would be born from his royal lineage. This marked the bitter opposition of the enemy, which was already prophesied by God after Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit. "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed" (Gen. 3:15). The imprecations in the Psalms are in harmony of what God said in the garden of Eden, where God placed a curse upon Satan. This curse would find its fulfilment when David's Great Son would be born. "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool" (Ps. 110:1).

The Psalmists were actually praying for the Lord to display His attributes of justice and righteousness. Similarly the New Testament Christian prays: "Thy kingdom come." By thus praying, Christians call on God to establish His righteous reign. In the words of the Heidelberg Catechism, this means that we ask God to

rule us so by thy word and Spirit, that we may submit ourselves more and more to thee; preserve and increase thy church; destroy the works of the devil, and all violence which would exalt itself against thee; and also, all wicked counsels devised against thy holy word; till the full perfection of thy kingdom take place, wherein thou shalt be all in all. (Answer 123; cf. Q & A 52)

Christ Himself repeatedly drew attention to the fact that curses rested upon all those who would not submit to His rule, and thus were His enemies (cf. Matt. 13:37-52; etc.). He also called imprecations upon the disobedient and evildoers. To the Pharisees who sought to undermine His rule, he had the most awesome imprecations: "Ye are like whited sepulchres . . . Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers. Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell" (Matt. 23:13-33; cf. Lk. 10:12-16, etc.).

The imprecatory Psalms are, therefore, also Messianic. The Psalmists looked for the day when the Lord would reign and all His enemies were destroyed (Cf. Ps. 97:1-9; 45:3-7; 47:8; etc.). Christ's coming into the flesh ushered in this kingdom of righteousness (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 10:7, etc.). *The call of the Psalmist for God to execute justice and judgment finds its fulfillment in Christ, Who came to establish the kingdom of God. He came to extend mercy, but also to execute judgment upon the wicked.*

Christ's coming brought mercy, first of all. He came, "not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved" (John 3:17, 12:47). But it cost Him His life to extend mercy to guilty sinners. On the cross is presented the most awesome spectacle of divine justice. Here "mercy and truth met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Ps. 85:10). There Christ prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Lk. 23:34). Therefore the day of grace for all God's enemies has been extended, and Peter, in rebuking Simon the magician, calls him to repentance and prayer (Acts 8:20-23), and Stephen prayed for his murderers (Acts 7:60). Because of Christ, the time of mercy has been extended.

Looking for the Lord's Return

But one day God's awful wrath will fall upon all the wicked and disobedient to the Gospel, upon all who remain God's enemies. Then the curses will come in all their terrible and awesome fury. For then Christ will be no more the merciful Savior, but the Judge Who has the keys of hell and death (Rev. 1:16-18). For that day the souls before the altar in heaven are longing and praying, like the Psalmists of old. Like the Psalmists, their prayer is imprecatory in nature. "And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" (Rev. 6:10) The cries for the revelation of God's justice and righteousness of the souls in heaven are essentially the same as the imprecatory prayers of the Psalmists who longed for the Day when the Judge of all the earth would do right.

Therefore, not only the prayers for help and the songs of joy and praise are meaningful for God's people today. But they also can identify with the imprecatory parts of the Psalms as they express the longing for Christ's return, when He shall come to judge the living and the dead. According to the Heidelberg Catechism, it is a comfort to know that Christ returns and judges. Because

in all my sorrow and persecutions, with uplifted head I look for the same person, who before offered himself for my sake, to the tribunal of God, and has removed all curse from me, to come as judge from heaven: who shall cast all his and my enemies into everlasting condemnation, but shall translate me with all his chosen ones to himself, into heavenly joys and glory (Q & A 52).

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NEWS

The Reformed Fellowship which has long been encouraging the development of the Reformed Theological College of Nigeria (Tiv Seminary) has just sent a shipment of over \$500 worth of books for the school's library. Thanks to the generosity of Baker Book House which has long handled such shipments, we were able to do this at a cost of just under \$300 to our Tiv Library fund.

THE AGONY AND THE ECSTASY OF MY TEACHING

Nelle Vander Ark

Often when I am asked about my work and I say, "I teach English," my questioner flinches a bit and backs off. I sense I am someone to be feared. I teach a dreadful subject . . . one that many have failed and fear failing again.

Miss Nelle Vander Ark is Associate Professor of Communications at the Reformed Bible College in Grand Rapids, Mich. This article appeared in the Summer, 1981 RBC Newsletter and is reprinted by permission.

Why does the study of one's native language cause so much anxiety? One reason lies in some unnecessarily fearful experiences students have had in schools where English was taught for its own sake and no effort was made to show how one's appreciation and use of language could improve the quality of life. Another reason — not unrelated to the first — is the lack of conviction in North American, English-speaking homes and communities, even among Christians, about the need for attractiveness and effectiveness in both oral and written communication. Disregard for proper grammar and usage, slovenliness in speaking and writing is the accepted, sometimes the preferred, way of life. Anyone who tries to turn the tide is fighting what Ed Newman calls "a lonely crusade." Certainly such a person will produce tension. It is hard work to change attitudes of careless disregard for language to careful concern for the subject and genuine enthusiasm for learning English well.

But for just "such a time as this" I teach English at RBC and thrive on the challenge. I feel I am dealing with "the heart of the matter" in Christian education every day in teaching both composition and speech to those who want to communicate the Word of the King. I take the position that one's language is a gift of God and, therefore, one must treasure it and polish it. I attempt to show that a good understanding of grammar serves to unravel meaning. I demonstrate how grammar study improves understanding of Scripture and of many songs. In teaching proper usage, I emphasize that a representative of God and a messenger of God's truth and beauty may not be slovenly and cannot afford to be anything but attractive in the use of language. In composition I work for clarity of thought and total effectiveness in expression. (Such teaching requires that there must be some substance — something to say. This substance is found in learning to read God's Word and to observe God's work and God's world. This, too, is part of my teaching.) In speech, I seek to develop students who use language appropriately and speak persuasively in keeping with the Great Commission.

My overall objective in teaching English (both written and spoken) is:

*to develop mature, free Christians
who have command of a vital language
to the delight and honor of God,
to the benefits of others, and
to the enrichment and enjoyment of
one's own life.*

And, isn't that, after all, a big part of the goal of Christian Education? ●

twenty-four/december, 1981

BENONI

*Living like a nomad
Leaving Laban and Paddan-Aram
On the way to the Promised Land
Which had become a place of fear and dread
For Jacob fleeing Esau's wrath
Trouble with Laban, trouble with Leah
Perhaps more serious trouble with Esau
And now labor pain, my soul leaving me
The name to be given my son
Benoni, the son of my sorrow*

*A thousand years have gone by
The bondage in Egypt
The wandering in the wilderness
The chaos and unrest of the time of the Judges
A developing kingdom under Saul and David
The disruption of the nation into North and South
A time of prosperity for both Israel and Judah
And then decline and eclipse, Ephraim conquered
By the Assyrians and 150 years later Judah
Subjugated and carried into captivity
by the Babylonians
The Promised Land a habitation of jackals
Jeremiah sees me weeping for my children,
comfortless*

*It is more than six centuries later
The Roman Empire is now ruling the world
With some power delegated to men of
the provinces
Like Herod the Great. Wise men have come from
the East
To lay treasures at the feet of the Desire of
All Nations
There is no room for a possible rival in Judea
Herod orders all male children under
two massacred
But Joseph is forewarned by an angel in a dream
He and Mary and the Christ-child flee to Egypt
Thus was fulfilled, says Matthew, the prophecy
of Jeremiah*

*A voice was heard in Ramah
Wailing and loud lamentation
Rachel weeping for her children*

John E. Meeter
Olympia, Washington