



Clarion

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New Approaches to Mission?

By J. De Jong

Introduction

It is clear that also in the Reformed world mission is changing. The old model of Reformed mission was that a missionary was sent out for life to preach the gospel to those who had never heard it before. He was basically viewed as a representative of the western church and western culture who had to give leadership in all aspects of church institution and organization on the mission field. He was first and foremost, a preacher of the gospel. Today, missionaries are normally sent out for shorter periods of time. Rather than being leaders on the field, they take a more advisory role with regard to the national churches. Rather than impose his own cultural perspective, he allows room for "contextualization," i.e., he allows the national church to develop its own forms of organization and worship according to its own needs. And often today, the missionary takes the role of instructor or consultant.

Coupled with these changes is a growing awareness of other churches proximate to the Reformed tradition that also engage in mission work near or around the mission fields of the Reformed churches. The obvious example in our case is the IPB in Brazil. Cases like these have raised the question concerning cooperative endeavors in mission. The ICRC has also placed the matter of mission on its agenda, and has decided that cooperation of member churches in the area of mission is to be encouraged (cf. Constitution, Art. III).

In Brazil matters have been taken a step further. One of the churches working in the Brazilian mission, the church at Assen, has proposed the development of much closer ties with the IPB, with the stated purpose of strengthening the reformational wing in this church, and so promoting the Reformed convictions in this church. They have proposed the assignment of a full-time instructor from the Dutch and Canadian Reformed Mission in Brazil to the seminary of the IPB in Recife. This is an example of the kind of approach being found in today's mission projects. Similarly, the church of Spakenburg-Zuid has taken upon itself the responsibility of sending two instructors who will organize and conduct the training of ministers and evangelists in the Reformed Church in Zaire.

Reasons for the changes

There are several reasons for these changing patterns in mission. First, we may point to changing views with respect to the cultural gap between the west and the so-called "third world," the traditional mission areas. Formerly, the line of direction was unilateral: everything came from the west, and the mission fields were passive receivers. Today, national churches on the mission fields are seen as independent churches who also have something to offer to the world. Mission is a two-way street!



Second, the incidence of so-called "virgin territories" in mission has declined considerably. Mission fields today have a hybrid character, and are primarily made up of people who in their background have had some contact with the gospel, albeit marginal or minimal. For example, the missionaries in Brazil deal primarily with people who have a Roman Catholic background. Many have been baptized in the Roman church, even though they have had little or no further association with it.

Third, it is becoming increasingly difficult to have missionaries admitted into foreign countries which serve as potential mission fields. Many of these countries have unstable governments, others are governed by leaders who are adverse to western influences, or foreign religions. Here Irian Jaya is the telling example. The only possible way of admitting missionaries in Irian today is through the Junior Theological College in Boma. It is no longer possible to send a missionary to preach the gospel in the literal sense of this term.

Fourth, one can notice changing views with respect to the missionary's task. For example, Dr. L. Joose, a missiologist in the Netherlands, connects the earlier Reformed mission principle of preaching the gospel in virgin territories with what he calls "the nineteenth century civilization or progress ideology." In other words, the idea that virgin territories have priority is being put under review. The principle is regarded as being too closely affiliated with the old colonial model of relations between national states.

What about the reasons?

A survey of these reasons indicates that some of the changes in missions are inevitable and unavoidable. As mission fields become established, one naturally must give more attention to nurturing and supporting national churches in accordance with the needs that arise among them. And one of the primary needs of the young churches is *knowledge*, in order that they may become more firm-

ly rooted in the true doctrine, and learn to discern the spirits in their situation. Also, if governments refuse to accept missionaries, churches can only be commended for making the most of the opportunities that are still available. As the missionaries of Irian Jaya have pointed out: the mission work there is far from completed!

Another element concerns cooperation with other churches, specifically with those of a Presbyterian background. In the Netherlands these requests have normally come from the churches themselves, and are directed to the Dutch churches. More often than not they are requests for instructors who are equipped to aid the national church in the training of evangelists and ministers for the work within the national church. One can understand that requests like these should not be flatly rejected because of confessional differences. Thus, also developments in the area of cooperation are understandable, and not to be rejected out of hand.

Dangers

Yet developments such as these are not without their dangers. While many Reformed churches are conscious of these, at times it appears that they can be easily overlooked. Hence it is worthwhile to point out some of these dangers. First, a new emphasis on "instruction-missions" or "teaching-mission" should not obscure the central mandate that Christ gives His church, *viz.*, that the gospel should be *preached* to the ends of the earth. The primary focus in mission must fall on the preaching as the initial and primary task of the missionary. Indeed, it may be more fruitful, on analogy of the New Testament, to think in terms of missionaries and fellow workers – the former directed to preaching, and the latter directed to providing the added necessary instruction to strengthen and root the young churches in the faith.

A second factor closely connected with the first is the question whether the priority of so-called "virgin territories" represents an expression of "progress ideology" or whether it reflects the teaching of Scripture itself. On more than one occasion, the apostle Paul refers to his calling to preach to those who have not heard the good news before, Rom. 15:20; 2 Cor. 10:16; Gal, 2:7. In all these references, the apostle is concerned not to build on another man's foundation, or in another's territory. One may also think of the words of Christ Himself, who said that the gospel had to be preached throughout the whole world, and then the end would come, Mt. 24:14.

While the search for and acquisition of so-called "virgin territories" may be more difficult today, the priority reflected in the Bible passages above should not be discounted. Indeed, the Canadian churches ought to begin confronting the question whether or not our connections with the British commonwealth do not give us more opportunities that may not be open to our Dutch sister churches. To be sure, working with Holland's mission programs has advantages for our churches, considering our size. But this should not preclude the careful investigation and consideration of other possibilities.

Third, the adoption of a cooperative model in mission work is not without its dangers. To suggest that no cooperation is possible would be foolhardy. But cooperative efforts on a mission field are plagued with the same problems that inevitably arise on the home front, *viz.*, that at some point the *differences* in doctrine and church government must be dealt with. It would be incorrect, in my view, to discount the differences for the sake of a cooperative effort. The threat

of compromising Reformed principles in doctrine and church government becomes more acute in the measure that cooperative projects are undertaken.

Coupled with this danger is the pursuit of the strategy of "reformation from within" as a goal in mission. This is the aim suggested by the church at Assen with regard to the cooperative relationship with the IPB in Brazil. In this framework, mission gets a new goal, one that, if one is not cautious, can compromise on mission's essential goal. For the new goal here becomes: reforming an existing church from within. But the essential mission task is to preach the gospel of God, and so *plant* the church. How far must you deviate from the latter to gain the former? Or, how much must you hold the principles of Reformed church organization at bay in order to work within another structure?

If one judges this proposal in the light of the history of the church, then one cannot be favourably inclined to the idea of "reformation from within." This was essentially the principle of the *Reveil* in the 19th century, and it is related to the idea of "revival" today. But "revival" and "reformation" are two conflicting principles! The program of "reformation from within" has never worked in the church's history.

Caution enjoined

The over-all point in these comments will be clear. Churches must be watchful of their interests. There is no doubt that changes in mission are inevitable and unavoidable. Neither should all cooperative efforts be shunned. But it would be erroneous to throw out the old principles of Reformed missions for the sake of new ones. The line of Voetius and Kuyper should not be discarded in favour of a new model. At most, our models should be adapted to changing circumstances. The principle task of the missionary is: to preach the gospel. With shrinking resources and strained budgets, churches must also think in terms of setting their own priorities for their work. And a principle of cardinal importance to my mind is: Your own mission initiatives should take priority over cooperative efforts.

Churches must also remember that with increased dangers and temptations, prayer for the work of mission must not be wanting. More than ever, we should be mission-minded! In a changing world, it is important that the churches do not lose sight of the norms, but apply them to existing situations and possibilities to the best of their ability. And even in the face of shrinking possibilities, the *principles* must be maintained. Christ also says, "Nevertheless, when the Son of man comes, will He find faith on earth," Luke 18:8. This may also be interpreted to say: will He find a mission-minded church, faithful to the principles of the beginning?

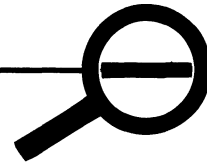
These matters are brought forward in order that they may have the attention of all in the churches. Churches are challenged today to use their talents and resources in the best possible ways. May it be clear that the desire to follow through on the mission mandate with true faith and obedience lives deeply in our hearts, so that it is actively maintained until the day Christ returns!

Some sources:

C. Haak, "Zending-92: Op Gods tijd en naar zijn woord" *De Reformatie*, (1992) pp. 377ff.

L. Joose, "Reformed Missions: Back to the Future" *Reflection: An International Reformed Review of Missiology*, Vol. 3, no. 1-2 (Sept./Oct., 1992) pp. 15-21.

J. Klamer, "Kerkelijk opbouwwerk in het buitenland" *De Reformatie*, (1991) pp. 21ff.



Synod Ommen 1993

Our Dutch sister churches have been meeting in synod since April 14 and they will soon break for the summer. It is time to take note of some of their decisions, based on reports in *Nederlands Dagblad*.

Theological University in Kampen

Prof. H.M. Ohmann, well-known to the Canadian Reformed Churches from his time in our midst in 1971-1981, has reached the age of retirement. The synod appointed as successor Drs. G. Kwakkel, who has been teaching Hebrew in Kampen and Prof. Ohmann was given a most honourable release with great thanks for his dedicated labours for the churches. In the meantime Drs. Kwakkel has accepted this appointment. The synod, however, decided not to appoint a successor for the vacancy created by Drs. Kwakkel's appointment just yet. Instead the governors of the Theological University were asked to appoint a temporary instructor for three years which they have done.

The question whether theological students have enough practical skills when they graduate from seminary has kept our sister institution in Kampen busy and it is also becoming a point of discussion in our own Theological College. The Synod at Ommen decided unanimously to allow the Senate in Kampen to give the students a larger practical component in their studies. Up to now only catechism teaching was the required practical part of the theological program. Now a much more comprehensive practical component will be introduced. Although details still need to be worked out by the school, the following will probably be introduced: going along on or conducting pastoral visits and pastoral discussions with congregation members, attending and participating in consistory meetings, and leading congregational meetings. All this will take place under the supervision of the Theological University and the pastor involved. The idea

appears to be to get these elements in during the student's theological studies so that theory and practice becomes more and more integrated. Near the end of one's studies there is to be a short period in which the student conducts worship services and gets involved in other aspects of the work of a minister.

The synod listed six advantages for the greater involvement of practical work before graduating. Firstly, through this practical work the student will not lose sight of the real goal of his studies. Secondly, for many students the practical work will be an extra stimulus for studying and for some it will be an occasion to ask whether they are suitable for the office of minister. In this latter case, if one is not suitable for the office, this can possibly be dealt with before ordination and much grief can be avoided. Thirdly, an opportunity is given to get practical experience under the supervision of others, without having the final responsibility. Fourthly, the practical experience can be very bene-

ficial for one's personal development. Fifthly, through the practical work, the theory can be tested against the reality of practical life. Sixthly, through the practical work of the students, the professors involved will also be kept closer to real life.

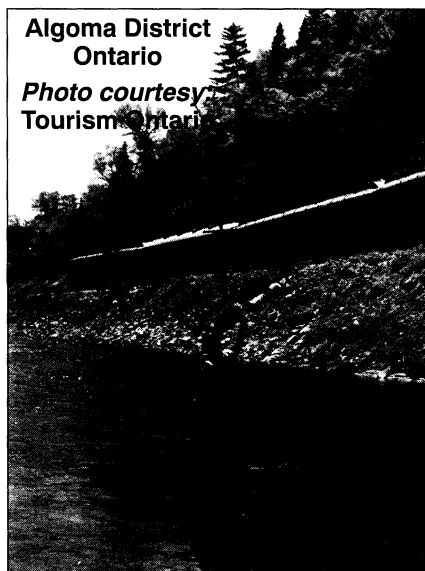
Clearly such a program will need the full cooperation of many ministers, consistories, and congregations. Also, since Kampen does not want to reduce its academic requirements, it will be a challenge to integrate all this into the present duration of study. It will be interesting to see how this program develops.

In a separate, but related decision, synod also asked the Theological University to report to the next synod on the question whether the speaking of an edifying word by students of theology can take a different form from what has become customary, namely, that this opportunity (only) be offered to students who have finished their practical components. Such speaking of an edifying word would then take place with the permission of the churches and with sufficient supervision from the Theological University.

Relations with churches abroad

The number of contacts that the Dutch churches have abroad continues to grow and it is encouraging to see how the Lord is busy all over the world. With respect to Australia, the synod decided to continue the contact with the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA) with a view to achieving a sister relationship. Two grounds were given. Firstly, judging from her doctrine, actions, church government, and discipline, the PCEA is a true church of Jesus Christ. Secondly, because the sister churches in Australia (The Free Reformed Churches, [FRCA]) do not yet have a sister relationship, it is not desirable to get ahead of the FRCA and offer the sister relationship to the PCEA at this time.

OUR COVER



The synod also decided to maintain its offer of sister relations with the Free Church of Scotland, be it with slightly revised rules. The first rule used to be "to take mutual heed that the corresponding churches do not deviate from the Reformed Confession in doctrine, liturgy, church government and discipline." That was changed to "to assist each other as much as possible to maintain the Reformed Confession" etc. The more positive tone of this revised rule was in response to criticism from Scotland that the original wording was too negative and judgmental. (Our Synod Lincoln 1992 adopted a similar revised rule.)

Contact would be continued, and intensified where possible, with the OPC, the Reformed Churches in New Zealand, and the Presbyterian Churches in England (at Accrington, Hull, and other places). These young British churches would also receive financial aid. The Free Reformed Churches in the Philippines would receive similar assistance in order to help strengthen the Reformed character of these churches.

Elders and the blessing

It was decided that from now on elders who conduct reading services at which no ministers are present may raise the hands and speak the salutation and blessing, such as "Grace to you and peace. . . ." Initially the proposal was that elders "should" do this, but that was weakened to "may" do this so that churches have time to get used to this new rule.

Among the grounds for this decision are the following. Also when no minister of the gospel is present, we can still speak of a worship service because the essence of a worship service is determined by the fact that God meets with His people in a gathering that has been called together by the consistory (cf. Mt. 18:20).

Another ground is that the authority to give the salutation and blessing is given through the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ with His blessing. These words are found in Scripture (e.g., Num. 6:24-26; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 13:13; 1 Tim. 1:2b; Rev. 1:4b, 5a) and have been used in the worship service for centuries. It is the communal responsibility of the elders together that this authority to give the salutation and the blessing be used.

It was also noted that Scripture speaks of the office of elder and that there are only gradual differences be-

tween a minister (who is also an elder; cf. 1 Tim. 5:17) and an elder.

The question was raised whether this decision would mean that an important distinction between an elder and a minister would be lost and parts of the Belgic Confession and Church Order would have to be rewritten. This was denied and synod gave reasons for this denial in a separate ground. The meaning of the different offices are so clearly recorded in Art. 30 (Belgic Confession), Art. 2-4, 16, 12 and 22 (Church Order) that this decision of synod does not infringe on what is generally accepted with respect to the offices and/or liturgy. The issue in question is clearly defined, namely, that also in the absence of the minister the authority to bless the congregation in Christ's name remains undiminished.

Not everyone was happy with this decision. Also the advisors from the Theological University thought it premature and that it would have been better to have appointed a study committee to consider all angles first.

Other decisions

Reflecting a desire for a common approach to divorce and remarriage problems in the churches, the Synod at Ommen decided that deputies should be appointed to study the whole matter

and report with their recommendations a half year before the next synod.

A letter was sent on behalf of the churches to the Dutch Senate expressing concern that a proposed anti-discrimination law would infringe on the freedom of religion. It is feared that this law, if enacted, would among other things mean that it would become illegal before Dutch law to characterize as sin what the Bible describes as such (e.g., homosexuality).

It was decided that there should be a minister for the pastoral care of all the deaf and hard of hearing in the federation of the churches. The church of Zwolle-Zuid was appointed to call such a minister.

Two evangelism projects (at Anna-Paulowna and Enkhuizen) will receive financial assistance from the federation of churches since the local churches are too small to carry this work on their own. Deputies will be appointed to collect and distribute this supplementary aid. A request for aid from the regional synod of the southern Netherlands for their evangelism work in Gent, Belgium was turned down because it was not clear that this would be supplemental help.

After a summer recess, the synod will reconvene on August 31, 1993. **C**



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EDITORIAL COMMITTEE:

Editor: J. Geertsema
Coeditors: J. De Jong, C. Van Dam
and W.W.J. VanOene

ADDRESS FOR EDITORIAL MATTERS:

CLARION
41 Amberly Boulevard
Ancaster, ON, Canada L9G 3R9

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REMEMBER YOUR CREATOR

By R.A. Schouten

Working on Worship¹

The Bible expresses as very joyful attitude toward the worship of God. The well-known words of Psalm 122 are a case in point: "I was glad when they said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the LORD!' " Also Psalm 84 speaks about the desirability of being with God in His dwelling place: "How lovely is Thy dwelling place, O LORD of hosts!"

For a faithful Old Testament worshiper, no experience could match the thrill of being with the holy God in His temple. Think of Psalm 27: "One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in His temple."

From a New Testament perspective, we understand the house of the Lord to be the Church. God dwells among His people in Word and Spirit. The church members are the living stones of the house of the Lord. When they come together in worship, then the temple goes up and the Lord comes to dwell in their midst. New Testament worship may lack the pomp and ceremony of the Old Testament liturgy, but its loveliness is deeper and its privileges stupendous. In this spiritual worship of the new covenant age, the believers have direct access to the throne room of the living God. Jesus Christ has made the way for them! Fellowship with God is now more intimate than was ever possible in Solomon's temple (cf. Hebrews 12:22-24).

It follows, then, that the Old Testament Psalms about the joy of worship have not lost their relevance. If anything, we who live in the "last days" of the world can sing them with renewed verve and vigor.

Knowing these things, questions begin to arise. Does worship still compel our interest? Do we anticipate the moment of meeting our God in the midst of His people? Is it our highest joy to stand

in the presence of the Most High? Is our worship really centered on God? Further, are the expectations we have about worship based on God's Word?

Complaints about worship

We ask these questions because sometimes we meet evidence to the contrary. It goes without saying, of course, that a great many young people go to the church service with indeed much joy and pleasure. Still, there are troubling inconsistencies. For example, it can be noticed that not all young people appear to be aware of their surroundings on Sunday mornings and afternoons. By their posture and demeanor, you might judge them to be watching a fourth-rate movie or listening to some worn-out jokes for the tenth time in a day rather than sitting in the presence of the Holy One who made heaven and earth.

Sometimes the attitude displayed finds a voice. Remarks like the following can be gleaned: "Church is boring . . . it doesn't do anything for me . . . I get nothing out of the service . . . it's so tiresome. . . ." On other occasions, we notice tedium induced power snoozes during the services. We can observe a failure to participate in the sung praise of God. In still other cases, we can note that attendance is not regular. For some people, one day in the world is better than a thousand in the house of God. They would rather be doorkeepers in the tents of sin than to ever dwell among the people of God. Worshipping the Maker of heaven and earth seems to them a drudgery instead of a pleasure.

From another category of people we encounter a different type of complaint. They are in church regularly. They don't sleep. They do sing. Yet they are not really happy. They hunger for a different style of worship. They find the Reformed worship service arid and stuffy. If they could have their preference, they

would jazz up the service to a greater or lesser degree.

First of all, they believe, the sermons should be shorter (15 minutes maximum!) and simpler (please don't challenge us with high thoughts). Then, too, they feel that the church should allow other people to be involved in the worship service. Worship should not be a "one's man show." Further, why not permit other styles such as the use of drama, puppets for children, liturgical dance or even clowning for Jesus? In any case, we will need something more than those old Testament Psalms with Genevan melodies. We need songs that are more lively, songs which go hand-clapping and foot-stamping and raucous hallelujahs. . . .

The basic issue

Behind the different complaints about worship, we can isolate a basic, underlying cause. We could ask people: what is worship for? Or, better yet: for whom is worship? Scripturally, the answer comes very quickly. Worship is for God! Worship is God-directed and God-centered. It has a vertical orientation. Worship is not intended in the first place to impart personal satisfaction, nor is its purpose to please our aesthetic inclinations. In worship, the focus is on God.

Once again, Psalm 95 is our guide in these matters. In verse 5, we hear the call to worship: "O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker." Worship is bowing down with heart and mind (if not in body) before the Creator and Saviour. Worship means adoring God. It is a confession of His Kingship over us. It is a way of saying: "Lord, you are our Master, our Lord, our Owner. All we have and are is from You, the Living God. You are worthy of all praise!"

When we come together in worship, we are to be aware of the nearness

of God. As we enter into His presence, our minds will be preoccupied with Him in His majesty and mercy. If things are well with our souls, there will be a feeling of being enraptured with God, our God, great in glory, the Lord so marvellous and mighty.

When people show an attitude of boredom in the worship service they are demonstrating that they don't really care about God. God does not fascinate them. Instead, they are preoccupied with themselves! And what a silly obsession the self really is! How boring to focus on man, small, finite and sinful, rather than on the Living God.

If we remember that worship is God-centered, we will not so quickly say, "I got nothing out of it." The first concern

is: what did God get out of you? Did He receive true praise from your heart and mouth? Did He notice in your attitude that He is your greatest joy and highest pleasure? Could the Lord see that His living Word is like gold to you?

Of course, people may find it rather petty of God that He desires to be worshipped every day and every week. But this is only because the god in whom they believe is not the real God, not the God who speaks in Scripture. Knowing the real, living God of the Bible, nobody will find it small-minded of Him to demand regular worship. Instead, this necessary worship will seem singularly appropriate.

If it is really true that worship bores you, it would be a good idea to examine

the overall drift of your life. Remembering that worship is a foretaste of heaven, it may be said that those who find worship unappealing in this life will also be repulsed by the unceasing adoration of heaven. Heaven will hold no delight for them. Since only those who delight in the presence of God are permitted to dwell with Him in heaven, there will be no place for those who find God boring. God is boring only for those who worship themselves. If the self is the center of life, then God and His Word will be a competitor and hence, a tiresome distraction from the real focus. Let us all evaluate our priorities. . . . **C**

(To be continued.)

The Grand Canyon Revisited

By N.H. Gootjes

The following letter was written in reaction to my articles "What does God reveal in the Grand Canyon?," published in *Clarion*, 42, nos. 7ff. In my answer to this letter I hope to answer some other reactions to my articles, as well.

Dear Editor,

I appreciate Dr. Gootjes' criticism of the CRC Report on special and general revelation as basis for harmonizing science and faith. I agree totally that "problems between Scripture and science are problems between divine revelation and human investigation" and not between special and general revelation.

However, I have a concern that Dr. Gootjes paints too simplistic a picture of the understanding of general revelation. True, all are without excuse because they have seen God's creation. But how do they understand what they see? We need to understand creation with the eyes of faith. We ought not to uncritically accept the "discoveries" of secular

scientists, but to note that most of what Dr. Gootjes terms discoveries are only theories which are in fact the gods of humanism and materialism. The danger which the CRC is falling to is precisely that uncritical acceptance.

How do we understand the creation, preservation, and government of the universe? Clearly if we just turn off all our senses, general revelation is not getting through to us. So we must engage our investigative powers. Many people do this only to a superficial extent: "Wow, beautiful, God created it! But some dig a little deeper into general revelation. Note that I do not say "receive more general revelation," but that this general revelation is already complete and that some examine it more closely. In the same way, some dig a little deeper into special revelation; we do that in Bible study, listening to a sermon, and ministers and especially theological professors have this as part of their special duties. As theologians share with the people what they have found in Scriptures about God, Chris-

tian scientists too ought to share what they have found in creation about God. Both of these have a role to play in building up the body of Christ in her knowledge of God, which is the observation and understanding of His qualities as listed in Article 1 of the Belgic Confession.

In summary, let us not neglect the duty of the Christian scientist, which includes the rejection of ungodly "science," but let us not equate their work with the receiving of general revelation.

Yours in Christ,
Arnold Sikkema
Langley, BC

Christian scientists

My first remark concerns the concluding sentence. The writer makes a plea for the Christian scientist. Another reaction which I received expressed the concern that I was negative towards Christians studying science.



Let me therefore state clearly that I have no objection whatsoever against Reformed people studying science. I can only applaud efforts of Christians with the necessary gifts to study science. The world is God's world. Christians, also those who are studying science, work in something created and maintained by our God. If someone has the ability and the perseverance, let him by all means study science.

It could be objected that studying science is dangerous because of the unchristian views that prevail in this field. To be sure, this is dangerous and those who want to study science, should be forewarned. But then, what is without danger? Where are we not exposed to temptation? When we study a language we are exposed to an unchristian worldview through the books we have to read. When we do not study but have our own business we are exposed to unchristian dealings and in danger of taking over worldly methods. The world is full of sin, and we cannot escape it.

If someone already feels attracted to unbelieving theories that prevail in science he should be well advised to stay out of it. Just as someone with quick fin-

gers should not become cashier at a supermarket. If a person has a scientific mind and a mature faith, however, let him study science if he wants. And let the Christian community surround him with a Christian worldview and with their prayers.

Science and general revelation

The second matter concerns the understanding of general revelation. The letter says: "How do we understand the creation, preservation and government of the universe? Clearly if we just turn off all our senses, general revelation is not getting through to us. So we must engage our investigative powers." This leads to a special task for the scientists: they study general revelation. "Christian scientists to ought to share what they have found in creation about God."


This is based on a misunderstanding of general revelation, in my opinion. Let us go back to the beginning: What is general revelation? We only know for sure that general revelation exists because Scripture teaches it explicitly. How, then, does God's Word speak about general revelation?

In the first place, Scripture nowhere singles out scientists as having anything in particular to do with general revelation. Scripture tells us that ALL MEN received general revelation. See Acts 14:16, 17a: "In past generation God allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways; yet He did not leave Himself without witness. . . ." "All the nations" are the recipients of this revelation. Or look at Rom. 1:18, 19a: "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them. . . ." Man in general receives this general revelation. Farmers and scholars, men, women and children, all receive general revelation. Scientists are included in mankind.

In the second place, science does not contribute to the understanding of general revelation. Let us again look at the two places we quoted for general revelation. Why was Paul sure that those inhabitants of Lystra had received general revelation? Because God "did not leave Himself without witness, for He did good and gave you from heaven rains and fruitful seasons . . .", Acts 14:17. Romans 1 emphasizes even stronger that God brings home this general revelation to men. "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them," Romans 1:19. No one can turn off all his senses so that general revelation will not get through. God brings home the knowledge of Himself in the hearts of everyone.

Creation, preservation and government are not in themselves general revelation. In that case a scientist, who studies the created world, could contribute to the understanding of general revelation. Creation and providence are, according to Article 2 of the Belgic Confession, the means of general revelation. God uses these means to convince all men of "his invisible things, namely, His eternal power and deity." The idea that scientists have a deeper understanding of general revelation is foreign to the Bible.

In conclusion

For this reason I cannot agree that Christian scientists ought to share what they have found in creation about God (see my second point). Let them, however, by all means share what they have found in creation about God's world (my first point). 

Abuse in the Christian Family

When I first started writing this article, I felt that the Bible did not deal with abuse. How very wrong I was. While the Bible does not use the negative word "abuse" per se, it does stress the positive word "love." Romans 13:10 "Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."

Every Sunday we hear the minister say, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second like it. You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments, depend all the law and the prophets" Mt. 22:39, 40.

We are also familiar with Eph. 5, "Husbands love your wives as your OWN body" and Eph. 6:4: "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

The Bible often speaks about the relationship between Christ and the Church as being the same as between husband and wife (Eph. 5:23). Christ does not beat us into submission, we are not His "slaves." Christ is gentle and slow to anger. We constantly commit sins against Christ. No woman or child could hurt a man as much as we sin against Christ. Is there anything that a wife or child can do that makes it acceptable or understandable that the husband/father strikes out at them? Who makes this decision?

In an abusive situation, a husband and/or father goes totally against the God-ordained relationship by breaking several commandments:

1. The fifth commandment. "To honour your father and mother." Lord's Day 39, Q/A 104; Form for Infant Baptism. An abused child cannot honour his/her father if he (the father) goes against the will of God. An abusive father cannot give good instruction and discipline nor does he have patience

with their weaknesses and shortcomings because he is too occupied with degrading them, calling them terrible names, and hitting them so that he can have absolute control. He is a tyrant in his home.

2. The sixth commandment. "You shall not kill." Lord's Day 40, Q/A 107 says that God hates hatred and anger and that we must love our neighbour as ourselves, showing patience, peace, gentleness, mercy and friendliness and to *protect* him from as much harm as we can. An abusive father provokes his children to anger so that they hate their father for his actions and their mother and themselves for allowing it to happen. An abusive husband and father kills the wife and children's self-esteem, self-worth and honour. He kills their very soul.

3. The seventh commandment. "You shall not commit adultery." Lord's Day 41, Q/A 109: Since we, body and soul, are temples of the Holy Spirit, it is God's will that we keep ourselves pure and holy, also inside the marriage (Form for Celebrating the Lord's Supper). In *Like Living Stones*, p. 38, Rev. Pouwelse expands on the contemporary English meaning of the word adultery which is a sexual relationship of a married person with someone who is not his or her spouse. When he expands on the meaning, he says and I quote ". . . for everything that disrupts the married state or that defiles body or soul, which have to be kept pure and holy as temples of the Holy Spirit." Since he is not referring to sexual intercourse, I can only assume that he is speaking about physical and/or sexual abuse of the body and emotional abuse of the soul. How can God's temples be glorified when they are abused?

4. The eighth commandment. "You shall not steal." Lord's Day 42, Q/A 111, supporting text Mt. 7:12: "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up

the Law and Prophets." An abusive husband and/or father steals a person's freedom by physically or verbally beating her into submission. She may be afraid of cooking certain meals, leaving her house, spending money on groceries, having a coffee with a friend (if she still has any), listening to Christian, classical or children's music, asking a question or letting her child(ren) make any noise. This is what "pushing the right buttons" means in the *early* stages of abuse, in later stages it takes a lot less. They are prisoners in their own home.

5. The tenth commandment. "You shall not covet." To covet is to desire greatly (something that belongs to another). An abusive husband and/or father desires to have such absolute control over his family that he will do ANYTHING to reach and maintain that control.

As one can see from the previously mentioned texts, abuse has NO part in God's kingdom. It must be very difficult for anyone to fathom the terror that women and children feel in the so-called "security" of their houses. I hope to give you a better understanding of what happens, in general, and how the victim feels.

First of all, we have to identify the abuser. This can be the charming, friendly man next door who will give the shirt off his back to you. It may not be the unshaven, heavy set man with the beer belly. One cannot go by visual appearance at all. All one has to do is watch the news, for example; the Milwaukee man who killed all those men, kept parts of their bodies in the freezer and ate them. Outwardly he appeared to be quite a nice young man but he was a murderer and a cannibal. This makes it very difficult for "outsiders" to know what is truly going on in the homes.

Secondly, we have to define abuse. Abuse is not a single incident. At first it is a lot of little incidents. It is the constant degrading or hitting every day

and not knowing what the husband/father will do next. The abuser has to maintain control over *everything*. He will do this by force, belittling, guilt, etc. Anything the victim says or does may be "pushing the right buttons." When a victim mentions some of the things that happened, they may seem very minor. One has to remember that it is too painful to talk about the actual physical or sexual abuse. The victim first has to trust someone before they can let themselves become that vulnerable. Also, the victim will either break-down and get really upset or they will be cold and unfeeling (they have learned to turn off their feelings since it is easier to live that way). Either way it is very difficult for someone who has not gone through it or studied abuse to deal with these emotions. But Christians *must* understand the gravity of these situations.

If a woman or child is physically or sexually abused, emotional abuse will be there also. The male has to force the woman and child(ren) to fear him, to be terrified of him in order to "accept" his beatings and for him to be able to treat her like a sex object. Since the children are there, watching their father, their role model, treating their mother, their other role model, without respect, the sons are more likely to become abusers themselves. The daughters, on the other hand, will feel that they are worthless, that all men can hit them, sexually touch them or totally degrade them. The children also will be terrified, in fear that their father will strike out at them, fearful of what he will do to their mother and yet being totally helpless, just like their mother is. All they can do is cower in the corner.

The first person a victim may talk to is the officebearer (a male). They must realize that it is virtually impossible for a woman to confide in another male about what her husband (a male) is doing to her. Why would this male be any different? If she does tell him, and he says, "everyone has marriage problems," or "he must have had a bad day," or "you provoked it," or "did you withhold sex from him?", it will only confirm what she already felt, namely, she *deserves* this type of treatment. The problems will not go away with these comments rather they will snowball.

In reference to the comment of withholding sex. This would not happen in a healthy Christian marriage. If a husband hits and loathes a wife outside of the bedroom, he will *not act lov-*

ingly in the bedroom. This may cause her to say no to sexual intercourse because it is *not* making love. He also may force her to do unacceptable things just to fulfill his physical desires and to maintain absolute control. There is no unity.

A woman is taking a great risk by *going* to the officebearers. If her husband finds out that she has told them, he will mistreat her even more. This probably is the same husband who smiles charmingly and *very* convincingly to the officebearers and say "No, I would not do that" or "she is exaggerating" or "she pushed all the right buttons." If it is obvious that abuse has occurred, for example, bruises existing in *exposed* areas, he may say that he will not do it again. The wife will also fall for this sweet talk (she has many times before). She wants to believe him with her hole heart. BUT DO NOT BELIEVE HIM. He does not just have a temper but has psychological problems and she will be in more trouble than before. How can she go to the officebearers then? It only causes more pain.

A woman only leaves an abusive situation when she is so terrified for her children's safety that she cannot do anything but go into the unknown and then only if she has some emotional strength left in her. She is afraid, this time of being rejected by the church, her family, and everyone in her life. She probably cannot financially support herself and her child(ren). She may not have the skills or confidence to get a job. She knows that her husband will not support her; he will say it is her fault that she left him or that he cannot afford to help pay for a roof over their heads, clothing on their backs, or food in their stomachs, even if he is earning more money than she is. SHE IS ALL ALONE.

In closing, I would like to say that when a couple has marital problems, they must do their utmost to solve these problems. But, if a woman has been terrorized to the point where she *must* leave for the safety of her children and herself, she should not be sent back, or be made to feel guilty. She has had enough guilt placed on her already. Abuse is NOT a marital problem. It is a problem which the husband had BEFORE the marriage. The wife would not have known about it. It was hidden from her. This is a deep-rooted psychological problem. The couple should seek professional counselling and should not live to-



CALLED to Burlington South, ON, and Guelph, ON:

Candidate J. VanWoudenberg
of Hamilton, ON.

* * *

CALLED to Elora, ON:

Candidate J.G. Slaa
of Orangeville, ON.

gether until the *counsellor* says that it is safe for the woman and child(ren). If this problem is not dealt with and they do live together, we will only raise more abusers and women (girls) who feel that any man is allowed to mistreat her, sexually molest her and/or emotionally degrade her because she is nothing more than a slave, a worthless piece of property.

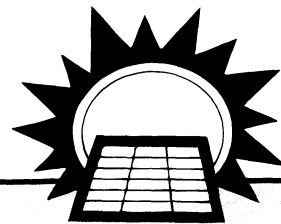
Let us show the women and children in the church that we truly and wholeheartedly love them and therefore care about their well-being. Listen carefully to them. When you gain their trust, they will be able to mention the more serious problems. It takes time, patience and understanding. If they have any hint that you believe the abuser, they will not be able to open up to you. Think very carefully about what you say.

After writing this article, I realized how wrong I was when I thought that the Bible did not deal *with abuse*. *Throughout the Bible we are taught to love and protect one another*. This needs to start at home. "Do not be deceived. God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life" (Galatians 6:7, 8). It is our *duty* to protect women and children from harm (Lord's Day 40, Q/A 107).

Yours in Christ,

(For legal reasons and for my child's sake, I would like to remain anonymous.)





By Mrs. R. Ravensbergen

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

Romans 8:18

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Romans 8 is a beautiful chapter in the Bible: full of comfort, full of hope.

Suffering, many people know what that is: they experience it themselves, or they see it happen around them. There can be so much suffering, that it affects a person's whole life, or even a whole country! But then we read here in Romans: "this suffering is not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." The whole creation is looking forward to that day. Here on earth is groaning. The creation groans, we, people groan, and there is the Spirit, "who intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words."

The creation groans. Everything is moving, restless, and noisy. But nothing is accomplished, for it leads to decay. Yet there is hope, "it will be freed from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God."

We, children of God, are groaning, too. Sure, we received the Holy Spirit, who guides us, and prays for us. But we are still under the power of sin and death, and we are waiting for that glorious day when we will be freed from that power.

The groaning, or sighing of the Holy Spirit is a part of His interceding for us. Those sighs are too deep for words, we cannot understand them. But God does, for they reach His holy throne.

We are still on our way. God's work here on earth is not finished yet. He sees our suffering and our difficulties. But He also sees what we cannot see. He tells us, "Don't be discouraged. I work for good with those who love me, who are called according to my purpose. I will take care of everything. And one day you, my children, will share the eternal happiness with my own Son. Then you will be without sin: justified."

In that knowledge, with that comfort, we can go on again. If God is for us, who can be against us? The future looks good!

Encouraged like that we can go on, even though the suffering is still there. And not only suffering, but also temptations and fears. We will be tempted to follow the examples of the people of the world. Do we really live as God's children, or do we do the things that other people want us to do, even when we know that it is wrong? Do we enjoy being part of the communion of saints, or do we rather skip church on Sundays?

There are also fears. We are worried when we think about the future. What is going to happen to the world, or our country, when God's commandments are not being observed? How can such a coun-

try be blessed? It can only result in chaos, and what is going to happen to us?

But then we have to read our chapter again. For the Lord is in charge. There is hope for God's children, for His church. "Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."

And in that hope, based on the work of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are saved.

*When we cry "Abba! Father!"
The Spirit witness bears
That God made us His children
And we, with Christ, are heirs.
The Spirit as the first fruits
Of glorious liberty,
Helps us await with patience
What we do not yet see.*

Hymn 37:4

Birthdays in September:

Mary VandeBurgt will be 37 on the 11th
32553 Willingdon Crescent
Clearbrook, BC V2T 1S2

Jenny Bontekoe will be 29 on the 14th
"ANCHOR" Home, 30 Road, RR 2
Beamsville, ON L0R 1B0

Paul Dieleman will be 24 on the 29th
307 Connaught Avenue, Willowdale, ON M2R 2M1

We have another request for birthday cards for Marsha Moesker.

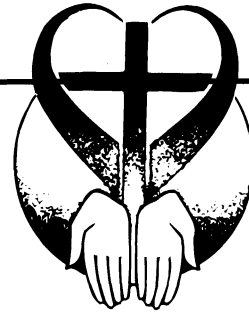
On September 8th she will turn 16.

Marsha is autistic and does not speak. She lives in a home for autistic adolescents. Her address is:

Marsha Moesker
Gateway House
4807 Georgia Street
Delta, BC V4K 2T1

Happy birthday to all four of you.
Until next month,

Mrs. R. Ravensbergen
7462 Hwy. 20, RR 1
Smithville, ON L0R 2A0

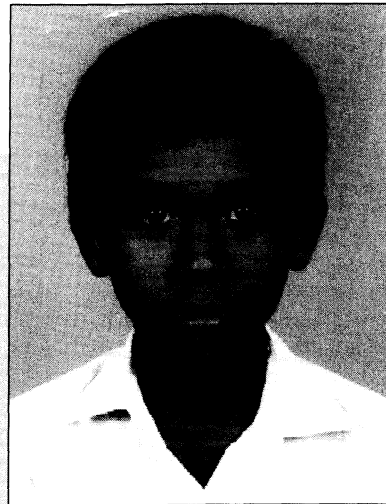


Helping Children in India

Helping children has been a focus of CRWRF since its earliest beginnings. Where poverty, hunger, and strife exist, children are surely among the most helpless and afflicted. And when they are without the protection and support of a loving parent, often their situation is desperate. The provision of a caring home environment is then of paramount importance. Opening Children's Homes where poor and needy kids are cared for is one way of responding to our Lord's command to "bring the homeless poor into your house (Isaiah 58:7).

We cannot begin to make a dent in the tragedy affecting innumerable children living in dire poverty today, yet we can bring hope to a few of these little ones. Our "newest" Children's

David Mayn came to our home since his mother has been unable to find regular work. His father deserted the family



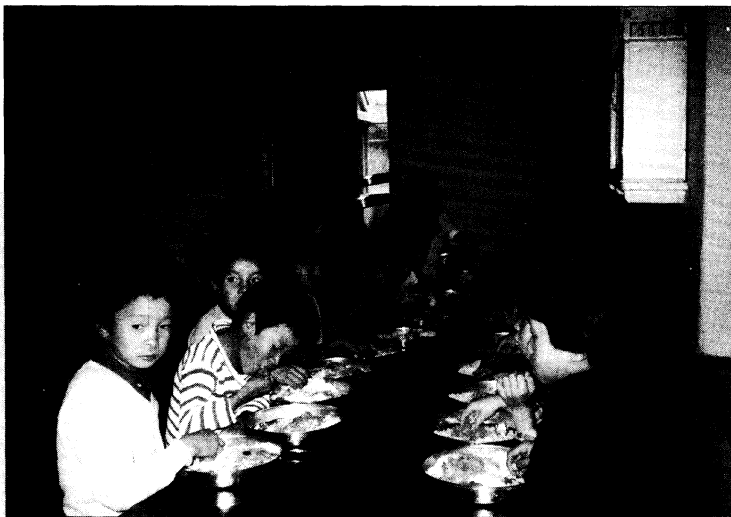
Home opened its doors on *June 1st, 1992* in the town of *Ootacamond*, located in south-west India. The staff have brought 50 needy youngsters into

their (our) house and there attempt not only to meet their immediate temporal needs, but also to show concern for the eternal welfare of the children entrusted to their care.

The climate in this community is pleasant for Ootacamond is located at a comfortable altitude of 6,000 feet. Housing is in an old, spacious 15-room rented home with the eventual hope being to purchase land and build. The children, aged 2-12 years have settled in and are doing well. Those of school-age attend nearby English-language schools.

Both Indian and Tibetan children make up the "Ooty" family. The 25 Indian children come from the surrounding area and while some are parentless, many are from one-parent, impoverished homes. David Mayn is a typical case. His father deserted the family and his whereabouts are unknown. His mother is very poor and has no regular source of income.

Another child, seven-year old Vijaya, is also fatherless. Her father died



The dining hall "scene" at Ooty

when she was three months old and her mother struggles to earn a few rupees by working as a casual labourer. The work is not regular and she faces extreme difficulties and poverty.

The 25 Tibetan children, mostly orphans, have come to "Ooty" from a Resettlement area, Arunchal Pradesh, in northern India near the Indo-Tibetan border. Just reaching "Ooty" involved a 4,000 train trek – quite a journey for youngsters!

Arunchal Pradesh was settled by refugees who fled Tibet prior to or following China's invasion of their country. There seems little chance of ever returning. Though primarily Buddhist, these Tibetans are willing to have their children brought up in a Christian environment. We are very thankful for this chance to share the Good News with those who would not otherwise be exposed to it. What a tremendous opportunity to show the compassion of Christ, and to teach these little ones of the God who is there and who is not silent!

This new home was recommended to us by SREK ("Save a Child") whose representative, Kees Rookmaaker, visits our homes in Kenya regularly and will visit and report on this home in India also. (SREK has many more such homes in India.) Day-to-day supervision is handled by the Divya Shanti Christian Organization whose local governing board gives guidance and direction.

The children are cared for by Mrs. Parimal, who has training in child care, and Mrs. Adilakshmi, who grew up in a children's hostel run by Divya Shanti in Bangalore. We are assured that they are doing excellent work among the children.


Sponsorship has played a significant role in allowing us to open this third children's home. Funds formerly committed to Achego and Kodich were freed for another project when children in those homes received individual sponsors. If participation in this program continues to increase, we may be able to give sponsors to *all* of the children at Achego (all 40 at Kodich are already sponsored) and perhaps expand the program to Ooty. Sponsorship involves a commitment of \$30/month to meet the needs of one particular child. Anyone interested is invited to write us at the address below.



Seven-year-old Vijaya is a part of the Ooty family. Her widowed mother has struggled unsuccessfully to provide for her only child

Thank you for your interest and prayerful support which makes this work possible. May the Lord richly bless our efforts to "satisfy the desire of the afflicted" – in His strength and to the praise of His glory.

*If you pour yourself out for the hungry
And satisfy the desire of the afflicted
Then shall your light rise in the
darkness,
And your gloom shall be as noontide.*

Isaiah 58:10 

Gifts for the works of CRWRF may be directed to:

Canadian Reformed World Relief Fund
PO Box 85225
Burlington, ON L7R 4K4

*All gifts are gladly received.
Donors of \$10.00 or more will be issued a receipt for tax deduction.*

Report of the meeting of the Independent Reformed Churches held in St. Catharines, ON, Saturday, May 29th, 1993

The Deputies in Eastern Canada for the Promotion of Ecclesiastical Unity (appointed by General Synod Lincoln 1992) attended this meeting as observers.

Last year (May 23, 1993) the Canadian Independent Churches met in Wellandport, ON and formed the Confessional Fellowship of Reformed Churches. Since Independent Churches in the U.S.A. were not involved and did not want to be left out of developments towards some sort of federative relationship, the present meeting was held. This meeting was thus a first in its kind, including all Independent Churches in a special meeting apart from the Alliance of Reformed Churches (ARC). It was convened by the independent churches in Pompton Plains (NJ), Wellandport (ON) and St. Catharines (ON).

The chairman, br. Stan Antonides, opened the meeting in a Christian manner, and welcomed all the delegates of the independent churches with the ARC together with observers, visitors and others.

As first point on the agenda, delegates from the Dutton Independent Reformed Church (MI), the Wellandport Orthodox Reformed Church (ON) and Pompton Plains Reformed Bible Church (NJ) presented their papers which they had prepared for this meeting in order to facilitate the discussion about the future of cooperation and possible federation of these Independent Reformed Churches.

The first speaker, the Rev. P. Murphy, minister of the Dutton Independent Reformed Church, presented the stance of his council, which deemed it "necessary, prudent, and visionary, for the Independent Churches to remain inde-

pendent for a while and not to federate formally at this present time."

The Rev. J.S. Gangar, minister of Wellandport Orthodox Reformed Church presented their position, proposing that the member churches of the Alliance of Reformed Churches divide into "two separate organizations with mutual respect and some working relationship," (*viz.*, one organization of churches which have seceded from the CRC and one of those who have not). He suggested that the "wise way forward is for us to federate with each other and then seek ecumenical dialogue with other like-minded denominations."

Thirdly, br. P. Moen of Pompton Plains Church stated that his Council has tended to be a part of the "go slow" approach to structuring a new organization. "We like the idea of an eventual federation among like-minded Reformed Churches but we want to be sure that there is always an open door for new churches or unorganized groups of believers."

All three speakers gave an extensive rationale for their propositions, supporting it with examples from the history of the CRC and explaining the advantages for the autonomous local churches as well as for the better functioning of the ARC.

The three proponents then took place in a panel to facilitate a formal discussion on the matter on the floor: the future of the ARC as well as the possible federation of Independent Churches. For some of the delegates, the ARC sufficiently helps the independent churches deal with matters of protest and appeal, candidacy and other matters of mutual assistance. Those who defended a continued independence did so for the purpose of healing and further ma-

turing of the local congregations to greater autonomy, and they also considered the present opportunities for mutual help adequate. Others, however, stressed the fact that the two groups among the member churches of the ARC had different interests, concerns and needs. They saw the difference especially in the fact that the churches remaining in the CRC live in a broken relationship, while the independent churches are united. The united independent churches would have more of a commitment and cooperation if they form a federation then they now experience in the ARC. Although the conclusion from this discussion could seem to show a difference in three directions the consensus appeared to be that these were three different angles in the same direction. The differences perceived may be matters of process, time and pace, yet the overriding sentiments were positive toward the desire and need for a future federation.

After lunch, the meeting was reopened for further discussion. Before the delegates continued this discussion, opportunity was given for some special presentations. The Rev. C. Ebbings (OPC) spoke for Mid-America Reformed Seminary, sharing greetings and information with the delegates. The Rev. R. Sikkema spoke concerning the Confessional Conference sponsored by the ARC (July 21 - 24 at Wheaton, ILL). The theme of this conference is "Creation and Evolution, a matter of biblical Hermeneutics." They hope to adopt 13 articles of a confession concerning creation and evolution. The Rev. W. Leigh introduced the concept of "Urban Nations," a new organization to reach out to new immigrants in New York City.

The meeting continued to discuss questions pertaining to the different needs of independent and other ARC churches and the possibility of using the ARC as a vehicle for working toward a federation. Attempts to use the ARC for this purpose were defeated in 1991, but seeing that the meeting of the ARC in Nov. '93 will be composed predominantly of independent churches, it will depend on them what the agenda of this ARC meeting will contain. During the pursuant discussion some important topics of the nature, structure, and extent of a federation were raised in view of the different pre-

sentation. The Dutton council desires a broader manifestation of the unity of the church than has been the case in the past (unite Presbyterian and Reformed) while the Wellandport Council wants to continue in the path of the past, using the Church Order of Dort which is based on principles and guidelines derived from the Bible. Others promoted the idea that the ecumenicity be explored with the Canadian Reformed Churches, the O.C.R. Churches, the Free Reformed Churches, in order to come to a federation including all "conservative churches" as propounded by the Burlington Confer-

ences. In order to avoid denominationalism as well as independentism, the importance of federating with churches which are united in the unity of the true faith was stressed.

Although attempts failed to bring the meeting to a close with the expression of its consensus in the form of a motion, the consensus of the meeting was to move towards some sort of federation and to do so through the ARC.

For the Eastern Deputies
W. den Hollander



A United Reformed Church in Our Time?

The conference involving the independent churches and the Canadian Reformed churches of Alberta that gathered to discuss the unity of their churches, was very informative and was conducted in a good spirit.

Unity talks are not new in the history of the Reformed churches. I have been reading recently about the efforts which took place in the Netherlands in 1892. It took 60 years to accomplish. I doubt that my grandchildren are going to be interested in our present unity discussions 60 years from now. However, with the aid of modern communications systems and the speed at which they work, unity can and should be achieved in this century, and if not, it may as well be written off.

I realize the hesitancy of some to get into yet another church federation, especially after having left a very powerful hierarchical system; one which believes in its own manmade ideas and which will not tolerate those who differ, even if those differences are based on a belief in the infallibility of the Bible as that comes to expression in the confessions.

The persons involved in unity discussions, primarily the ministers, already overworked in their congregations, will have difficulty finding the time to do the matter justice. One of

the most important questions will be: "Should past divisions be ignored, or should they be used to test today's decisions to prevent future problems?" I prefer the latter approach.

In 1968 a group of church members in the Netherlands left the Reformed Church (Art. 31). This group is now known as the Netherlands Reformed Church. These churches are very local. Over the last 25 years some disconcerting changes have arisen among these churches. Some are still as the churches they left in 1968. Others have allowed or fostered changes such as children at the Lord's Supper, some are contemplating women in office, while some have allowed for women deacons. What was the reason for the changes among these churches? The lack of a real church federation perhaps? And then there was the lack of their own college or seminary to fill the vacancies of retiring ministers. Also, one man churches, such as Rev. Spurgeon's in London, England, or like Rev. Scholte in Pella, Iowa, had no future. Once these ministers passed on, the church membership dwindled, and it did not take long for these churches to disappear. Noting these problems, it seems to me that a church federation is necessary, also for the purpose of training future ministers.

In forming a United Reformed Church consisting, for instance, of independent churches, Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches, Canadian and American Reformed Churches, and possibly other denominations, a new federation would be born. It is not a matter of one church denomination swallowing another; no, it will be a federation of all the involved churches, with a new name.

To get the ball rolling, those churches (and denominations) involved could have committees meeting with each other to report back to their consistories, etc. To avoid the process from going too slowly and thus allowing apathy to set in, the first item that should be agreed upon should be a timetable with a definite date for unity in mind, and work towards that.

If this scenario becomes a reality, then I, Deo Volente, will see unity in my time and I will be a member of the United Reformed Churches in this century.

Ralph Winkel (63)
Edmonton, Alberta

Note of the Editor: It is clear that church unity is still an important matter for Canadian Reformed people.

