

Clarion

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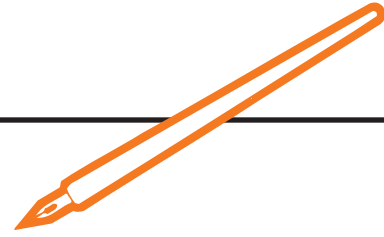


The Reformers

Numbers

10:1-10

By J. Geertsema



Emotion-filled holistic enthusiasm from Mexico

At first sight, the title may seem to indicate a New Age kind of experience. This is a wrong impression. These words are a positive characterization of an address presented at a meeting organized by the Burlington Reformed Study Centre. The address was delivered by Dr. J.P. Roberts. He spoke about "The Reformation in Mexico." Dr. Roberts is a professor at the *Seminario Teológico Juan Calvino* of the Independent Presbyterian Church in Mexico City. *Clarion* has recently introduced Dr. Roberts and the seminary to its readers in a report by Dr. C. Van Dam. Dr. Van Dam reflected on a visit he had made to this seminary last May. My intent is not to give a report, but rather to share with you my thoughts and reflections on the meeting in Burlington.

Enthusiasm

The first thing that struck me was Dr. Roberts' enthusiasm for the Reformed faith. He stressed the great importance of the Reformed faith, not for its own sake, but because it confesses the teaching of God's Word in all its riches. It is this Reformed, Biblical faith that the people in Mexico need to hear and by which they (and all other nations) must live. When practised, this faith will build up individuals, families, societies, even entire nations. Dr. Roberts said that there is proof of this in history. He drew our attention to the positive development after the Reformation in those nations where the Calvinist faith had taken root and permeated the thinking and actions of the people.

Holistic

Dr. Roberts calls the Calvinist, Reformed faith "holistic." "Holistic" comes from the Greek adjective which means "whole." "Holistic," therefore, means that the whole of life, life in all its aspects, is taken into account. To understand what Dr. Roberts means by "holistic faith" we need to begin with the triune God in all His works. We need to begin with the "whole" of God, so to speak. We must begin with Father, Son, and Spirit, and with their "whole" triune work as this is revealed to us in Scripture and as we confess it as Reformed believers. The work of the triune God can best be described with the words of the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 8: God the Father and our creation, God the Son and our redemption, and God the Holy Spirit and our sanctification. Just as Father, Son and Spirit are one God, one "whole," so also are their works of creation, redemption, and sanctification, a unity, one "whole."

This not only means that the Father made all things, upholds and governs all things through His Son (John 1:3; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16-17; Heb. 1:2-3) and that the Spirit was actively involved also (Gen. 1:2). It not only means that the

three divine Persons were also working together in redemption and sanctification. It also means (and this is very important) that the three-fold works of the triune God have the same *object*. Christ Jesus came down to this earth and entered our life as a human child in order to deliver creation from the grip of sin, Satan, and the curse; He came to redeem that which God had created through Himself. And the Holy Spirit sanctifies that very same creation of God which Christ Jesus redeemed through His cross.

World view

This has great consequences for a Biblical world view. If Christ Jesus is Redeemer and Lord of all that God created, having been appointed by God as the great King and heir of heaven and earth, He must also then be acknowledged as the Redeemer King of creation. Our Lord Jesus Christ has declared that He is the Redeemer for all in order that He might be Lord over all. He is the Redeemer of all creation. He has redeemed creation from the destructive grip of the adversary (who is the deceiver and murderer from the beginning) and from the grip of unbelief and rebellion, as well as from the curse as the consequence of sin. Since Christ now has accomplished the redemption of creation from the curse, reconciling it to God through His blood (Col. 1:20-21), He has also poured out His Holy Spirit upon His church to begin the sanctification of creation for God. This process of sanctification will be fully accomplished when the Lord returns; then there will be a new heaven and a new earth. Now, however, the church must begin to sanctify this created life by living wholly in the service of Christ. The church calls the whole world with the gospel to this same faith and this same sanctification.

Faith is a gift of grace

Faith in Christ as Redeemer is a gift of grace to believers received from the Creator and heavenly Father. But what does this gift of faith in Christ as Redeemer mean in daily life? Believers must now live as those who have been redeemed by Christ, through His blood and Spirit. Their lives are no longer in the grip of Satan; they no longer live for sin. Their lives are lived for their God. They live for their Creator and Redeemer and Sanctifier. This is true, first of all, for their whole(!) personal life and walk with God. This is also true, however, within the many relationships which they have in God's creation. Believers receive their place in church life, in their marriage and family, in their daily work and the labour relations in which they live, as gifts from their Creator and Redeemer and Sanctifier. They must, therefore,

dedicate these relationships to the service of their triune God. (see Eph. 5:21-6:9 and Col. 3:18-4:1).

All of life

The redeeming power of Christ and His claim on creation and created life, however, is not limited to the church, nor to the families, nor to the labour of believers. This redeeming power is for *all* created life, in all its aspects. Christ's redeeming work is a power for society as a whole, and for the nation as a whole. In all of life, and therefore education too, believers need to acknowledge God as Creator, His Son as Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit as Sanctifier. Therefore, Christians seek to build Christian schools where the Word, the gospel, of the triune God dominates all instruction. Christians must establish schools which teach citizens how to build a Christian society under King Jesus Christ; believers must found schools where citizens can learn how the Word of the Creator Redeemer can and must sanctify the politics of a nation for God. This confession for all created life – this holistic gospel – that Christ is the Redeemer through His blood, and Sanctifier through His Holy Spirit, is what makes Dr. Roberts so enthusiastic today (as it did Augustine and John Calvin, Abraham Kuyper and Klaas Schilder, before him).

It is the proclamation and promotion of this confession of which Dr. Roberts spoke in such an emotional way. This confession of Christ must be the basis of the "Reformation in Mexico." And who, having come to know this gospel of Jesus Christ, God's eternal Son, through whom God created and redeemed and sanctifies His creation, would not become enthusiastic and emotional?

Emotion

Now the question is: Can we still recognize this enthusiasm in our midst? Or are we forgetting this reformation-truth, this heritage of the 16th century Reformation, and of the Doleantie, and of the Liberation? The gospel of Christ does not leave us luke-warm or even cold, does it? For this is the message of Christ for a lost world, given to the church to proclaim and to live it! Are we still emotional about it? The heading uses the word "emotion-filled." Enthusiasm implies emotion. Dr. Roberts is enthusiastic about the "holistic" Reformed faith that leads to an "holistic" reformation of all of life. Yet, he warned against the emotionalism which is often the basis, the driving force and the content of much Christian belief in non-Reformed churches. That emotionalism builds on feelings rather than on doctrine. For exactly that reason, it does not lead to an "holistic" reformation. It remains very much restricted to one's own soul, Dr. Roberts explained. It also does not build society or nation. It does not build schools either. However, the Biblical doctrine of Christ as Redeemer of what God created, when received and practised in enthusiastic (emotional) faith, does build nation, society, schools, and families.

Mexico

May God bless the Reformed faith in Mexico. May He bring forth a Reformation in that country, to His glory and the up-building of the nation. May He preserve this faith in the rest of North-America as well. May He bless it for the same purpose.

And let us remember the warning of Christ: The first will be last and the last first.



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By D.G.J. Agema

Consecrate to Me every firstborn male

¹ The LORD said to Moses, ² "Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether man or animal...."

¹¹ "After the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites and gives it to you, as He promised on oath to you and your forefathers, ¹² you are to give over to the LORD the first offspring of every womb. All the firstborn males of your livestock belong to the LORD. ¹³ Redeem with a lamb every firstborn donkey, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck. Redeem every firstborn among your sons.

¹⁴ "In days to come, when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' say to him, 'With a mighty hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ¹⁵ When Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed every firstborn in Egypt, both man and animal. This is why I sacrifice to the LORD the first male offspring of every womb and redeem each of my firstborn sons.' ¹⁶ And it will be like a sign on your hand and a symbol on your forehead that the LORD brought us out of Egypt with His mighty hand."

Exodus 13:1-2; 11-16

When a baby is born to parents in the congregation then the parents will bring this baby to church in order to have it baptized. In the Church order we stipulate that the consistory must see to it that this happens as soon as feasible. One of the first "journeys" we make in life is to church to be baptized. In Israel the birth of a baby was also surrounded with ceremonies. There was the circumcision of boys on the eighth day. There were the sacrifices for the mother. But there was also the redemption of each first born

male. The father had to pay five shekels to redeem his oldest son.

We find the law concerning this redemption in Exodus 13. When you read these verses you notice that this law applies to humans as well as animals. Also the first male of each animal had to be redeemed. It is even so important that when you cannot redeem that animal, you shall break its neck. There were two options: life through redemption or death. In connection with the oldest boy there was no command to

kill when redemption was not possible. The command is simple: redeem. The message is that without redemption there is no life possible in Israel.

However, this is not how the commandment begins. The LORD says to Moses, consecrate to me all first born. What does it mean to consecrate a child? You find the answer in verse 2: "Whatever opens the womb is mine, says the LORD." To be consecrated means that the LORD says "You are Mine. You belong to Me." It is as if the

What's inside?

Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation! This is the command the Lord Jesus left with His church in Mark 16:15. Obedient to that command we preach the gospel in our churches at home, and we send out missionaries. This issue of *Clarion* features several reports about missionaries and mission work.

For almost 40 years, the church at Toronto has had a missionary working in Irian Jaya. Rev. Henry Versteeg has worked there on behalf of Toronto for the past 20 years. A few days after his 20th anniversary, there was a changing of the guard in Toronto. Rev. Versteeg is moving on to be Chatham's minister; the Rev. Stephen 't Hart is taking up the missionary mantle and is being sent to PNG. Diane Kampen writes about these significant events in Toronto.

Surrey and Hamilton have missionaries in Brazil. These churches and their missionaries participate in the Latin American Mission Conference. Rev. John Kroeze writes about the recent meeting of this conference.

As churches, we support MERF which propagates the gospel in the Middle East. Mrs. C. (Joanne) Van Dam and the Rev. J. Mulder fill us in on the work the Lord Jesus Christ is doing through MERF.

The ICRC had its fourth meeting this past October. Several of the papers presented at that conference had to do with missions. We publish the press release of the recent meeting.

To train missionaries, you need seminaries. We recently had the privilege of meeting Dr. J.P. Roberts of the John Calvin Seminary in Mexico City who told us about the work the Lord is doing in Mexico. Prof. Geertsema touches on this in his editorial.

Two issues back, Dr. Riemer Faber introduced us to Melanchthon. Dr. Faber has kindly supplied us with a second article on Melanchthon – specifically about the man's place among the Reformers.

In addition, you will find a few other contributions. We hope you will enjoy this issue.

GvP

LORD puts a stamp of ownership on this oldest boy. "You are mine, therefore your father has to redeem you and you can now live with Me."

Why would this apply only to the oldest boy? Is the oldest better than the rest? Are boys more important than girls? No, all children in Israel belonged to the LORD and His covenant. Then why take only the first born? Because the first born is the symbol of all that follows. The Israelites were used to this symbolism. When they brought the first fruits to the LORD, then these first fruits represented the whole harvest. So also when it comes to the children of Israel. The children born in the covenant belong to the LORD. It applies to the baby you carry in your arms, to the toddler that learns to walk, to the child that starts grade one, to the teenager that struggles with him/herself. They belong to the LORD. Their baptism signs and seals it.


At the same time we know that our children are sinners like all other children, like all of us. How is it then possible that the LORD God adopts them for His own? We have to keep in mind the close connection between consecration

and redemption, as shown in Exodus 13. The LORD says these children are mine, therefore they need to be redeemed. The background of this command is what happened in Egypt. It refers to what happened with the first born in Egypt, they were killed by the angel of God. At the same time, in Israel, the firstborn were kept alive. Why was this? It was because there was blood on the sides and the top of the door frames. No blood meant, death. Blood meant, life.

The LORD therefore says to His people, "Through this blood you have become mine." The blood on the door frames in Goshen points to the blood of Christ. In Him we are sanctified. In Him we have been ransomed. No, our fathers do not have to go to redeem their oldest sons, we may bring our children to be baptized. Yes, they are conceived and born in sin. Yes, they are even subject to condemnation, but thanks to God He redeems them through Christ.

Our children do not know about this at the time they are baptized. The children in Israel did not know about their redemption either. In itself that is no hindrance for being grafted into His covenant. At the same time the LORD

shows that it cannot stay this way. Eventually these children will have to come to know it. That is the task of the parents. In verse 14 the LORD says that when in time to come your son asks you, "What does this mean?" then you have to explain to your son that the LORD has redeemed us with His mighty arm.

It is wonderful to bring your child to church to be baptized. It is also wonderful to say, "I do." But then, we have to do it too. Then, we are called to teach our children how rich they are, and what this means for their daily lives. Sure it also means that we send them to catechism instruction and to our schools, but as parents we have the calling to teach them. This teaching is not saying it once and expect that the children will know it. It means that as parents we have to be consistent and patient. We have to make our instruction understandable to them in their circumstances. This is not easy. It can lead to struggles between parents and children. Rather than let it escalate into a power struggle, let us as parents and children together marvel at the grace of our Lord. Let us together ask Him for His grace and Holy Spirit. 

Melanchthon's place among the Reformers

By R. Faber

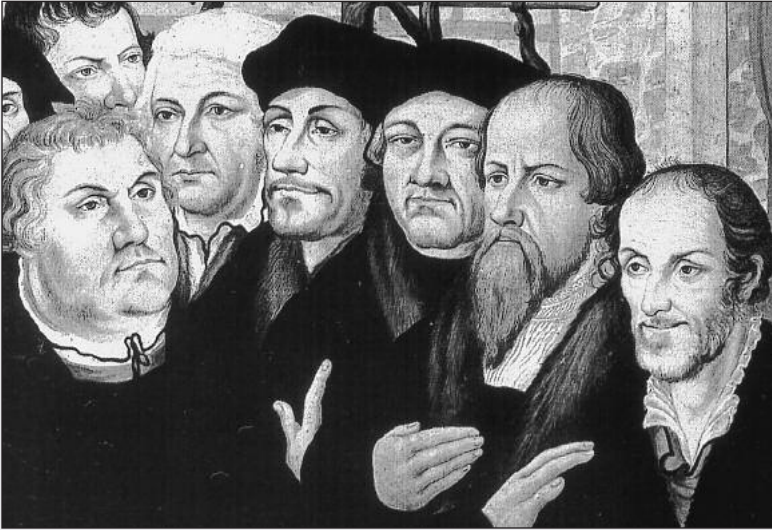
Philipp Melanchthon (1497-1560) was one of the most important reformers of the sixteenth century, but he is not well-known today. The titles of three modern biographies express the humble status he has achieved: *Reformer without Honour*; *The Quiet Reformer*; *The Unknown Melanchthon*.¹ Explanations offered for this fact rest mainly upon the negative reception of Melanchthon's teaching in the period immediately following the Reformation and in the two centuries following his death in 1560. Also, Melanchthon's own voluminous writings, though very clear, are not readily understood. For his thought developed throughout his life, and earlier teaching appears to be contradicted by later convictions. Furthermore, as a

diplomatic reformer, Melanchthon stressed different, even opposing ideas as the circumstance demanded, so that his writings may appear inconsistent to the modern reader. Compared to his close friend Martin Luther, Melanchthon has received little attention.

The lack of interest may have come to an end with the five hundredth anniversary of his birth, an event celebrated in his native Germany and abroad by numerous publications, conferences and exhibitions. Modern scholarship is turning its attention more and more to events and figures other than the well-known ones of the Reformation, with the consequence that also the works of Melanchthon are studied again. But the exact nature of

Melanchthon's contribution to the Reformation will not be easily described, and no doubt differences will remain regarding his significance even after this year of renewed interest.

One way to assess Melanchthon's role is to consider him in relation to the other reformers. As a key negotiator in the theological and political manoeuvrings, Melanchthon was highly sensitive to the various opinions held by his contemporaries. As the following article seeks to demonstrate, Melanchthon occupied a mediating position on several doctrinal and political issues. As the Reformation unfolded, and as the political alignments shifted during the stormy years of the sixteenth century, Melanchthon sought



The Reformers
– Philipp Melancthon (far right)

to steer Wittenberg diplomatically on a middle course. Especially in his relation to the “great men” of the Reformation – Erasmus, Luther and Calvin – Melancthon reveals a moderating approach to the controversies. Three issues will be treated here: the doctrine of the human will, the teaching of the Lord’s Supper, and the position of reformers towards Roman Catholicism.

Melancthon and Erasmus

Erasmus was not a reformer; but he did “lay the egg that Luther hatched.” And as a forerunner of the Reformation, Erasmus helped to set the agenda pursued in the sixteenth century. The attitudes of the reformers to the “prince of humanists” reveal their attitudes to one of the most complex features of the sixteenth century, namely the relationship between christian Reformation and Renaissance humanism. For the humanism represented by Erasmus comprised not only the learning and literature of antiquity, but also its norms and values. The reaction of each reformer to the Biblical humanism of Erasmus is revealing, but especially that of Melancthon, who was arguably the most “humanist” reformer.²

Erasmus and Melancthon shared a deep admiration of antiquity, a pursuit of learning and eloquence, and intellectual tolerance. Both were peace-loving men who disliked ecclesiastical polemics. Especially in the first years of the Reformation, Melancthon was attracted to the senior Dutch scholar. Erasmus had praised Melancthon’s first major publication – a Greek grammar – and suggested that the young scholar would make an important mark. For his part Melancthon showed a debt to Erasmus by composing the *Loci Communes* in a form and style Erasmus

had advocated. When Melancthon joined the University of Wittenberg, Erasmus reacted with the thought that Philipp would have a positive, moderating influence on Luther. However, Melancthon’s expressed support of the Reformation caused the wary Erasmus to become more cautious towards him.

His early writings suggest that Melancthon did not consider Erasmus very different from the Wittenberg reformers; by 1522, however, he notes a growing difference between the sort of change promoted within Roman Catholicism and that advocated by the Wittenbergers. In a brief discussion of the differences between Luther and Erasmus, Melancthon makes the following observations.³ Luther teaches the true Christian proclamation not understood by the world and secular reason; that is, “how we ought to be comforted over against death and the judgement of God, and how we ought to conduct our lives against all the wiles of Satan and against the power of the gates of hell.” Such proclamation is revealed in Scripture alone. Erasmus, on the other hand, teaches what also “the pagan philosophers taught,” namely good morals and civil norms. “But I ask,” writes Melancthon, “what does philosophy have to do with Christ? Or what does the Holy Spirit have in common with the blind reason of human beings? Whoever pursues this sort of theology may advocate charity but does not teach *faith*.”⁴ Melancthon notes that, unlike Luther, Erasmus wrongly assumes that man in his natural state is capable of decisions that lead him toward righteousness. He believes that philosophy can improve the condition of the soul. Melancthon and Luther teach that the will of the natural man is “bound” to do evil, and that righteous-

ness comes only by God’s grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Erasmus admired Melancthon’s scholarship and literary skills, but not the substance of his teaching.

In 1524 Luther and Erasmus clashed openly over the doctrine of the human will. Erasmus taught that the will is able to make proper moral decisions even in its natural state; Luther stressed depravity and the inability of the natural will to decide anything good. Meanwhile Melancthon feared that the rift would separate not only Erasmus from Luther, but all contemporary humanists from reformers. He sought to mediate between the two for a while in the hopes that humanism might be kept in the service of the Reformation, but in the end he had to state that he sided with Luther. Melancthon had adopted Luther’s distinction between Law and Gospel, as well as his starting point in the total depravity of mankind. However, he was not unaffected by Erasmus’ teaching on predestination and the freedom of the will, and in the end he assumed an intermediate position.

Melancthon’s teaching on human will became known later as the “synergist” position. This term derives from the word “working together” in 2 Corinthians 6:11, where we read: “Working together with Him, we entreat you not to accept the grace of God in vain.” Melancthon believed that the will of the human was not inactive or totally passive in the process of regeneration. In the 1521 edition of the *Loci Communes* he had written that mankind possesses free will only in “external matters” – what one wears, what food one chooses to eat. Regarding the inner matters of the heart, however, we possess no virtuous free will

that is capable of meriting righteousness. But by 1537, Melanchthon emphasizes the responsibility of the believer “to work out his own salvation” (Phil. 2:12). Accordingly, he writes in a series of theses on the topic: “Our will cannot succeed without the Holy Spirit, but when it arises and supports itself by the Gospel, it does so by the aid of the Holy Spirit. . . . I do not approve of the Manicheans, who attribute no activity to the human will, not even when assisted by the Holy Spirit (CR 12.481).” In a similar vein, he writes in the 1540 (“*variata*”) edition of the *Augsburg Confession*: “Man’s will has no power without the Holy Spirit to work spiritual righteousness. . . . Spiritual righteousness is wrought in us when we are helped by the Holy Spirit. And we receive the Holy Spirit when we assent to the word of God.”⁵ He did not speak of co-operation as a Pelagian would, but he did ascribe to the human will an active role in the regenerating work of God the Spirit.

One way to explain this development in Melanchthon’s thought is to state that whereas Luther emphasized the total depravity of the unconverted, Melanchthon alerted believers to their responsibility as regenerated creatures. The basis for this emphasis was a conviction that the power of the Spirit to make a new creation of the elect should not be underestimated. Furthermore, Melanchthon had observed in his visitations that many who claimed to be reformed were not in fact reforming their lives. The “Zwickau affair” showed him how easily society can become normless when bolstered by a fervent but insubstantial teaching that does not promote individual duty. Melanchthon stressed that believers must show true repentance in their conduct and speech, since all will be judged according to their works. The regenerate man has a responsibility to act morally.⁶ When seen in this light, Melanchthon’s thought on the human will may, like some of his other convictions, be interpreted as an attempt to temper Luther’s more radical position. E.P. Meijering concludes that Melanchthon never did abandon the Reformed teaching on the depravity of fallen humanity.⁷

Melanchthon and Luther

When Frederick “the Wise” appointed Melanchthon professor of Greek at Wittenberg University in 1518, Martin Luther was not impressed. He had hoped the Elector would give the chair

to Peter Mosellanus of Leipzig. By the time Melanchthon uttered the last words of his inaugural lecture, however, he had dispelled any qualms Luther might have harboured. Melanchthon’s rejection of medieval scholasticism, his promotion of the classical languages and return to the Bible were convictions Luther applauded. While significant differences later developed between the two reformers, Luther and Melanchthon always remained close friends. “Melanchthon was the only humanist with whom Luther came to terms and whom he tolerated. We may even go so far as to say that he entered into an alliance with him.”⁸

Differences between Luther and Melanchthon are grounded especially in the careers of their youth and in their characters. Luther was a monk who by a personal, even troubled experience was led to discover justification by faith alone. Melanchthon was a cultured humanist who by learning came to the source of the Christian belief. Both ended up at the Bible. Luther was capable of crude manners and expressions; Melanchthon was courteous and civil. Luther was steadfast and unflinching; Melanchthon occasionally affected by doubt and lack of confidence. Luther’s writing style was graphic and expressive; Melanchthon’s precise and accurate. Luther, knowing the effects of sin in life, trusted solely in the mercy and providence of God; Melanchthon worried for his own responsibility in the reform of the church. And while Luther wished merely to return the church to its true worship, Melanchthon wanted to develop a universal system of knowledge. From these antitheses it is clear that Melanchthon was Luther’s fellow worker, not his follower.

Divergences over the doctrine of the Lord’s Supper almost drove Melanchthon away from Wittenberg, and it is testimony to Luther’s and Melanchthon’s commitment to the Reformation that their friendship was not broken. At issue was the “local inclusion” or physical presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in the elements. According to Luther this tenet was supported by the text “this is my body” (1 Corinthians 11:24). Melanchthon had presented Luther’s position – later referred to as “con-substantiation” – in his discussions with Zwingli at the Marburg Colloquy of 1529, but it was clearly a teaching he himself could not advance. There are two basic reasons why Melanchthon did not agree with Luther: 1) other biblical texts supporting

Luther’s position are not convincing; 2) the church of the apostolic and patristic eras allowed for a figurative explanation of 1 Corinthians 11:24.

Melanchthon moved towards a Calvinistic position especially through the influence of his fellow student, Oecolampadius, and Martin Bucer. In the 1535 edition of the *Loci Communes* he abandons Luther’s position openly, stating that the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in the elements of the Supper is real, but not physical. Calvin was pleased that Melanchthon accepted a more “spiritualist” understanding of the real presence, but he was somewhat annoyed that Melanchthon had been so slow in revealing his true colours. However, there were good grounds for Melanchthon’s caution, as later developments show. For the Gnesio-Lutherans would perceive Melanchthon’s shift as a serious challenge against Luther’s teaching. It was at the cost of much abuse from radical Lutherans that Melanchthon made the shift from the view of “local inclusion” of the sacrament.

Later followers of Luther branded Melanchthon a traitor to the Reformation also in the matter of relations with Rome and the pope. And here, too, understanding of Melanchthon’s role evokes some sympathy. Together with the other reformers, but more so, Melanchthon had hoped that reform would not necessitate departure from the Romanist church. This desire to accommodate the pope is most evidenced in Melanchthon’s negotiations at the diet of Augsburg (1530). One view of Melanchthon’s behaviour at Augsburg is that while Luther was prevented from attending by the imperial ban, Melanchthon nearly bartered away key tenets of the Reformed faith for the sake of coming to an agreement with Rome.⁹ Also when he subscribed to the *Smalcald Articles* in 1537, Melanchthon revealed a readiness to allow the pope to maintain his authority over the bishops “for the sake of peace and general concord among Christians.” It is for this reason that the motto of the 1997 commemorations of Melanchthon’s birth in Germany is “Melanchthon: Born for Dialogue.”

The difference in attitude to Rome between Luther and Melanchthon may be ascribed in part to the latter’s confidence in human reason. Luther rejected outright any confidence in the understanding of “learned men;” he placed all his trust in the providence of God. When Luther, confident in the faith, would have stopped the dialogue with

the Romanists, Melanchthon, relying upon reason, continued it. A letter from the absent Luther to Melanchthon at Augsburg illustrates the difference: "It is not in our power to place or tolerate anything in God's church or in His service which cannot be defended by the Word of God, and I am vexed not a little by this talk of compromise, which is a scandal to God. With this one word 'mediation' I could easily make all the laws and ordinances of God matters of compromise."¹⁰ On the basis of this and similar evidence, assessments of Melanchthon's behaviour at Augsburg have not been favourable. His view of emperor Charles V was much too idealistic, and his hopes for reconciliation with Rome were unrealistic. But it is also characteristic of Melanchthon that, after the negotiations had broken down, he published the so-called *Apology to the Augsburg Confession*, a document that once again strongly defends the Reformed position and harshly attacks the Romanists.

Melanchthon and Calvin

Relations between Melanchthon and Calvin were marked by a deep mutual respect. Also trained as a humanist, the younger Calvin appreciated Melanchthon's rejection of medieval scholasticism and speculative theology. Calvin's first scholarly work, a commentary on a work by the philosopher Seneca, had earned him a place in the company of the finest academics such as Melanchthon, and revealed his interest in the relationship between faith and intellectual culture. Melanchthon's precise formulations and exact definitions appealed to Calvin. And Melanchthon's conduct in international affairs had earned him respect in France, where his eloquent expression of the faith was more appreciated than that of Luther. It is not surprising, therefore, that scholars have found considerable evidence of Melanchthon's influence upon Calvin.

The most significant influence of Melanchthon upon Calvin concerns the *Institutes*. It has been shown that especially the first edition of Calvin's work was indebted to Melanchthon's *Loci Communes*.¹¹ The chapters dealing with the Law contain ideas and expressions similar to Melanchthon's, and Calvin's concept of the three-fold use of the ten commandments appears to be a specific instance of such influence. However, in many cases Calvin refines Melanchthon's already nuanced ideas. Especially on the doctrine of the natural will, Calvin advances beyond

his colleague. For, as D. Steinmetz shows, while Melanchthon posits that man has a limited knowledge of God and His justice, Calvin – closer to Luther than to Erasmus – responds by noting that mankind is so utterly blind by nature that it cannot perceive the existence and justice of God that is indeed revealed in nature.¹² Such developments in doctrine attest to the benefit Calvin received from the theological deliberations of his older contemporaries, and especially Melanchthon.

Calvin admired Melanchthon's ability to formulate the reformed faith; he did not, however, appreciate Melanchthon's apparent vacillations at the important theological and political diets. Although evidence suggests that Calvin signed the *Augsburg Confession* of 1540, he was not very satisfied with it.¹³ In a letter to Farel in 1541 he writes: "Philipp and Bucer have composed ambiguous and insincere formulas concerning transubstantiation, so as to try to satisfy the opposing party by giving nothing. I could not agree with this method. . . (CR 39.217)." While Melanchthon wished to leave the issue of the "local inclusion" an open question for the time being, Calvin thought that open treatment of this doctrine should not be suppressed for the sake of political gains.

Calvin appreciated Melanchthon's intellectual tolerance, but he felt at times that too much was granted by him for the sake of conciliation. In a lengthy letter to Melanchthon in 1550 he writes that he cannot exonerate Melanchthon for yielding so much to the papists: "You should not have made so many concessions to the papists; for you have loosed those things the Lord has bound up in His Word, and you have granted them the opportunity to bring shame upon the Gospel (CR 41.594)." In this matter of relations with Rome, Calvin thought, Melanchthon had over-stepped the boundary between doctrines "concerning which there could be no dispute" and those over which difference of opinion should be tolerated. Yet he did share with Melanchthon the desire to aim for unity wherever doctrinal harmony warranted it.

Conclusion

Melanchthon's role in mediating the Reformation was considerable. Sensitive to the doctrinal and political differences among the diverse parties of Protestantism and Roman Catholicism, he promoted open communication. At times this approach was admired: Luther stated that he "cannot tread so

softly and gently as Philipp can." At other times Melanchthon's conciliatory approach was reckoned as compromise. Yet his expressions of the reformed faith in several key confessions was appreciated by his contemporaries, and his moderating influence was admired by all non-radical reformers. The refinement Melanchthon brought to the key doctrines of the natural will and the Lord's Supper served to advance the understanding of Scripture and its teachings. The gratitude of the reformers for Melanchthon's role may be summed up by the following description by Luther: "I am here in order to do battle with the sectarians and the devil; this is why my books are very aggressive and argumentative. I must uproot stumps and tree-trunks; cut down thorns and thickets, and fill in water-pools. I am the rough woodsman who must build a road and keep it open. But Master Philipp moves about quietly and in an orderly fashion; he builds and plants, sows and waters according to the great gifts which God has given him so amply."¹⁴

¹Respectively by M. Rogness, C. Manschreck, and R. Stupperich (Originally: *Der Unbekannte Melanchthon*).

²The most exhaustive treatment of Melanchthon's "humanism" remains A. Sperl, *Melanchthon. Zwischen Humanismus und Reformation* (Munich, 1959).

³The interpretation of this passage in *De Erasmo et Luthero Elogion* (1522) differs from that offered in C. Manschreck, *Melanchthon: The Quiet Reformer* (New York, 1958), 115.

⁴Bretschneider, C.G., Bindseil, H.E, eds., *Corpus Reformatorum* (Halle, 1834-), vol. 20, 699-700. Subsequent references to these volumes appear as "CR."

⁵Quoted from Manschreck, 300.

⁶Thus M. Rogness, *Philip Melanchthon. Reformer without Honour* (Minneapolis, 1969), 126-129.

⁷E.P. Meijering, *Melanchthon and Patristic Thought* (Leiden, 1983), 183.

⁸Thus W. Pauck, "Luther and Melanchthon," in V. Vatja, *Luther and Melanchthon* (Philadelphia, 1960), 13.

⁹Thus R. Stupperich, *Melanchthon* (English Translation; Philadelphia, 1965), 82-92.

¹⁰Quoted from C. Manschreck, 204.

¹¹Thus A. Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin* (translated by D. Foxgrover, W. Provo; Philadelphia, 1987), 146-151.

¹²D. Steinmetz, *Calvin in Context* (Oxford, 1995), ch. 2: "Calvin and the Natural Knowledge of God."

¹³For Calvin's reaction to the *Augsburg Confession* see W. Nijenhuis, *Ecclesia Reformata* (Leiden, 1983), ch. 5, "Calvin and the Augsburg Confession."

¹⁴From the Preface to the German translation of Melanchthon's interpretation of the Epistle to Colossians (1529); quoted from Pauck, 25.





More dreams

W. Robert Godfrey, president of Westminster Theological Seminary in Escondido, CA., is among a more prominent group of CRC leaders in the West that have come to the point of leaving the CRC. According to reports in *Christian Renewal*, these men have come to the conclusion that there is no hope for a positive change in the CRCNA. Two California churches leaving the CRC federation, First Chino and Escondido, stated that they will be looking for people from other denominations to present their denominations to them for possible affiliation. Presbyterian churches will also be considered in their affiliation strategies. One church in the greater Grand Rapids area has recently joined the OPC.

In the midst of this additional wave of departures from the CRC, Dr. Godfrey offers his reflections as to what means should be employed to come to greater unity among confessionally orthodox Reformed and Presbyterian churches. His "dream" as he calls it, recently published in *Outlook* and in *Christian Renewal* takes the following form:

In North America today we have many confessionally Reformed denominations: for example, Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, Free Reformed Churches, Korean-American Presbyterian Church, Netherlands Reformed Churches, Orthodox Christian Reformed Churches, Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Presbyterian Church in America, Protestant Reformed Churches, Reformed Church of the United States, Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, United Reformed Churches. Each of these denominations has a distinctive history. Each has struggled in its own context to spread and defend the Reformed faith. Each treasures the Reformed confessions and has sought to live and minister according to them.

Each of these denominations has peculiar strengths and emphases that it brings to the Reformed community. These various denomi-

nations are often perceived as expressing Reformed Christianity distinctively: some seem to have particularly strong congregational life, some seem to lay great emphasis on piety and prayer, some seem to stress clear doctrine and maintaining the antithesis between believers and the world, some seem to be devoted to evangelism and missions and some seem to champion the historic (*sic*) Reformed approach to worship. None of these strengths and none of these histories should be lost.

Yet each of these denominations has weaknesses. *Perhaps the clearest weakness is the failure to express the unity of confessionally Reformed Christianity.* If these churches hold to the Reformed confessions, why are they not united? When members of these groups gather informally, there is often a great sense of connection and appreciation for one another. But too often these denominations allow their individual histories (and suspicions) to block a visible expression of unity.

The failure to manifest unity greatly weakens the credibility of the Reformed cause. Our opponents too easily can claim that conservative Reformed Christianity is hopelessly divisive and expends its energy on theological warfare rather than on making Christ known. That charge misses the real hostility of our culture (and many churches) to Reformed Christianity, but still has an element of truth to it.

What can be done? One solution would be to continue having inter-church relations committees talk to one another and seek organic union after working through all differences and suspicions. Another would be to widen participation in the National Association of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches (NAPARC) and use that organization as the visible expression of our unity. Is there another option? It may only be a Reformed dream but I believe that

there is. Our confessional Reformed denominations should consider a bold move to express their unity and increase the credibility of their witness. Let all of these denominations (or as many as are willing) join together under one general assembly (or general national synod) with each former denomination becoming a particular synod under that general assembly.

This simple (and modest!) proposal would obviously have to be worked out in terms of specifics, but let me suggest some of the elements of the idea that would help it work. The general assembly would adopt the *Westminster Standards* and the *Three Forms of Unity* as its confessional basis. It would meet every three years and have very specific, limited powers. It would have the authority to make decisions in relation to joint actions of the synods. The general assembly would be composed of delegations from all the synods according to the size of each synod (in fairness to the larger synods) but the decisions of the assembly would have to be ratified by a majority of the synods (in fairness to the smaller synods). The assembly would have the authority to remove a synod that was judged to have departed from the Reformed faith but would not have the authority to interfere with the internal operations of a synod. The assembly would encourage greater cooperation and coordination among the synods, and over time some synods would probably merge, but each synod would be free to make those decisions on its own.

Each synod would initially continue to function exactly as it does now as a denomination. All current practices, teachings and ministries would continue as they are. Over time synods could investigate avenues of cooperation and even merger (*sic*) with other synods, but that would be entirely up to each synod. For example the Reformed

Presbyterians, if they became a synod under the new general assembly, would be able to preserve their doctrine and practice of exclusive Psalm-singing without musical instruments with no possibility that the general assembly could ever interfere with that position.

Is such an idea an impossible dream? Not if we Reformed Christians are as bold and courageous in pursuing the *unity* of the church as we have been in pursuing the *purity* of the church. The idea is basically very simple and requires no local changes for any of the denominations. It does require confidence in the brethren and a willingness to accept some teachings and practices different from our own. It would force all of us to ask with new focus: what does it mean to be Reformed and what must others believe and do for us to recognize them as adequately Reformed? The potential advantages are tremendous. We could have a confessionally Reformed denomination of a size that would increase its witness and resources dramatically in North America. It would express the fundamentally positive character of Reformed Christianity. Most importantly it would show our fidelity to the Bible's call for unity and manifest our desire to testify clearly to Christ's gospel of grace. Will one or two denominations lead the way to turn this dream into a reality? Dreamers awake! There is work to do!*

A few comments on this proposal:

1. Let me not quibble that the Canadian and American Reformed Churches are not represented in the otherwise rather comprehensive list of churches that Dr. Godfrey compiles. Yet this is a strange phenomenon, since we are known as a group of churches promoting ecumenicity through different avenues. For example, we have been attending the Alliance of Reformed Churches since its inception in 1991. Dr. Godfrey is unusually silent regarding this organization which has been working for unity among Reformed churches for some time. Perhaps he is deliberately quiet since he himself was conspicuously absent, while many other churches including ourselves were present, working on the very "dream" that he only now begins to conjure up.

2. A more substantial point is that the failure to be involved in ecumenical endeavour is marked as a weakness of all these "denominations." Now that

may apply to some of them, and I can only agree that all Reformed churches must do their utmost for healing the unnecessary and unwarranted divisions among them. The meetings of the Alliance would no doubt have benefited from the input of other groups like the Free Reformed or the Protestant Reformed. Having the same roots, we belong together, and every effort must be made to work for this goal. But as a blanket statement, I do not believe that all these "denominations" can be equally tarred with the same brush. And there are some current impediments to unity that need a good deal of discussion before actual merger is possible. Neglecting this discussion would be denying or disparaging gifts and insights the Head of the church has given to His people.

3. Turning to this proposal proper, this dream has all the marks of a "quick-fix" without any substantial discussions sought for at all. Turning the dream as such into reality may just turn into a nightmare as well. For Dr. Godfrey wants to grant authority *de facto* to what he sees as a "higher" body overseeing all these "denominations." This is clearly for him an overriding authority, one which however, would be flexible enough to allow each "denomination" (now: particular synod) to have and keep its own distinctives. Yet by the operation of some kind of magical formula (of which we read nothing) this body would have the power to cut off denominations that were considered to be no longer "Reformed," and presumably add others it saw as Reformed. But who would make the decisions here? And how would delegates making the decisions be able to abstract themselves from their own traditions and "distinctives?"

Dr. Godfrey's dream implicitly operates with a hierarchical model which it unconsciously carries over from the "denomination" he decided to leave. Not only the United Reformed Churches, but others as well, have indicated that this hierarchical approach is not to be maintained in the Church of Christ. A group of churches – especially those recently seceding from hierarchy – will not be ready to thoughtlessly hand over authority to such a "super-synod." That is an impossible dream. Even the idea that these are permanent bodies, which also permeates Dr. Godfrey's dream, is something that needs correction.


4. There is every reason to believe that once a proposal like this is accepted, the avenues to further discussion and debate on issues dividing the churches

would be well nigh closed. Why discuss at all if all the differences are reduced to matters of confessional indifference? Such a reduction effectively circumvents the need for further discussion. The result is a modality church, a church of such far-reaching colours and shapes that one will not be able to discern a coordinating homogeneity.

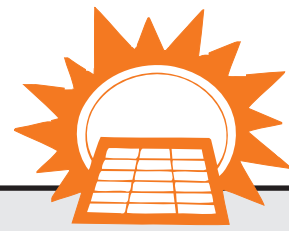
5. In this dream, differences between Reformed and Presbyterian polity are all lumped together in the one pot of non-confessional differences. This makes the dream unrealistic to say the least. To be sure, one cannot expect Presbyterians to abandon their polity, just as they cannot expect us to abandon ours. But the uncritical acceptance of these churches into a unifying "super-denomination" will only kill the initiative to explore and delineate the differences with any degree of understanding. While we need not rule out forms of cooperation among these different kinds of churches, organizational unity would require a more detailed examination of the church-political differences. Besides that, one would at least expect some statement of agreement or understanding regarding the confessional differences.

6. Dreams are far removed from hard reality. It makes more sense for churches of a common background to come to understanding and unity first before entering into mergers with Presbyterian bodies, mergers which would potentially plough under cardinal elements of the distinctively Reformed approach to church government. We ought more eagerly to seek unity with those with whom we stand on the basis of a common heritage before forging a union with churches of a different confessional and church political heritage. The rule is simple: let us overcome the smaller barriers before we head full speed into the bigger ones. Then we can be more assured of holding to the essential elements of the order and government that Christ has given to His church.

7. Besides these comments we can state that we are grateful for the developments, and the progress that has been made. The brothers have come to realize that the way of secession was unavoidable for them. We hope that with fruitful contact between like-minded churches progress towards greater ecclesiastical unity can be achieved, through the grace and kindness of God.

* "Christian Renewal." Vol. 16 Number 4, Oct. 20, 1997, (pg. 5), taken from "Outlook." September 1997, (pg. 17). Emphases in the original. 

RAY OF SUNSHINE



By Mrs. R. Ravensbergen

*"Cast your burden on the LORD, and He will sustain you."
Psalm 55:22a*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

When you read this, the change of seasons is upon us. For most of us for the worst, and for some (down under) for the better.

The time of growing gardens with veggies and flowers is over. Maybe a few late blooming flowers are still left, but most of the garden looks pretty dead, and sad. We enjoyed nice sunshine and a beautiful summer and fall. Maybe we did a lot of canning and freezing, to preserve some of the abundance of the fruits that grew during the summer and the fall. But now we are getting ready for the long, cold winter.

It is good to know, that the Lord created the seasons, and that they pass only because He wants it to go that way. It is the Lord Who promised us that after every winter there would be spring and summer, and after every summer, fall and winter. That succession of the seasons will not stop or fail as long as the earth continues.

It is even better to know that in all those things the Lord takes care of us. It is not so that the Lord wants us to fend for ourselves during the dark, cold days of winter, or that we can do without Him when we are sowing and planting and harvesting. No, in all things we depend totally on God, the Almighty, our Father in heaven. He gives us what we need in all circumstances.

But is that always true? What about the illnesses for which there is no cure, or the wheelchairs, those who are unable to use arms or legs for the rest of their lives, the deaf, the mute, the blind, the old, the mentally challenged, those who have no work, the poor, the lonely, the childless, or whatever else we have to add to this list. What if we are faced with such a major difficulty in our life? It is easy to say that the Lord takes care of us and knows what we need, but sometimes we can hardly believe that anymore.

Of course it is very human to think and/or talk like that, we will probably never receive answers to some of our questions. Yet we do not have to despair or to bury ourselves in our sorrow. We can do something instead.

When we buy something in the store and there is something wrong with it, then we go back to the store, right? So where do we go when we receive something from the Lord? Of course we go to Him when we are happy and thankful, but also with our questions and our unhappiness. He knows what is difficult for us, and He does not want us to struggle with that on our own. Our Father knows that we cannot do that. He expects us to come to Him. That does not mean that He will always take our problem away from us. It means that He will make us strong enough to carry our burden. He will strengthen our faith. He gave us the Holy Spirit to make us so strong, that even in the most difficult situation we will be able to accept our lives, and to praise our God and Father in heaven. The Lord will fill us with the good news that we find in His Holy Word. He will comfort us

with the knowledge that we belong to Him, that we are children of His Covenant and share in the promises of eternal life. With His help we will be convinced that our hardships are not to be compared with what our Saviour suffered for our sins. We must pray for that support, and the Lord will give it to us.

When we go to the Lord, expecting all our comfort from Him alone, then we will receive even more than comfort. He will make us so strong in our faith that we can also show it to others. Other people will notice how we endure our difficulties, that we do not complain, but praise the Lord. We will live a life of thankfulness and be happy and cheerful when we depend on the Lord in all circumstances. Then we will also believe that our Father gives us what we need, even if we thought at first that we could not handle what He brought our way.

There is even more. When we are able to deal with our lives in an obedient and thankful manner, we can show to others the greatness of our God. We can witness to others that the Lord is our Saviour, and that *that* is the reason for our strength and our thankfulness. And so the Lord may even use our handicap or illness or grief to bring others to Him.

Let us pray then, for ourselves and for others in our community. So that we all together may rejoice in our Lord and Saviour. To Him we are so special that He directs our lives, for each of us in a different manner. He uses us in His plan. By working diligently on the task that He has designed for us in this life, we all may work together towards the return of our Lord on the Day of His Glory.

*Come, praise the LORD! 'Tis good and pleasant
To praise His mercy ever present.
Sing to the LORD, our God and Saviour,
Who shows His steadfast love and favour.
He builds Jerusalem's foundations
And reunites His scattered nation.
The Lord heals all the broken-hearted,
For He binds up the wounds that smarted.*

Psalm 147:1

There are no birthdays in December, but I received a letter from Mary Vande Burgt. Thank you for the letter, Mary. We are happy to hear that you are doing well, with the Togeretz family, in the church, and in the many things that you are doing every day and that makes the time go fast. Mary asked me to print the following thank-you note:

"I would like to thank brothers and sisters for the cards I received. 50 cards or over, every year. Like to thank you for that again. Enjoy receiving cards, it brightens my days always sure nice. Like that.

Thanks again, love, Mary Vande Burgt."

Until next month,

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

A farewell to Rev. H. Versteeg and family and a welcome to Rev. S. 't Hart

By Diane Kampen

During the week of September 21, 1997 the Church at Toronto and the supporting churches of Classis Ontario North experienced a changing of the guard in respect of the work of foreign mission. Rev. Stephen 't Hart was installed as the new missionary, and Rev. Henry Versteeg took his farewell. The following are the highlights of that eventful week.

Rev. S. 't Hart, inaugural sermon, September 21, 1997

Rev. 't Hart chose 1 Peter 2: 9-10 as his text: *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were no people but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.*

Theme: God chooses a people for Himself to declare His wonderful deeds.

As a sending church, what motivates us to bring the gospel to Irian Jaya or Papua New Guinea? Why do we preach to the heathen nations? This text, rooted in the Old Testament book of Isaiah, indicates that we belong to God as a chosen race, a royal priesthood, who have been set apart by Him to declare His wonderful deeds. This choosing by God was an act of His mercy whereby we, as believers, are established as strangers and sojourners in this land, our place of temporary residence. Those promises first given to the chosen nation Israel are now ours through Christ, without whom we would still be in darkness and ignorance. By God's electing love, "we are born anew to a living hope," we have been made a royal priesthood, and have been called to live holy lives. This distinctive way



Rev. and Mrs. 't Hart, (right) and Clarence and Jeanette Togerez enjoying the evening.

of living must be evident in the way we speak and walk with the Lord. It must reflect the virtues of the One who has called us. It must cause us to live and shine as beacons of light, bringing this light – the Gospel of Christ – to all who live in darkness, so that this light may shine to the ends of the earth.

Rev. H. Versteeg, farewell sermon, September 21, 1997

Rev. Versteeg preached on the text 3 John: 5-8: *Beloved, it is a loyal thing you do when you render any service to the brethren, especially to strangers, who have testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey as befits God's service. For they have set out for His sake and have accepted nothing from the heathen. So we ought to support such men, that we may be fellow workers in the truth.*

Theme: Continue in the work of the Lord for all nations.

In this 3rd letter John speaks a word of praise to Gaius for the manner in which he has supported and assisted

those who labour in the Lord. He commends Gaius for his service of caring, feeding, and supporting. He expresses great joy in noting Gaius' deep love for the Lord when he proclaims that "No greater joy can I have than this, to hear that my children follow the truth." It is this love for the Lord which binds God's people together, and we know that this too is given by God out of grace, not something which is automatically passed on from generation to generation.

Similarly Rev. Versteeg commends the congregations at Toronto and the supporting churches for the faithful and consistent manner in which they supported the work of mission in far away Irian Jaya. He too experienced great joy in witnessing the results of the work that they were able to do under the blessing of the Lord and with the support of the churches in Canada. He noted especially the work of the late Rev. Dombon and praised God for providing such a faithful servant. And during their most recent return trip they marveled at God's handiwork in the baptism of so many members. Also during this trip they saw the good results of the ongoing support the churches are providing

to the family of Rev. Dombon, and he expressed thankfulness for this continuing evidence of the bond of love.

Rev. Versteeg continued by encouraging the churches to remain faithful in this work and thereby to continue to be commendable. We are now to give our support to the family 't Hart as they take up their task in a new mission field and with all the attendant difficulties. He encouraged us to respond fruitfully and joyfully to this call of the Lord to spread His work in Papua New Guinea, not focusing on numbers (of those converted), but on obedience. At the same time he urged us to remain commendable in respect of the Church at Manggelum for they, as fellow workers in the Lord who share in His blessings, will continue to need our prayers and support.

Farewell evening, September 26, 1997

The 20 years of service to the Lord in the Mission field had come to a close. The Versteegs could now embark on a new venture in the Church at Chatham, a different congregation and a different way of life. But before sending them off under the blessing of God, the congregation at Toronto organized an evening of farewell.

Rev. den Hollander in his opening remarks spoke of this evening as set aside for giving thanks to the Lord. In it we wanted to express our thankfulness, affection, and praise for the Versteeg family and in our coming to the end of an era. He spoke to us on Acts 20: 17-38 where God, working through weak earthen vessels, uses His people to expand the church of Christ.

During the evening we could enjoy the talents of the congregation in music, song, skits, and poems. Contributions were made by individuals and by societies, from younger to older members. Everyone took part in making a lasting impression and giving a demonstration of thankfulness for the Versteegs' dedicated work in Irian Jaya and for their participation in Toronto's congregational life. Since returning from the mission field Rev. and Mrs. Versteeg have led a parenting course, Mrs. Versteeg has been active in several study societies, and the children have enthusiastically joined in congregational activities.

Rev. 't Hart spoke to us on "the changing of the guard." The mantle was now placed on his shoulders and, just as Elijah had requested "a double portion of the spirit" of Elijah, so Rev. 't Hart hoped that God would grant him also a double portion.



Mrs. Versteeg, surrounded by her family, receives a bouquet of thanks.




Rev. Versteeg conveys his words of appreciation and farewell.

A slide presentation of the family in Irian Jaya gave us a time to reflect on the 20 years of service now at an end. Mr. John Boot, our Mission Board representative for 40 years, then spoke to us on the work which had been done by Rev. Versteeg. The people of Irian Jaya were anxious about their situation and had many questions about God and how He could change their lives. It was a very difficult path for them to understand and believe in the living God of Scripture. Through the continual preaching, teaching, admonishing, and leading of Rev. Versteeg, the Holy Spirit opened the hearts of the people and many came to faith. Through many disappointments and setbacks, God blessed the work and the congregation grew in faith and numbers. Therefore we are not to forget the Church of Manggelum, but continue to show our love and support for this young congregation. At the same time we may work on a new mission field, different in language, people, and difficulties, but the same in respect of serving the Lord by spreading His Word of grace. For in this manner God continues to gather, defend, and preserve His Church.

As a token of thanks, the Versteegs were given a small toy piano. This was to be replaced in their new home with a real piano, purchased with the cheque given to them on behalf of the congregations.

The evening ended with words of response by Rev. Versteeg. He thanked the congregations for their support and indicated that he was prepared to hand over the mantle to his fellow missionary. He reflected on the fact that in the 20 years of service that they began as

husband and wife, they had been blessed with 5 children who grew up in Irian Jaya and developed many friendships there, creating bonds that would last a lifetime. They remember especially the singing of the people there and of the memories this evoked. All this made it very difficult to leave Irian and to adjust to a very different culture. The two years they were able to spend in the Toronto congregation helped considerably with this adjustment and they appreciate the opportunity given them for this. He also remembered the work of Clarence and Jeanette Togeretz in the MAF and expressed the hope that God would continue to care for them in their situation. Rev. Versteeg made special hope that God would continue to care for them in their situation. Rev. Versteeg made special mention of the Mission Board and how their dedication and willingness to serve long terms made his work that much smoother. In closing, the family observed one of their traditions, and sang a song of farewell. Rev. den Hollander closed this festive evening with prayer of thanksgiving.

We thank the Lord for giving us Rev. Versteeg as missionary. The work that he was able to do and the lives he touched will leave a lasting impression. Even though we are but instruments in God's Hand, we may boast in the Lord and thank Him for the guidance and wisdom which was showered on this family, so that the gospel could be spread to the far corners of the world. *Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation.* (Mark 16:15) 

The Eleventh Latin American Mission Conference

By J. Kroeze

Every two years the reformed missionaries in Latin America hold a conference to discuss the methodology of mission and to discuss the specific problems they encounter on the field. It was decided that it would become an ICRC regional mission conference in 1993, the first of which was held in Curaçao in 1995. This year the conference was held in Surinam, where the OPC works among Dutch-speaking Surinamers. Their missionary is Karl Hubenthal, an American, who has learned Dutch to be able to do this work. He also works among Indians, and among English speaking Hindustanis. This man organized the conference with the help of Klaas Harinck, a Dutchman, who runs an orphanage there, and is involved in maintaining Reformed church services in an ex-leper colony.

Holding conferences in the tropics, in the third world is a risky undertaking. The flights in and out of these countries are infrequent, and if something goes wrong it can take up to a week to rectify. On the other hand sometimes it is easier as well. Five mission workers went to the conference from Brazil, and two managed to get in without a visa, and a third with only an invitation to the conference. Once in the country they applied for the visa and got it. Other travellers did not make it on time. Several only arrived on the second day of the conference, and three from Curaçao only on the third day at night due to the infrequent flights. Besides this there was the usual lost baggage, some of which did not arrive at all, and several of the participants were reduced to lending even underwear from their hosts and fellow participants.

The participants of the conference are drawn from everywhere. There were missionaries from the Can. Ref. Ch., from the GKN (liberated), and from the OPC present. Missionaries from other Reformed bodies were also invited but


did not come. Besides the missionaries, the professors of missiology from the churches which work in the area are invited. Representatives of the sending churches, or sending bodies, are also invited to come. Also invited are those who work with the missionaries on the field in mission related areas, or in mission related organisations. There were eighteen participants this year.


The conference was held from Oct. 1, 1997 to Oct. 8, 1997. The main topic was Divine Right Government. The paper was presented by the guest speaker, Brian Wingard, an OPC minister set aside for theological training of pastors in Kenya. He argued that also on the mission field the Bible must determine what the form of government of the church is. There is much experimentation on the field due to difficult situations, and because of different cultures. In many instances the situation, the culture, or the ingenuity of the missionaries has been allowed to determine the form of government of the church, and this has led to many problems. Over against this Brian placed the Scriptures, as interpreted by the confessions, and applied according to the church order. This caused quite some discussion, since some felt that the confessions and church order restricted the exegetically justifiable solutions to certain problems.

Other topics which were dealt with were the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, presented by the writer. Since charismatic religion is so strong on the mission field, it is necessary to have a good grasp of what the Holy Spirit actually does. Roelof Sietsma presented a paper on family planning in Brazil in Christian perspective. The situation in Brazil is one where there is much poverty, so the tendency also in the church, is to have no more than two children, and then to be sterilized. This of course kills the growth of God's church, so what should we advise? Ben Bolt of De Verre Naaste pre-

sent a paper on strategy planning to help us approach our work with a goal and time frame in mind. This should help us to work in a more efficient manner.

Besides these topics, every mission field had an opportunity to present their work to the conference, to discuss what they were doing, and to receive advice from the others. This is perhaps for the missionaries the most interesting part, because here is where the rubber hits the road. Methodology, ideas for solving common problems, for spreading the gospel in more effective ways, all these and more are discussed with gusto.

I think that most participants will say that the conference was well worthwhile. We all went home with renewed enthusiasm and ideas. We enjoyed the personal contact with our fellow missionaries and others. The discussions held informally were, as always, the most important. The understanding of the position of others was also deepened. Some of these positions cause the writer quite some concern. For this reason alone it is worthwhile to hold these conferences, to try to come to a proper understanding of what we ought to do. We hope and pray that the Lord will preserve His church throughout this world, and that He will give us wisdom to spread His word, in this world, in such a way, that the churches which are built will be to His glory. 



CHURCH NEWS

DECLINED to Flamborough, ON
Rev. J. de Gelder
of Smithville, ON

Middle East Reformed Fellowship

NEWS from MERF-Canada

Biblical training begins in earnest at John Calvin Centre (JCC)

Three large groups of pastors and elders (and some wives) attended the 89th, 90th and 91st Augustine Programme study terms, each lasting about two weeks. One hundred and eleven people attended the three study terms, which have taken place from mid August until early October. Rev. Dr. Abdel-Masih Istafanous, MERF's Chairman and Rev. Don Buchanan served as the guest instructors for the 89th study term, which was designed for pastors. Rev. Buchanan is expected to assume his ministry as MERF's Coordinator of Ministries in January 1998. Dr. Istafanous' sessions concentrated on the teaching of the Bible on the Church, its nature, its marks and its privileges and obligations. Rev. Buchanan gave a series of expositions on the Book of Daniel concerning Christ's sovereign rule over human history.

Rev. Lawrence Eyres, retired OPC minister (USA), spent six weeks at JCC in Larnaca. He served as guest instructor for both the 90th and 91st study terms, preached and conducted Bible study at the International Evangelical Church. He also led a tutorial programme as part of training new MERF staff. His instruction on the person and work of the Holy Spirit and eschatology and church eldership were both timely and refreshing. Rev. Eyres is the author of a well-known book on the eldership published by Presbyterian and Reformed Publications (New Jersey).

Rev. Evert Hempenius (of the Netherlands) served as another guest instructor for the 90th study term, which was also for Arab pastors. Rev. Hempenius's teaching sessions focussed on the accurate reading of the Bible as God's reliable revelation of Himself and His will in the Lord Jesus Christ. He also gave several expositions from 1 Corinthians on the gifts of the Holy Spirit as they related to the problems of

immaturity and disunity among early Christians converted from Hellenistic heathen temple worship backgrounds.

The second guest instructor of the 91st study term, which was designed for Arab Elders, was Rev. Martin van Veelen (also of the Netherlands.) He gave a series of lectures on the Christocentric and covenant nature of God's revelation in the Bible. He also gave some lectures on the relationship of the Old and New Testament and the special manifestations of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Elder Lee De Young, Chairman of MERF-USA, spent several days at the John Calvin Centre during the 91st study term. He led several morning devotions focussing on praying for Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist and other non-Christian people in Africa and Asia. His visit also proved to be of much encouragement to the Atallahs and other staff members.

Rev. Victor Atallah, MERF's General Director, lectured during the three study terms on the significance of change which took place in the Church's observance of the Lord's Day and the celebration of the Sacraments from the Old to the New Testament.

African Sudanese church officers receive training and report on the state of the Sudanese Church

About 80 Pastors, evangelists, ruling elders and deacons, from different tribal communities have participated in Biblical training programmes organized by MERF in Egypt, Cyprus and Sudan over the past four months. The Reformed churches in the Sudan have continued to express concern about the needs of their people for equipped and competent spiritual leadership. A written report by a group of church representatives from the southeastern regions says: ". . . All attempts to intimidate our faith in Christ and all imposed Islamic regulations and efforts to convince our people not to pray to the Lord have for the

most part proven to be futile. The gains of the Church have far exceeded any measurable losses as a result of the pressures we continue to face from Christ's enemies who want to impose on us their religious and cultural ideas. Now we need qualified spiritual leaders to consolidate both victories of the spiritual warfare. . . ."

This and other written and verbal reports presented to MERF's Executive Committee have also indicated that the Northern Muslim authorities are now seeking to impose new regulations which make it impossible to erect even the simplest of church gathering facilities without the written approval of a regional Muslim court. Such regional courts have been appointed throughout the country even in areas where there are no Muslims at all. The Minister of Interior recently announced the appointment of temporary courts for areas not under government control to preempt any future legitimacy for unlicensed religious facilities. Recently, the authorities ordered the demolition of several church facilities in the north and east of the country.

The main concern, of both the local Sudanese MERF Committees and MERF's leadership remains the provision of trained spiritual leadership for Reformed churches in the country as well as continuing to help them meet their diaconal needs.

Gospel broadcasts continue to reach many in both Iraq and Kuwait

Mail response and reports from local believers confirm the impact of MERF's Gospel broadcasts on many Kuwaiti and Iraqi Muslims. The economic, political and security situation in both nations continues to cause anxiety among most people. This coupled with the growing weariness of Islamic fanaticism is contributing to the

growing desire of people to seek after spiritual alternatives.

K. A. of Baghdad sent a letter in August saying: “. . . Your last envelope included the Gospels of Luke. I had been able to find the Gospel of John locally. Both have enlightened much. Now I have a new understanding of the plans and purposes of God for all people. The events, which led to the Messiah’s murder by the Jewish religious leaders show clearly how negative religion can become. My friends and I have been discussing these matters. Yet, Messiah’s resurrection confirms the triumph of God’s goodness over man’s evil. . . .”

Some special concerns to remember in your prayers:

- The staff of the John Calvin Centre seek to organize efficient means of

caring for Biblical training events and meet the needs of trainees during the next six months.

- MERF’s Gospel broadcasting team as they meet the challenge of expanding the number of weekly broadcasts and improving their effectiveness in reaching millions of Arabic-speaking people.
- The groups of local believers meeting quietly in homes in Yemen and S. Arabia.
- The security of Algerian believers as massacres continue to claim the lives of many innocent people throughout the country.
- The Christian communities throughout Sudan, especially the need for competent spiritual leadership among the Reformed churches there.

Thank you for your continued support!

We are very grateful for the regular support we receive from churches and individuals. The cheques come in from all over Canada! Sometimes you enclose best wishes for the work of MERF. Be assured that we always take note of it and we thank you for your prayers and encouragement. May the Lord continue to bless the work of spreading the Gospel in the Middle East.

If you would like to make a personal or corporate donation please make cheque payable to:

MERF-Canada
1225 Highway 5, R.R.#1,
Burlington ON L7R 3X4

On behalf of MERF-Canada,
Rev. J. Mulder, chairman
Mrs. J. Van Dam, secretary 

News from the Women’s Savings Action

Contributions received

Seasons come and go. The years seem to fly by. Every day brings changes in our modern fast paced society. But the faithfulness of the Lord is steadfast and sure. And once again we have experienced the blessing of the Lord upon our work as Women’s Savings Action. During this past year a total of **\$33,880.50** was collected. **Thank you all very much!** Our thanks to you as representatives and volunteers who have helped to collect and count; and our thanks to all of you who have contributed! Among our co-workers once again this year is the Theological Library Fund Committee in Western Australia; we received a total of \$2,835.64 from Australia. To all of you “down-under” – your contribution is greatly appreciated! This year we also gratefully acknowledge the amount of \$166.64 donated by the Selles family from the royalties of books written by the late Prof. L. Selles for ILPB.

College evening presentation

Once again this year we were able to present the Principal with a pledge for

\$25,000 for the purchase of books and periodicals for the coming year. During the past year no other items were funded by the Women’s Savings Action. With the high cost of books and periodicals it is felt that the entire amount which we are able to give should be spent at this time on these items.

What was different this year was that Mrs. E. Hofsink – as our new president – joined us on the stage for the first time. We very much appreciate her willingness to take on this responsibility. We know that she will take on her new task with dedication and enthusiasm!

Expansion

Plans for the expansion of the library are progressing. A detailed report by the building expansion committee has been finalized during the summer and has been sent to the Board of Governors for approval. General Synod to be held in 1998 will be dealing with this matter. Over the last number of years we have been able to set aside funds for expansion after our regular contribution for the library has been

given. So far we have been able to transfer \$45,176.48 into the expansion fund. And during this past year we were able to invest \$35,000 which will be passed on to the Theological College when expansion takes place. There will be a special committee of the Theological College which will be raising funds for the addition. However, as Womens’ Savings Action it would be nice to come with a sizable amount as a gift from the “women of the church” when expansion takes place, wouldn’t it? In 1985 we were able to contribute \$125,000 towards the new facilities. Let us see what we can do this time around!

Sincere appreciation

Our sincere appreciation goes to those of you who have done and do the work (the collecting, the counting and so on) – the representatives and the volunteers – whether you have “retired,” whether you continue to take on this task (some for many years already!) or whether you have just joined our ranks! Without your faithful participation and

dedicated efforts we would not be able to carry on!

But of course there would be no work to do, if you did not continue to give your donations! And so our heartfelt gratitude to all of you for your contributions! Materially the Lord has blessed each one of us differently. Whenever you are called upon to make a donation be assured that whatever amount you give whether it be a tin of change or a cheque it is received with thankfulness. If perchance you or your congregation did not make a donation . . . please do so this coming year! In the *Canadian Reformed Magazine* of December 1969 Mrs. G. Selles put it very well: "I do hope that by our combined efforts [as Women's Savings Action] we may show the Faculty, the Committee, and the Board of Governors, that we, as women of God's Church, are with them, in our thoughts, in our prayers and in our deeds."

Every year when we as Board attend the Library Committee Meeting in the spring, we are struck by how often the words appreciation and gratitude are used with respect to the work of the Women's Savings Action for the library. For remember the Women's Savings Action is the only source of funds for the regular purchase of books and periodicals and what would the Theological College be without an up-to-date library! And what an important role our Theological College plays in the life of the churches! What a privilege to be able to support the training for the ministry of the glorious gospel in this very worthwhile way! May all our labours be to the praise and glory of His great Name!

president

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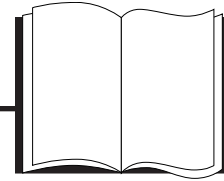
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**Theological College Women's Savings Action
Contributions July 1, 1996 to June 30, 1997**

ABBOTSFORD	\$2,037.93
ALDERGROVE	1,261.50
ANCASTER	677.43
ATTERCLIFFE	728.75
BARRHEAD	645.00
BRAMPTON	91.00
BURLINGTON EAST	1,391.95
BURLINGTON SOUTH	746.76
BURLINGTON WEST	1,020.00
CALGARY	
CARMAN	524.00
CHATHAM	520.00
CHILLIWACK	210.00
CLOVERDALE	1,018.50
COALDALE	765.00
EDMONTON, IMM.	804.00
EDMONTON, PROV.	1,792.50
ELORA	210.30
FERGUS	343.70
GRAND RAPIDS	1,029.47
GRAND VALLEY	125.25
GUELPH	528.54
HAMILTON	1,274.00
HOUSTON	
LANGLEY	1,983.50
LANGLEY/WILL.HTS.	595.00
LINCOLN	432.25
LONDON	55.50
LYNDEN, WASH.	508.29
NEERLANDIA	1,065.14
ORANGEVILLE	211.20
OTTAWA	84.00
OWEN SOUND	106.94
ROCKWAY	
SMITHERS	964.50
SMITHVILLE	928.50
SURREY	3,057.35
TABER	530.00
TORONTO	102.00
VERNON	494.00
WATFORD	
WINNIPEG	2,014.47
YARROW	
AUSTRALIA	2,835.64
Royalties (Selles)	166.64
Total collected	\$33,880.50

Please note: Our fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30. Any contributions which came in after June 30 will appear on the financial statement next year.



NOT in Defence of the REFORM PARTY

By E. Vanwoudenberg

I feel compelled to respond to the letter Br. A. Harke submitted to the *Readers' Forum* of September 5th. Br. Harke's letter makes me fear that he has swallowed the Reform Party's line of holding BINDING referendums on moral issues, hook, line and sinker. He writes: "There is nothing to be lost, everything to be gained," if such a referendum on abortion is held. In other words the commandment THOU SHALL NOT KILL, as is the case with the murder of over 100,000 unborn children a year in Canada, is no longer unalterable by Divine Decree, but instead should become subject to the decision of the easily manipulated masses. Not the voice of God, but the voice of the people will decide, says Reform. J.J. Rousseau and the "French revolutionaries" would agree with that.

Is Br. Harke aware that a simple amendment of Section 223 of the Criminal Code of Canada would establish the sanctity of life from conception till natural death? This could be established without the need to introduce legislation or the risk of facing a court challenge. All that is needed is the political will to implement it. This is the CHP solution to the holocaust of the unborn and the threat to our elderly and handicapped.

The reason why the Reform Party has not adopted this position is because they lack the fortitude and commitment to take a stand on moral issues. Instead they have made every effort, especially in Ontario during the last election, to prevent potential Pro-Life candidates to run. An article in the September issue of *The Interim* documents how Nancy Branscome, the executive director of the Reform party and admittedly Anti-Life, rejected aspiring Pro-Life candidate John-Henry Western of Bancroft. Mr. Western was told that there was no point for him to show up at the nomination meeting since "about 50% of the Reform party is Pro-Choice." What difference is there between this and similar action

taken by Prime Minister Chretien, who refused to sign the nomination papers of several Pro-Life candidates?

On my way to church one morning, I listened to a CBC reporter interview Mr. Manning. He was asked the following three questions, which I repeat here to the best of my recollection:

1 - Mr. Manning, is it true that in the 1988 election when you ran in the riding of Yellowhead you said that you were pro life, but if your constituents directed you to vote otherwise, you would vote their wishes? Manning's answer; Yes I did.

2 - Mr. Manning, is it true that you said in the 1993 election in your current riding of Calgary West, that you are opposed to Euthanasia, but if your constituents directed you otherwise you would vote their wishes? And sir, is it not true that in a recent poll in your riding a majority of those polled voted in favour of "death with dignity?" Answer: Yes that is true.

3 - Mr. Manning, as a man of principle, what issue will it take, before you will vote on your principles? I listened with abated breath for his answer. It came after a noticeable pause . . . I don't know.

Do I write this in a vindictive frame of mind? Not at all! What Br. Harke and many others do not know, is that the Christian Heritage Party, which was registered as a Federal Political Party before Reform, met in Edmonton in 1987 to discuss a possible merger between the two. In my capacity as leader, I, together with Br. J. Voorhorst, met with Mr. Manning and three others for several hours. The conclusion was that no agreement could be reached because Mr. Manning refused to commit himself to take a stand on the moral issues, because, as we were told, the Reform Party was to be pragmatic and populist in order to become successful.

I share Br. Harke's concern about the consequences Bill 33 (the sexual

orientation bill) will have, but how does he defend the action of the Leader of the Reform Party who, during an interview with *Extra West*, the radical homosexual newspaper in Vancouver, said that he had no trouble with homosexuals running for the Reform Party? This was further documented in the September *Interim* which reported that members of the far left Toronto city council (one being an openly militant homosexual) were officially invited to become Reform candidates.

It is like one Reform Party candidate admitted: "I am dead scared if we ever become government, because we are by virtue of being a Party that is constituency driven, a house divided." I predict that we won't have to wait till they are government, but that even their present role as official opposition party will bring them much internal struggle and fragmentation.

Br. Harke further comments that the CHP is a Party that "does not seem to be able to come to an agreement among themselves whether they want to be a political party or an evangelization party. When people read their material they don't quite understand whether they are being asked for their political support or are being called to repentance." In response to this I can only conclude that he is guilty of the same error he wrongly accuses Prof. C. Van Dam of in the opening remarks of his September 5th article. I hope that the information I have mailed him under separate cover will open his eyes to the magnitude of this error. Especially the general brochure the CHP used in the last election makes a mockery out of such comments.

Br. Harke claims to be confused by the many labels for Christians. There are "committed Christians," "consistent Christians," "pragmatic Christians" and "CHP Christians," with CHP Christians on top and "pragmatic Christians" at the bottom he says. Fortunately, he says

"amen" to the closing comments of Prof. Van Dam when he wrote: "The Lord will use in His own way every faithful testimony in politics that directs the attention to His rights, privilege and commands." Did you notice, dear brother, that the key word in this quote is the word "FAITHFUL." Without that word all our efforts become self-directed and self-serving. Faithful political witness is not "constituency driven," it is "obedience driven." It becomes "God centered" instead of "referendum centered." We see this lived out in the life of a politician like Daniel or, to come closer to home, in the life of Wilberforce. The opposite we can observe in the life of a politician like King Rehoboam or, to come closer to home, in the life of Preston Manning.

You see committed Christians, consistent Christians and CHP Christians are all one and the same if their first and sole purpose is to be *faithful* Christians – faithful to the revealed will of God in respect to those issues on which the Lord has left no doubt. We mention as examples: the sanctity of life, and our duty to defend it no matter what the cost; the duty for those in authority to be "God's servant to do you good" and to bring "punishment on the wrongdoer" (Romans 13); not to steal from the next generation what is not ours to take; and to be good stewards of the world and all that is in it, just to name a few.

It is not, dear brother, that I doubt your sincere intention to do just that. No! I take issue with you that you de-

pend a political party which has from its inception decided that no stand for righteousness would be taken. In spite of the fact that many well-meaning Christians like you have joined it, support it and vote for it, the truth is not diminished that "pragmatic Christians" who believe that God's laws can be decided by binding referendum are *wrong*.

Ed Vanwoudenberg lives with his wife Audrey in Hope, BC.



The views expressed in Reader's Forum are not necessarily those of the editorial committee or the publisher. Submissions should not exceed 900 words. Those published may be edited for style or length.

PRESS RELEASE



International Conference of Reformed Churches

The fourth quadrennial meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Churches was held in Seoul, Korea, from 16-23 October 1997. The venue was the Seo-Moon Church complex, just south of Olympic Park.

The host church, the Presbyterian Church in Korea (Kosin) provided for the delegates with great generosity and consideration, and created a memory that will long remain with those who were privileged to attend.

New members and visitors

When the meeting opened, there were 14 member churches; after the reception of new member churches, there are now 21, representing over 450,000 people across the world. These are from 11 countries and four continents, plus Australasia. Interested visitors from 10 other churches were also present. Introductions were presented by delegates from:

- Christian Witness to Israel
- Church of Christ in Sudan among the Tiv

- Independent Presbyterian Church of Mexico
- Institute of Reformed Theological Training
- Lanka Reformed Church
- Missionary Training Institute
- Presbyterian Church of Australia
- Reformed Church in Japan
- Reformed Churches in South Africa
- Reformed Presbyterian Church North East India Synod
- Reformed Presbyterian Churches in Cardiff
- Taiwan Reformed Presbyterian Church

Papers

Five papers were presented to the meeting, and discussed. These papers will appear in the printed Proceedings of the meeting.

The first paper was presented by Mr. Mark T. Bube on "Principles of Reformed Missions." Beginning with the premise that worship lies at the heart of the church's missionary endeavors, Mr. Bube outlined God's decree to save a people for Himself, for the manifesta-

tion of His glory. He noted that God has foreordained all the means by which such is to be accomplished; that it is to the church that Christ has entrusted this ministry for the gathering and perfecting of the saints; that in this supernatural ministry, God is especially pleased to make the preaching of the Word an effectual means of accomplishing that end; and that, in His Word, God has fully supplied the elders in His church with all that is necessary for them to carry out this work.

Dr. Soon-Gil Hur spoke on "Women in Office, with Particular Reference to 'Deaconesses.'" He stated that eldership is restricted to male members of the church because its task is to exercise authority over the congregation. This is a clear teaching of the Scriptures (1 Timothy 2:12). However, diaconal office does not involve the exercise of authority. Therefore, it seems possible that female members may be installed as unordained deaconess or assistant-deacons, seeing that women were positively involved in the life of the apostolic church.

Dr. Robert C. Beckett's paper discussed "Biblical Principles for the Relation Between Church and State." Dr. Beckett affirmed the total sovereignty of God over all the structures of authority in both secular and ecclesiastical realms. The New Testament does not give approval to any specific form of government. Democracy involves the determination of laws by the majority views of fallen man, and is a perilous substitute for the infallible Word of God. Both church and state are established by God under the sovereignty of Jesus Christ, and are distinct structures that should peaceably co-exist and support each other. Complete separation of church and state is an unbiblical illusion, and Christians should be encouraged to act as "salt and light" within the political process. Involvement of pastors as politicians is forbidden by Scripture, and brings dangerous confusion to the gospel message. Within a pluralistic society, the church can best fulfil its duty to God and the state by prioritizing the Great Commission. Obedience is to be rendered to the state as far as humanly possible, without transgressing the law of God. When the demands of the state are in conflict with the law of God, God must be obeyed rather than man, and civil disobedience becomes inevitable.

The fourth paper was presented by Dr. Richard B. Gaffin. The subject was "Challenges of the Charismatic Movement to the Reformed Tradition," and Dr. Gaffin addressed two issues: the meaning of Pentecost (being baptized with the Holy Spirit); and, the cessation of certain gifts of the Spirit. On the first issue, Dr. Gaffin argued that Pentecost has its significance in terms of *historia salutis* (the completed accomplishment of salvation), not *ordo salutis* (the ongoing application of salvation). It does not provide a repeatable paradigm event for individual Christian experience. In the light of the truth of 1 Corinthians 15:45 ('the last Adam became a life-giving Spirit'), Pentecost reveals the unbreakable unity between the activity of the exalted Christ and the Holy Spirit in the church in all aspects of their conjoint activity. On the issue of cessation, Dr Gaffin argued that New Testament prophecy possessed inspired and infallible authority, and was present in the life of the church only for the period when the NT canon was in the process of formation. The view that NT prophecy continues today with lower, fallible, authority, was shown to be not sustainable exegetically and to undermine the final authority of Scripture.

Finally, the Rev. David John spoke on "The Ministry of the Word Amongst Asian Religious Peoples." He gave information about Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Zoroastrianism in India, stating that many Asian people respect their elders; they worship ancestors; and seem to be very respectful and humble. They claim to be seekers of wisdom, peace and light, desiring to become one with god and achieve salvation. To achieve this goal they go to extremes, such as "yoga," transcendental meditation, and asceticism. This often means a withdrawal from real life – its hardships, trials, and responsibilities. Tradition holds that the gospel was brought to India first by Thomas, the disciple of Jesus, in AD52. Christian missions, including both Roman Catholic and Protestant, have been present in India ever since. Besides evangelism, educational work and establishments of mercy have been founded. It is said that annual church growth in India is about 3.4%, and that there are now about 97,700 "Christian" congregations with 7,300,000 members and 16,000,000 adherents. It should go without saying that the only approach to all religions is by the Word of God and the only salvation is by the atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Constitutional update

The meeting also revised the constitution and regulations of the ICRC. In a significant move, the meeting agreed to amend section 1.a to read:

Those Churches shall be admitted as members:

a. which faithfully adhere to the Reformed Faith stated in the confessional documents listed in the Basis, and whose confessional standards agree with the said Reformed Faith; This defines the faith shared by the member churches as the Reformed Faith expressed in the Three Forms of Unity and the several versions of the Westminster Confession of Faith, thus making clearer the intent of the original wording. Various other changes of a more minor or cosmetic nature were also made.

Missions conferences

Following the Conference's 1993 decision to encourage the holding of regional ICRC missions conferences during the years between ICRC meetings, this meeting took the further step of including \$8,000US per year in its budget to assist in this. The member churches were encouraged to cooperate in missions endeavours where possible. An ICRC Missions Committee was appointed to assist in the cultivation of missions interest in

the member churches. The meeting also encouraged cooperation in areas of evangelism, diaconal ministries, and training for the ministry.

Mutual accountability

A large forward step was taken toward perfecting unity among ICRC members by the meeting's suggestion to members that each take initiative in informing the others, and seeking their advice, if they were contemplating actions that could affect their mutual relations. This would enable the churches to offer advice as thinking on the subject developed, and prevent surprising one another with actions already accomplished that could affect their relationships.

Next meeting

A four-year budget, extending through the next ICRC meeting, was adopted; this amounted to \$119,000US, or less than \$30,000US per year, or less than 7c per church member per year. The 21 member churches are:

1. The Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church
2. The Canadian Reformed Churches
3. The Christian Reformed Churches in the Netherlands
4. Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales
5. The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland
6. The Free Church of Central India
7. The Free Church of Scotland
8. The Free Church in Southern Africa
9. The Free Reformed Churches of North America
10. The Free Reformed Churches in South Africa
11. Gereja Gereja Masehi Musyafiri N.T.T.
12. Gereja Gereja Reformasi di Indonesia N.T.T.
13. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church
14. The Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia
15. The Presbyterian Church in Korea (Kosin)
16. The Reformed Churches in The Netherlands (liberated)
17. The Reformed Church in the United States
18. The Reformed Churches of New Zealand
19. The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland
20. The Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America
21. The United Reformed Churches in North America

The next meeting of the ICRC is to be hosted by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 2001. 