

Canadian Reformed Churches
Committee for Correspondence
with Churches Abroad

Secr.: J. Visscher
18080-57A Ave.,
Surrey, B.C.
V3S 1J6

1986
Rec. Apr. 14, 1986
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April 8, 1986

To the GENERAL SYNOD of the
Canadian Reformed Churches
meeting in Burlington, Ontario.

Esteemed Brethren,

Enclosed please find a letter from the Deputies of our sister churches in South Africa containing fraternal greetings. As of this date, no other greetings have been received. All the sister churches have received notification of the convocation of this Synod, as well as the Provisional Agenda and a copy or copies of our Report to Synod. The latter were sent by air mail. It is possible that greetings will yet come in via telegram.

We have also enclosed a number of additional documents relating to our activities:

- A) Address to Synod Heemse;
- B) Papers delivered at the ICRC, Edinburgh;
- C) Minutes of the ICRC, Edinburgh;
- D) A report on the ICRC, Edinburgh.

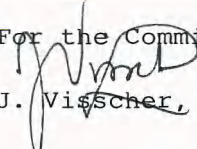
We did not have these printed and attached to our Report to Synod for the reasons that the time was short and the factor of cost had to be considered. There was also the fact that the Report on the ICRC by the Convener of our Committee appeared in Clarion, as well the various papers are in the process of appearing in the same magazine. Should your Assembly decide to include some of these documents in the ACTS, your clerk should be fore-warned that one of the papers will need extensive linguistic revision before it can be printed.

As instructed by General Synod 1983 our Report was printed. This process turned out to be more time consuming than first thought. If we type it locally and copy it we can have it out in two weeks. Now it has taken closer to seven weeks. We attach no blame to any one seeing that typesetting is a labour intensive task; however, Synod should be aware that the change in its regulations regarding reports will mean that these will take longer to appear.

Thus far, our update. We wish the brethren the Lord's guidance in all of your deliberations

Respectfully submitted on April 8, 1986.

For the Committee,


J. Visscher, Convener

Return to first Clerk of Synod!

Rec. Apr. 14, 86!!

THE FREE REFORMED CHURCHES IN SOUTH AFRICA

DEPUTIES FOR CORRESPONDENCE WITH CHURCHES ABROAD

1986
176^I
G.
(2 pages)

Committee for Correspondence with Churches Abroad
of the Canadian Reformed Churches
Rev. J. Visscher, Secretary
18080 - 57A Ave.
SURREY, B.C.
CANADA

c/o Rev. F.J. van Hulst
7 Ceres Close
La Rochelle
7530 BELLVILLE
Republic of South Africa

1986 - 01 - 09

Esteemed Brothers

Your letter of 1985-10-24, refers.

We thank you for your invitation to send delegates to attend your forthcoming General Synod Burlington 1986. Unfortunately, we will not be able to have somebody from our churches personally attending the actions of your Synod. However, by means of this letter, we send your Synod, as well as your Churches in general, our cordial and fraternal greetings. Through our correspondence relationship we are able to share in the deliberations of your churches. In this way we experience that throughout the world our Lord Jesus Christ "gathers, defends and preserves for Himself, by His Spirit and Word, in the unity of the true faith, a church chosen to everlasting life" (L.D.21).

We wish your Synod strength and wisdom in dealing with the matters concerning your churches and the guidance of the Holy Spirit in taking decisions which are to the glory of God and edifying not only to your churches, but also to the international community of Reformed churches. May the Lord bless you in your activities at Synod, as well as your churches as a result of this work in His Coming Kingdom!

You may remember from our letter of 1985-01-22 that at about the same time our Synod Pretoria 1986 convenes, the Lord willing. From the convening church at Pretoria we have not yet received a more detailed agenda than the one enclosed with our letter of 1985-01-22. We will send you our Deputies Report to this Synod as soon as possible (probably during February) while we also hope to receive your Committee Report to Synod Burlington in due time.

With much interest we have read your report to Synod Cloverdale 1983, especially Section VII on Korea, where you frequently refer to the decisions of Synod Johannesburg 1982. With our present rules for ecclesiastical correspondence, which are essentially the same as yours, we do not have the possibility of entering

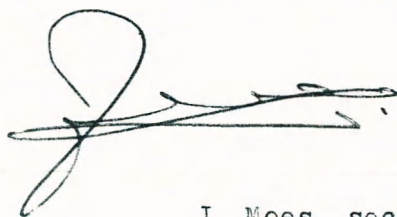
official correspondence with the churches in Korea and at East Sumba/Savu, due to language difficulties. However, we have been offered a "fraternal relationship" by the Korean churches, which is for them a less intensive form of ecclesiastical contact than the sister church relationship which they have with the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands and South Africa and with the Free Reformed Churches in Australia. Nevertheless, we now have accepted their offer, but emphatically not as (a lower level of) official ecclesiastical correspondence, but merely to give a name to the fact that we have much in common and that we regularly keep each other informed about our activities and decisions. As long as we have not resolved the language barrier, which plays a dominant rôle in the official correspondence relationship, we have no objection to, in this way, giving expression to the fact that we have regular contact with each other. Whether this stand will meet with our coming Synod's approval will be known in a few months time.

With regard to Korea we read that you have a translated version of the amendments to their Form of Government. Furthermore, we note that Synod Cloverdale 1983 has charged you (Art.105.D.3.a,b,c) to obtain more information on their Form of Government and Confessional Standards. For our further contacts with Korea this information will also be very valuable. Therefore, if you have any information in English available of their amendments to the Confessional Standards, of their Form of Government, their Manual of Discipline and their Directory of Worship we would be much obliged if you would send us a copy thereof.

It would appear that our contacts with Korea develop along the same lines and with the same problems. Therefore, it would be very useful if we could come to a common approach and consult and inform each other regularly on further developments in this regard.

May the Lord bless you in your responsible office, also during Anno Domini 1986.

Yours in Christ

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large loop at the top and several horizontal strokes below it.

J. Moes, secretary

1986

17 b II
(2 pages)

Address to the General Synod of Heemse 1984 of the Gereformeerde Kerken in The Netherlands

The Committee for Correspondence with Churches Abroad decided in its meeting of December 7, 1983 to send the Rev. J. Visscher (convener of the Committee) to represent the Canadian Reformed Churches at General Synod Heemse 1984 of the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland. The Rev. J. Visscher will be in The Netherlands from June 5-18. Following is his opening address which has been translated into the English language.

Mr. Chairman, Members of Synod and Honoured Guests:

It is with great pleasure that I may bring to you the greetings and best wishes of the Canadian Reformed Churches. At your last Synod, the Synod of Arnhem 1981, a telegram was used to convey our greetings; however, Synod Cloverdale 1983 expressed the desire to have a more personal form of representation at Synod Heemse. As a result, the Committee for Correspondence has delegated me to represent your sister churches in Canada.

Needless to say, this constitutes a rare honour. Of all the ecclesiastical relationships that our churches maintain none is so dear to us as the one that we have with you. Although the Canadianization of our churches is proceeding at a fast pace; nevertheless, we continue to recognize that our roots and our heritage are here. Many of our older members are avid readers of *Nederlands Dagblad* and *De Reformatie*. There is a keen interest in the events and developments that take place in the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland. There is also a lot of travel between our respective countries which continues to strengthen the ties.

With respect to that matter of travel, I may express to you our appreciation for the fact that it was possible to have two representatives of your churches present at Synod Cloverdale 1983, namely the Rev. Dr. K. Deddens and the Rev. J. de Gelder. The fact that the former is now in Canada as professor of diaconology at our Theological College should not be misinterpreted. We have no policy in place to entice away 50% of your delegation every time you decide to send one. More than anything else, it was a happy coincidence that the man whom you decided to send was also the man who had been tentatively approached to fill this vacancy.

Truly, we are thankful that Dr. K. Deddens was led to accept his appointment, just as we are thankful for all of those servants of the Lord who have come to Canada over the years. Whether this trend will continue for much longer however appears doubtful. The busiest years of immigration were in the early 1950's, with the result that a new generation is arising which is not so familiar with the Dutch language. The appreciation of our Dutch heritage is still there, but it is more an appreciation at a distance. Needless to say, this is having repercussions. Calling ministers from Holland becomes more difficult. Hiring teachers from abroad will also taper off, especially due to the fact that this year the Teachers' College in Hamilton will graduate its first class. Also, at the Theological College we hope to have five graduates this year, which will go quite a ways in filling existing vacancies. As a matter of fact, if our enrollment continues to grow it may even be so that we shall see immigration in reverse.

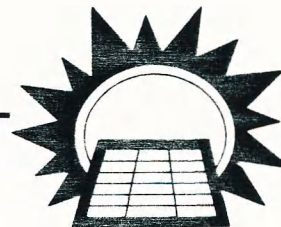
What all of this indicates is that the Canadian Reformed Churches, while continuing to prize very highly the ties that exist between our respective churches, are more and more taking on an independent existence. There was a time when we were Dutchmen in a foreign land, later we were half-Dutch and half-Canadian, soon we shall be fully Canadian. But does this mean that we shall begin to diverge from the Confessions and the Church Order which are of European origin? By the grace of God, we hope not. We recognize the fact that the Church of Jesus Christ is catholic and international, that she crosses boundaries and ethnic distinctions, that we are part of that Church being gathered from every tribe and nation.

Nevertheless, it is so that in the midst of unity there may also be diversity. In this regard when you read our Acts 1983 you will notice that there is much that speaks of unity: confessional revisions and retranslation, revised Psalms and Hymns, an updated Church Order, joining the ICRC, etc. Yet there are also some things that lean towards diversity, or a slightly independent course if you will. Synod Cloverdale 1983 decided to charge its Committee for Correspondence to do still more work on the matter of a relationship with the Presbyterian Church in Korea (Koryu-

pah). It also decided to request the Korean churches to give their reactions to certain difficulties that we see with respect to the Westminster Standards and church polity of Westminster. As a result of these difficulties, we have also asked that this matter be placed on the agenda of the ICRC meeting at Edinburgh and have asked Dr. J. Faber and the Rev. J.N. Macleod to address some of these difficulties.

Related to this, is the fact that Synod Cloverdale 1983 also went on record as being opposed to any fundamental change to the rules of correspondence and expressed its reservations about the formalizing of ecclesiastical contacts with churches with which correspondence cannot as yet be established. It is true that the Canadian Reformed Churches have formalized contact with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in the USA but Synod did not want this to be perceived as a common practice. In short, Synod Cloverdale 1983 was of the opinion that correspondence and correspondence only should be the established relationship for inter-church relations. Should this position meet with disagreement on your part, as it no doubt will seeing your past decisions, I would counsel you to address Synod Burlington 1986 on this matter.

Should you ask, "what gives rise to these differences?" One may point to two basic factors. One is the impression among many in Canada that the number of your ecclesiastical contacts have expanded too fast and not always with the fullest consultation between sister churches. There is also the view that some of these relationships have been established without sufficient attention being paid to historical examination, confessional integrity, and relations with other churches and organizations. Another factor that accounts for our different way of looking at other church federations has to do with geographic proximity. If you should decide to recognize churches of Presbyterian persuasion that has very little in the way of repercussions for you at the local level. You are not living on a continent that has many Presbyterian churches, but we are. Because of this the need is felt to proceed very cautiously. The Canadian Reformed Churches wish to build bridges to the Presbyterian world, but we wish to do this in such a way that it will not compromise our confessional in-



"And this is eternal life, that they know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." John 17:3

Everlasting life as expressed in the Scriptures is that life, which alone is worthy to be called life. It is not a life which continues endlessly only because one simply does not die, but because death shall be no more. It is not a life that triumphs over its adversary, death, but a life wherein no more death, or anything such as, sickness and trouble, disaster and calamity, sorrow and crying, that reminds us of death, will be, or ever shall be there (Rev. 21:4).

We ought not to express it negatively. Everlasting life is a positive idea (conception) which is free from all negativism and contradiction. It is LIFE.

The beauty of it is to add nothing to it, but to express everything with that one word. "This is eternal life, that they know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent" (John 17:3). Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood (I Cor. 13:12b). Through the history of the centuries Christ has brought life to His people — He gave them everlasting life. And that LIFE, which is on this earth experienced by all believers as a beginning of the eternal joy shall be enjoyed fully on the Day of the Lord, and ever after. This is the ending whereof is no end.

Translated from: *Het Koningschap van Christus*,
by Ds. A. Ringnalda

"Eternal life does not begin with death; it begins with faith."
Samuel Shoemaker

We have received a request to remember Jim for his 23rd birthday on July 4. He is the oldest of seven children and is mentally handicapped. Jim works for a company in Burlington and is quite happy to be there. Jim is looking forward to going to "Camp Boo" again this year. His address is as follows:

JIM BUIKEMA
549 Enfield Road
Burlington, ON L7T 2X5

Jenny Hansman hopes to celebrate her 37th birthday on July 7. She suffers from encephalitis (a form of sleeping sickness) and is confined to her home most of the time.

JENNY HANSMAN
19890 - 55A Avenue
Langley, BC V3A 3X5

Charlie will be celebrating his 9th birthday on July 20. He keeps a scrapbook and is looking forward to putting some new cards in it. He also enjoys going to "Camp Boo" during the holidays.

CHARLIE BEINTEMA
401 Park Street
Chatham, ON N7M 3S7

Jim hopes to celebrate his 23rd birthday on July 28. He cannot speak or write, but is trying very hard — he understands everything. His hobbies are swimming and bike riding. He likes sports very much, water sports especially.

JIM WANDERS
Huron Regional Centre
PO Box 1000
Orillia, ON L3V 6L2

A thought for today — Try it! It works!

Stop wishing for things
You complain you have not
And start making the BEST
Of all that you've got.

By Helen Steiner Rice
from *Somebody Loves You*

Send your requests (with permission of the person involved); and please send me updated information, brothers and sisters. It will be very much appreciated.

Mrs. J.K. Riemersma
380 St. Andrew Street East
Fergus, ON N1M 1R1

tegrity and will meet with the support and understanding of our members.

It is to this end that the Canadian Reformed Churches also hope that the forum of the ICRC will prove to be of benefit. There are some members who doubt its value, but the Synod of Cloverdale was convinced that the Conference should have our support and participation. It is our hope that it will provide yet

another avenue to bind our churches together, to increase our understanding of each other, to give mutual assistance wherever that is needed, and to testify to the truth of God in a world infested with liberalism, revolutionary theology and false ecumenism.

For the rest, brethren, it is our wish as churches that the ties between us may strengthen. We pray that the Lord will

grant you much wisdom as you deal with the matters on your agenda. May you be found obedient in all things, and may you not depart from the faith once delivered to the saints. May you continue valiant in the truth, just as our forefathers of the Secession who 150 years ago considered the truth of God more valuable than the praise of men and the approval of kings.

1986
17 b. III
(31 pages)

A REPORT ON THE FIRST MEETING OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES

The Preliminaries

On the first weekend of September 1985 the city of Edinburgh, Scotland, was in the process of catching its collective breath. All during the previous month it had been wall-to-wall tourists. They had come from practically every corner of the globe in order to experience the Edinburgh International Festival with its plays, concerts, dance troupes and famous Military Tadoo. But now the foreign hordes were departing having satiated their appetites and no doubt emptied their bankrolls as well.

Still, it was not all a case of outflux for as the thousands exited a few visitors began arriving in preparation for the first meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC). They came by plane, train, car and bus. Either they were welcomed at their point of arrival by a representative of the Free Church of Scotland, the hosting Church, or else they made their way to the Pollock Halls of Residence of the University of Edinburgh where they were greeted by the Rev. J. Macleod. It seems that in some mysterious Scottish way he had been conscripted to act as conference organizer. Some were even heard to refer to him later, and that rather irreverently, as the "ecclesiastical gofor", a name not totally out of order since he was always "going for this" and "going for that." In any case, he bore it all with good humour and did an excellent job taking care of the needs of his guests.

By Monday evening, Sept. 2, most of the delegates, advisers, and observers, some accompanied by their wives, had arrived and were transported to the Assembly Hall of the Free Church, St. Columba's Church, in the heart of the city. The occasion was the Prayer Service for the first meeting of the ICRC. Prof. C. Graham, Principal of the Free Church College, opened with prayer, after which Prof. Dr. J. Faber read the Scriptures. The Rev. D. Lamont, Minister of St. Columba's Church, delivered the message based on that always relevant third verse of the epistle of Jude, "Beloved, being very eager to write to you of our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." In his address Rev. Lamont dwelt especially on the issue of concern in this verse, as well the commitment that this verse calls for. Following this service a social gathering took place in which most of the appropriate introductions were made.

The Conference Meetings Open

On the next day, Tuesday, Sept. 3, the first meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Church commenced. The Constituent Assembly which had been held three years before in Groningen, the Netherlands, was about to produce its first fruits. Some were heard to speak of the moment as being of historic proportions, others were more moderate in their assessments.

On behalf of the hosting Church, the Free Church of Scotland, Prof. A.C. Boyd, professor of New Testament at the Free Church College and the past Moderator of the General Assembly, brought the meeting to order. Ps. 93 was sung without musical accompaniment, as is customary in the Free Church where organs are absent and a precentor sets the tune. Rev. 1 was then read. Prayer was offered in the customary posture of the Free Church which means standing. After that Prof. Boyd welcomed all of the guests.

With the opening formalities out of the way, the meeting proceeded to an examination of the credentials of the Churches represented. A committee consisting of the Revs. J. Klamer (Indonesia), A. Veldman (Australia) and J. Visscher (Canada) scrutinized the documents presented and reported that all were found to be in good order. The following Churches, along with their representatives, were present:

a) Participating Churches-

Canadian Reformed Churches -

Rev. M. van Beveren, delegate

Rev. J. Visscher, delegate

Dr. J. Faber, adviser;

Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland -

Rev. D. Thomas, delegate;

Free Church of Scotland -

Rev. J. N. Macleod, delegate

Rev. D. Lamont, delegate

Prof. D. Macleod, adviser

Prof. C. Graham, adviser;

Free Reformed Churches of Australia -

Rev. G. Van Rongen, delegate

Rev. A. Veldman, delegate;

Gereja Reformaci in Indonesia -

Rev. J. Klamer, delegate;

Gereformeerde Kerken in the Netherlands -

Rev. O. J. Douma, delegate ✓

- Prof.H.M. Ohmann, delegate;
 Presbyterian Church in Korea -
 Prof.P.S. Oh, delegate.
- b) Churches Applying for Membership-
 Free Church in Southern Africa -
 Rev.N.P. Mpayipeli, observer-delegate
 Rev.H. Sliep, observer-delegate
 Prof.A.C. Boyd, adviser;
 Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia -
 Rev.W.P. Gadsby, observer-delegate
 Rev.J.D. Heenan, observer-delegate
 Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland -
 Rev.T.C. Donachie, observer-delegate
 Rev.C.K. Hyndman, observer-delegate.
- c) Observer Churches-
 Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore -
 Rev.L.C. Kwee, visiting-observer;
 Free Church in India -
 Rev.D. John, visiting-observer;
 Free Reformed Churches of North America -
 Rev.C. Schouls, visiting-observer
 Rev.C. Pronk, visiting-observer;
 Free Reformed Church in South Africa -
 Rev.F.J.^{van}Hulst, visiting-observer
 Mr.J. Moes, visiting-observer;
 Iglesia Evangelica Presbyteriana del Peru -
 Rev.A. Tuesta, visiting-observer;
 Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (South Africa) -
 Rev.J.E. Potgieter, visiting-observer
 Dr.P. Rossouw, visiting-observer;
 Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Christchurch, New Zealand -
 Rev.A. Young, visiting-observer;
 Orthodox Presbyterian Church - U.S.A. -
 Dr.F. Kingsley Elder, visiting-observer
 Rev.J.P. Galbraith, visiting-observer
 Rev.J.J. Peterson, visiting-observer;
 Reformed Church in Japan -
 Rev.S. Morinaga, visiting-observer;
 Christian Witness to Israel -
 Rev.M.A. Macleod, visiting-observer.

Upon the recommendation of the Provisional Committee, the following executive was proposed and agreed to:

Chairman	- Rev.D. Lamont
Vice-chairman	- Rev.G. Van Rongen
Recording Secretary	- Prof.C. Graham
Corresponding Secretary	- Rev.M. van Beveren

Next, the Agenda was adopted and the Provisional Committee tendered its report. This Committee was appointed in 1982 at the close of the Constituent Assembly in Groningen to oversee the preparations for this first meeting of the ICRC, as well as to assist the Provisional Secretary. The reporter, Prof.C. Graham, mentioned that there had not been all that much work for the Committee to do. This was due especially to the fact that the ICRC was still in an embryonic stage and that the participating Churches were somewhat unclear as to what their input should be. He expressed the hope that in the future the ICRC would have on its agenda not just topics of a theological nature, but that also topics of an ethical, social and more practical character. The Conference should have a full agenda and not be solely dependent on formal lectures or introductions.

New Members

After this Report, the Conference went over to the next matter on the agenda which had to do with applications for membership. The following Churches had requested to be received as new members: The Free Church in Southern Africa, The Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland.

To scrutinize these applications a committee was proposed consisting of the delegates: H.M. Ohmann, convener, J.N. Macleod, A. Veldman and J. Visscher. This committee later met and examined the documents that each of these Churches had submitted according to the Constitution. Interviews were also conducted with representatives of these Churches in which further information was received, as well as pertinent questions were asked. The result of this process was that on the next day the committee could report that there were no obstacles to admitting these Churches as members of the Conference and to upgrading their representatives to delegate status. (Elsewhere in this issue certain basic facts about these new members can be found)

With regard to these applications a few points require further elaboration. All three Churches have as their subordinate confessions the Westminster Standards, while the Reformed Presbyterian Church(Ireland) also holds to the historic Covenants. The Free Church in Southern Africa is in

the process of translating these Standards into the Xhosa language, and will submit this translation for scrutiny to the Conference once it is completed.

The Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia was queried especially about its subscription form for office-bearers and what it meant to accept "the system of doctrine" as set forth in the Westminster Standards. Was this in any way a weakening or a qualification in this matter of subscription? From the discussion that followed, it became clear that there was no desire whatsoever to compromise here, but rather to emphasize that office-bearers do not stand in exactly the same position over against the confessions as they do over-against the Scriptures. The Scriptures have divine authority and must be believed in their totality; whereas, the confessions have ecclesiastical authority and may contain human interpretations and insights which are not infallible. Nevertheless, the doctrine which they seek to summarize and stress is faithful to the Scriptures.

As an illustration of this it was mentioned that the Westminster Standards identify the AntiChrist as the Pope of Rome. In the time when these Standards were being written that may have been an obvious identification, but today it is considered dubious. The Pope may exhibit certain tendencies that are AntiChrist-like, but an absolute identification is something that few would want to make. By the same token, one can also refer to the fact that our previous edition of the Belgic Confession considered the letter to the Hebrews to be a product of Paul's inspired pen, whereas almost all office-bearers took exception to this. Did that undermine their Subscription? Not necessarily, since it is a recognized fact that the authority of our confessional standards is a subordinate one. They always have to be tested with the touchstone of the Scriptures.

Another matter which had the attention of the committee had to do with how these Churches requesting admission to the Conference related to Churches in their own land who were already members. In Ireland the Evangelical Presbyterian Church was a member, and if the Reformed Presbyterian Church was admitted, there would be two Churches in one country. The same was the case in Australia where the Free Reformed Churches were already in and the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia was requesting to be allowed in. In South Africa the situation was different because the Free Reformed Churches there were not yet requesting membership, although they might do so in the future.

In each case the committee was able to ascertain that there was an active striving on the part of these Churches to promote unity. In Ireland the EPC and the RPC were doing their utmost to come closer together. In

Australia the FRC and the PCEA were taking up contact with each other and were hopeful that it would deepen. There was no desire whatsoever on the part of the applicants to perpetuate their own existence and to refuse to heed the command of the Lord for unity.

A Committee on Proposals and Finances

In addition to a committee on membership, a committee was also appointed to examine and report on correspondence, proposals from member Churches, as well as financial arrangements for this and future meetings of the Conference. To this committee were appointed: Rev.O.J. Douma, Rev.J. Klamer, Rev.D. Lamont, and Prof.P.S. Oh. The next day the Revs.W.P. Gadsby, N.P. Mpayipeli, and J. Visscher were added to this committee.

On Thursday, Sept.5, the committee's report was submitted and a considerable number of recommendations were adopted. With respect to Conference expenses, it was decided to establish a General Fund to cover all expenses. The costs to the member Churches will be based on the number of baptized members in each Church taking into account the estimated average per capita income of these members. The reason why it was decided to go with the number of baptized member, instead of the number of communicants, has to do with the fact that in most of the Presbyterian Churches there are also sizeable numbers of "adherents." These are members who have been baptized and who support the Church financially but who have not yet publicly professed their faith. If they had been ignored in the assessments it could have be rightly argued that certain members Churches would be contributing at a less than proper rate.

The reason why it was decided to use "the estimated average per capita income" is probably more apparent. It relates to the fact that among the member Churches there is a wide discrepancy when it comes to standards of living. At one point the committee was ready to recommend that "the national per capita" figures be used, but then it came to the conclusion that that too would be grossly unfair. To mention but one case in point, the Free Church in Southern Africa is a Church made up almost totally of black people and their incomes are considerably less than those of the whites, hence it would have been unfair to expect them to pay the same fee. It is thus hoped that by using an ~~an~~ estimated average per capita income formula the assessments will turn out to be much more equitable. At the same time it was realized that this formula has the potential to give the Treasurer some serious migraines. If it proves unworkable, he will simply have to come to the next meeting of the Conference with suggestions for improvement.

It was also decided that member Churches would have to pay for the travelling expenses of their own delegates and that if that proved impossible assistance could be requested from the General Fund. An amendment to the affect that the Conference also pay for travelling expenses was defeated on the grounds that it would prove too costly. As for Churches sending observers or Churches applying for membership, they would have to bear their own traveling and lodging costs.

With respect to this meeting of the Conference in Edinburgh, it was decided that delegates and advisers of member Churches would be billed L135.60(\$260.00)per person, while observers would be charged L180.60(350.00) per person. The discrepancy between these two figures relates to the fact that in the case of delegates and advisers, the hosting Church, the Free Church of Scotland, decided to assume some of their expenses. In addition the Free Church also assumed the extra costs relating to secretarial work and sundry matters.

On a related financial matter, the Conference also decided to appoint a Treasurer in the person of Mr H.A. Berends of Surrey, Canada, and gave him a detailed mandate. The auditing of his books will be done by the Treasurer's member Church, in this instance the Canadian Reformed Churches.

Furthermore, the Conference decided that each study committee which the Conference appoints is expected to do its business through the mail. If an actual meeting is called for, the committee has to submit a request to the Interim Committee which will either approve or disapprove the expense involved. In this way there exists some kind of control over study committees and their expenses.

A couple of member-Churches, namely in Australia, Canada and the Netherlands had requested that certain amendments be made to the Constitution and By-Laws of the Conference. In this matter the Conference agreed with the proposal of the committee that these items could not be dealt with at this meeting but would have to be placed on the agenda of the next meeting. The reason for this relates to the fact that amendments to the Constitution need to be received by the member Churches two years before the Conference, and at that particular time only one or two Churches had joined, one of them being a Church proposing the amendments, namely the Free Reformed Churches of Australia. Needless to say, it hardly made sense to send these amendments to the member Churches when there were only

two members who could properly consider them and instruct their delegates accordingly.

Now there may be some who are of the opinion that the ICRC in making this decision was simply side-stepping the issues. That was not the case at all. The Conference recognized the legitimacy of these amendments but could not handle them for reasons that have to do with the start-up of the Conference. As such part of the decision on ~~the~~ matters reads, "to inform those member Churches (CRC, FRCA, GKN) which have submitted amendments to the Constitution and Regulations that the matters raised by them could not be dealt with at this meeting of the Conference due to the fact that the establishment of the Conference made it impossible to meet the constitutional provisions regarding amendments to the Constitution and Regulations; to place these amendments on the agenda of the next meeting of the Conference."

Finally, the Conference had received a proposal on missions from the Churches in the Netherlands, and after some discussion it followed the committee's recommendation to appoint a study committee with the mandate: (a) to gather information from the member Churches regarding their missionary activities and training programs; (b) to study the possibilities of co-ordinating the missionary programs of the member Churches when it comes to training, mission fields and exchanging missionaries; (c) to examine the need to produce listings of relevant missionary literature on an ongoing basis, and to promote the publication of an introduction to Reformed missions; (d) to report to the next meeting of the Conference.

From this mandate it can be readily perceived that this study committee has a rather wide-ranging task from information gathering to examining the whole area of missionary co-operation to stimulating certain publishing efforts. Once its report is tabled it will be up to the member Churches to decide whether or not to make use of its recommendations. These in turn may prove very helpful when it comes to planning future missionary activities.

Tuesday Evening - The Doctrine of the Church

On Tuesday evening, Sept. 3 at 7:30 p.m. the Conference was back in session. The various applications for membership to the ICRC by the Churches mentioned above were dealt with and approved. Afterwards, in what was to become an evening custom, some of the lesser known member Churches and observer Churches received an opportunity to introduce

themselves. On this particular evening, Prof.P.S. Oh gave some information regarding the Presbyterian Church in Korea(Kosin), followed by the Rev.J. Klamer who introduced the Reformed Churches on East Sumba/Savu(Indonesia).

The next item on the agenda was the paper prepared by Dr.J. Faber titled "The Doctrine of the Church in the Reformed Confessions." He began his speech by making reference to the timely character of this topic seeing recent developments in the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches. He then went on to the Reformed Confessions and characterized them in a four-fold manner as being Scriptural, catholic, anti-Romanist and anti-spiritualist.

Thereafter, Dr.Faber divided these Confessions into five periods:(i) the period of first reflection and consolidation (eg. 67 Articles of 1523, Ten Theses of Berne of 1528, the First Helvetic Confession of 1536); (ii) the period of new orientation (eg. the Geneva Confession of 1536, the Geneva Catechism of 1541, the Second Helvetic Confession of 1562 or 1566); (iii) the period under the cross (eg. the French Confession of Faith of 1559, the Scottish Confession of 1560, the Belgic Confession of 1561); (iv) the period of the Second Reformation (eg. the Hungarian Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism of 1563); (v) the period of Reformed posterity (eg. the Canons of Dort of 1618-1619, the Westminster Standards of 1643-1649).

Having made these distinctions, Dr.Faber then went back and examined the four characteristics in detail drawing on the Confessions for elaboration. Dealing with the scripturality of the doctrine of the Church, he drew attention to the relationship between the Scriptures and the Church, as well as to the nature of the Church itself as being a gathering, a company. Under the catholic characteristic, he stressed the continuity of the Church and gave as an example the expression "outside of the church there is no sl^avation." He also showed how the Reformed Confessions are so often structured according to the ecumenical creeds. In connection with this he deplored the whole development whereby the word "catholic" has sometimes been either replaced by or added to the word "christian" and suggested that the Conference might appoint a committee in order to come to a common text for the ecumenical creeds.

On the aspect of anti-Romanist, he showed how virtually all of the Reformed Confessions share this characteristic. Time and again one finds in them that Roman Catholic abuses are being attacked, especially those that relate to the government and offices of the church. Dr.Faber also stressed that the equality of ministers and churches is fundamental to Reformed

church polity and should be powerfully maintained over against Rome and false ecumenicity. In this context he also wondered whether the Westminster Confession, while being a good Reformed document and anti-Romanist, did not leave itself open in Ch.31 to hierarchism.

On the last characteristic of anti-spiritualist, the speaker showed how the Confessions do not promote a schismatic search for a perfect community. This aspect should also be considered timely seeing the 20th century with its holiness movements and neo-pentacostal revivalism.

Finally, Dr.Faber turned his attention to two distinctions, the visible and invisible Church and the true and false Church. Regarding the former, he referred to the First Helvetic Confession of 1536, as well as to the Genevan Catechism. In particular he made mention of the fact that Calvin spoke of the Church in two ways, that which is invisible to us but visible to God and that which is visible to men. He also showed how the Belgic Confession, although not using the terms visible and invisible, speaks in the same vein. As for the Westminster Standards, they use this distinction in a pointed and systematic manner. It was precisely this systematizing that drew some critical remarks from Dr.Faber. Drawing on the writings of Prof. John Murray, he wondered whether the Westminster Standards do not speak of the visible and invisible Church as two distinct subjects, two separate entities? He warned that this can so easily lead to a polarization of the so-called invisible and visible Church. Dr.Faber did, however, add that these Standards do not show a low esteem for the visible Church. Furthermore, the Article 26-31 prove that they show in many striking respects, the Scriptural, catholic, anti-Romanist and anti-spiritualist tendency of a typically Reformed confession.

As to the matter of the true and false Church, the speaker traced their development through the Genevan Confession of 1536, the Second Helvetic Confession, the Confession of the English Congregation of Geneva, the Scottish Confession, the Belgic Confession, and the Westminster Confession. He stressed that this distinction between true and false must be maintained, that it should always be so that the true Church hears the voice of the Good Shepherd and follows Him because it knows His voice.

Wednesday morning - Discussion

Although one question regarding Dr.Faber's address was handled on the Tuesday evening, the bulk of the discussion took place on Wednesday morning and early afternoon. The issues raised were many and varied.

Space does not permit us to mention all of them, but here follow the main ones.

It was asked whether the Reformers went far enough in their condemnation of Roman Catholic baptism and whether they should not have requested that converts be re-baptized? A later supplementary to this question was put rather bluntly, "If an unregenerate man (a false priest of Rome) can baptize, why can not any Tom, Dick or Harriet do it?" In his response, Dr. Faber went back to Augustine and his struggle with the Donatists and showed how this controversy had influenced Calvin's position in his Institutes. Calvin did not want to go in the direction of re-baptism, and we should be careful not to depart from his position. In connection with this, he mentioned that this topic also has the attention of our missionaries in Latin America; however, he stressed that he was not in favour of re-baptism, also seeing the influence of neo-pentecostalism and anabaptism in that part of the world. It would only work confusion and lead to a wrong identification with them.

From a pastoral point of view, Dr. Faber urged that our approach should be to speak to Roman Catholics and ask them whether they know what it means that they have been baptized into the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. If they do not, then it is incumbent upon us to educate them.

As for the possibility that any "Tom, Dick or Harriet" could baptize if a priest is allowed to do it, Dr. Faber used the apt illustration of an errand boy. He is given a letter which contains all kinds of promises and commitments in it, only in the process of carrying it he soils it with his dirty hands. Does such an outwardly soiled letter void the promises in it? Not at all. They remain valid. So it is with baptism too when it is administered by a person unfit to do so.

Dr. Faber was also asked to elaborate on what is meant by the "pluriformity of the Church." In doing so he dealt with the background of this expression. He showed how Abraham Kuyper had propagated this idea in his Stone Lectures, as well as in his Principles of Sacred Theology. According to Kuyper, the essence of the Church shows itself in many forms. Relying on the idealism of German philosophy, Kuyper saw Lutherans, Anglicans, Roman Catholics, the Reformed as being different forms of the same essence. By way of illustration Dr. Faber mentioned that he had seen the garden of Principal Graham which has in it all kinds of beautiful flowers. Well, so Kuyper would say, it is with the Church too. It is made up of all

kinds of beautiful flowers(denominations) and together they form one beautiful garden(the Church).

In his criticism of this Kuyperian construction, Dr.Faber pointed especially to two things. The first is that Kuyper did not recognize the impact of sin in all of this. He failed to see that divisions in the Church were the result of sin and conflict. In addition, Kuyper also undermined the whole confessional distinction between the true and the false Church by his stress on pluriformity.

Another question that arose had to do with the possibility of appointing a study committee in order to come to a common text on the ecumenical creeds. Dr.Faber stated that he could support such a suggestion.

On the matter of visible and invisible Church, one of the Scottish brethren felt that a few comments and questions were in order. According to his understanding it was never the intention of the Westminster divines to teach the existence of two separate Churches. Rather they wanted to emphasize that the Church can be viewed from two perspectives, namely, the Church as we see it and the Church as God sees it. That some may have taken refuge in the concept of the invisible Church is not a proper extension of this distinction but rather an abuse of it. As for the matter of incipient elements of hierarchy being present in the Presbyterian system of church government, he wondered whether this was an accurate statement. What is wrong, he asked, with submitting the judgment of the few to the judgment of the many in Synods or General Assemblies?

In reply, Dr.Faber made it quite clear that he appreciated those who love their confessions. "I love people who love the Westminster Confession," he remarked. As for the distinction visible and invisible, its origin can be traced to Augustine in his struggle with the Donatists, also Wycliffe and Hus used it in their conflicts with the Roman Church. It has a legitimate use, but it can also be used in such a way that polarization takes place between these two aspects. That is what we should be on our guard against. One should not take refuge in the invisible Church, and by the same token one should not take refuge in the visible Church either. "I always tell our people, 'You are not saved because you are a member of the Canadian Reformed Churches, but you are saved through faith in Jesus Christ,'" he said.

The question was asked whether the fact that the Westminster Standards do not speak of a true and false Church could be attributed to the later character of these Standards? And what about this distinction, is it outdated, too simplistic? How do you handle such a distinction today, for

example in this Conference? In Ireland, South Africa and Australia there is more than one true Church.

Dr.Faber reacted to these questions by stressing that the Westminster Confession is in the same line as the Belgic Confession and the Scottish Confession when it comes to this matter of true and false. The terminology may differ because the Westminster Confession speaks about the false Church as "the synagogue of Satan" but the teaching is the same. As for this distinction being out-dated, Dr.Faber denied it. It is a Scriptural one. It also goes back to Augustine and the Donatists.

But how then should this distinction be handled? Dr.Faber pointed out that when the Westminster Confession speaks about pure and less pure Churches, it is referring to a distinction that is made within the true Church. In this regard one can think of the seven Churches of Asia Minor which were all true but not all equally pure. As for the matter of unity and the relationship of true Churches to each other, Dr.Faber made mention of Calvin who time and again showed that he was no schismatic. He was even willing to sign the revised Augsburg Confession if that would promote the cause of unity with Luther. More up to date, he mentioned the situation in Canada where there are two true Churches, the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Free Reformed Churches, who exist side by side. Such a situation exists yet it should be recognized as being an unbearable one. There should be unity. We should sit around the same Lord's Supper table. We should do everything possible to promote unity.

Can you put a deadline on coming to unity of say six to seven years? Dr.Faber doubted the wisdom of that. All kinds of factors play a role in these divisions, often sociological and non-theological ones too. Nevertheless, we should continue to preach the message of Eph.4. We must do what we can to remove stumbling blocks. We must have the attitude of Rom.15 and if that means that organs in the Church would have to go at the cost of communion, then the organs should go. We must never forget the teaching of I Cor.1 and Jn.17. Christ is not divided. To which he added, "my conscience can not rest if Christians in the same city do not come together."

In addition to these questions others were asked about the rights of the consistory, about the "gathering" aspect of the Church, about the marks of the Church.

On the whole, Dr.Faber's presentation, as well as his responses to the questions raised, was very well received. As a matter of fact, the impression created by this whole discussion on the Church was that there really are no basic differences on this point between the member Churches of the Conference. There are no doubt differences in practices and applications, caused in large part by the differing historical backgrounds and developments, but there appeared to be no essential ones.

Wednesday evening - Piety in the Psalms

On Wednesday afternoon, the Conference met again after lunch and had a preliminary discussion on financial matters. That evening Rev.D. John introduced the Free Church of India and the Rev.C. Lau did the same for the Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore. Thereafter Prof.H.M. Ohmann received the opportunity to deliver his paper entitled "Piety in the Book of Psalms."

Prof. Ohmann began his address with a word study on the various words for piety in different languages: Dutch, Latin, Hebrew. He concluded that piety denotes integrity, trustworthiness, incorruptibility, soundness. In relating it to the book of Psalms he considered that the best approach would be to begin with Psalm 1. It is the Psalm of the two ways. In it we find the key word "blessed". In it there is mention of another key word "law." The speaker elaborated on both.

Still, he warned against hanging the whole book on just one Psalm, with the consequence that he proceeded to explain Psalm 2. There we see that things are placed in a world-wide context and there as well we meet "the Lord's anointed" which in the first instance is a reference to David and thereafter finds its fulfillment in Christ. In Him we see true piety personified.

From there Prof. Ohmann went on to delve into some details. The first was that all piety in the Psalms is theocentric. He cited Ps.62, Ps.85, Ps.73, Ps.116 as proof of this. He stressed as well that the psalmists stress the display of God's power in creation(cf.Ps.8,19,29,104). Then too the place emphasis on the works of God in history(cf.Ps.136,105,106,78).

Next, he addressed himself to David, the context in which he wrote, and the position from which he wrote. In Ps.7,17,26 we meet David as he protests his innocence. We see the enemies that he has to fight against, the enemies within and without. In this connection too attention was paid to the workers of iniquity. As well Prof. Ohmann showed that in so many respects these Psalms mirror the future sufferings of Christ.

He then went on to question whether it was right for the authors of the psalms to be so busy protesting their innocence. Was that proper? Was it right for them, and is it right for us, to speak this way? Should we not avoid such statements and such psalms seeing our sins? It all depends whether there has been true confession of sin, whether there is sincerity of heart. To such a person forgiveness is extended. Piety presupposes

confession, as well as integrity and finally a taking refuge in the sanctuary. There true reconciliation is to be found.

Thursday morning - Discussion

The discussion on Prof. Ohmann's paper began in earnest the next morning, Thursday, Sept. 5. One delegate asked about how piety relates to the fear of the Lord. In response, the speaker gave an excursus on Ps. 112. Another delegate wondered whether sufficient attention had been paid to the matter of prayer in relation to piety. Prof. Ohmann remarked that it was not at all his intention to minimize this matter, adding that we need "to knuckle down on our needs." Another person expressed his dissatisfaction with the word "piety" and wondered whether it did not leave all kinds of openings to subjective thinking. He would have preferred to see the Psalms treated as songs of God's covenant people. In reply, Prof. Ohmann said, "Brother, I am not a subjectivist"; and at the same time he had no regrets on having gone on a "piety tour", as he called it. There is an element of pietism in the Psalms. As for not approaching the matter from the covenant, he said that this matter could be found in his paper, albeit not so explicitly. The reason for that being that it might have given the wrong impression. In his words, "here comes those Dutch covenant talkers again."

Thereafter, the discussion turned into a whole debate about the matter of how to understand the "cursing" or imprecatory Psalms. It was especially Ps. 137 that became the focal point of this discussion. Prof. Ohmann insisted that we must not eliminate the element of vengeance or revenge in these Psalms. Another speaker dissented and said that vengeance is now a matter for the Lord alone to exact. And so it went on and on. All sorts of factors relating to this matter were bounced around. In short, a very interesting exchange of ideas but without a real resolution of this thorny problem.

Voices of Discontent

Some time later that same Thursday afternoon, once a number of business items had been dealt with, the Conference experienced a kind of mini-fireworks display. Prof. D. Macleod requested the floor and proceeded to put some pointed questions to the Conference. Why was the Conference needed anyway? What made it distinctive from other organizations like the WCC and the RES? What about pressing social issues in today's world like apartheid and world famine; why were they not on the agenda? What about issues relating to inter-communion between Churches? Furthermore, he

went on to suggest that the Conference set aside an afternoon to speak about some of these concerns.

No sooner was he finished and the Rev. J. Klamer asked for the floor and wondered out loud about the heavy theological character of the speeches. Is this really what we want? What do we expect from the Conference? Are we receiving it? If not, why not? He concurred with Prof. Macleod's suggestion for a kind of open forum.

Needless to say, these remarks provoked a very lively discussion. Some felt that these matters could be added to the agenda. Most were of the opinion, however, that they could not be dealt with formally by the Conference seeing that they had not been properly placed on the agenda, either via a member Church placing them on it or as a result of a paper delivered to the Conference. In the end it was decided that the Executive Committee would discuss the matter and come up with a recommendation. This recommendation, when it later came, was that if those attending the Conference wanted to have an informal discussion on these issues that would be fine, but there was no way that these matters could as yet be properly added to the agenda and formally discussed.

Thursday evening - Sacraments and New Life in the Spirit

That evening the Rev. S. Morinaga introduced the Reformed Church in Japan and the Rev. A. Young introduced the Orthodox Presbyterian Church of Christchurch, New Zealand (not affiliated with the OPC in America).

Thereafter, Prof. D. Macleod, Professor of Systematic Theology at the Free Church College in Edinburgh, spoke on the topic "The Relation of the Sacraments to New Life in the Spirit." In his introductory words, he stated that over the centuries there has been a tendency in Christendom to exaggerate the importance of the sacraments and to see them as dispensing special grace. At the same time, there has been a tendency too to construct theologies using as basis non-biblical words for the sacraments like "sacramentum" and "mysterion." Next, he showed how the sacraments have frequently been discussed in a very polemical framework, as seen for example in the whole debate between Roman Catholics and Reformers and among the Reformers themselves. In this connection he was of the opinion that Calvin had gone out of his way to conciliate Luther, something he should have avoided. At the same time he championed Zwingli who according to him had received a lot of bad press over the years. Such a dismissal of Zwingli was indefensible seeing that his views on the sacraments were fully

biblical. Finally, he stressed that the authority of the sacraments does not depend on any theory of their efficacy.

Having made these points for openers, Prof. Macleod then went on to assert that the sacraments presuppose new life in the Spirit. They do not regenerate but they presuppose that those who undergo them are already regenerate. As proof he went on to cite the case of Abraham who was circumcised when he was a believer already. The same applies to baptism and to the Lord's Supper. Paul presupposes that those who partake of that Supper have come to faith and are able to discern the body.

But that in turn raises the question, "what about infant baptism?" Prof. Macleod stated that there was no biblical warrant whatsoever to assume that a child is regenerate or born under an unconditional promise. He referred in this regard to Jacob and Esau. But that still does not answer the question, so he went on to say that we should rest our case on the fact of divine appointment. God has ordained it. In addition, what is pre-supposed in this matter of infant baptism is not the faith of the child but the faith of the parents. Because the parents believe, the child should be baptized.

Still, Prof. Macleod went on, the sacraments do more than presuppose new life, they also nourish new life. But how? He acknowledged that on this point there are many questions and problems. Some say that sacraments nourish by means of special sacramental grace or invariable efficacy or the real presence. The speaker criticized each of these ideas as being unbiblical or coming from a world view alien to that of the NT.

Therafter he showed how the sacraments express new life in the Spirit and touched on the aspects of obedience, confession, communion, hope and eucharist. He also showed how they symbolise new life. They are communal, festal, require a life of sincerity and truth, and are interim or provisional.

Finally, he stressed that the sacraments bind together all who live the new life in the Spirit. It was in his treatment of this point that Prof Macleod made a number of practical applications in the area of ecumenism, apartheid and diaconal care. If there is real new life in the Spirit it should become evident in the area of ecclesiastical unity. It should mean an end to all discrimination against brothers and sisters of another race. It should lead to increased concern and care for those who are hungry or the victims of Soviet and Muslim oppression. After all, the first order in the post-Pentecost Church is the diaconate.

Friday morning - Discussion

The next morning after the previous day's Minutes had been adopted, the discussion of Prof. Macleod's paper began. It turned out to be a controversial one. Dr. Faber stood up and expressed the sentiment that Prof. Macleod had touched a raw nerve. For one he was not very pleased with the set-up of the paper. He stressed that when we speak about the sacraments we must do so within the framework of the covenant. He went on to cite the Scottish Confession as support, as well as the Westminster Confession. He was also of the opinion that the speaker had left out the most important words and made a number of poor distinctions. Baptism is not based on the spiritual life of the infant and neither is it based on the spiritual life of the parents. It is based on an ordinance of God. The administration of baptism presupposes that parents belong to the covenant, and if we put it as Prof. Macleod does then we fall into subjectivism.

At the same time, however, Dr. Faber was pleased with the remarks made on "sacramentum" and other terms. But then again when it came to Prof. Macleod's view of Zwingli, he disagreed and once more quoted from the Scottish Confession. He also disagreed with the assessment given of Calvin. The Reformer spoke on the basis of Scripture and tried to give expression to that intimate relationship between Christ and the believers. In closing, Dr. Faber remarked that he would have liked to hear more about the matter of paedocommunion.

After that length reaction to his paper, Prof. Macleod received the floor. He defended his approach to this particular subject which had been assigned to him and explained that he had not used covenant terminology for fear that the covenant child status might lead some to think he was going in the direction of regeneration. He concurred that the real foundation of the sacraments had to do with the ordinance of God, but felt that that in itself did not clear up all the difficulties. As to the charge of subjectivism, he refuted it by saying that it did not fit in and that he was opposed to all mysticism. At the same time, this did not mean that he would ever want to bypass the experience of God's grace. The twin perils, he said, are subjectivism and objectivism.

On the matter of his attempt to rehabilitate Zwingli, Prof. Macleod refused to budge. His opinion remained that in many ways Zwingli's understanding of the sacraments was clearer and more Scriptural than that of Calvin's. He could not help but conclude that a number of Calvin's quotes were full of difficulties. As for paedocommunion, he hesitated to give it his

prohibition and acknowledged that a difficult symmetry existed between infant baptism and adult communion.

Thereafter, Prof. Ohmann arose and opened with the comment that "Prof. Faber has mown the grass before my feet." He then went on to assert that God's promise does not depend on those who have new life in the Spirit, rather it stands with the one who issues it. After his comment, questions were asked about whether the sacraments do not strengthen in a specific way, about the necessity of the sacrament, about diaconal care and apartheid.

In response, Prof. Macleod stated that it is true that God and man are not equal parties when it comes to the covenant. He emphasized that we baptize the physical seed of covenant keepers, and not of covenant breakers. Furthermore, he stressed that children are God's heritage and that we must care for them. But at the same time, he refused to concede that sacraments strengthen believers in some specific way, and felt that such a view came too close to attributing special grace to the sacraments.

With regard to the necessity of the sacraments, he stressed that a refusal to come to the Lord's Supper should not be viewed as an expression of humility but as an expression of defiance. After which he expressed the opinion that as a Conference we are substantially one, and that our differences do not relate to the relevance of the covenant, but on how to handle it. He admitted to being very committed to covenant theology and reiterated that no serious disagreement was present among the assembled delegates for no one claims an unconditional promise. He then went on to elaborate on the matter of diaconal aid and said that the Scriptural teaching is to do good to all men, especially to those who are of the household of faith. Believers do not live in isolation. They have a calling to try to sanctify their respective communities. As for apartheid, he was of the opinion that as believers we are common members of the body of Christ and that it is out of such a perspective that critique must be made.

After responding to a few more questions, the discussion came to a close and the Conference adjourned early. Upon leaving one could not help but hear delegates remark that they had the impression that Prof. Macleod was a man of controversial disposition. His paper set many tongues wagging and many heads shaking, but then in the end after all of the dust had settled most had to concede that quite a few of the flags which he had waved in the paper had been hauled down during the discussion. For my own part I could agree with such an assessment; however, my impression remains that

certain aspects of Prof. Macleod's thinking on covenant theology could use some further reflection and clarification.

The Banner of Truth Trust

Seeing that there was some time to spare yet that Friday afternoon a tour was organized to the offices of the Banner of Truth Trust. For those not acquainted with the work of the Banner, it might be well to add that it is a publishing venture which specializes in the republication of Puritan literature. For many years a great deal of this material was out of print and hard to obtain with the result that few knew very much about the Puritans and their writings. But then about thirty years ago it was decided to re-issue the best of these writings. In addition, the Banner has also been responsible for the republication of a number of standard works in Presbyterian theology. At the moment it is busy trying to incorporate more modern works into its list of publications.

From the offices of the Banner, we went to the warehouse where quite a number of bargains could be had. These were mostly books which contained one or two minor flaws. As you might expect the opportunity was well used by some to stock their shelves.

Friday evening - The Doctrine of the Covenants

On the evening of the same day, the Conference was once again in session. It began with a word of welcome to the Rev.D. Szabo, a minister of the Reformed Churches in Hungary. Thereafter, Rev.A. Tuesta spoke about the Churches which he serves in Peru, the Iglesia Evangelica Presbyteriana. The Rev.W.P. Gadsby of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia was next but seeing that the time was passing, he relinquished his place on the agenda until a more suitable time could be found.

This in turn gave the Rev.J.N. Macleod the opportunity to deliver his paper on "The Doctrine of the Covenants and the Reformed Confessions." Rev. Macleod, however, began by saying that it was not his intention to give his entire presentation of some 37 odd pages. Seeing that all the delegates had received it ahead of time, he felt that this would not be necessary. Furthermore, his health was not of such a nature that he could present such an elaborate discourse at this time. A few comments would have to suffice.

He began by thanking the Canadian Reformed Churches for the honour of inviting him to present a paper on this topic to the Conference. He was of the opinion that it was a matter of great relevance, especially when one sees

the way that the English speaking world is dominated by the ideas of individualism and subjectivism. You see this especially in the whole emphasis on revivalism. Think of the influence of the Moody-Sankey movement with its emotionalism and its self-centered emphasis. Only a re-consideration of the doctrine of the covenant is an effective antidote to this particular threat. Connected with this is also the fact that there is a relationship between revivalism and the neo-pentacostal movement. True enough, this may be a reaction to what is called "dead orthodoxy", a term which the speaker did not like because orthodoxy is neither dead nor killing, but why exchange the one evil for the opposite extreme? Let us re-affirm our commitment to covenant theology for then we are in the historic line of the Church.

With respect to his paper, he added a number of remarks. He said that he had inserted a section on the covenant of works because he believed it to be in line with biblical revelation. There is even a linkage between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. But at the same time, any effort to make the covenant appear as an agreement between equals is to be roundly condemned. He then went on to assert that the member Churches must explore and seek to discover what each tradition has to contribute on this topic. All elements of tension need to be explored and we should seek to come to the closest possible understanding. It is on the basis of the Reformed Confessions that we can enrich each other in our covenant thinking.

It is not my intention to give a summary of what is said in Rev. Macleod's lengthy paper beyond the fact that it deals with the covenant of works, the covenant of grace, the relationship between them, election and covenant, the free offer of the Gospel, participation in the covenant, and the position of the seed of the godly in the covenant. (The Editor informs me that this paper will be serialized in subsequent issues of Clarion)

After Rev. Macleod had finished with his introductory remarks, the Chairman proposed that the Saturday morning session be suspended, and that the discussion of this paper be delayed until Monday morning. The reason being that a trip had been arranged for the next day to a number of historic places to the north of Edinburgh. The delegates readily agreed and the session was closed.

An Excursion with Prof. Collins

Saturday morning dawned, but it was no day for sleeping in. The delegates were up early again, this time in preparation for their trip with

Prof. G.N.M. Collins. For those who are not acquainted with him, Prof. Collins is the Professor-emeritus in Church history of the Free Church College. He has authored over half-a-dozen books on Scottish Church history and in the process acquired an exhaustible fount of anecdotes and incidents. Although no one knew his precise age we were later told that it was in the neighbourhood of 85 years. This bit of information proved unsettling to some of the delegates for they could barely keep up with the pace set by the good professor.

In any case, after an early breakfast we piled into two blue mini-buses and set off. Over the great suspension bridge that spans the River Forth we went and entered what is often called in Scotland "the kingdom of Fife." Our first stop was the historic Falkland Palace, the place where Andrew Melville, the successor of John Knox called King James VI "God's sillie vassal" and spoke to him about there being two Kings and two kingdoms in Scotland. "There is Christ Jesus the King, and His kingdom the Kirk, whose subject King James the Sixth is, and of whose kingdom he is not a king, nor a lord, nor a head, but a member. And those whom Christ has called and commanded to watch over His Kirk, and govern His spiritual Kingdom, have sufficient power of Him, and authority so to do, both together and severally, the which no Christian King nor Prince should control or discharge, but fortify and assist, otherwise they are not faithful subjects nor members of Christ."

Then we proceeded to Kilmany. Here Thomas Chalmers was inducted as minister in 1803 and experienced true conversion in 1811. In 1815 he left and became in due time a leader in the Evangelical Wing of the Church of Scotland. In 1843 he led 474 ministers out of that increasingly moderatist Church and formed the Free Church of Scotland. He was a man mighty in the Gospel and a great champion of social reform.

From Kilmany we went to Dundee. Here we had lunch in the local Free Church of Scotland building, after which we went to view a portion of the ancient city gate from which the Reformer George Wishart (1513-1546) ministered fearlessly to those sick and dying of the plague.

Then it was on to Leuchars. The significance of this place has to do with the fact that here one finds an ancient Norman Church dating back to the 11th century ~~and~~ which is still in use. In later years this same Church became famous due to an incident connected to the Covenanter leader, Alexander Henderson. Before the days of his conversion Henderson was appointed to serve the Church in Leuchars; however, the parishoners did not want to receive him with the result that they nailed shut the doors of the

Church. Unable to open them, Henderson and his party had to crawl through a window, and so the induction proceeded. A few years later Henderson was converted under unique circumstances. Indeed, rarely has God's providential care been more in evidence. Henderson went to listen to Robert Bruce preach, and it so happened that his text was John. 10:1, "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber."

From Leuchars it was on to the famous city of St. Andrews. Here we visited the ruins of the Cathedral and saw the grave of Samuel Rutherford, a famous Scottish pastor and theologian, a member of Westminster Assembly of Divines and the author of Lex Rex, a classic on constitutional government. Next, we walked to the ruins of the Castle and saw the place where George Wishart was burned at the stake, as well as the famous bottle dungeon. Then, a few of us went to the nearby University of St. Andrews and viewed the spot where another Reformer, Patrick Hamilton, was martyred.

A Psalmody Recital

By now the afternoon was nearly spent and it was time to head back to Edinburgh. That evening a Psalmody Recital had been scheduled in St. Columba's Church for the benefit of the Conference. After a hurried ride home, a quick meal, and some sprucing up, we traveled to the center of Edinburgh for the recital. There the combined choirs of Edinburgh and Glasgow entertained and edified us with some truly beautiful renditions of the Scottish Psalms.

A unique feature of these Psalms is that they can be sung to many different tunes. One person said that as many as twenty to thirty different tunes can be used with each Psalm. Now that number is probably an exaggeration, but the fact remains that through a very unique device a great variety of tunes are accessible. How is this done? By cutting the pages of the Psalter in two. The top part contains about 300 different tunes, and the bottom part contains the rhymings. Beside the heading of each Psalm one finds cited a number of the most common tunes for that particular Psalm. For example, Psalm 23 can be sung for starters to the tune Wiltshire (No. 136); St. Fulbert (102); Erin (60). In this way all kinds of combinations are possible.

Another treat that particular evening had to do with the singing of the "Dutch Seven" (van Beveren, Faber, Van Rongen, Veldman, Van Hulst, Sliep, and Klamer), joined by others of lesser fame. They entertained the audience with a number of Psalms sung in the Dutch language. You may wonder how

they managed without an organ, but they did. The Scottish choir leaders were even talking of conscripting them. In any case, it was a very enjoyable and enlightening evening.

On the following day, Sunday, Sept. 8, the delegates dispersed to a number of the Free Church congregations in and surrounding Edinburgh. For most it was an opportunity to worship and to fellowship, to catch their breath and to prepare for the final days of the Conference.

Monday morning - Discussion

On Monday morning at 10:00 a.m. the Rev. D. Lamont, Chairman, called the meeting to order. After opening exercises and the adoption of the Minutes, the discussion began on Rev. J. N. Macleod's paper. It soon became apparent that the delegates were quite pleased with the way in which Rev. Macleod had treated this matter. It was a thorough and balanced piece of work. Naturally, that did not preclude the asking of a few questions. Was it really all that wise and accurate to speak of this covenant as a "covenant of works?" And did that not convey the impression of an Arminian way of speaking? Is the covenant of works of continuing relevance? What about the manner in which the Larger Catechism speaks about covenant and elect? What is the relevance of this topic for ecumenical relations?

In his response, the Rev. Macleod thanked the delegates for their comments and the brotherly spirit in which they were made. Proceeding to the particular questions, he remarked that as to the expression "covenant of works", he did not want to be a stickler on terminology and conceded that a different name could well be used. Nevertheless, he doubted whether the alternative name suggested, namely, "the covenant of favour" was all that fortunate. It might well result in a coalescing of the Edenic and post-Edenic covenants. There is an element of contrast and an element of correspondence here and both must receive their proper due.

On the point of how the Westminster Standards speak about the covenant and its relation to election and baptism, Rev. Macleod acknowledged that there are elements of tension here. There are these elements of tension between the symbols of the 16th and 17th century, and there are even these elements between the Westminster Confession and the Westminster Catechism. Furthermore, it was his opinion that more work is needed in order to resolve some of the theological problems concerning these issues. Is the Heidelberg Catechism in its statement in LD 26 on infant baptism not too unqualified? Are the terms used in the Larger Catechism really so suitable?

As for the matter of how his paper related to ecumenicity, the speaker admitted that he had not given that much thought. He did feel however that such a dimension would be worthy of further exploration at a future meeting of the Conference.

In closing, he remarked once more that it was necessary for member Churches to go out of their way to understand each other on these matters. The tensions that exist within Reformed theology on this point should be addressed, and hopefully resolved. These tensions do not imply that one or other confessional formulation is unscriptural, but they do require further understanding and elaboration.

Monday evening - Inter-Church Relations

On Monday evening, the Rev. J.J. Peterson received the floor in order to say a few words about the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Among other things he stated that there is no indication that women will be admitted to offices in the Church. As for the study committee, that was appointed more to get a grip on the hermeneutical side of the issue. On the matter of child communion, he elaborated on the background of this topic and how it related to an Ethiopian chapel in Michigan with coptic background. He insisted that the OPC will continue to demand a credible confession of faith in order to partake of the Lord's Supper. As for the RES, he described the fact that the OPC found itself in a very difficult position. It has increasingly confronted the GKN (Synodical) with its deviations. It has never yet blurred its testimony. At the same time, he was of the opinion that there was a contest going on for the leadership of those Churches in the RES from the Third World. The liberal elements want to give them their brand of leadership; whereas the OPC prefers to give them its kind of leadership. In that regard the OPC has considerable influence. It remains very reluctant to leave the RES and in so doing abandon these Churches to these dangerous influences. He requested the prayers of the delegates for the difficult situation in which the Lord has placed them.

After Rev. Peterson concluded his remarks, the Rev. J. Visscher received the opportunity to deliver his paper on "The Exercise of Inter-Church Relations." He began by sketching the background of this topic and how it came to be placed on the agenda of the Conference. It was put there primarily at the urging of the General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches which wanted a return to some semblance of order in a situation in which all kinds of different relationships were being considered among sister Churches. Also the contacts in the ICRC would expose the CRC to Churches

who maintain "fraternal relations" and not "correspondence." In short, is there some common ground when it comes to inter-church relations?

Rev. Visscher then went on to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the different relationships in existence, as well as those currently under consideration. He showed that these relationships can be placed in either of two basic frameworks. Furthermore, he showed how within these two frameworks there are different applications of the rules. After evaluating these applications, he went on to plead for the correspondence framework and showed how with some modifications this framework could remove most of the existing reservations and serve as a common relationship for members of the Conference.

Tuesday morning - Discussion

The next day this paper came up for discussion. Before that happened Prof. H.M. Ohmann asked permission to distribute a rough draft of certain proposals on inter-church relations which the Dutch Deputies had been working on. No sooner had he done so and he was asked to explain their background. This in turn led to an extensive discourse both on the past history of the rules for correspondence, as well as a point by point clarification of the rough draft.

The unfortunate consequence of this was that the paper delivered the night before did not quite receive the thorough-going discussion that was hoped for. Still, a number of questions were asked. Rev. J. Galbraith said that he found it very basic to the underlying factors of the Conference and an extensive and valuable review of the whole question in inter-church relations. But he did have some questions: What is the definition of a sister-Church? What are the criteria for a true Church? What is the ultimate goal of inter-church relations? Someone else asked whether the goal was a world-wide Reformed, Presbyterian Church seeing that the Bible does not recognize national boundaries? What role do factors of culture, language, play in all this? asked another. What about the inclusion of "liturgy" in these rules, what does that imply? Another delegate stressed that the content of this paper would need careful consideration. Still another pleaded for the closest fellowship with other true Churches in the world.

In his answers, the Rev. J. Visscher explained further the five criteria by which possible sister-churches should be judged. He also employed the marks of the true Church and elaborated on them when it came to the concept of true and false Church. As for the ultimate goal of inter-church relations being one Presbyterian and Reformed Church in the world, he was

of the opinion that while every obstacle that separates Churches should be removed and unity should be promoted to the utmost, it would be idealistic, to say the least, to envisage one internationally organized Church. It is not likely that what has failed to come about in the days of the early Church or in the days of the Reformation will come about in our day. The complete and visible unity of the Church will become the reality on the day of Christ's appearing.

Some time was also spent answering those questions which had to do with barriers between Churches that relate to cultural and linguistic factors. The speaker stressed that we must make up our minds as to whether we are going to aim low or high when it comes to relations between Churches. If we aim low we shall be able to live with our rules because they will not demand much. Only at what cost? At the cost of meaningful relationships perhaps? Conversely, if we aim high we may have to address tensions within our rules but then at least we will be giving expression to the fact that we are and should be as sister-Churches a hand and a foot to each other.

After additional questions were answered, the discussion came to a close. It will no doubt take some time to determine whether or not this paper will have any effect on the exercise of inter-church relations. Each delegation will hopefully study it and pass it on to the appropriate committees in their local Church for further consideration and reaction.

More Business Matters

This being the last day of the Conference it was necessary that a number of remaining business matters be dealt with. The day before the following people had been appointed to the Committee on Missions: Rev.M.K. Drost, Prof. Dr.K. Deddens, Prof.C. Graham, Prof.A.C. Boyd. To the Committee on the Ecumenical Creeds were now appointed: Prof.J.L. Mackay, Prof.Dr.J. Faber, Prof. Dr.N.H. Gootjes, Rev.G. Van Rongen. To supplement the Interim Committee, composed automatically from the Executive, the following were appointed: Rev.O.J. Douma, Prof.J.D. MacMillan, Rev.J. Visscher.

It was also decided to accept the offer of the Canadian Reformed Churches to have the next meeting of the Conference in the vicinity of Vancouver. The date remains to be determined, although it will be held D.V. in the summer/autumn of 1989. If, for one reason or another, the Conference could not be held in Canada, the Netherlands will be the site.

A communique was also proposed and adopted which summarized this first meeting of the ICRC.

Special stress was also laid on the fact that it are the member Churches who are responsible for proposing topics which should be on the agenda. If the topics that were handled in Edinburgh were not specific or practical enough, then the fault lies in a lack of input from the member Churches. Hopefully the next meeting will see a wider range of topics being addressed, topics which relate to the struggles, issues and questions which member Churches have.

The Conference Closes

That evening, Tuesday, Sept. 10, the first meeting came to a close. Words of appreciation were addressed to the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, as well as to the other members of the Executive. The hosting Church, the Free Church of Scotland, was thanked for the care and attention it gave to the needs of the delegates. Finally, Prof. A.C. Boyd gave a closing address on Matthew 6:9-13 (the Lord's Prayer) after which the Conference came to an end.

In Summary

In summing up this first meeting of the ICRC, it has to be said that these ten days in Scotland saw a tremendous amount of discussion and debate, both formally and informally. Indeed, some were led to remark that more business may well have been done over breakfast, lunch and supper, over coffee breaks and excursions, than during the structured sessions. The result of all of this was that by the time the delegates left for home they had a fairly good understanding of what lives in the member Churches.

And this may well prove to be the chief benefit of meetings such as these. Some ask, "What did you now accomplish in Edinburgh? What do you have to show for all of that time and money spent?" To be honest, there is little of a concrete nature to point to. Naturally, matters of missions and ecumenical creeds come to mind, but beyond that there are few specifics to boast about. But was that the intention to begin with? Some may have envisaged an organization that would make all kinds of pontifical statements, set up all kinds of sub-committees and develop into a real ecclesiastical bureaucracy, but that was never the intention of a Conference such as this.

The purpose of the ICRC, as expressed in its Constitution, speaks about promoting unity, encouraging fuller ecclesiastical fellowship, missionary cooperation, studying common problems and presenting a Reformed testimony to the world. In these areas progress has been made. Through

the discussion held on the various topics our unity became more and more apparent. The paper on the doctrine of the Church met with almost total agreement. No member Church wanted to polarize the visible and invisible aspects of the Church, or give room to any form of hierarchism. The paper on piety as that relates to the Psalms was favourably received. The paper on the relationship of the sacraments to new life in the Spirit was very controversial and not totally satisfying to all, but it did not undermine the underlying unity. The paper on the doctrine of the covenant was also well received and both it and the previous paper showed that no tendency towards presumptive regeneration exists. The paper on the exercise of church relations provoked no dissent, but brought the issue into sharper focus.

Naturally, it would be an exaggeration to say that we now understand each other perfectly and agree totally with each other. There are tensions that remain. There exists a need to go on and come to a greater understanding of each other's backgrounds and ways of doing things. On the topics of the covenant and church for instance, there exists a real need for those Churches who have been shaped by the ecclesiastical controversies of the thirties and forties ^{in the Netherlands} to set forth their insights in print. Likewise, there is a need for the Scottish Churches to do the same in the areas of liturgy, regeneration and sanctification. We must go on to learn from each other and to teach each other out of the respective treasures which the Lord has given to us.

In the area of missions too progress has been made. I realize that some might hesitate to call it that, but when ten Churches can come together and agree to set up a study committee, it is difficult to think of another word. True, the work of this committee is mostly advisory, but that too can prove to be of great benefit. At the moment there is very little real interaction between the member Churches in this area, with the result that our decision-making is not always able to take all the pertinent factors into account. At the moment no member Church has a well-developed and mature missionary training program. At the moment there exists no modern Reformed introduction to the science of missions. If ~~the~~^{is} committee can bring about improvements in these areas it will be performing a real service.

As for the matter of addressing common problems and issues, it has to be admitted that not much was done on this front. And the same applies to presenting a Reformed testimony to the world. The Conference made no pronouncements concerning pressing issues in the world today, and that may be interpreted as a lack. At the same time this is an area that needs to be

handled with care and discernment. Undoubtedly a future meeting will give more attention to these areas.

At the same time there may be some who are somewhat disconcerted by the fact that the Conference did not deal with the amendments proposed by our Churches. Technical problems prevented their being dealt with. Still, a few things might be mentioned regarding them in so far as the meeting in Edinburgh was able to shed some light on them. On the matter of subscription, the fear was expressed in the past that by joining the Conference we would be subscribing to additional confessions, eg. the Westminster Standards. I personally spoke about this fear with one of the Scottish brothers who was with me on the constitutional committee in Groningen three years earlier. He, as well as others, expressed amazement that any one would interpret the Constitution in such a fashion. We subscribe only to the confessions of our respective Churches, he said. In this Conference we do no more than recognize that each other's confessions are Scriptural and we come together in mutual recognition of this fact. For Conference purposes the basis is the Scriptures and the subordinate standards.

On the matter of denying membership to Churches who are members of the RES, there was again no formal discussion only the sentiment expressed that if you add the RES to the list, some other Church will want to add the WARC and another the ICC. The result would then be that the ICRC takes on a completely negative image. Besides, the constitutional expression "or any other organization whose aims and practices are deemed to be in conflict with the Basis" should suffice as a brake on dual membership. As for the other amendments, they drew little reaction. It was felt that they were simply a matter of wording. No doubt all of these concerns will get a proper airing four years from now.

There remains one more thing to add to this summary and that is the fact that it was especially the delegates and observers from the smaller Churches who proved the most enthusiastic about the existence and potential of the Conference. Many of these Churches have little in the way of resources. Their membership is small. They feel extremely isolated in the world. For them the Conference is a source of hope. They see it as a channel through which to meet and develop ties with other Churches. They see it as a visible expression of the catholicity of the Church and concrete proof that they are not all alone in the world. They see it as a means to procuring theological study outlets for their students, as a way of stimulating missionary activity in their areas, as a forum for discussing problems that appear beyond their capacity to resolve. For them then the existence of the

ICRC is a very positive development, a development which they hope will produce many future benefits.

The first meeting of the ICRC is history. A step has been taken. Many more steps need to be taken. Where will it all lead? Only the Lord knows. Yet we abide in the conviction that if our efforts are in harmony with His Word He will bless what has been done at Edinburgh, and what will D.V. be done in 1989 and beyond. May the magnification of His Name be and ever remain the overriding aim of the ICRC.

J.Visscher

Minutes

1986
17^b
IV

At Edinburgh and in St. Columba's Free Church of Scotland on Tuesday 3 September 1985 the International Conference of Reformed Churches met pursuant to the decision of a Constituent Conference held in Groningen in 1982, and was constituted with devotional exercises conducted by Rev. Professor A.C. Boyd representing the Free Church of Scotland as calling Church.

(18 pages)

1. After constituting the Conference Professor Boyd proposed that the credentials of those attending should be scrutinised by Rev. J. Visscher, Rev. J. Klamer and Rev. A. Veldman.

This was agreed to, the credentials examined and reported on - those of the Free Church of Scotland to be produced later.

The following is therefore the list of participating Churches arranged according to the categories listed in the Constitution.

1. CHURCHES IN MEMBERSHIP OF CONFERENCE (Delegates and Advisers)

PARTICIPATING CHURCHES	REPRESENTATIVES	STATUS
Canadian Reformed Churches	M. Van Beveren J. Visscher Dr. J. Faber	Delegate Delegate Adviser
Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland	D. Thomas	Delegate
Free Church of Scotland	J.N. Macleod D. Lamont Professor D. Macleod Professor C. Graham H.M. Ferrier	Delegate Delegate Adviser Adviser (Alternate)
Free Reformed Churches of Australia	G. Van Rongen A. Veldman Dr. S.G. Hur	Delegate Delegate Alternate
Gereja Gereja Reformaci In Indonesia	J. Klamer	Delegate
Gereformeerde Kerken in Netherlands	O.J. Douma Professor H.M. Ohmann S.S. Gossen	Delegate Delegate Alternate
Presbyterian Church in Korea	Professor Pyeng Seh Oh	Delegate

II. CHURCHES APPLYING FOR MEMBERSHIP (Observer Delegates)

PARTICIPATING CHURCHES	REPRESENTATIVES	STATUS
Free Church in Southern Africa	N.P. Mpayipeli H. Sliep Professor A.C. Boyd J. MacPherson D.N. MacLeod I. Glover	Observer Delegate Observer Delegate Adviser Adviser (Alternates (for (Advisers)
Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia	W.P. Gadsby J.D. Heenan	Observer Delegate Observer Delegate
Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland	T.C. Donachie C.K. Hyndman	Observer Delegate Observer Delegate

III. OTHER CHURCHES ATTENDING (Visiting Observers)

PARTICIPATING CHURCHES	REPRESENTATIVES	STATUS
Orthodox Presbyterian Church in New Zealand	A. Young	Visiting Observer
Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore	C. Kwee Lau	Visiting Observer
Free Reformed Churches of North America	C. Schouls C. Pronk	Visiting Observer Visiting Observer
Free Reformed Churches in South Africa	F.J. van Hulst J. Moes	Visiting Observer Visiting Observer
Iglesia Evangelica Presbyteriana del Peru	A. Tuesta	Visiting Observer
Iglesia Reformada Presbyteriana (Spain)	R. Cerni	Visiting Observer
Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (South Africa)	Dr. P. Rossouw J.E. Potgieter	Visiting Observer Visiting Observer
Orthodox Presbyterian Church - U.S.A.	John P. Galbraith J.J. Peterson Dr. F. Kingsley Elder	Visiting Observer Visiting Observer Visiting Observer
Reformed Church in Japan	Susuma Morinaga	Visiting Observer
Christian Witness to Israel	Murdo A. MacLeod	Visiting Observer
Free Church in India	D. John	Visiting Observer

2. The Convener then proposed that Executive Officers be appointed and the following list was duly approved:

Chairman:	Rev. D. Lamont
Vice-chairman:	Rev. G. van Rongen
Recording Secretary:	Professor C. Graham
Corresponding Secretary:	Rev. M. van Beveren.

Those appointed were duly welcomed and the Chairman proceeded to introduce the business of the session.

3. There was submitted an outline agenda for this and the ensuing sessions of Conference and in adopting this, Conference agreed to hear visiting observers introduce their Churches at evening sessions.
4. The Provisional Committee were asked to report and the Report was submitted by Professor Graham. It was noted that the Committee had exhausted its remit and should now stand dismissed but Conference agreed that it should be authorised to submit data and proposals to such Committees as Conference would appoint to review material and financial arrangements for this and any subsequent Conference.
5. It was noted that applications for membership of Conference were forward from three Churches, viz.

The Free Church in Southern Africa; The Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia; the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland.

- 5.1 The following were appointed to examine and report on the documents of these Churches:
Professor H.M. Ohmann, Convener, Rev. J. Visscher, Rev. A. Veldman and Rev. J.N. Macleod.

6. Conference appointed a Committee to examine and report on correspondence, proposals from member Churches and financial arrangements for this and future Conferences consisting of: Rev. O.J. Douma, Rev. J. Klamer, Professor P. Seh O and Rev. D. Lamont.

This first session was closed with the Benediction.

At Edinburgh and within St. Columba's Free Church of Scotland on Tuesday 3rd September 1985 the International Conference of Reformed Churches did again convene and was constituted by devotional exercises.

SESSION II

1. Mr. F.J. van Hulst from the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa who had arrived in the afternoon, was duly welcomed.
2. REPORTS: Report of Committee on Applications: The Committee reported through the Convener, Professor H. Ohmann that all three applying Churches had satisfied the Committee and they recommended that these Churches be admitted as full members of Conference. It was noted that the Free Church in Southern Africa was in process of translating the Westminster Confession into the Xhosa language. Conference would on some future occasion therefore wish to be assured of the faithfulness of the translation.

RESOLUTION: Conference agreed therefore that the Free Church in Southern Africa; the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia and the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland be recognised as full members and their delegates be seated accordingly.
3. INTRODUCING THE CHURCHES: Two members gave brief introductory accounts of the Churches they represent.
 - 3.1 Professor Pyeng SehOh introduced the Presbyterian Church in Korea giving a brief outline of its history, creedal position and present numerical strength and institutions. He expressed the desire that Churches in membership of Conference would co-operate in theological education and that they would demonstrate some positive reaction to reviving influence of Shintoism in Korea and Japan.
 - 3.2 Rev. J. Klamer spoke of the origin and development of the Indonesian Reformed Churches which had grown up as the first of missionary outreach by the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands. Language difficulties had prevented members of these Churches from attending this Conference.
4. CONFERENCE ADDRESS: Dr. J. Faber addressed Conference on the subject of "The Doctrine of the Church in the Reformed Confessions" and copies of the Address were subsequently made available to Conference.
5. It was agreed to take up consideration of the issues raised in the Address at the first session tomorrow.

This Session was closed with the Benediction.

At Edinburgh and in St. Columba's Free Church on Wednesday 4th September 1985, the International Conference of Reformed Churches did again convene and was constituted with devotional exercises.

SESSION III

1. Minutes: The minutes of Tuesday's sessions were circulated, adjusted and approved.
2. The Doctrine of the Church in the Reformed Confessions: Conference resumed consideration of the previous evening's address when several members of Conference took part and raised issues to which Dr. Faber again referred.
3. It was moved, seconded and agreed to that:

RESOLUTION:

In accordance with the suggestions made by Dr. Faber, Conference appoint a Committee to study the text of the three ecumenical creeds in order to come to a common text that can be recommended to the member Churches.

It was agreed to appoint the personnel of the Committee at the next Session.

4. Report of Committee on Correspondence etc. This report was submitted by Rev. D. Lamont, Rev. G van Rongen being in the Chair.

After some discussion it was agreed to hear the Committee's proposals regarding finances before dealing with matters of correspondence. Subsequently it was agreed to refer their remit back to the Committee for further consideration and report, Messrs. Visscher, Gadsby and Mpayipeli being added to the Committee.

This Session was closed with prayer.

At Edinburgh and in St. Columba's Free Church on Wednesday 4 September 1985, the International Conference of Reformed Churches again convened and was constituted

SESSION IV

1. Revs. C. Schouls and C. Pronk visiting observers from the Free Reformed Churches of North America who had arrived during the day were welcomed by the Chairman as was also Murdo A. MacLeod a visiting observer from the Christian Witness to Israel.
2. INTRODUCING THE CHURCHES: The Churches introduced this evening were the Free Church in India represented by Rev. D. John and the Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore represented by Rev. C. Kwee Lau.
 - 2.1 Mr. John gave some account of the origin and present development of the Church and reported on present strength, organisation and ministry. He outlined the social and economic background of the people to whom the gospel was being ministered. Impact on the traditionally Hindu population was less than desired.
 - 2.2 Mr. Lau reported that his one-congregation Church is presently in its infancy having been instituted no more than four years ago. The congregation is surrounded by a population of 2½ million of multi-racial origins. There are many professedly Christian Churches in the area but most are hostile or indifferent to Reformed doctrines. But through a Bible Study group and the influence of books of a Reformed character and the teaching of visiting preachers from the U.S. the congregation came to be established. He anticipated encouragement from Churches associated with this Conference.
3. CONFERENCE ADDRESS: Professor H.M. Ohmann addressed Conference on the subject of "Piety in the Book of Psalms" copies of the Address being available to members of Conference.
4. It was agreed to postpone appointment of the personnel of the Committee on ecumenical creeds until a later Session.

This Session was closed with prayer.

At Edinburgh and in St. Columba's Free Church on Thursday 5 September 1985 the International Conference of Reformed Churches again convened and was constituted with devotional exercises.

SESSION V

1. MINUTES: The minutes of Wednesday's sessions were circulated and approved.
2. "PIETY IN THE BOOK OF PSALMS": Conference referred again to Professor Ohmann's Address of last evening, inviting clarification of several points which Professor Ohmann expounded in greater detail.

3. COMMITTEE ON ECUMENICAL CREEDS: It was agreed:

That a Committee be appointed to prepare a list of grounds for the action proposed and to nominate personnel.

It was also agreed that this Committee consist of Mr. Van Rongen and Professor Oh with Professor Faber and Professor Macleod as advisers.

4. COMMITTEE ON CORRESPONDENCE, FINANCE, ETC.: Rev. J. Visscher reported for the Committee.

- 4.1 With reference to Section I of the Report - Conference Expenses: it was moved and seconded that it be decided:

First Motion

- (a) to establish a General Fund to cover the expenses incurred by the I.C.R.C.;
- (b) to bear the costs of the Conference as member Churches on the basis of the number of baptized members taking into account the estimated average per capita income of the baptized members in each member Church;
- (c) to have member Churches pay for the travelling expenses of their own delegates, and those member Churches unable to pay such expenses may request assistance from the General Fund;
- (d) to declare that Churches sending observers or Churches applying for membership will be expected to bear their own travel costs, as well as other costs which may be incurred, while attending the meeting of the Conference.

Second Motion:

It was also moved and seconded that paragraph (b) of the first motion be amended by the addition of the words "including travelling expenses" after the words "costs of Conference"; and that paragraph (c) be deleted - (d) then becoming (c).

On a vote being taken the first was carried by a majority.

wherefore:

It is decided:

- (a) to establish a General Fund to cover the expenses incurred by the I.C.R.C.;
- (b) to bear the costs of the Conference as member Churches on the basis of the number of baptized members taking into account the estimated average per capita income of the baptized members in each member Church;
- (c)/

- (c) to have member Churches pay for the travelling expenses of their own delegates, and those member Churches unable to pay such expenses may request assistance from the General Fund;
- (d) to declare that Churches sending observers or Churches applying for membership will be expected to bear their own travel costs, as well as other costs which may be incurred, while attending the meeting of the Conference.

4.2 With reference to Section II - Conference Expenses 1985 it was agreed as follows:

That unless a contrary undertaking has previously been given in the name of Conference it is decided:

- (a) to charge the delegates and advisers of the member Churches £135.60 per person;
- (b) to charge the observers £180.60 per person;
- (c) to acknowledge that the FCS will meet the travel costs and Conference expenses of the observers from the FC in Southern Africa, the FC in India, the Iglesia Evangelica Presbiteriana del Peru;
- (d) to thank the FCS for bearing the extra costs relating to venue, secretarial/office work and sundry matters;
- (e) to charge the Treasurer to bill the delegates and observers to collect the monies due and to reimburse the FCS;
- (f) to charge the Treasurer to take into account in the making of his budget that the GKN still needs to be reimbursed for expenses incurred by the Prov. Secretary and the Interim Committee for the period between the Constituent Assembly and the first meeting of the Conference (Edinburgh).

4.3 With reference to Section III - The Treasurer it was moved seconded and agreed

It is decided to appoint a Treasurer, who will be an ex officio member of the Interim Committee, with the following charge:

- (a) to draw up a budget for the Conference with the assistance of the Interim Committee;
- (b) to request each member Church to submit to him the number of its baptized members, as well as the estimated average per capita income of its members;
- (c) to assess each Church on this basis;
- (d) to collect the instalments needed on a yearly basis (June 1
- (e) to reimburse all costs incurred by the Conference;
- (f) to submit his financial report to the next meeting of the Conference.

4.4 With regard to Section IV - Auditing, it was moved, seconded and agreed to

It is decided to charge the Treasurer's member Church to audit his books before he submits his financial report to the next meeting of the Conference.

4.5 With regard to Section V - Study Committees it was moved, seconded and agreed to:

- (a) that each committee appointed by the Conference is expected to expedite its dealings through correspondence;
- (b) that in such cases where these committees are of the opinion that an actual meeting is necessary, they shall approach the Interim Committee for approval regarding the reimbursement of their expenses.

4.6 With reference to Section VI - Amendments, it was agreed:

- (a) to inform those member Churches (CRC, FRCA, GKN) which have submitted amendments to the Constitution and Regulations that the matters raised by them could not be dealt with at this meeting of the Conference due to the fact that the establishment of the Conference made it impossible to meet the constitutional provisions regarding amendments to the Constitution and Regulations;
- (b) to place these amendments on the agenda of the next meeting of the Conference;
- (c) to request the member Churches to react to these amendments if they deem this necessary 12 months before the next meeting of the Conference by sending their replies to the Corresponding Secretary.

4.7 With reference to Section VII - Missions it was decided:

to appoint a committee on Missions with the following mandate:

- (i) to gather information from the member Churches regarding their missionary activities and training programs;
- (ii) to study the possibilities of co-ordinating the missionary activities of the member Churches when it comes to training, mission fields and exchanging missionaries;
- (iii) to examine the need to produce listings of relevant missionary literature on an ongoing basis, and to promote the publication of an introduction to Reformed missions.
- (iv) to report to the next meeting of the Conference.

5. Conference directed the Executive Committee to reflect upon the possibility of devising ways and means whereby a later session could address itself to urgent and relevant issues facing the Churches to which no reference has been made in the agenda.

This Session was closed with prayer.

At Edinburgh and in St. Columba's Free Church of Scotland on Thursday 5 September 1985, the International Conference of Reformed Churches again convened and was constituted with devotional exercises.

SESSION VI

1. INTRODUCING THE CHURCHES: The Reformed Presbyterian Church in Japan and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Christchurch, New Zealand were the Churches introduced this evening.
 - 1.1 The Rev. Susuma Morinaga recounted the story of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Japan with recollections of the hostile atmosphere in which the Christian Church had to exist. This had led to sad defections on the part of many professing Churches. Since the war some progress had been made in spreading the evangel and the Reformed Church had arisen under the leadership of 9 ministers. Now there are c120 congregations organised under 5 presbyteries. Much is due to the help of missionaries from Churches in the U.S.A.
 - 1.2 The Rev. A. Young introduced the New Zealand Churches, telling of its emergence as a result of the dissemination of reformed literature blessed by the Spirit of God. Due also to reaction to the failure of the Presbyterian Church to deal Biblically with heresy there was some access of strength to the Reformed cause. The Church though small shows some signs of growth, and the general situation in New Zealand makes aggressive evangelism a matter of great urgency. He viewed Conference as in a position to help their cause in New Zealand by way of counsel as to how efforts should be most profitably directed, in the provision of help in theological training and in the provision of opportunities for the New Zealand Church to give expression to its missionary interest.
2. CONFERENCE ADDRESS: Professor Macleod addressed Conference on the topic "The Relation of the Sacraments to New Life in the Spirit" an outline of his address being circulated to members.

This Session was closed with the Benediction.

At Edinburgh and in St. Columba's Free Church of Scotland on Friday 6 September 198 the International Conference of Reformed Churches again convened and was constituted.

SESSION VII

1. MINUTES: The minutes of Thursday's sessions were circulated, adjusted and approved.
2. "The Relations of the Sacraments to New Life in the Spirit": Conference referred again to the Address delivered by Professor Macleod.
3. Letter from Caribbean Christian Ministries was circulated for the attention of Conference.

This Session was closed with prayer.

At Edinburgh and in St. Columba's Free Church of Scotland on Friday 6 September 1985 the International Conference of Reformed Churches again convened and was constituted with devotional exercises.

SESSION VIII

1. WELCOME: Notice was taken of the presence of Mr. Daniel Szabo from Hungary and he was warmly welcomed as a guest of the Conference as one who drew attention to and challenged to prayer for the Church behind the iron curtain.
2. INTRODUCING THE CHURCHES: The Church introduced this evening was the Iglesia Evangelica Presbiteriana del Peru represented by Rev. A. Tuesta. He told of the origins of his Church in missionary work of the Free Church of Scotland, and spoke much of his personal indebtedness to the missionaries. He spoke also of the liberty now enjoyed in Peru for preaching without hindrance in Church buildings, in the open air and by radio. His own work as pastor involved not only the care of a congregation but also religious education of boys in Colegio San Andres. Though the Church nationally still needed help there were some self-supporting congregations in the city of Lima.
3. CONFERENCE ADDRESS: This evening's study was on "The Doctrine of the Covenants and the Reformed Confessions" and a paper prepared by Rev. J.N. Macleod had been previously circulated. Mr. Macleod introduced the paper and highlighted some of the main issues developed in it and demonstrated their relevance to current evangelical thinking.

This Session was closed with prayer.

At Edinburgh and in St. Columba's Free Church of Scotland on Monday 9 September 1985, the International Conference of Reformed Churches again convened and was constituted.

SESSION IX

1. MINUTES: The minutes of Friday's sessions (VII and VIII) were circulated, adjusted and approved.
2. "THE DOCTRINE OF THE COVENANTS AND THE REFORMED CONFESSIONS": Conference gave attention again to the topic expounded by Rev. J.N. Macleod in the previous session. Mr. Macleod responded to the discussion.

This Session was closed with the Benediction.

At Edinburgh and in St. Columba's Free Church of Scotland on Monday 9 September 1985 the International Conference of Reformed Churches again convened and was constituted.

SESSION X

1. THANKS TO CONFERENCE: Mr. Daniel Szabo from Hungary, expressed his appreciation of the courtesies extended to him as a guest of Conference. He conveyed greetings from the congregations in Eastern Europe which he represented.
2. INTRODUCING THE CHURCHES: The Churches introduced this evening were the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, USA and the Free Church in Southern Africa.
 - 2.1 The Orthodox Presbyterian Church: Rev. J.J. Peterson introduced his Church - outlining its links with the earliest missionary and Presbyterian preachers who went from the British Isles to the USA. He referred to the halcyon days of Princeton Seminary and the subsequent deterioration of theological standards which led to the emergence of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The Church now has about 190 "Churches and chapels" throughout the USA. There are 250 ministers (including retired ministers, missionaries and professors). Foreign missionary work has been to Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Cyprus and Kenya. Work in Ethiopia had to cease as a result of hostile action.

Presently though a Committee is studying the issue of women in office, there is no sign of a change: there is also a Committee studying the issue of child participation in Communion. The question of possible union with the Presbyterian Church in America is also receiving attention and will be reported on to the Assembly next June. With regard to the RES, being still in membership, they have argued forcibly against action and decisions of some of the Churches in membership. The desire not to abandon the leadership, especially of the Third World Churches in the RES, to those who would change its historic stand, is a strong consideration for remaining in the RES.
 - 2.2 The Free Church in Southern Africa was introduced by Rev. N. Mpayipeli. He spoke of the origin of his Church in missionary work of the Free Church of Scotland. The Westminster Confession of Faith is the accepted subordinate standard and the Church is organised in two Presbyteries. There are about 1700 communicant members cared for by three national pastors and four seconded missionaries. The Church has initiated a Bible School offering correspondence courses and it aims to be a centre for the training of ministers. The current unrest in Southern Africa occasioned difficulties for the ongoing work of the Church. Marxist and Communist influences were clearly discernible in fomenting this unrest.
3. CONFERENCE ADDRESS: The Address this evening was on "The Exercise of Inter-Church Relations" and was given by Rev. J. Visscher. The text of the Address was circulated.

4. REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE: A report from the Executive Committee in the following terms was adopted:

Matters referred to the Committee are indicated below with the recommendations of the Executive.

1. APPOINTMENT OF A TREASURER:

It is proposed that Mr. H.A. Berends, 14572 - 60 Ave., Surrey, B.C. Canada be appointed with responsibility for ingathering funds from the participating Churches and discharging the accounts of this Conference and providing for future outlays.

- He is book-keeper of the Canadian Reformed Church at Cloverdale, B.C.
- Secretary of the Foundation for Superannuation of the Canadian Reformed Churches;
- President of Progressive Manufacturing Co.;
- Vice-chairman of the Consistory of the C.R.C. of Cloverdale.

2. PERSONNEL OF THE COMMITTEE ON MISSIONS:

It is proposed that the following be appointed:

Rev. M.K. Drost - Netherlands
Prof. K. Deddens - Canada
Prof. C. Graham - Scotland
Prof. A.C. Boyd - Scotland
Chairman: Prof. A.C. Boyd

3. AGENDA MATTERS:

No way could be found within the limits of the Constitution to allow of new agenda matters being proposed from the floor of Conference. It is, however, recognised that those participating in the Conference are free to meet informally as and when they desire and the suggestion is made that if such a meeting is held those involved should report to the Inter-Committee on matters which they think should feature in Conference agendas and specifically on ways and means whereby future Conferences should not be precluded from giving attention to current affairs of immediate concern. The Constitution as at present agreed requires a year's notice of agenda matters.

4. An additional matter concerns the Closing Address of this Conference. It is proposed that Professor A.C. Boyd who presided at the opening be asked to deliver this Address.

This Session was closed with the Benediction.

At Edinburgh and in St. Columba's Free Church of Scotland on Tuesday 10 September 1985 the International Conference of Reformed Churches again convened and was constituted.

SESSION XI

1. MINUTES: The minutes of yesterday's sessions were circulated and approved.
2. INTRODUCING THE CHURCHES: Conference recalled that it did not permit Mr. Gadsby to introduce the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, a paper giving the text of his proposed constitution had been circulated. It was agreed that a summary should be engrossed in the minutes of this Session.
 - 2.1 The Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia: This is one of the smaller Australian Churches: its origin dates back to the year 1846 with ecclesiastical repercussions to the Disruption in Scotland. Now there are fourteen congregations in the denomination served by eleven ministers and one home missionary. The communicant membership is in the region of 620. The creedal statement of the Church is the Westminster Confession, the polity is Presbyterian and close links involving inter-eligibility of ministers are maintained with the Free Church of Scotland. The Church has not lacked internal strife which has prejudiced its effectiveness: it has too, been somewhat slow to awaken to the need for evangelistic outreach. But now there are positive signs that those weaknesses are being averted and the outlook is quite encouraging. The prayers of members of Conference are coveted.
3. THE EXERCISE OF INTER-CHURCH RELATIONS: In referring again to this topic Conference noted a document entitled "Rules to enter into and maintain Relations with Churches abroad" which had been circulated. This presented the views of Deputies for relations with Churches abroad of the G.K.N. and was expounded by Prof. Ohmann. Discussion also covered the data and arguments presented in Mr. Visscher's address of last evening and he responded to the discussion.
4. BUSINESS MATTERS:
 - 4.1 Committee on Ecumenical Creeds: Conference considered the grounds for appointing this Committee and agreed as follows:
 1. In the respective member Churches some various texts of these creeds are used.
 2. It is desirable that the International Consultation Text of the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed be scrutinized to ascertain whether this text is faithful to the Received Text of the Creeds.

4.2/

4.2 Personnel: Conference agreed that the Committee be comprised of the following membership:

Prof. J.L. Mackay	-	Scotland
Prof. J. Faber	-	Canada
Prof. N.H. Gootzes	-	The Netherlands
Rev. G. van Rongen	-	Australia (Organiser).

4.3 Interim Committee: Conference noted that in accordance with the Constitution the Provisional Committee appointed in 1982 stood dismissed. It was noted also that the Interim Committee consists of Rev. D. Lamont, Chairman, Mr. G. van Rongen and Prof. C. Graham with Rev. M. van Beveren as Correspondence Secretary. The following alternates were appointed:

Rev. J. Visscher
Rev. O.J. Douma
Prof. J.D. MacMillan - no priority attaching to the order of names listed.

4.4 Communique: Conference gave attention to the issuance of a communique reflecting in general their work.

This was agreed in the following terms:

The first meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Churches took place in Edinburgh 3-10 September and brought together ten member Churches and observers from nine other Churches. The participants came from many different countries, representative of all continents.

This being a first meeting the discussions were largely of a theological nature homing in on the concept of the Church and the covenant in the Reformed Confessions.

Whilst there was evident agreement on the bases of Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th centuries, underpinning unanimous affirmation with regard, e.g. to the Bible as the inspired and infallible Word of God and the only rule of faith and life; the Lord Jesus Christ as God and King of this world to whom all people and governments must give account: there was also recognition of difference of perspective on matters of less importance.

Conference recognised the Christian duty of securing the closest possible unity of Reformed Churches on the practical level. With this in mind, and having regard to the fact that Christ gathers His one catholic church out of all tribes, nations and peoples, there was set up a Committee on Missions with a directive to investigate areas of mutual helpfulness in missions and in the training of those called to leadership in missions. Conference also appointed a Committee to study the text of the three ecumenical creeds, in order to come to a common text that can be recommended to the member Churches.

4.5 Next Conference: Conference resolved that another Conference should be convened in the summer/autumn of 1989 (D.V.) in Canada with the Canadian Reformed Churches as calling Church. Should these arrangements prove impractical the Conference would meet in the Netherlands with the G.K.N. as calling Church.

This Session was closed with prayer.

At Edinburgh and in St. Columba's Free Church of Scotland on Tuesday 10 September 1985 the International Conference of Reformed Churches again met and was constituted.

SESSION XII

1. MINUTES: The minutes of Session XI were circulated and approved.
2. THANKS: Thanks of Conference were tendered to the Chairman and Vice-chairman for their excellent conduct of business and to the Free Church of Scotland for their work as calling Church. The thanks of Conference were also accorded to all who had helped in the preparation for and the conduct of Conference and to those who had contributed in any way to the comfort of those participating in Conference.
3. CLOSING ADDRESS: An appropriate closing Address was delivered by Prof. A.C. Boyd.
4. MINUTES: The minutes of this Session were submitted and approved.

This Session was closed with the Benediction.

The Doctrine of the Church
In Reformed Confessions.

Prof. J. Faber
1986
17.6.VI
(20 pages)

I. Significance

The topic of the doctrine of the Church in Reformed Confessions is a timely one.

If we ponder the significance of this issue, we think of the famous characterization of the twentieth century by Otto Dibelius who already in 1926 called this century [proclaimed this century to be] "das Jahrhundert der Kirche", the age of the Church. If one sketches the development of the Roman Catholic doctrine, one finds as its apex the first and second Vatican Councils with the dogmas of the primacy and infallibility of the pope (1870) and of the sacramentality and collegiality of the office of the bishops (1964), dogmas concerning the Church of Christ. The dogmatic constitution Lumen Gentium is called the Magna Charta of Vaticanum II. Its chapters, e.g. about the mystery of the Church, the people of God and the hierarchical structure of Christ's Church, are the basis of the decree on ecumenism Unitatis redintegratio, promulgated on the same day as the dogmatic constitution concerning the Church, Nov. 21, 1964.

By its statements and actions, Rome tries [attempts] to grasp the lead in the ecumenical movement of the twentieth century. On the other hand, there is the World Council of Churches with its Faith and Order Paper, entitled Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, the so-called Lima document of 1982. This document, fruit of study and discussion during almost fifty years since Lausanne 1927, shows the basic agreement in ecclesiology —the doctrine of the Church— among the members of the World Council and works towards visible unity. It is now in the process of being received by those member churches and it requires a response from truly Reformed and Presbyterian churches.

Apart from this development in the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council, the contacts that some of us had in the Reformed Ecumenical Synod and all of us now entertain within this International Conference of Reformed Churches ask for ecclesiological clarity; clarity in the doctrine of the Church.

One would almost be inclined to speculate somewhat about the history of the Church and the development^{clp} of its dogma. In the first centuries the confession of the triune God was at stake and especially the work of the Father in creation —overagainst gnosticism. In the sixteenth century, the dominant issue was the work of the Son in redemption and its perfection and absoluteness —over against Roman Catholicism. And now the Church is engaged [involved] in a struggle to understand better the Word of God concerning the work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification. Of foremost importance in this broad ^{ma/}primitological context —"I believe in the Holy Spirit"— is the confession concerning the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints. We have arrived at the struggle concerning the third part of the Apostles' Creed, over against false ecumenicity. It has been said that the struggle regarding the doctrine of the church will be the fiercest, because it is based in the trinitarian dogma and deals with the communion. The conflict concerning the communion can only end in a definitive separation and therefore the end of this antithesis will coincide with the appearance of the Anti-Christ.

II. Scope and Division of the Reformed Confessions.

In this eschatological light of a generation upon which the end of the ages has come, we now look at the doctrine of the Church in the Reformed confessions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. For, although in this twentieth century we may have arrived at the period of a further and decisive development of the third part of the creeds of the early church, we should not forget that already in the time of the Reformation the doctrine of the Church had to be refined. We cannot now elaborate on the scope or the characteristics of the Reformed Confessions in general. Let it suffice that I characterize them in a fourfold manner: they are Scriptural^v, catholic, anti-Romanist, and anti-spiritualist. Thetically speaking they are Scriptural^v and catholic, for they intend to speak obediently, following Holy Scripture as the only rule of faith and they stress the continuity of the Church of all ages. Antithetically speaking they reject

Romanist doctrine, church government and ecclesiastical practices, which rejection is (~~the doctrine~~) a specific characteristic of the doctrine of the Church in the Reformed Confessions. They also oppose spiritualism, especially as it had become manifest in the Anabaptist movement. Also in this antithetical context, there is a remarkable parallel with, e.g., Augustine's struggle against Donatism and this reflects not only upon the Reformed doctrine of the sacraments —especially baptism— but also upon the doctrine of the Church. So the Scriptural and catholic character of the Reformed confessions is evident also in their anti-Romanist and anti-Spiritualist tendency.]

In their Scriptural, catholic, anti-Romanist and anti-spiritualist nature or scope, the Reformed Confessions show a remarkable unity and harmony, although there are many variations in the manner of expression and even some discrepancies. In the various confessions there is unity of faith also with respect to the doctrine of the Church.

III. Division.

When we now come to a survey and a division of the Reformed Confessions, we must mention the 20th century German collections of E.F.K. Müller, Wilhelm Niesel, Paul Jacobs and the English collection of Arthur C. Cochrane Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century, complemented by the catechisms employed by the Church of Scotland since the Reformation, and edited by Thomas F. Torrance under the title The School of Faith.

There is quite a variety in the selection and the number of documents collected. Müller gives 58, Niesel 15 and they have only 6 in common: four confessions —the French, Scottish, Belgic and Second Helvetic Confession— and two catechisms —the Geneva Catechism and the Heidelberg Catechism. Five of these documents are also found in Jacobs; but he does not republish the Heidelberg Catechism. It is noteworthy that neither Wilhelm Niesel or Paul Jacobs pays any attention to the Westminster Standards. Although Arthur Cochrane prints 12 confessions, he

restricted himself to the sixteenth century and therefore omitted the Westminster Confession.

One of the results of this sorry state of affairs is to be seen in the most elaborate study of our topic. Under the direction of Hans Küng, the Roman Catholic scholar Benno Gassmann wrote a doctoral thesis entitled Ecclesia Reformata: Die Kirche in den reformierten Bekenntnisschriften (The Church in the Reformed Confessions) [Frieberg: Herder, 1968]. He utilized for his extensive [detailed] study, 18 documents, namely 33 from the 16th century, 7 from the 17th century, 5 from the 19th and 3 from the 20th century. But again, he restricted himself to the continent of Europe, excluded, therefore, also the Westminster Standards, and is, thus, less serviceable for our purpose in this international conference of Reformed and Presbyterian Churches.

If, in the line of Gassmann, I try to ^{make} ~~give~~ a division ^{of} ~~to~~ the Reformed Confessions, I would divide them into five periods:

There is the period of the first reflection and consolidation, in which period cities such as Zurich, ~~Berne~~, Basel and Straz~~burg~~ are in the centre. At the beginning of this period stand Zwingli's Sixty-Seven Articles of 1523 and the Ten Theses of Berne (1528), and the end is formed by the First Helvetic Confession of 1536.

Then follows the period of new orientation. It is the period of Calvin with his Geneva Confession ⁽¹⁵³⁶⁾ and Geneva Catechism (1541), and of Bullinger with his Second Helvetic Confession (1562 or 1566).

In the meantime a third group of confessions arises: the confessions of the Reformed Churches under the cross: the French, Scottish and Belgic Confessions of Faith (1559, 1560, 1561).

The period of the Second Reformation brings us the Hungarian Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism, (1563).

Then the last group is formed by the confessions of the Reformed posterity. To this period belong the Canons of Dordt and the Westminster Standards.

When, after this division, we now try to come to grips with the broad contents of Reformed Confessions as far as the doctrine of the church is concerned, we could approach these groups of confessions in chronological order. Gassmann does so and he provides his readers with many details. I prefer to take a more synthetic approach and to show that the four characteristics of Reformed Confessions in general also apply to [are applicable to, are valid for] their doctrine of the Church in particular. This doctrine is ^(a) Scriptural, (b) Catholic, (c) anti-Romanist, and (d) anti-spiritualist. Thereafter we ~~would~~ ^{could} deal with two specific ^{distinctions} aspects: (e) The "visible" and ^{the} "invisible" church [in Reformed confessions] (f) The true and ^{the} false church [in Reformed Confessions]

IV Characteristics

A) Scriptural.

The Scriptural^yity of the doctrine of the church in Reformed Confessions can [may] be demonstrated in a twofold manner. First, as far as the relationship of Holy Scripture and Church is concerned and, Second, in the description of the nature of the church itself.

Zwingli's first thesis in 1523 read: "All who say that the Gospel is nothing without the approbation of the Church err and slander God." ^{(And} The first thesis, that led to the Reformation of the city of Berne in ¹⁵²⁸ ~~Switzerland~~, proclaimed:

The holy, Christian Church, whose only Head is Christ, is born of the Word of God, abides in the same, and does not listen to the voice of a stranger.

In this wonderful, typically Reformed thesis, we hear the confession that the Church is creatura verbi, a creature of the Word of God, born out of it and living from it. The Word of God stands above the Church, and the expression "Word of God" is identical to "gospel" or "Holy Scripture". The gospel is not dependent upon the ^papprobation of the Church, but, ~~is~~ in ^{an} ~~the~~ allusion to the Gospel of John chapter 10, the church is characterized as the flock of sheep that listens to the voice of the Good Shepherd and does not listen to the voice of a stranger.

Zwingli's theses 13 and 14 of 1523 are illustrative in this respect:

13. When we listen to the Head, we require a pure and clear knowledge of the will of God, and we are drawn to Him by His Spirit and are conformed to Him.
14. Hence all Christians should do their utmost that everywhere only the Gospel of Christ be preached.

In later Reformed confessions the marks of the true Church will be enumerated and the first mark will be the pure preaching of the gospel. One could state that this mark is indicated in a nutshell already in the first Reformed confessions. Negatively, it means that the Church is not based on human ordinances, and positively that it is founded in the sovereign work of God, Who unites the believers with Christ through the gospel.

It would be an easy task to illustrate from later confessions this Scriptural character of the Reformed (~~Confessions~~) doctrine of the Church as the subordination of the Church to the Word of God, but I would like to move on to another point.

We could ^{namely} ~~also~~ state that this Scripturality shows itself ^{also} in the definition or description of the Church. One of the most important questions to be answered was: What is the Church?

If one is to answer this question Scripturally—according to the contents of Holy Scripture—one has to begin with the Old Testament terms for 'congregation' or 'assembly': the Church in the Old Testament is the assembly or congregation of the people of God. In continuity with the Greek ~~translation~~ translation of the Old Testament, there is in the New Testament the noun ekklesia, 'church' or 'congregation', and this church is depicted in a trinitarian manner, as the assembly of the people of God (the Father), the body of the Lord Jesus Christ (the Son), and the temple of the Holy Spirit.

There was the temptation for the Reformed confessors to fall into an anti-hierarchical over-reaction and to approach the Church individualistically. Now it is remarkable that already in the confessions of Strazsborg and Basel (the Tetrapolitan Confession 1530, ~~the First~~) the First

Confession of Basel 1534, and the First Helvetic Confession of 1536), we find a stress on the Church as communion or community, or fellowship of believers. The concept of the gathering comes to the fore, and the Church is described as being gathered by the triune God and as coming together in the unity of true faith. This element of gathering is of uppermost importance in ^{the} doctrine of the Church in Reformed confessions. The First Confession of Basel (1534) states in Article 10:

We believe one holy, Christian Church, the fellowship of the saints, the spiritual assembly of believers which is holy and the one bride of Christ... And we read in The First Helvetic Confession [of 1536] about the holy, universal Church as "the fellowship and congregation of all saints which is Christ's bride and spouse" (Art. 14; the Latin text speaks of a "sancta ⁴sanctorum omnium collectio"). This First Helvetic Confession qualifies [characterizes] the Church as not only seen and known but "also gathered and built up by visible signs, rites and ordinances, which Christ Himself has instituted and appointed by the Word of God as a universal, public and orderly discipline" (non solum construitur cognosciturque, sed... constituitur). In this imperfect present tense constituitur we see the Church as an earthly, empirical assembly that is not finished yet, but is in the process of being gathered and built. At the same time the Church itself is God's instrument in this ongoing process; there is a constitutum and there is a constituendum. The Church's ministers are in these [German, Swiss Reformed] confessions time and again called God's co-workers (cooperarii —see Gassmann, 89) and this striking epithet underscores the dynamic nature of the ongoing work of the gathering of the Church.

In the period of Calvin and Bullinger, we find a similar stress on the Church as a company of the faithful. The Geneva Confession of 1536 even stresses that this description is valid for each and every local congregation:

While there is one only Church of Jesus Christ, we always acknowledge that necessity requires companies of the faithful to be distributed in different places. Of these assemblies each one is called Church. (Article 18)

The Second Helvetic Confession, —that beautiful confession of Bullinger—
puts answers the question, "What is the Church?" (as follows) ^{and answers} (as follows):

The Church is an assembly of the faithful called or gathered out of the world; a communion, I say, of all the saints.... (The Latin text speaks of ..."Ecclesiam id est, e mundo evocatum vel collectum coetum fidelium").

The headings in Bullinger's confession are evidence of the Scriptural character of his doctrine of the Church. The Church is called the assembly of citizens of one commonwealth, the temple of the living God and there are special paragraphs about the Church as bride and virgin, as a flock of sheep, and as the body of Christ.

When we come to the confessions of what I called the "churches under the cross", we think of the French Confessions of 1559 upon the formation of which Calvin exercised much influence. The true Church is "the company of the faithful who agree to follow God's Word and the pure religion which it teaches". In this historic city of Edinburgh, I cannot but quote the Scottish Confession of 1560 with its trinitarian foundation:

As we believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, so we firmly believe that from the beginning there has been, now is, and to the end of the world shall be, one Kirk, that is to say, one company and multitude of men chosen by God, who rightly worship and embrace Him by true faith in Christ Jesus, who is the only Head of the Kirk, even as it is the body and spouse of Christ Jesus.

When the Scottish Confession stresses that there is one Church from the beginning of the world, it reminds this Reformed believer of his beloved Heidelberg Catechism and the well known [familiar] sentence "that the Son of God, out of the whole human race, from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves for Himself, by His Spirit and Word, in the unity of the true faith, a Church chosen to everlasting life..." (Lord's Day 2/). Again the incomplete, unfinished character of the church is expressed, or rather, the ongoing, dynamic act of Christ's gathering His Church: "gathers, defends and

preserves" are verbs in the imperfect present tense.

Let me end my list of quotations with the description of the Church in the Belgic Confession of 1561:

We believe and profess one catholic or universal Church, which is a holy congregation and assembly of true Christian believers, expecting all their salvation in Jesus Christ, being washed by His blood, sanctified and sealed by the Holy Spirit.

The original French text has two nouns "congrégation et assemblée", ^{which} fact in most English translations is neglected. Festus Hommius rendered in his Latin translation "congregatio seu coetus". Dr. Klaas Schilder saw in congregatio —related to the noun grex, flock— the divine act and in coetus —from co-ire, to come together— the human act. God in Christ brings us together and we in faith come together. This explanation may be deficient, in historical or symbological respects, for "congregation" and "assembly" are used interchangeably in the French original of the Belgic Confession. Nevertheless, it is a Scriptural and dogmatically sound reasoning, in the line of the Reformed Confessions.

But the main point in my characterization of the contents of Reformed confessions in their description of the nature of the Church was this: in the line of the Scriptural terms for the Church as congregation or assembly, Reformed confessions have emphasized the fact that the Church is a gathering, and that this gathering is an ongoing, dynamic work of the triune God, which divine action should evoke our human response so that we, by the grace of God, become cooperarii Dei, co-workers of God.

I will not now make an application of what this means for this International Conference of Reformed Churches and its members, but only express the conviction that this Scriptural Reformed Confession is and remains a timely one.

B) Catholic.

In our second characteristic, we called the Reformed Confessions concerning the Church catholic. Every one who is acquainted with Reformed confessions and the

history of their doctrines, knows that in this second characteristic we enter upon a field that is almost as wide as the previous topic, the Scripturality. Even if we limit the concept of catholicity now to its temporal aspect, we have to restrict ourselves in our exposition of the continuity of the Church. Not only do the Reformed Confessions repeatedly speak of the continuity of the Church throughout the ages ~~—as already heard—~~, but this continuity is evident in the very language of the confessions, even in their specific phrases. By way of example, I mention the saying: extra ecclesiam nulla salus —outside the church there is no salvation— well-known since the days of Origen and Cyprian. Reformed Confessions also stress that God grants salvation in the Church and through the Church. In the Catechism [of the Church] of Geneva, the question is asked: Why do you insert the article concerning forgiveness after the Church? The answer reads:

Because no man obtains pardon for his sins without being previously incorporated into the people of God, persevering in unity and communion with the Body of Christ in such a way as to be a true member of the Church.

The following question asks:

And so outside the Church there is nothing but damnation and death?

Answer: Certainly, for all those who separate themselves from the community of the faithful to form a sect on its own, have no hope of salvation so long as they are in schism.

Calvin's very forceful words ~~that~~ remind us of the beginning of Book IV of his Institutes. ^{They} find an echo in Bullinger's Confession. We esteem fellowship with the true Church of Christ so highly, ^{Bullinger} ~~he~~ says,

...that we deny that those can live before God who do not stand in fellowship with the true Church of God, but separate themselves from it. For as there was no salvation outside Noah's ark when the world perished in the flood; so we believe that there is no certain salvation outside Christ, who offers Himself to be enjoyed by the elect in the Church; and hence we teach that those who wish to live ought not to be separated from the Church of Christ.

A similar reasoning is followed in Article 28 of the Belgic Confession: Every one

is bound to join himself to the true Church, "since this holy congregation is an assembly of those who are saved, and outside of it there is no salvation".

□ This confession is catholic, but not Romanist; it does not elevate the Church in a positivist or triumphant manner. It should not escape our attention that the Second Helvetic Confession in this context spoke of "no salvation outside Christ". And in the Belgic Confession the phrase "extra ecclesiam nulla salus" is taken up in a normative sense. The Reformed believer does not attempt to occupy the place of God in the last judgment but ends this twenty-eight^h article by stating simply:

Therefore all those who separate themselves from the same —the congregation— or do not join themselves to it act contrary to the ordinance of God. (Cf. Scottish Confession, Art. 16).

[Augustine especially is the one in the Ancient era to whom the Reformed Confessions owe much in usage of terms and phrases. The distinction "in the church but not of the church", applied to hypocrites, is Augustinian. □ But even more important than this reference to so-called "church fathers" is the fact that] the Reformed Confessions are often structured according to the ecumenical creeds.

The First Confession of Basel (1534) and the First Helvetic Confession (1536) followed in the main lines the Apostles' Creed. It goes without saying that especially the Catechisms, e.g. the Geneva Catechism and the Heidelberg Catechism, deal with the church in the ~~text~~ explanation [exposition] of the Apostolicum. -

□ It is appropriate in this context to mention a discrepancy with respect to the translation of the received text of the Apostles' Creed. In German [Reformed] Confessions —e.g., the Heidelberg Catechism— sometimes a Medieval custom is adopted by replacing the word "catholic" by the word "Christian", or adding the word "Christian" to the word "universal". The first thesis of Berne (1528) spoke of "the holy, Christian Church" instead of the "holy Catholic Church". The Dutch-speaking churches that are members of this conference, the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (Vrijgemaakt), ^{still} have a text of the Apostles' Creed that slightly

differs
~~differs~~ from the received text. The Canadian Reformed Churches [—to whom I myself belong—] even try to transfer this text to the English-speaking world by using the words "I believe a holy catholic, Christian Church". I regret this development as slightly infringing upon the true catholicity of the Church of God and its ecumenical creeds. May I, in this connection, suggest that this International Conference, or a subsequent one, appoint a Committee to study this topic [the International Consultation Texts of the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed] in order to come to a common text [that can be recommended to all members?]. But let me hastily return to the Confessions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They showed their catholic character also in expounding the unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity of the Church as confessed in the ecumenical creeds.

*of the
ecumenical
creeds*

C) Anti-Romanist.

Right from the beginning in 1523, Reformed Confessions were anti-Romanist. Zwingli's Sixty-Seven Articles attack the so-called clerical traditions with their pomp, hierarchy, titles, and laws. They are "a cause of all nonsense, because they are not in agreement with Christ, the Head". Especially in the beginning of the Reformation, Roman Catholic doctrine and abuses are attacked. [Dispensations concerning fasting are called a "Roman fraud" for no Christian is bound to perform works which God has not commanded.] In the description of the false church in the Scottish and Belgic Confessions we see a picture of the Roman Catholic Church of the sixteenth century, "the horrible harlot" (CS, Ch. 18):

It ascribes more power and authority to itself and its ordinances than to the Word of God, and will not submit itself to the yoke of Christ. Neither does it administer the sacraments as appointed by Christ in His Word, but adds to and takes from them, as it thinks proper; it relies more upon men than upon Christ; and persecutes those who live holily according to the Word of God and rebuke it for its errors, covetousness, and idolatry. [BC, Art. 29].

One could write an entire treatise on the government of the Church and its offices to show the anti-Romanist character of Reformed Confessions.

~~Right f~~

Right from the beginning not the magisterium but the ministerium is emphasized, not the lordship over but the service to the gospel and the congregation. [In 1523, Zwingli declared:

61. The divine Scriptures know nothing of an indelible imprint by consecration which the priests have invented in recent times.

62. Furthermore the Scriptures do not recognize any priests except those who proclaim God's Word.]

There is no power in the Church except for edification, the Tetrapolitan Confession says. "They who teach what conflicts with Christ's commands cannot represent the Church of Christ" (Chapter 15).

The First Helvetic Confession acknowledges Christ Himself as the only true and proper Head and Shepherd of His Church: "We do not acknowledge or accept the head at Rome and those who are bishops in name only". The French Confession is *strongly* anti-hierarchical:

We believe that all true pastors, wherever they may be, have the same authority and equal power under one head, one only sovereign and universal bishop, Jesus Christ, and that consequently no Church shall claim any authority or dominion over any other.

This equality of ministers and churches, [also stated in, e.g., Article 32 of the Belgic Confession,] is fundamental for Reformed church polity. It should be powerfully maintained in this twentieth century over against Roman Catholicism and false ecumenicity. We think of Chapter III of the dogmatic constitution of the Church of Vatican II and its strong hierarchism. We also think of the Lima document of the World Council (Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry) with its consistently neglecting the office of elder (presbyter) and its entrenching of the diocesan bishopry as an indispensable instrument for the unity of the church.

In this context, I modestly ask our Presbyterian brothers whether they ~~could~~ *are will* to entertain a question concerning their beloved ~~not~~ ~~Westminster~~ ~~Confession~~ of the Westminster Confession. It is clear that the Westminster Confession is a good Reformed document ^{and} anti-Romanist: Chapter 25.6 — There is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ; nor can the Pope of Rome in any sense be head thereof.

But in chapter 31, is spoken of synods and councils and it is stated that their "decrees and determinations, if consonant to the Word of God, are to be received with reverence and submission, not only for their agreement with the Word, but also for the power whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God, appointed thereunto in His Word". The question is this: Does this juxtaposition "not only— but also" not give to synods and councils a power that is reminiscent of ~~the~~ hierarchy^{ism} ~~is~~?

D) Anti-Spiritualist

~~The~~ last characteristic of Reformed confessions also concerning this doctrine of the church was: they are anti-spiritualist.

Spiritualism in the sixteenth century was cognate to Donatism in the fourth century and the Reformed confessions have recognized this fact not only in the doctrine of baptism but also in the doctrine of the Church and its ministry.

When the French Confession strongly condemns the papal assemblies, it acknowledges:

Nevertheless, as some trace of the Church is left in the papacy, and the virtue ~~and the doctrine~~ and substance of baptism remain, and as the efficacy of baptism does not depend upon the person who administers it, we confess that those baptized in it do not need a second baptism.

Calvin's concept of "some trace of the church in the papacy" —vestigium ecclesiae— is anti-Donatist and anti-spiritualist.

Also the Belgic Confession is anti-spiritualist in its acknowledgement that no perfect Church in this dispensation is to be found: there are "hypocrites, who are mixed in the Church with the good, yet are not of the Church, though externally in it". Those who are members of the Church, may be known by the marks of Christians. "But this is not to be understood as if there did not remain in them great infirmities". Reformed confessions do not promote a schismatic search for a perfect community. The anti-spiritualist tendency is also recognizable in the manner in which the ministers of the Word are acknowledged as God's co-workers (First Helvetic Confession, Article 15).

Because we touched on this topic before, let it suffice to state that the anti-spiritualist scope of the Reformed Confessions is of timely significance also in this twentieth century with its holiness movements and neo-pentecostal revivalism.

V. TWO DISTINCTIONS. A) "Visible" and "Invisible" Church.

We now arrive at our two last points: the distinctions "visible" and "invisible" and "true" and "false" with respect to the Church in Reformed confessions.

Let me first again list some expressions *concerning visibility and invisibility.*

The Tetrapolitan Confession (1530) says: Although that whereby it is entitled to be called the Church of Christ —namely, faith in Christ— cannot be seen, yet it can be seen and plainly known from its fruits.

The First Helvetic Confession of 1536 states: And although this Church and congregation of Christ is open and known to God's eyes alone, yet it is not only known but also gathered and built up by visible signs, rites and ordinances.

According to my opinion, it is clear that in these early Reformed confessions not two churches are taught, one visible and another one invisible, but that there is spoken of an invisible aspect or invisible aspects of the church. The emphasis is even on the visibility: the fruits of faith and the visible signs, rites and ordinances of the Church.

The Geneva Catechism mentions "the visible Church of God", and "the fellowship of those whom He has elected to salvation which cannot be seen plainly by the eye". From Calvin's Institutes (IV.1.7) we know that he heard Holy Scripture speak of the Church in two ways. "Sometimes by the term 'church' it means that which is actually in God's presence.... Then, indeed, the church includes not only the saints presently living on earth, but all the elect from the beginning of the world. Often, however, the same 'church' designates the whole multitude of men spread over the earth who profess to worship one God and Christ". Calvin makes, thus, a distinction between that which is invisible to us and visible to the eyes of God alone, and that which is called 'church' with respect to men.

~~The similar vein speaks~~ The Confession of the English congregation at Geneva (1556)

speaks in a similar vein.)

and the Scottish Confession of 1560. A somewhat different approach is found in Bullinger's Second Helvetic Confession. There we find the heading: 'The Church is not bound to its signs'. "We know —Bullinger asserts— that God has some friends in the world outside the commonwealth of Israel". Another heading reads: 'The Church appears at times to be extinct', and under this heading we find the familiar reference to first Kings 19:10, 14, the days of Elijah and the seven thousand under the reign of Ahab. "Whence the Church of God ~~may be~~ may be termed invisible; not because the men from whom the Church is gathered are invisible, but because, being hidden from our eyes and known only to God, it often secretly escapes human judgment". *Here "invisible" is used in the sense of "hidden".* Although the Belgic Confession does not use the words "visible" and "invisible", Article 27 declares that the holy Church sometimes for a while appears very small, and in the eyes of man to be reduced to nothing". This confession also refers to the seven thousand men who had not bowed their knees to Baal. *Here again one could speak of the In*
The Westminster Standards ^{*however,*} formulated the distinction of the visible and invisible Church in a pointed, systematical manner. Chapter 25 of the Westminster Confession, and Larger Catechism, Questions and Answers 64 to 66. Let me quote Westminster Confession, Chapter XXV:

- I. The Catholic or universal church, which is invisible, consists of the whole number of the elect that have been, are, or shall be gathered into one, under Christ the Head thereof; and is the spouse, the body, the fulness of Him that fills all in all.
- II. The visible church, which is also catholic or universal under the gospel,.. consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children; and is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation.
- III. This catholic church —that must be the catholic, visible church, mentioned in section II and III [J.F.]— has been sometimes more, sometimes less visible.

What shall we say now?

First of all, from our list of quotations, it may have become clear that Reformed confessions, even when they use the terms "visible" and "invisible" in connection

with the Church, are not identical. There are differences and nuances in usage. Nobody will deny that the Church has invisible aspects. The actions of God in calling and regeneration are imperceptible to men. And faith in Christ has an invisible aspect, although the fruit of faith can be seen. In some confessions the fact that God alone knows His elect leads to a construction of an invisible church, as far as its membership is concerned. Then there is what one could call the hidden church, the Church in the days of persecution which appears at times to be extinct (Bullinger). ^{Finally} Then, as the Belgic Confession rightly states, the holy catholic Church is spread and dispersed over the whole world. It means that nobody on earth can bring the entire church at a certain moment within his purview.

But precisely these many and diversified considerations make the systematized distinction of the Westminster Standards, according to my humble opinion, open to discussion. ~~is a distinction~~. Allow me to say to my Presbyterian brothers: one of yourselves, one of your own prophets, has said so. I refer to the essay of John Murray in his Collected Writings, Vol. I, entitled "The Church: The definition in Terms of 'Visible' and 'Invisible' Invalid" (pp. 231-236). His conviction was: "The distinction between the church visible and the church invisible is not well-grounded in terms of Scripture, and the abuses to which the distinction has been subjected require correction" (232). The term "Church" in the New Testament designates what is visible. [The term ["Church"] in the singular is ^{also} used to designate the 'churches' in their collective unity. This general and embracing use of the term 'church' is found particularly in the Epistle to the Ephesians. But] Dr. Murray is of the opinion: "The 'Church' in the New Testament never appears as an invisible entity and therefore may never be defined in terms of invisibility". (p.234). He rightly deems this thesis to be of deep practical significance.

If ^{Prof.} ~~Dr.~~ Murray is right —and I think that he is— the questions arise: Do the Westminster Standards speak of the invisible Church and the visible Church as two definite subjects, two separate entities? Does this not infringe upon the truth of the Nicene Creed: "We believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church"? Is it right to divide the Scriptural epithets of the Church so that the invisible church is called the spouse and the body of Christ, and the visible church His kingdom, the house and family of God? Therefore, is in Scripture, e.g., the metaphor of the body not applied to the one ekklesia with its invisible and visible aspects? What about the dynamic action of Christ in His ongoing church-gathering work, so Scripturally confessed in the sixteenth century confessions? Does it receive enough attention in the Westminster Standards? ^{Prof.} ~~Dr.~~ Murray makes us alert to the danger of what I call a polarization of the so-called "invisible" and the so-called "visible" Church. Some, who are disobedient to the obligation to foster unity and fellowship in the Church of God, escape to the idea of the "church invisible". Also within this International Conference, there could be the danger that we

meet one another in a far-away place, and bypass one another in our own country, and in the meantime soothe our consciences with a distinction between visible and invisible Church. In the contacts between the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and the Canadian Reformed Churches, the deputies of the latter have ~~rightly~~ warned against a (~~pluralisation~~) polarization of the visible and invisible church. It results in a low esteem for what is called the visible church, a weakening of church-consciousness, a lack of understanding of the seriousness of the calling to separate from the false church, and the rise of the "theologoumenon" of the pluriformity of the church which is neither taught by the Scriptures and by the Reformed Confessions. This "theologoumenon" of the pluriformity of the church proved to be an undermining factor in the fight against the sins of the Church and for its reformation.

Let me immediately add, however, that the Westminster Confession does not show a low esteem for what is called the visible church. It is called "the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ, the house and family of God, out of which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation." In Section III, we read:

Unto this catholic visible church Christ has given the ministry, oracles and ordinances of God, for the gathering and protecting of the saints, in this life, to the end of the world; and does, by His own presence and Spirit, according to His promise, make them effectual thereunto.

The following Articles 26 - 31 all deal with the church: the communion of saints, the sacraments, church censures, synods and councils, and those articles show, in many striking respects, the Scriptural, catholic, anti-Romanist, and anti-spiritualist tendency of a typically Reformed confession.

B) True and False Church

We have come to our last point: the true and the false Church in Reformed Confessions. The Geneva Confession of 1536 already made this distinction without using these specific terms:

In as much as all companies do not assemble in the name of our Lord, but rather to blaspheme and pollute him by their sacrilegious deeds, we believe

that the proper mark by which rightly to discern the Church of Jesus Christ is that his ~~holy~~ gospel be purely and faithfully preached, proclaimed, heard and kept, (and) that his sacraments be properly administered.... Hence the churches governed by the ordinances of the pope are rather synagogues of the devil than Christian churches.

The Second Helvetic Confession speaks of the notes, signs, or marks of the true church, especially the lawful and sincere preaching of the Word of God:

Accordingly, we condemn all such churches as strangers from the true Church of Christ, which are not such as we have heard they ought to be.... Moreover, we have a charge from the apostles of Christ "to shun the worship of idols" (I Corinthians 10:14; ~~5:21~~^{Joh} 5:21), and "to come out of Babylon" and to have no fellowship with her, unless we want to be partakers with her of all God's plagues (Rev. 18:4; I Cor. 6:17).

The 1556 Confession of the English Congregation of Geneva lists three marks of the Church of God: the pure administration of Word, sacraments, and ecclesiastical discipline. It is followed by the Scottish Confession with its powerful Chapter 18, ^{concerning} The notes by which the true Kirk shall be determined from the false. We hear there about the pestilent synagogue of Satan and the horrible harlot, the false Kirk. "The true Kirk... always hears and obeys the voice of her own Spouse and Pastor, but takes not upon her to be mistress over the same".

Let me be silent about Article 29 of the Belgic Confession and only point out that the Westminster Confession also, in its unadulterated form, knows of the dreadful possibility that churches "have so degenerated, as to become no churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan" (Chapter 25.5).

Over against those —even within the Reformed Ecumenical Synod— who reject the distinction between the true and false Church as obsolete, we maintain the deep Scripturality and catholicity also of this aspect of the doctrine of the Church in Reformed Confessions.

The confessions basically began in 1523 with the Scriptural distinction ~~between~~ of the Good Shepherd and the hirelings, and the mark of a true Church, also in the twentieth century, remains: "The sheep hear ^{his} voice, and he ~~who~~ calls his

own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice."

The gathering of these sheep by this Shepherd of John 10 is the true, catholic Church of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the one God to whom be glory for ever.

August, 1985.

J. FABER
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Canada.

PIETY IN THE BOOK OF PSALMS

by Prof. H. M. Ohmann

1986
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Piety in the Book of Psalms is the title of my address (10 pages)

With respect to this title immediately the question arises on which part the speaker would like to put the emphasis. On Piety? Well, it can be done and ought to be done to a certain extent. What otherwise is the sense of having this word, this term in the title? However, before putting the emphasis on a certain matter or idea one should find out and ascertain what exactly is meant by it, so circumscribe or define the term in order to use it in the proper way.

That the second part of the title ought to be emphasized, is self-evident. The Psalms are part of the Word of our God, invested with His Divine authority, to which we have to submit. In a conference of churches of reformed signature this hardly needs comment. However, this is not all there is to it. While we are in full agreement on the issue of the infallibility of Holy Writ, another point coming up for consideration is what we are going to do with it; how we are going to work with the material that has become available in this wonderful part of the Scripture. The Bible is a book to be put to full use and to good use, in order that we may enrich our life; and this especially applies to the book of the Psalms, the beloved Book of Psalms.

We should form an idea of piety on the basis of this book.

Yet, speaking of piety implies that the speaker and his audience do already have some idea or notion.

Judging from my Dutch background you all understand that the word piety is a translation of the Dutch word "vroomheid". Usually applied to certain phenomena in religion, religious life. The original usage of the word "vroom" did not have a bearing on religious life, ^{though} but rather on military matters, on warfare. "Vroom" was a synonym of brave, valiant, ~~with~~ ^{with being} originally related to the Latin word "primus", the first, which via "frumus" developed to "vroom". A "vrome" man is a man who is the first when the battle-cry is heard and troops stand by in the barracks. From Dutch we were going back to Latin "primus" or Greek "promos", the commander or leader of the army.

It is not my intention, however, to detain you by an expose about the word in my native tongue, though dear to me. Your own English word "piety" plunges its roots in the classical past it being part of your Latin heritage. In a dictionary of

synonyms it significantly is found in the company of terms like fidelity, allegiance, loyalty. The shared meaning is : faithfulness to something to which one is bound by a pledge, by duty, or by a sense of what is right and appropriate . Fidelity e.g. implies strict and continuing faithfulness to an obligation, a promise or a responsibility. Or Loyalty likely^{is} to imply a more personal attachment and a more emotional relationship than fidelity and regularly denotes a faithfulness that is steadfast in the face of any temptation to defect, renounce or betray. Piety stresses fidelity to obligations regarded as natural and fundamental and the observance of duties required by such fidelity. e.g. filial piety involves love and dutiful respect for one's parents. This exactly is the meaning of the Latin word *p i u s* . In either way, I think, we are led to the heart of the matter; anyway we come closer to it.

For the Book of Psalms itself offers a term that lends itself admirably to being translated by 'piety'. I mean תָּמִים *tāmām, tōm*, N.H. Ridderbos writes in his short commentary on this book, I preferably translate by "upright, pious". They denote integrity, Integrity implies trustworthiness and incorruptibility of such a degree that one is incapable of being false to a trust, responsibility, or pledge. Soundness is another translation. In the book of Exodus you find it applied to a sacrificial animal. It should not be taken in a moralistic sense, but rather in the sense of entrusting, committing oneself to a person and the Person is the LORD GOD, the only One man can trust.

In using this very word to typify the pious, the Old Testament, the Bible is applying a high standard to man. By that standard man will be measured and judged. So the God of the Bible is making high demands and it will take some effort to come up to the requirements.

That is correct, yet it needs some explication which I hope to give in what follows.

First and foremost , I pointed already to it, it I mean the standard ought not to be taken in a moralistic way. /what is Not that the Bible is not in favour of moral, may be I better say ethical. On the contrary in this very book we are taught what a life pleasing the LORD implies. However then we learn that there is more to it than ethics, be it ever so important. It is rather an position or stand toward the questions or issues that are at stake. It is to choose for the LORD, I better say

to submit to the LORD, which implies a surrendering after resistance or even conflict to the will of God. Man's heart and his innermost feelings and deepest thoughts come into the picture. are involved.

Which is all the difference in the world from what we call a moralistic attitude as we meet in New Testament times with scribes and Pharisees and other people who lead a life that is built on a kind of contract. Let us do the commandments in order that we may be rewarded according to our merits. Since a man's lot is hanging in the scales let us take care to be able to turn the scales by a surplus of good works. The Lord Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and since He knew His Bible, the Psalms must necessarily point into the same direction.

The position taken is not eudaemonistic either, an attitude of calculating people the only thing they have in mind is the result or the outcome.

I mention both attitudes on purpose for we come across these questions in studying the piety in the book of Psalms. We meet it in the very first Psalm.

Discussing the Book of Psalms we find out that it is not so easy to come to grips with the matter. Just leafing through the pages we notice that a wide variety of issues comes up for consideration. For instance: The workers of iniquity; the Kingdom of God; the Messiah; Creation and the wonder of nature; the history of Israel, the people of God, I can say just as well the history of salvation; the covenant; Sin and grace; death and life; Foolishness and wisdom; Lie and truth. All in all, how do we grapple the matter?

Wondering and pondering, the thought flashed through my mind: Wouldn't the very first Psalm be the right angle of incidence (invalshoek) to the book. Supposed this psalm is not for no reason at all put at the head of the book, this song might offer a helpful approach. I think we have a clue here.

As you all know it is the Psalm of the two ways. And of two kind of people, walking in the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked respectively. And finally ^{it is} the psalm of the end, the outcome of the two ways. Let us not overlook the last element for it is significant in a psalm like this. As I have remarked before neither legalism, nor moralism, ^{leave} alone eudaemonism are the apt setting of the psalm. But the Psalm does point out two ways and the goal the ways lead up to. That goal is an integral part of the psalm commencing with a

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congratulation. For that is actually the meaning of the very first word of the Psalm. We are used to "blessed" but what the author does is congratulate those who walk in the right way.

By this very word a wonderful light is shed on the pious or righteous we meet in the psalm. They are a happy people With happy I mean what is effectively or successfully appropriate with respect to the end. End, goal, target all words fitting in the context where the way plays such a prominent part, because a way is meant to lead to a certain end.

How does man know he should choose. Is it a matter of careful planning ? Or - in the opposite case: of scheming?

Psalm 36 tells us so concerning the wicked. The same may be said re the God-fearing or pious. Moreover since way stands for conduct, way of life, there must be some planning behind it. Nevertheless this is not ^{only} the decisive ^{factor} Proverbs 16 :9 " A man's mind plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps. It is not a matter of careful planning that man reaches his destination. Right, yet this is

not what I mean

In the first Psalm we read of the law, the torat YHWH. His delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. תורה means instruction. The LORD reveals Himself as the instructor, teacher of his people, his children each and everyone. The Law is the norm - let me underline that - no righteousness without the yardstick, the measuring rod of the law, Yet, basically the law salutary or may be I better say Salutiferous. So, not a book, a code damping down people's joy, but on the contrary gladdening man's heart. They (could not) were not able to proceed on the way without the law of the LORD., and they take a pleasure in it. Just consider the verb תָּקַח one of the verbs of speaking but not the ordinary verb, Th.W.A.T. we read: "to give expression to, to voice one's feelings." It means that man is entirely wrapped up in the law, is absorbed in the law. The object of the verb is in Psalms like 1 and 119 : the law; elsewhere 35 and 71: God's righteousness' and also the LORD's acts 35:28 and 77 :13. ^{Say} The law, God's righteousness; God's mighty deeds; God Him

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winning him
not he is on the
right track

self are put on one level in the book of Psalms. Law here is not the Law that condemns sinful man - though it stands to reason that in this book sins are condemned.- but law that causes man to take heart in all circumstances of life, be it that man is prospering be it that man has to face the hardships of life. First and foremost in the very first Psalm prosperity features as the sure outcome of a life according to the Law. A Psalm like 112 strongly underlines this We should keep this in mind , lest we go astray

Knezel, Sweper

in being under the impression of meeting in the psalms with a sort of people marked by bigotry, sanctimony. And I do think quite a few people in reading this Psalm are under this impression, and though they do not dare to say so, are inwardly peeved off by what actually is a misunderstanding, a misrepresentation.

However, let us not make the whole book turn on, hang on the first Psalm. Be the hymn of congratulations to the man who walks on the right way ever so important, the outlook would be too narrow to get the entire book with a worldwide view and rich contents into the picture.

For those two types or categories of people are not people you can meet any time and any place. For one thing: How did they get to know the LORD and His law and his promise? Do the righteous, endowed with the revelation of the LORD, go their way all by themselves or just in the company of some fellow-traveller they happen to meet and can join with heading for the same purpose? The answer is in the negative. Now we turn to Psalm 2, sometimes called the second introduction to the book.

We hear of nations, peoples, kings of the earth. Psalm 2 teaches us to consider things in a world-wide context! In the centre of this context we discover a Person called the LORD's anointed; a king, who is backed up by the LORD. The king, really a man wielding power on earth has to face the uprising of a group of kings he has subjected. The situation looks precarious. Then the king is reassured. Make yourself easy about that. Not they, but you are my son, I have placed, put you in this particular position. I'll give you the ends of the earth as your possession. The kings of the earth are summoned to be wise, to make up their mind in due time, to kiss the feet of the LORD's anointed. In the time of the Psalms it was David, ~~not as~~ the forefather of Jesus Christ and his representative on earth. This psalm of course calls for a fulfilment in Him who really possesses the ends of the earth. Yet, centuries before the event, the fullness of time, Christ's reign was foreshadowed by the reign of David, the first son of Abraham who was given dominion over a world-empire! A great feat. A gift of the LORD. In the shadow of his wings the righteous find shelter. Even the great David whom we learn in the Book of Psalms as a strong personality, sure, but as a man loaded with vices just as well; and for a long time, two times during his life, a poor fugitive, chased by others even outside the boundaries of his native land, the promised land. Then he found his strength in

the LORD.

So, piety in the Book of Psalms is a piety focussing on the way, the pathway to life and prosperity and **simultaneously** on the LORD's anointed, first David, but in ultimate analysis David's Son Jesus Christ, ^{the heir of all things} who is able to overcome all hardships and temptations all by Himself. In the Book of Psalms great things are told about the righteous, their innocence, their sufferings, their restoration to life again, which did come true in their own life, sure, but which were really fulfilled in the life of THE RIGHTEOUS MAN JESUS CHRIST. So the second Psalm undergirds the truth of **the** first and all the following are put on record in confirmation of this very truth.

After the headlines we would like to point out some details.

First of all Piety in the Psalms is theocentric. "Of course" you say but is it a matter of course? The Psalms are part of God's word. What is particular about the psalms is that man is given the floor. Man is speaking! Words heard from God's own mouth, from His own lips are rare. Once in a while you read: God has spoken (Psalm 62) "Let me hear what God the LORD will speak" (Psalm 85) Usually man is speaking, and since his words are invested with Divine authority, we trust that all he says is is full agreement with the word of God. / God in a certain way trusts them for that. And don't forget the inspiration by the Holy Spirit. Still it is man who is uttering himself. ^{why?} The LORD likes to hear man's voice; I better say man's response to what He has spoken beforehand. Well, the experience man had with God time and again makes him strike up a melody to the praise of his God. "I will sing and make melody...I will give thanks"(108) Gratefully we can note down that in this book one of the aims of God's creation of man "that he might praise and glorify Him" has been attained. **תהלים** the title bears witness to it.

The psalmists have an open eye for the display of God's power in creation. . Psalm 8, 19, 29 and 104 To speak the way they do of God's handywork is part of their piety; the marveling at the sea, the shore, the mountains and the valleys, the animals, the birds, the plants and trees it all belongs to it.

God's power that became manifest in creation in turn is a clear evidence of His work in history. So there are psalms in which the mighty works of creation shade off into the works in history, so works of redemption. A good example is Ps. 136 Only the Creator is able to bring about such a delivery and

sometimes you notice
man correcting
himself
Ps. 23; 116

124

136

That is why a Psalm of redemption can end with the declaration :
"Our help is in the name of the LORD who made heaven and earth."

In this historic Psalm you see the author come from creation to the use the LORD makes of the various elements of creation in order to humble and smite powers and peoples which rather fancied themselves to sit in the chair of God and have the sources of welfare at their disposal. It is a people in low estate that is going to benefit by it; rescued from their foes they are the ones to be provided with food.

haughty

In Psalm 105 the same theme is struck. This is the Psalm where we read the names of the patriarchs and emphasis is laid on the covenant with the patriarchs, the promises, although their wanderings are not passed over in silence. They were few in number which implies their vulnerability. Look at Joseph. Who among the patriarchs was ever in such a sorry plight ? The word of the LORD tested him. ^{Then} God made the king release him. And in the time of Moses it was the same way. The plagues pass in review. God smote Egypt. So He led forth his people with joy. For he remembered his holy promise to Abraham his servant, so He did not forsake them in the wilderness. This theme is taken up in Psalm 106, but now shown from a different angle. For the praise of the LORD is attended by a confession of sins. They rebelled against the Most High in Egypt; in the desert; at Horeb; in the sad story of Korah c.s. and the story of Ba'al Peor; and the reiterated apostasy in the period of Judges . "Nevertheless He regarded their distress!" Psalm 78, again a lengthy psalm, dwells on the same theme, calling to mind what happened in Egypt and in the wilderness where they provoked the LORD to anger resulting in the sad history of the sons of Eli where God's power - the Holy Ark - was delivered into captivity. A far but obvious prelude to the humiliation of Christ. The narrative we know from the books of Samuel is shown in its real perspective in the book of Psalms. Because the theme of the captivity of the Ark by the enemies who were put to rout and forced to release their booty is taken up in those Psalms of the Ark as 24, 47, 68 . Prefiguring Christ's descent and subsequent ascension. to heaven. It is the apostle Paul who takes up the theme finally in his letter to the Ephesians.

SOD goes so far as to permit His Ark to be captured

History , a source, rich source for piety of a people which has come a long way from humble beginnings Abraham, one single man, up to its most glorious king, the man David, nay more its most splendid king Solomon.

There we are in the very time the majority of the Psalms have originated.

A Psalm of David it reads in the heading time and again. And though it may stand for a bundle under the title "of David", many psalms bear the stamp of the life and spirit of this child of God. Yet, you cannot understand David speaking the way he did without taking due note of the history prior to him, the vicissitudes of the people, of their backslidings and the LORD's steadfast love.

So only you can explain the poet's confidence. In God do I see refuge. It is not indicative of a strong character, a strong-willed person, but of a man who felt often weak and in low spirits, yet strengthened himself in his God. Trust and confidence clearly marks the piety of God's child. "In God I trust without a fear. What can man do to me?" (56:10) Not because he knew himself to be such a nice man, a wonderful person, but because he was aware of his special position: "Know that the LORD has set apart the godly for himself." (Psalm 4) He is the LORD's anointed, he need not take recourse to vain words or lies or tricks.

For this reason we can understand that David PROTESTS HIS INNOCENCE. In Psalm 7 and 17 and 26. Some have shivered in hearing a child of God striking this note. "If thou triest my heart, if Thou visitest me by night, if Thou testest me, thou wilt find no wickedness in me!" How can a man - sinful man - speak so. But we should take into account who is the man uttering himself this way! Not the first man you meet on the street. Not just anybody, but the man destined to be the representative of God on earth. He, who is fully entitled to speak so. And the cause he advocates and stands for is the right one.

Moreover the LORD has put this man to the test over and over again. The majority of the Psalms are personal lamentations about the lot, the hardships of life, that befell the innocent. Psalms born out of distress and suffering. So we read in the psalms of enmity. Because David was a king of his people, the enemies are supposed to come from abroad, from other countries where people serve other gods and do not know the ways of the LORD God in heaven: Psalm 3, 18, 20 and 21; 60. The question arises: What about the stand, the position, the believer is to take? Observing that it is the LORD's hand visiting, chastising king and nation, the first thing to do is to submit themselves to the hand of the LORD, to examine oneself, and see if there be any wicked way. The LORD had promised his people, that they, being delivered from the hand of their enemies, might serve Him without fear. (Luke 2, 74) So an enemy-invasion can be an indication of the anger of the LORD. That is one side. On the other hand Scripture

So, be careful!

teaches that the enemy is to be fought against. That is to say in the name of the LORD. In His law, Deuteronomy 20, we find prescriptions on warfare. During the battle Israel and its king is to represent the LORD over against the enemy. So it requires the greatest care how to put up a fight. That's why we read of prayer and offerings before and thanksgiving after the battle. Psalm 20 and 21. A prayer for victory. Also this is part of piety in the Book of Psalms, for it is part and parcel of the occupations of the christian in the New Testament in his struggle against the evil one, the devil. Here again we ought to consider O.T. matters in their N.T. perspective. Behind king David is the LORD his GOD. Behind the heathen power is the Satan and his host. We should not speak with disdain about the Old Testament in this respect. A fight according to the rules of Scripture is obligatory to the believers of Old and New Dispensation. Basically the covenants are one.

Still harder is the fight and tougher the battle when the enemy turns out to be an insider, a member or a gang to be found within the boundaries of Israel. In most cases complaints in the psalms are raised regarding suchlike enemies. **As everyone can** imagine this case is far more disappointing. The man in whom one has put his trust - just think of Psalm 41 and 55 "But it is you my equal, my companion, my familiar friend - or even if it is not an intimate friend, one of the inner circle of the king or the righteous brother, turns out to be a betrayer. Moving, touching are the complaints. Now the enemy does not come out into the open but rather lies in ambush, or operates in disguise. The authors of the psalms have had enough of it. Within the covenant-circle you see two camps, two parties and the dividing line is that between lie and truth; death and life. This way it is portrayed in the psalms. When David or his fellow combatants raise their complaint and cry to the LORD it cuts them to the heart to witness the plotting, the schemes, the intentions of the workers of iniquity come to light in a circle of which you wouldn't expect it. It is here that the children of God are tested by their GOD whether they are going to defend his cause whatever the cost, or yield to the enemy. These psalms with complaints about the evil workers give us an insight into the spiritual life of the psalms. Here you get to know the people when they take sides with the LORD to the cost of the loss of ~~onetime~~ friends dear to them. It is here that in the psalms the suffering of our LORD JESUS CHRIST clearly comes into the picture. We do not sing the praises

of heroic pen or of the fierce David. At times they did feel really small over against such an opposition. Yet they fought knowing the battle to be the LORD's. Well, that is what piety in English, what Dutch "vroomheid" is according to the meaning in the original tongue.

Last but not least, one more remark is to be made. Piety is the translation of Hebrew integrity. We pointed to it already but return to it. The authors of the psalms more than once protest their innocence; asseverate their righteousness. Is that ~~correct~~ ^{proper}? Even if it applies to the cause, is it allowed for a man to speak this way? Are we permitted today to utter ourselves in the same vein? Realizing our sins and iniquities which make us condemnable in the sight of the LORD our GOD. Shouldn't we rather refrain from using suchlike psalms. and take only the penitential psalms and the psalms of praise to God on our lips? That sounds good and ^{seems} completely in accordance with our confessions stressing man's fall into sin and exalting the tender mercies of the LORD above all.

There are penitential psalms. Not only concrete sins but also the hereditary sin is confessed. ^{ps 51, 32} These Psalms have paved the way to the understanding of what sin is in the sight of God under both Old and New Testament. Paul refers to them in his epistle to the Romans. Knowledge of sin is even deepened when Paul what originally applied to the workers of iniquity applies to all men of all times. Reading the psalm it is as if we look into a mirror and observe our natural face. ^{Is that right?} ~~A heinous crime~~

Sins are to be confessed. It is a blot on the escutcheon. The more serious because David was the LORD's representative. he has made the enemy despise and scorn the LORD. David is severely punished for it. To confess sins is not an easy matter. But he who has humbled himself in sincerity of heart, may hear the tidings that his sin is forgiven. And sing of it in those wonderful psalms 32 and 51. To confess sin is not an easy matter for sin itself is not an easy matter, as David found out in the remaining years of his life. But the relationship was restored. Piety in the psalms, sure, a guideline for piety of the Christian church, of the believers. Sin is disruption of the covenant-relationship. But, thank to God, in the center of the Psalms is the sanctuary, where the psalmists take refuge time and again. Because of the service of reconciliation carried out in the temple, they could be so sure of the trustworthiness of their God. That certainty, nay certitude, nay assurance of faith. is the hallmark of the piety of the Psalms IN THEE O LORD DO I SEEK REFUGE LET ME

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Prof JN Macleod
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37 pages

1.1 Introduction

In recent years there has been a remarkable revival of interest in Covenant Theology. This has been particularly the case in the fields of Old Testament studies and in the history of Dogmatics and there is abundant evidence that the spate of research is still gathering momentum. Federal Theology is so closely linked with biblical chronology that it could not but suffer eclipse from the reconstructions of higher criticism. But with the increasing scientific confirmation of traditional biblical chronology we are seeing a renaissance of Covenant Theology. This places a special responsibility on churches which faithfully adhere to the Reformed Confessions to engage in an ongoing appraisal of these developments in scholarship and to evaluate the bearing of these matters, if any, on our confessional formulation. However high a regard we may have for the purity of our Tradition we may not shirk this and indeed if we are faithful to the teaching of our Confessions on General Councils this will be mandatory for us. We believe that such an evaluation need not be undertaken reluctantly or in fear. We are not lacking in confidence that the result will be in the main; though perhaps not in every precise detail; to authenticate the biblical reliability and doctrinal excellency of our symbols. This paper does not claim to be such an evaluation but it may furnish us with some evidence of the need for it and of the general vindication of our standards under the scrutiny of present day scholarship. For the comfort of the pious who may already be trembling for the ark of God we can do no better than quote from the remarkable preface to the Scotch Confession of 1560 "If any man will note in this our confession any article or sentence repugnant to God's holy word, that it would please him of his gentleness and for christian charity's sake to admonish us of the same in writing; and we upon our honour and fidelity by God's grace do promise him satisfaction from the mouth of God, that is from his holy scriptures or else reformation of that which he shall prove to be amiss." ¹

1.2 Definition of Subject

The title of the paper is somewhat vague but I am happy about this because a sharper definition as a starting point might serve our purpose less well. Whilst we can identify a corpus in Reformed Dogmatics designated "Covenant Theology" it is also true that there are significant differences in the way that this locus of doctrine has been set forth in works on dogmatics. Indeed one of the interesting theories at present strongly advocated is that we have two equally authentic traditions of Covenant Theology; the bi-lateral concept of covenant said to emanate from Zurich, primarily from Bullinger, and the unilateral testamentary approach more closely related to Calvinism. It is

not our purpose here to examine the presuppositions of this hypothesis or to test the accuracy of its claims historically but we can say that it ought not to be lightly dismissed especially since it impinges upon articles of faith that are at the heart of Reformed Dogmatics. It is enough for us here to make the observation relevant to our study that though the "Doctrine of the Covenant" is a cognizable designation it is not in itself a precise definition.

1.3 The second member of the title "Reformed Confession" requires preliminary comment especially because of the rather general usage of the term 'reformed' as a verbal adjective with nouns like Presbyterian or Baptist etc. Here it is used as designating the Creeds of the Swiss, German, French, Netherlands, Scotch, Irish and English Churches. From the Sixty Seven Articles of Ulrich Zwingli in 1523 to the Formula Concensus Helvetica 1675. The great Lutheran Creeds such as the Augburg Confession and Apology; Luther's Enchiridion and the Formula Concord are not considered. Nor are the Savoy Declaration or the Baptist Confession of 1688 or numerous more recent revisions of the Reformed Creeds on both sides of the Atlantic included. Not because they are regarded as unimportant or judged peremptorly to be not reformed but simply because that the differences between them and the Westminster Confession; on which they are based; are more or less predictable. But the creeds of the Anglican Church particularly the Thirty Nine Articles and the Irish Articles are included. The principle documents then that we will consider are The Second Helvetic Confession; The Gallican Confession; The Three Forms of Unity; The Thirty Nine Articles; The Scotch Confession; The Westminster Standards and the Formula Consensus Helvetica. This prescribes our field of enquiry within manageable proportions.

1.4 Arrangement of Subject

We will divide our subject into the two most obvious general divisions. Considering first the Covenant of Works and the Reformed Confessions and in the second section we will cover the field regarding the Covenant of Grace. This may appear stereotyped but it is almost impossible to do anything other than a consecutive study of the subject. Any attempt to take both divisions of Covenant Theology concurrently presents great difficulties and frequently ends in confusion and we hope to show that the two economies are inter-related.

1.5 Only in the Westminster Standards, The Formula Consensus Helvetica and to a lesser extent in the Irish Articles do you have what may be called a doctrine of The Covenant ^{of Works} explicitly asserted. The term covenant is not used in the Gallican Confession, The Thirty Nine Articles, or the Scotch Confession. There is one phrase in the Scotch Confession that some may judge to be synonymous with Covenant where it speaks of the Angel of the Council of God but this would be disputed. Direct references to the notion of the Covenant in the other Symbols of the 16th century are generally confined to the articles on the

Sacraments and more particularly to the articles on Baptism. Certain remarks are pertinent to these observations. A mere tabulation of the number of times 'Covenant' occurs does not constitute an evaluation of the doctrine of the Covenants in the Reformed Confessions. Nor does the absence of the term prove the non-inclusion of Covenant doctrine in the Confessions. Our study then may not be confined to the specific references to Covenant in the Creeds but must rather examine the symbols as to what extent they are compatible with the constituent elements of federalism or else are inhospitable to them.

1.6 Historical Comment

The observation made concerning the paucity of Covenantal terms in the Confessions of the 16th century is partly, at least, due to the facts of history. Though the root ideas of federalism can be found in Calvin and even in some of the earlier reformers like Zwingli and Bullinger yet there was no great development of the concept until the later part of the 16th century. Bullinger had indeed a fairly detailed Covenant Theology of Redemptive revelation but in many respects it was embryonic. As we shall have to note more fully later the initial covenantal theologies related to redemptive revelation. The conceiving of pre-redemptive revelation covenantally came somewhat subsequently. This historical fact must be considered in evaluating the Creeds or Confessions of the Reformation and post reformation era.

1.7 We need not be surprised to find great developments in Theology in an age of reformation. The very creedal symbols themselves are proof of the theological vitality of the age. And we must bear in remembrance that of no creedal document can it be said that the theological terminus has been reached in it. So development is not IPSO FACTO suspect far less wrong. Ofcourse it has to be borne in mind that many so-called advances have proved destructive to the church. All the more reason why every new formulation must be carefully scrutinised. Covenant Theology has been subject to a great deal of research and investigation, its fortunes have varied according to the prevailing theological climate. We believe the climate is favourable for a renaissance in the evangelical world. The enthusiasm for an all-conquering individualism is losing some of its momentum as revivalism is becoming threadbare. Also the recovery of lost ground by conservative scholarship must give a great impetus to the return on the part of reformed churches to their true and native habitat.

2.1 The Confessions and the Covenant of Works

The designation Covenant of Works is frequently objected to for a variety of reasons. It is alleged that it connotes the idea that man brings God under obligation. We allow that due respect must be given to the semantical aspect

of doctrinal statements, though as Calvin never tires of saying, one should not strive about words where principles are not at risk. If the term "Works" bears the connotation of man bringing God under obligation it was very far from the minds of federal theologians. The name can be exchanged, without prejudice to the schema, for Covenant of Life, or Covenant of Nature, as is frequently the case in the writings of federal theologians and in the Westminster Standards.

But it is not just the terminology that is chiefly objected to but the very idea of a Covenant with Adam in his pre-fall state. Since this is not a defense of the Covenant of Works arrangement only the most cursory attention will be given to this point here. Objections are principally based in the first instance on the lack of explicit scripture testimony. Federal Theologians although frequently quoting such texts as Hosea 6:7 and Job 31:33 have never based the case for an Edenic Covenant on random biblical texts but more so upon the good and necessary consequences of large segments of revelation such as Romans 5:12-21; 1 Corinthians 15:45-49 and upon foundational principles like the corporate oneness of mankind in their sinfulness. It is also urged, not only by those who reject Covenant Theology but even by many covenant theologians as well, that to speak of a Covenant of Works is to make an improper use of the Covenant concept, for not all covenant theologians accept a Covenant of Works. But neither etymology nor usage seems to preclude us necessarily from describing the Edenic administration as a Covenant. Some usages of the term *BERITH* certainly do not comport with the nature of the Edenic dispensation but it is another thing to assert that the term is so univocal and the concept so stereotyped that they may not properly admit of application to it at all. At the very least we can say that linguistic, exegetical and other studies, in recent times are supportive of the propriety of designating the pre-fall administration as a Covenant.

2.2. It will be helpful if at this stage we recall the main features of the Covenant of Works as that has been generally set forth by federal theologians. It was recognised that God alone can make a Covenant with man and He alone as God wills to do so. Hence the Covenant was always judged to be fundamentally *MONOPLEURON*. And in those Confessions which enunciate a Covenant of Works as one of their articles; like the Westminster Confession and the Formula Consensus Helvetica; this aspect of the Covenant is underscored. But in as much as the keeping of the Covenant by man; in order to enjoy Covenant favour; rested upon his obedience to the Will of God, it was *DIPLEURON*. It was commonly stated that there were four parts to it. The *STIPULATIO* - the demands made by God upon man; the *PROMISSIO* - the divine commitment to do good to man as long as he was obedient to his will; or the negative sanction of death

threatened on our disobedience; the ASTIPULATIO - man's commitment to supply what God demanded of him and finally RESTIPULATIO - the right to claim the good promised; which right it was said was his by virtue of the Covenant alone since it was not man that bound God but it was God who bound Himself to do good to man, if he remained faithful in observing the divine demands. To this it was usually added that the covenant had its sacraments. Most held that these were two in number; paradise and the tree of life. Others spoke of four. Adding to the two above; the tree of knowledge of good and evil and the Sabbath. As is well known the celebrated covenant theologians Cocceius and Witsius differed on this point. The promise was life. Not so much in the sense of bestowing upon man something which he did not have but rather in confirming man in what he had already received in his creation. It was generally acknowledged that, as God's image, man's state was not static but that it allowed for progress to ultimate blessedness. This brief resumé of the Covenant of Works is adequate to allow us to proceed to examine whether it comports with the Confessional Articles on man in his pristine condition or differs from their affirmations on the matter.

2.3 It has already been pointed out in respect of the creedal documents coming under review that we do not find an explicit confession of the Covenant of Works other than in the Irish Articles, the Westminster Standard and the Formula Consensus Helvetica. Hence the course that we shall follow in our investigations is to highlight the constituent elements of the Covenant of Works Schema and search our Creeds as to their statements on each particular article that attention will be focused on.

2.4 Unquestionably the most felicitous statement that we have in any Creed on the Covenant perspective of man's pristine state is in the opening assertion of Chapter VII of the Westminster Confession of Faith. "The distance between God and the creature is so great that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience to him as their creator yet they could never have any fruition of him as their blessedness and reward but by some voluntary condescension on God's part which he hath been pleased to express by way of Covenant."² The two thoughts that are basic to this statement are that man's blessedness consists in seeking by obedience to glorify his God and enjoy His favour and that God grants this boon to man not as a debt strictly owing to him for his obedience but as a privilege bestowed upon him out of the bountifulness of the good pleasure of God. To this is added a third thought that God was pleased to bind himself by way of Covenant with man so that he might truly grasp with assurance the prospect of enjoying the promised boon. Such is the heart of the Covenant of Works schema. In other words the Covenant was to establish a felicitous communion of life between God and man as a permanent

unlooseable boon arising from divine benevolence but bound^{up} with man's covenant faithfulness.

- 2.5 Now federal theologians have ever recognised that this Covenant was as truly a Covenant of Nature as it was a Covenant of Works. By this was meant that there was perfect affinity between man's nature and the Covenant. Put in other words it means that the promise of life, conditional upon man's obedience to the commandment of God, was in perfect accord with the state in which man was created. It emphasised that man was created in the Image and Likeness of God. To be more specific the Image was not "Donum superadditum" but a concreated excellency.
- 2.6 The Gallican Confession Art. LX says "We believe that man was created pure and perfect in the image of God." ³
 The answer to Question 6 in the Heidelberg Catechism is, "God created man good, and after his own image - that is, in righteousness and true holiness, that he might rightly know God his Creator, heartily love him and live with him in eternal blessedness to praise and glorify him." ⁴
 The point of this is brought out very clearly in the Irish Articles Art. 21. "Man being at the beginning created according to the image of God (which consisted chiefly in the wisdom of his mind and the true holiness of his free will) had the Covenant of the law ingrafted in his heart." ⁵
 The Second Helvetic Confession expresses it with equal felicity. "We therefore confess that "the law is good and holy" (Romans 7:12) and that this law is by the finger of God either 'written in the hearts of men" (Romans 2:15) and so called a law of nature, or engraven in the two tables of stone." ⁶ Chapter XII, para. 11.
- 2.7 In accordance with this we find in Scripture that the totality of man's life, not just as a general rule, but in every detail, was placed "under law to God". His relation to the creation in general, usually spoken of as the creation mandate - his social and family life - as the Lord of Glory testifies, concerning Adam before his heart was hardened by sin - conformed to the Will of his Creator; his vocation in all its dimensions including labour and rest, even his procreative functions and responsibilities. Every facet of life was measured by the category of obedience and every one of the Confessions testifies to his capacity to appreciate and offer the requisite obedience.
- 2.8 But this is not all. The Confessions in general do not view man, though created in the image, as already in possession of the pinnacle of blessedness possible for him to attain to, but speak of life as the boon bestowed on man in virtue of his perfect obedience to the Will of his Creator. As we saw the answer to Question 6 in the Heidelberg Catechism strongly implies this and the statement in the Belgic Confession is even more explicit. In Article XLV

it says "For the commandment of life, which he (i.e. Adam) had received, he transgressed; and by sin separated himself from God, who was his true life." ⁷ The Scotch Confession likewise represents man's original destiny in this way. Article XV. "The law of God we confess and acknowledge most just, most equal, most holy and most perfect commanding these things which being wrought in perfection were able to give life and able to bring man to eternal felicity." ⁸ The Formula Consensus Helvetica, Article VIII, is much more full and explicit on the matter, designating the arrangement a Covenant, nevertheless not differing in substance from the thrust of previous Confessions. "The promise annexed to the Covenant of Works was not just the continuation of earthly life and felicity, but primarily the possession of eternal life in heaven of course." And in Article LX it states "Therefore we do not assent to any view of those who deny that any reward of heavenly life was propounded to Adam, if he should obey God, and do not recognise any other promise of the Covenant of Works than that of enjoying perpetual life overflowing with every kind of good things - and that in an earthly paradise." ⁹

2.9

It is interesting that in its statement on this aspect of the Edenic administration the Second Helvetic Confession cites psalm 8 which is a profound theological reflection on man's glory in creation and what must be observed, even more particularly, is the pronounced eschatology of the psalm, plainly indicating an eschatological dimension to man's original state. This must be emphasised, so that it will be seen that these creedal assertions do not come to us as some kind of scholastic refinement in dogmatics, but as the confession of what they judged to be the truth, revealed by God in His holy word, concerning man's destiny under the pre-fall economy. "The Commandment ordained to life was found to be unto death." Romans 7:10. The law was designed to make man more blessed still. That it proved to be unto death is not the fault of the law as Paul emphatically declares in verse 14.

2.10

A few remarks on these confessional data are in order at this point before we lose sight of the significance of our citations. Geerhardus Vos, whose knowledge of the writings of the Reformers was of the very highest order, and whose insights into the revelational principles at issue in any theological construction was rarely matched; saw that the crucial distinction between Reformed and Lutheran anthropology hinged upon this very point. In his great article on the Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology after having summed up the Lutheran, Pelagian and Roman doctrine of man's original state he said "The Reformed view of the original state of man leads to a totally different result. It was a state of perfect uprightness in which he knew the good and did it consciously. As long as he remained in that state he could also be sure of God's favour. Up to this point the Reformed view concurs with the Lutheran. But whereas the latter can be satisfied by

perpetuating such a state and extending it indefinitely, the Reformed view fixes its gaze on something higher. It sees man not as being placed in eternal bliss from the beginning but as being placed in such a way that he might attain to eternal bliss. There still hovers above him the possibility of sin and death which is given with his mutable freedom. He is free to do the good out of his good nature but he has not yet attained the highest freedom which can do good only. The latter is placed before him as an ideal. The means of obtaining it is the Covenant of Works. Here too the state of grace is again ultimately determined by the idea of man's destiny in the state of original uprightness. What we inherit in the second Adam is not restricted to what we lost in the first Adam. It is much rather the full realisation of what the first Adam would have achieved for us had he remained unfallen and been confirmed in his state. Someone placed in that state can never again fall from it. As truly as Christ is a perfect saviour so truly must he bestow upon us the perseverance of the saints." ¹⁰ Herman Bavinck in his work "Our Reasonable Faith" writes in similar vein, "He (Adam) lived in paradise, it is true, but this paradise was not heaven and it could with all its beauty be forfeited by him. One thing was lacking in all the riches, both spiritual and physical, which Adam possessed: ABSOLUTE CERTAINTY. As long as we do not have that, our rest and pleasure is not yet perfect." ¹¹

2.11

Before leaving this point it is in order to draw attention to the Tree of Life which it is said was in the midst of paradise. Numerous points of great interest arise here which cannot be dealt with now but we would be remiss if we failed to refer to the significance of the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil for the point under consideration. Covenant theologians have uniformly taught that there was a sacramental relation between the Tree of Life and the Promise of the Covenant. The use of the symbolism of the early chapters of Genesis in the eschatology of the Apocalypse, was seen as confirmatory of this. Such sacramental signs and seals were looked upon as further confirmation of the covenantal character of the administration, since it was held that sacraments belonged to a covenant. In regard to "the tree of knowledge of good and evil" all the confessions agree in asserting that the cause of man's fall and ruin was his transgression of God's prohibition concerning the eating of the tree and thus incurring the penalty of death. The disobedience arose from the mutability of man's will wrought upon by the evil influence of satanic temptation. "The woman being deceived by the serpent and man obeying the voice of the woman both conspiring against the sovereign majesty of God who in express words had before threatened death if they presumed to eat of the forbidden tree." ¹²

It is needless to further develop here the details of confessional statements on this particular aspect of federalism we must move on to even more crucial

elements of the Edenic administration from the point of view of Covenant Theology.

- 3.1 At the very heart of the Covenant schema is the representative status of Adam and the consequential ruin of all mankind in his fall. Whilst it is true that the two Adam perspective on human history as expounded in Romans 5: 12-21 is not exclusive to federalism - the Lutheran creeds also assert this - yet it may be affirmed that it does not gain the prominency in any other theological construction that it does in federalism. Many see the heart of classical federalism in the mutuality that is bound up with RESTIPULATIO. This is not altogether accurate. Whilst it is no part of this paper to engage in a polemical defense of any particular species of federalism, it may be justly claimed that its genius lay in its grasp of the overarching importance of the two-Adam schema for the religious history of mankind. Here is the inspirational idea that enabled it to effect a fine balance between the theological and the historical motifs in the understanding of revelation.
- 3.2 We ask then do the confessions speak of Adam as a PERSONA PUBLICA and of the consequences of this for the human race?
- The Gallican Confession states, "What God had given to Adam was not for him alone but for all his posterity." ¹³
- The Westminster Larger Catechism's answer to Question 22 puts it expressly in Covenant terminology, "The covenant being made with Adam as a public person not only for himself but for his posterity." ¹⁴
- The Formula Consensus Helvetica says, "We cannot preserve heavenly truth and straightway give assent to those who deny that Adam represented his posterity and that by God's institution." ¹⁵
- 3.3 The corollary of this, that Adam's fall was the fall of mankind, was just as explicitly affirmed - in fact even more so. The Canons of Dort state, "As all men have sinned in Adam, lie under the curse, and are obnoxious to eternal death, God would have done no injustice by leaving them all to perish." ¹⁶
- The Second Helvetic Confession says, "Such a one as he became by his fall, such are all his offspring, even subject to sin, death and sundry calamities." ¹⁷
- The Thirty Nine Articles says, "Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians vainly talk) but it is the fault and corruption of the nature of every man that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam." ¹⁸
- The Scots Confession referring to Adam's sin, says "By which transgression commonly called original sin, was the image of God utterly defaced in man, and he and his posterity of nature became enemies of God, slaves to Satan and servants to sin." ¹⁹

3.4 Few religious faults could be more dangerous for believers than to treat this subject as if it was a matter for speculation only. First and foremost it is a matter for the profoundest confession of sin. And if a subjective note may be interjected at this point it is not to be doubted that a profound appreciation, "that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked", always leads to a clearer recognition that the believer does not possess a vestige of righteousness out of Christ. This had led to the placing of the Law and Grace in the strongest antithesis to one another soteriologically. The point that we are making is that a due appreciation of the solidarity of the race in sin, from a covenantal perspective, leads to as profound a confession of sin and to as sharp an antithesis between law and gospel soteriologically as you find even in Luther, despite the contrary caveats of the critics of federalism, that Covenant Theology is inspired by a spirit of legalism.

3.5 Thus whilst we indeed discourage dealing with this matter as a problem merely to satisfy our speculative faculty, which would be very harmful, yet we cannot, and should not, disallow the question, regarding the universal sinfulness of mankind, how are these things so? How does it come about ^{that} the sin of one results in all becoming sinful and sinners. One secretly admires the humility of the Gallican Confession when it says, "And we confess that it is not necessary to enquire how sin was conveyed from one man to another." Nevertheless it proceeds to state a pertinent fact of revelation when it goes on to say, "For what God had given to Adam was not for him alone, but for all his posterity and thus in his person we have been deprived of all good things and have fallen with him into a state of sin and misery." ²⁰ The touch of Calvin is unmistakable here and we can claim that it is in perfect accord with federalism. Although the idea of legal representation is not explicitly stated the Belgic Confession's affirmation is in complete accord with this. "We believe that through the disobedience of Adam, original sin is extended to all mankind." ²¹

3.6 We will steer completely clear of the MARE MAGNUM^v of the nature of imputation ^{v [great sea.] G} whether it is Mediate or Immediate but since the question, "in what way did the fall of Adam involve the fall of all mankind?" is so germane to Covenant Theology we must briefly consider it a little further. Every believer who has thought seriously on the biblical teaching on the sin of Adam involving all mankind - involving each individual of mankind - must have wrestled in his soul with the PECCATUM ALIENUM^v complex. We believe that only the Holy Spirit, ^{v [sin of some - one else.] G} of whom it is written "When he shall come he shall convince the world of sin"; by an effectual operation in our hearts can truly deliver us from this complex. Yet we may also expect that the theological answer to the problem should help us.

3.7 There are really only two possible replies to the question of how are we involved? How is it my sin? One is that the inclusion of the race in the first sin of the protoplasts is the result of some kind of realist view of

human nature. Despite the illustrious names associated with some form or other of this doctrine our judgement is that every form of realism creates more theological problems than it solves, if indeed it solves any at all. At the same time it is also difficult to see how so abstract a concept as realism can come home to the conscience of the sinner as a means of conviction of and relief from the protest original sin that all of us are native to. The second possibility is that the solidarity of the race in sin, though related to the fact that God "has made of one blood all nations of men", nevertheless its true ground is the fact that God, who is without iniquity, has constituted the link between Adam and all mankind in such a way that his is our (my) sin and He had done this by way of the federal oneness that obtained between Adam and his natural posterity, over and above the genetic bond. As the protoplast he is qualified to be the first Adam, this is the ground of his federal Headship and as our federal head his sin is our sin. This is more satisfactory, not because it unravels the mystery, but because the disturbed conscience is directed away from a questionable philosophical postulate to a divine ordination and so my confession of original sin is an activity of faith rather than a rational conclusion. We hasten to add that the Confessions in the main content themselves with a form of words that are not a definition nor meant to be. They do not really establish either of the views over against the other. The usual formula is "They being the root of all mankind". Which is but an assertion of the fact, in other terms, that Adam and Eve were the Protoplasts and as such the source of mankind's ruin. But the Westminster Standards do point to the Covenantal Oneness as the explanation. As the Shorter Catechism states it, "The Covenant being made with Adam not only for himself but for his posterity all mankind descending from him by ordinary generations sinned in him and fell with him in his first transgression" But all confess that all mankind sinned in Adam. And this doubtless is the crux of the matter. We are not by any means saying that those who adopt a realist position are unfaithful to the confessions for the confessions do not really assert exclusively either one position or the other. They only assert the fact. However interesting it might be to pursue a bit further other affirmations of the Confessions and the way these points relate their relationships to the constituent elements of the Covenant of Works system it is unnecessary for our present purposes to add more.

4.1 A brief evaluation of what we have so far surveyed is in order by way of concluding this section. What might be called an explicit assertion of the Covenant of Works is confined to the Irish Articles, the Westminster Standards and the Formula Consensus Helvetica. The Irish Articles assert the doctrine of the Covenant of Works but do not develop it to any great extent, though the influence of the Covenant scheme is apparent in many of its articles particularly its teaching on the Law. The Westminster Standards unquestionably affirm a Covenant of Works in the Confessions and the two Catechisms. However it has to be said that many of the refinements of federal theologians are

studiously avoided. The Formula Consensus Helvetica not only asserts a Covenant of Works but engages in a polemical defence of the views of one group of federal theologians as against the views of another group. This is particularly the case in respect of the debate over the nature of imputation. The point being made is that the doctrine of the Covenant of Works is not a precisely similar formulation even in the Confessions that affirm it. The doctrine is only found in any explicit form in the Creeds of the 17th century and though the Synod of Dort is an early 17th century symbol it does not affirm the Covenant of Works. None of the sixteenth centuries creeds affirm the Covenant of Works at all.

4.2 This raises very interesting questions. Zacharias Ursinus and Casper Olevianus both embraced a Covenant of Works or as Ursinus preferred to call it a Covenant of Creation. Olevianus indeed is generally accorded the distinction of being the formulator of the Covenant of Works doctrine, not indeed as a wholly de novo ^[new] theological concept. The point in referring to that here is that the question must be asked why it was not affirmed in the Heidelberg Catechism? Various answers could be proposed. One that Olevianus's fuller development of the doctrine was later by some years than the Catechism. At least the publishing of it was. It could also be that they may have taken the position that such a dogma did not belong to Catechetics. The pastoral character of the Catechism is widely recognised and acclaimed. The Gallican Confession, basically the work of Calvin, certainly predates any published formulation of the Covenant of Works, as do also the Scots Confession, The Thirty Nine Articles and the Belgic Confession. The Second Helvetic Confession, largely the work of Bullinger, also belongs to the seventh decade of 16th century - the great decade of Creed Formulation. Bullinger as is well known developed a very full doctrine of the Covenant but it was strictly in respect of Redemptive revelation. There is no evidence that he organised pre-redemptive revelation on a Covenant basis. The absence from the Articles of Dort is easily understood because the Five Articles are the response of the Synod to the Five Arminian Articles of 1610.

4.3 What conclusions are we to draw from this survey and evaluation? The doctrine cannot claim the authority of the early Creeds of the Reformation. So far as creedal affirmation is concerned it is very much a seventeenth century doctrine. Does this mean then that the 17th century creeds are not of the same family as the early reformed creeds in their basic assertions respecting the Edenic administration. I may refer here to an appraisal of the Old Scotch Confession of 1560 made by the late Professor A.F. Mitchell in his Baird Lecture of 1899 in which he also makes a brief comparison of the Old Symbol with the Westminster Confession of Faith. He wrote, "I venture to think that no one who, with a good conscience and honest intent, could sign that Confession and answer in

the affirmative the questions regarding election put to candidates for the ministry at their ordination, need hesitate to put his name to that which in 1647 was received as "in nothing contrary" to the former and held its place alongside of it even after the reign of Charles II, and under the episcopal regime." ²² This judgement of a prudent and erudite historian of Church history; and of reformed symbolology; is pertinent to the question whether the difference in age and structure means that we have two disparate traditions of Reformed Symbols.

4.4 In all the constituent elements of the Covenant of Works there is no substantial difference between the Creeds of the two eras with perhaps the exception of the Formula Consensus Helvetica. Its spirit and tone is so largely polemical in the manner in which its affirmations are articulated that an observable difference has to be conceded here, but the Canons of Dort have something of that polemical nature too. But this polemical note is hardly more pronounced in any 17th century documents than the uncompromising language which we find in the earlier Creeds on the subjects of the Church and the Sacraments. Considering all these factors and bearing in remembrance that all the Creeds are agreed on the Probative nature of the Edenic administration; that the blessing of Secure Life and Fellowship was one to be enjoyed through obedience by Adam; that also we have in them all something of the representative status of the protoplasts stated; solidarity of the race in sin and recognition of the two Adam arrangement as overarching the religious history of mankind, affirmed there is complete agreement on the substance of pre-redemptive revelation. Yet the organising of this data in accordance with Covenantal Categories by the seventeenth century Confessions is not unimportant, as we shall see when we consider the Covenant of Grace. Some might complain that the cutting edge of Federalism is too fine for a Creedal symbol in respect of pre-redemptive revelation and thus should be excluded from it. But then we do well to remember the OMOOUSIOS TO PATRI of Nicea.

THE COVENANT OF GRACE

5.1 When we turn to the Covenant of Grace we are not so dependent on inference as we are, to a great extent, with the Covenant of Works. Here we are on the solid rock of explicit and frequent scripture statements which clearly establish that the economy of redemption is of a covenantal nature. A 'word study' of usage in the Old and New Testaments will not be undertaken here, it would be superfluous to our purpose. But it is necessary to state what is the basic sense of the Divine BERITH or DIATHEKE in redemptive revelation. Some scholars like Meredith Kline hold that the ground idea of the BERITH is a

mutual pact, characterised indeed by divine initiative and sovereignty. From this he has concluded that it is eminently proper to treat the pre-redemptive Edenic revelation and also the 'inter-trinitarian economy' covenantally. Others like J Barton Payne urge that the primary meaning is Testament or Will. Geerhardus Vos in his 'Hebrews the Epistle of the DIATHEKE' puts forward the view that a study of that epistle, which he calls 'the last word in the development of the BERITH-DIATHEKE idea', establishes that there are two notions to the covenant concept. First there is the idea that the covenant is an institution established and set in operation for an ulterior end. Here the majesty of God and the Divine monergism in redemption shine through in its character as a Divine promissory dispensation. Secondly the covenant is seen as an end in itself; the fulfillment of religion in a life of union and communion with God in Christ; epitomised in the covenantal formula "I shall be to them a God and they shall be to me a people". This two-fold conception of the BERITH-DIATHEKE accords with the formulations of, and the perspectives on the covenant by, the federal theologians, not only in respect of the Covenant of Grace but also in respect of the Covenant of Works. And without asserting that this is the last word in definition it should serve us adequately for the purpose of considering further the doctrine of the covenant and the Reformed Confessions.

5.2 A Transitional Statement

Louis Berkhof in his Systematic Theology takes up the question, 'Is the Covenant of Works abrogated?' and he goes on to give the differing views among theologians on the matter. Arminians claim that it was wholly abrogated at the Fall. Reformed theologians are not unanimous in their views. Some hold that it has been wholly abrogated but others - and it would appear to be the majority view - that in some respects it has been abrogated while in another sense it has not. If we take man in his sinfulness and lostness we must remember that he is still unsevered from his original covenantal root and that he remains so unless and until he is united to Christ. This is the way that Thomas Boston in his celebrated 'Four-fold State' treats the matter - a divine who gets far less attention than he deserves. This is a much more biblical way of looking at things than to speak of man in his natural relationship to God and to rationalise from this premise. For the man in Christ "Old things have passed away all things have become new." Even his relationship to the law as a moral imperative is different. Not a different law but a different relationship to it. This perspective is brought out with great felicity in the Heidelberg Catechism where consideration of the law is taken up under 'Thankfulness'.

5.3 Does this mean then that there is no connection at all between the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace? that the two covenants are utterly diverse and disjointed? To say that this is so leaves both covenants in a condition of unacceptable suspense. The answer to this is that the junction between the two

covenants is Christological. "God sent forth His Son born of a woman, made under the law - GENOMENON EK GUNAIKOS, GENOMENON UPO NOMON - to redeem - EXAGORASEE - them that are under the law." In Christ the Covenant of Works is taken up and fulfilled. He is truly the Second Adam.

5.4 Biblical representation clearly establishes that there is such a link. The very first intimation of covenant that we have in the scriptures is in Genesis 6:18 and it embraces not only the salvation of Noah and his family but also of the world from prevailing wickedness. This^{is} finely expressed by W J Dumbrell, "A Biblical doctrine of covenant in the light of the evidence adduced cannot be merely anthropologically related. The world and man are part of one total divine construct and we cannot entertain the salvation of man apart from the world which he has affected. The refusal to submit in Eden meant a disordered universe and thus the restoration of all things will put God, man and the world at harmony again." ²³ God's Covenant of Grace looks back to the ruin of the Fall and far from conveying to us the idea that God has abandoned the Covenant of Works, so far as the sublimest sense of covenant is concerned, of effecting a communion of life between Himself and his image-bearer, he has sworn that it is His purpose to effect this. But this time covenant as means to this end will not rest in the faithfulness of mere man but in the unswerving obedience of the One who is God's fellow. It is a covenant that will not fail and one in which the law will be magnified and made honourable. The opinions of a large number of eminent theologians could be referred to as supporting this position. The following quote from R L Dabney puts it very plainly, "The Bible is always a practical book and does not wander from its aim: it concedes nothing to a merely useless curiosity. Now the object of God in giving to the church of the latter ages this brief history of primeval man, was to furnish us only with the great facts, which are necessary to enable understandingly to connect the Covenants of Works and Grace, and to continue the spiritual history of our race." ²⁴ We would only add that all such understanding is in order that we may know God as our blessedness.

5.5 Some Additional Historical Remarks

In the progress of dogma the Covenant of Grace came before the Covenant of Works. Zwingli and Bullinger, brought forward their doctrine of the Covenant of Grace to repudiate the assertions of the Anabaptists. Bullinger particularly developed the covenantal concept in the sermons on the Ceremonial Law in the Decades and in other works produced by him. He limited the covenant strictly to redemptive revelation and one can only speak of his covenantal theology as nascent federalism. It is Caspar Olevianus who is credited with the organising of redemptive revelation in a covenantal way in the more fully developed form. It is an honour that he must share with his colleague Ursinus; joint - author with him of the Heidelberg Catechism. This historical priority of the Covenant

of Grace is reflected in the Reformed Confessions as we have already noted. The 16th century confessions make no mention of a Covenant of Works. But in all the confessions, with the exception of the Scotch Confession and the Gallican Confession, there are specific references to the Covenant of Grace, chiefly in their dicta on the sacrament of Baptism. But still the paucity of use of the term covenant, or of the term 'testament' even, in reference to the Covenant of Grace, is a matter of some surprise. This probably indicates that at that time the covenant idea had not yet taken fast hold on the theological mind of the reformed churches, as it was later to do. The latter part of the 16th century and the first half of the 17th century was the age of greatest development in federal theology. When these facts of history are taken into account they explain to a great extent the differences in confessional formulations.

6.1 Towards a Further Confessional Evaluation

The progressive character of revelation by way of successive covenants, particularly in the Pentateuch; but never being lost sight of in the subsequent eras of revelation right down to the close of the canon of scripture; is the soil out of which federalism grew. Its biblical origins are unquestionable and from the very beginning covenant theology had what may quite legitimately be called a philosophy of revelation. It may be briefly expressed as the principle of Unity in the midst of Diversity. All the Reformed Confessions assert the unity of the scriptures in respect of their revelation of God's way of salvation, in the midst of the diversity of forms in which revelation came. This is not just assumed, it is explicitly affirmed in every one of our Confessions and in that respect they all correspond. But though they are univocal in that respect it will be seen that the unity is confessed from a slightly different perspective in the 16th century creeds than in the 17th century ones, particularly in the 'Westminster Standards'.

6.2 In the creeds of the 16th century we shall find that the unity is confessed principally if not purely from a Christological perspective.

The Scotch Confession, Art IV referring to Genesis 3:15 says, "Which promise as it was repeated and made more clear from time to time, so was it embraced with joy, and most constantly, received of all the faithful from Adam to Noe, from Noe to Abraham, from Abraham to David and so forth to the incarnation of Jesus Christ, all (we mean the faithful fathers under the law) did see the joyful day of Christ Jesus and did rejoice." ²⁵

The Thirty Nine Articles says, "The Old Testament is not contrary to the New for both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to mankind by Christ who is the only mediator between God and man." ²⁶

The Gallican Confession says, "We believe that the ordinances of the law came to an end at the advent of Jesus Christ; but although the ceremonies are no

more in use, yet their substance and truth remain in the person of him in whom they are fulfilled." ²⁷

The Second Helvetic Confession says "Jesus Christ is the only Redeemer and Saviour of the world, the King and High Priest, the true and looked for Messiah, that holy and blessed one (I say) whom all the shadows of the law, and the prophecies of the prophets did prefigure and promise." ²⁸

The same Christological emphasis, as the unifying principle of revelation is asserted in the Belgic Confession in the article on "The Catholic Christian Church". It says, "This church has been from the beginning of the world and will be to the end thereof, which is evident from this, that Christ is an eternal King, which, without subjects, he cannot be." ²⁹

6.3 From these and numerous other passages that could be quoted it will be seen that the unity of revelation was Christologically perceived. But with the development of the Covenant concept it was perceived that the Christology of the Old Testament and the Covenant were interlocked. Numerous scriptures brought this out very sharply like Isaiah 42:6, "I will give thee for a covenant of the people". Consequently in federal theology the Christological emphasis is taken up into the covenant and the unity of revelation is expressed covenantally as well as Christologically. The Westminster Larger Catechism brings this out with considerable force, "The covenant was differently administered in the time of the law and in the time of the gospel; under the law it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb and other types and ordinances delivered unto the people of the Jews and foreshadowing Christ to come." ³⁰ Other passages from the Westminster Standards could be adduced to show that the Christological motif is not obscured as a result of this ^{development} but it is now locked into the covenantal perspective. And even a cursory acquaintance with scripture is enough to convince one that this is of the nature of things in the unfolding of Revelation concerning God's so great salvation.

6.4 It was apparent from this twofold perspective of Christology and Covenant that the soteriological oneness of both Testaments was clearly established. There are few points on which greater emphasis is placed in the Reformed Creeds than that the fathers under the law (i.e. under the whole of the Old Testament economy) were saved through faith in the promised Saviour. The Second Helvetic Confession puts the matter very pointedly as follows: "Yet, notwithstanding, it is most certain that they who were before the law, and under the law, were not altogether destitute of the gospel." The Heidelberg Catechism says concerning the knowledge of the Mediator, Question 19, "Whence knowest thou this? Answer: "From the Holy Gospel, which God Himself first revealed in Paradise, afterwards proclaimed by the holy Patriarchs and Prophets and foreshadowed by the sacrifices and other

services of the law, and finally fulfilled by this His well-beloved Son." It has been frequently asserted that there was an improper spiritualising of revelation involved with this emphasis. There is no reason to deny that in many instances this was excessively done to the violation of the true meaning of the scriptures but the confessions do not lose sight of the multiplicity of forms in which revelation came but rather assert that. As is well known this is one area of Biblical studies that is an ongoing task for the church and developments have always to be taken account of. It is also now accepted that the covenantal perspective is one of the most helpful in grasping and elucidating the unity of essence with the diversity of forms that we have in revelation history. Federal theology is as true to the Grammatico-historico principles of interpretation as is any other approach to the systematising of Revelation.

7.1 One of the particular forms in which Revelation came to the people of God under the Old Testament is of special interest at this point. Frequent reference is made in the confessions to 'Types'. It is not necessary for us here to go into the matter of the definition of Types or into the elaborate and complex hermeneutical principles which must regulate Typology. The statement of the Larger Westminster Catechism that Types foreshadow Christ is all that is necessary for us to take up. They served not only to prefigure the Promised Christ but were also 'shadows' of the reality that stood behind them (or back of them). Types were as the writer to the Hebrews says copies of the thing of heaven UPODEIGMATA ΤΩΝ ΕΝ ΤΟΙΣ ΟΥΡΑΝΟΙΣ Hebrews 2:23. This fact of revelation has a great bearing on the way in which covenant theology developed; in particular because it was apparent that a full understanding of Divine Revelation required not only spiritual perception of its eschatological character but also of the heavenliness of its origin and more particularly of its core content. This heavenly dimension is found not only in such truths as the Trinity but pervades the whole of Divine Revelation. Though it pervades all of revelation it is particularly accentuated in 'TYPES'. And as Revelation progressed in fullness and pointedness so this element became more and more pronounced, so that when the Promised Saviour is 'Exhibited' it becomes its dominant note. "The second man is the Lord from heaven", 1 Corinthians 15:47. This cannot be more finely put than in the following quote from Geerhardus Vos: "When therefore, the question is raised how the Old Covenant can be identical in substance with the New, what is the common essence that, notwithstanding the great progress from one to the other, makes them two coherent stages in the expression and conveyance of the same spiritual reality, the answer is immediately forthcoming: the same world of heavenly spiritual realities, which has now come to light in the person and work

of Christ, already existed during the course of the old covenant, and in a provisional typical way through revelation reflected itself in, and through redemption projected itself into, the religious experience of the ancient people of God, so that they in their own partial manner and measure had access to and communion with and enjoyment of the higher world, which has now been let down and thrown open to our full knowledge and possession. In other words the bonds that link the Old and New Covenants together, is not a purely evolutionary one, inasmuch as the one has grown out of the other; it is, if we may call it, a transcendental bond. The New Covenant in its pre-existent heavenly state reaches back and stretches its eternal wings over the old and the Old Testament people of God were one with us in religious dignity and privilege; they were, to speak in a Pauline figure, sons of Jerusalem above, which is the mother of us all." ³¹ Federal theologians in seeking to come to grips with this heavenly reality that stood back of the historical disclosure but which yet permeated the historical, and viewing the matter from a covenantal perspective moved in the direction of taking up the PACTUM SALUTIS into its formulation of federalism. The movement came to full-orbed articulation with Cocceius and from then on it featured prominently in all the works on federal theology. Objections have been voiced even by federal theologians themselves, against the propriety of speaking of the inter-trinitarian economy in federal terms and these objections in so far as they are exegetically based have to be taken seriously. Criticism against some of the more ingeniously speculative schemes must be accepted as being validly made but excess of theological speculation by some exponents of the concept is not of itself grounds for the complete rejection of the idea. In dogmatics this aspect of federalism came to be called the Covenant of Redemption or as Cocceius himself preferred to call it, the Divine Testament.

7.3 An example of the way in which the pre-temporal and temporal are related to one another may be taken from Witsius. He says, "In order to understand more thoroughly the nature of the Covenant of Grace two things are above all to be distinctly considered. First the Covenant which intervenes between God the Father and Christ the Mediator. Second the Testamentary Disposition by which God bestows by an immutable covenant eternal salvation and everything relative thereto upon the Elect. The former agreement is between God and the Mediator. The latter between God and the Elect. This last pre-supposes the first and is founded upon it." ³² Other theologians stated the matter differently but there is no need to multiply examples. Turretin, as is well known, said that debate as to whether God made the Covenant with the Elect in Christ, or with Christ for the Elect, was futile. Regardless of different ways of expressing it all agreed that the manifestation in time rested upon the pre-temporal or eternal council of which it was the manifestation. There are two questions that demand

consideration here. Firstly - Is this a way of stating things that accords with the Confession? Secondly - In what way do the Confession treat this fact of revelation?

7.4 The belief that God's redemptive acts in history proceed from an eternal purpose of God is not an exclusively covenantal way of construing things. Reformed Theology recognised in a profound way that redemption proceeded from the free determination of the Triune God, that is from the will of God's good pleasure and that this will of God's good pleasure was a communal act of the Trinity. Due place was also given to the fact that in the relations which the Triune God economically sustained to creation that the Son was the person "through whom all things were created", that He was "the first-born of all creation", "the heir of all things and that in the Council of the Triune God it was altogether appropriate that the Son consenting to become "incarnate" should be the mediator between God and man. All the Confessions affirm the need for a Mediator due to the chasm that separates the Holy God from sinners. The Second Helvetic Confession says, "Moreover, we believe and teach that the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, was from all eternity predestinated and foreordained of the Father to be the Saviour of the world." ³³ The substance of what is taught is stated in the Westminster Confession as follows, "It pleased God, in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, his only begotten Son, to be the Mediator between God and Man, the Prophet, Priest and King, the Head and Saviour of his church, the Heir of all things, and Judge of the world, unto whom he did from all eternity give a people to be his seed and to be by him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified and glorified". ³³ Whilst there is no difference of substance between the Confessions on this point, as a comparison of the two statements above clearly show, yet taking chapters VII and VIII of the Westminster Confession together and some of the statements made in these chapters singly the influence of the developments in federal theology on the Westminster formulation is apparent. Speaking of the mediatorial office it says, "Which office he took not unto himself, but was thereunto called by the Father, who put all power and judgement into his hand and gave him commandment to execute the same. This office the Lord Jesus Christ did most willingly undertake." ³⁴ There are numerous important lessons here for us in regard to the way in which we should handle our Creeds. Like everything that is of man; in this case even of the church; it is conditioned by the age of its production. Hence we must as a first exercise always distinguish between the substance of the truth confessed and the form in which it is articulated. But we must not conclude from this that the Covenant is merely of the form of things, it is very much of their substance.

7.5 It is not necessary here to deal with other aspects of the Mediatorship, such as the teaching of the Confessions on the theanthropic person, and the offices

which he executes. But we may just mention in passing that there is a setting forth in clearer light of the two-fold character of the mediatorship - Godwards and Manwards - in the Covenant scheme. In Covenant theology the Suretyship of Christ comes into its due prominence. But whilst, as was said, the influences of the developments of federalism are observable in the way the Westminster Standards state things, it may not be claimed that they affirm a Covenant of Redemption nor on the other hand do they deny it. The earlier Confessional formulations clearly evince that they preceded that way of considering the inter-trinitarian council.

8.1 On account of difference of arrangement between the sixteenth and seventeenth century confessions, more than for any other reason, we must briefly consider Election. The position assigned to "God's Eternal Decree" in the Irish Articles and in the Westminster Confession has given rise to a charge of scholasticism against these symbols. And there is no reason to deny that the reading of the first four paragraphs of chapter III of the Westminster Confession; the clinical language in which it states things, helps to create this impression. But this is a case where first impressions are not to be trusted. We shall return to this later.

8.2 All that we need to consider concerning the subject of election^{here} is included in the following statement in The Second Helvetic Confession, "Therefor, not for any merit of ours, yet not without a means, but in Christ and for Christ, did God choose us; and they who are ingrafted into Christ by faith, the same also were elected".³⁵ All our Confessions emphasise that Election was in Christ. "God did then manifest himself such as he is; that is to say Merciful and Just: Merciful, since he delivers and preserves from this perdition all whom he, in his eternal and unchangeable council, of mere good pleasure hath elected in Christ Jesus our Lord".³⁶ The comfort of this fact is beautifully brought out by Calvin in Book II, chapter XII of The Institutes, speaking of the need for a Mediator he says, "If the necessity be inquired into, it was not what is commonly termed simple or absolute, but flowed from the divine decree on which the salvation of man depended. WHAT WAS BEST FOR US, OUR MOST MERCIFUL FATHER DETERMINED."³⁷ The comfort of election further appears in that we know that we have our christian calling of God's good pleasure alone and not of anything in ourselves. Therefor as Christ is the mirror of our election our calling is the evidence of it. This is brought out most clearly in the pastoral caution with which the Westminster Confession concludes its article on Election. "The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, that men attending the will of God revealed in his word, and yielding obedience thereunto, may from the certainty of their effectual vocation, be assured of their eternal election".³⁸ And the Canons of Dort put the matter, if anything more pointedly, that the chosen "attain the assurance of their eternal and unchangeable election, not by inquisitively prying into

the secret and deep things of God but by observing in themselves, with a spiritual joy and pleasure, the infallible fruits of election pointed out in the word of God, such as true faith in Christ, filial fear, a godly sorrow for sin, a hungering and thirsting after righteousness, etc".

8.3 One of the charges frequently made against federal theology is that from a spirit of scholasticism that it takes the focus of the sinner away from Christ to the hidden purpose of God. If this were the case it would be abundant reason to reject it. Any system of theology that fails to do full justice to "Behold the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world" condemns itself. The grave distortion of federalism which we have in Professor James Torrance's article, "The Strengths and Weakness of Westminster Theology" makes such a charge. It is nothing less than mischievous to append Perkins Golden Chaine to the article, as if the supralapsarianism of the celebrated Perkins was of the true spirit of federalism and of the thrust of the Westminster Confession. Such is the miserable distortion that is produced by an unhealthy bias. In the former part of this paper reference was made to the remarks of Professor A.F. Mitchell on this point in making a comparison between the Scotch Confession and the Westminster Theology; it is an adequate refutation of the charge. A small item of internal evidence in support of this may be alluded to. In the Westminster Confession the Decree is distinguished from the PACTUM SALUTIS. From a homoletical point of view this underscores that Christ is the mirror of election and brings into greater prominence the Trinitarian nature of redemption with all the fullness and richness of life that this means for the children of God. As Bavinck says, "Thus the election cannot have been an arbitrary or accidental deed. If it was governed by the purpose of constituting Christ a Head and the Church His Body, then it has an organic character and already includes the idea of a covenant".³⁹

9.1 There are good grounds for maintaining that nowhere is the gospel proclaimed with greater earnestness and warmth than, as it were, from the lap of the Covenant. So far as the administration of the Covenant is concerned federalism, at least in the form in which we have it in the Westminster Standards, has refused to surrender its CREDIMUS to rationalism. Unhesitatingly it proclaims, "Man by his fall having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the Covenant of Grace: whereby he freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved." Here is as free and full a proclamation of salvation to sinners as God allows and requires of us to make. Nor has it either chosen

the other horn of the dilemma of rationalism by obscuring far less denying election, for it goes on to state, "And promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe." Rationalism seeks the submergence of one aspect of the other, Calvinism and Calvinistic federalism unhesitatingly confesses both. Asserting on the one hand the Divine goodness in covenant administration, ^{to sinners} and on the other pastorally diligent in affirming that the essence of the covenant is only realised in the elect children of God. Put in another way, the Reformed Confessions painfully acknowledge that the church of God on earth comprises not only those who truly are God's children, but also those who are only nominally so; those who "have a name that they live but are dead".

9.2 A subject of great interest and great difficulty emerges at this point; the difference between the church as it is visible to man and the church as it is not yet visible to man; nor indeed can be until the day of judgement; and as only visible to God. What has been frequently referred to as The Invisible Church, as it is also designated in the Westminster Confession. Detailed discussion of this is not possible here but a few points may be briefly made. All the Confessions recognise that the church on earth is imperfect. This does not merely refer to the fact that many sects incorrectly assume to themselves the name of the church, but to the fact to which the Belgic Confession refers, "But we speak here not of the company of hypocrites who are mixed in the church with the good, yet are not of the church though externally in it." ⁴⁰ All of our Confessions recognise that not all who are externally part of the church of God, belong to God's family. This is one of the elements that led to the propounding of the notion of "The Visible" and "The Invisible" church which is the cause of some disquiet and much discussion amongst theologians. It is not of course the only factor calling for some kind of distinction between the true children of God and those who are only nominally so. Certain factors in the objective sphere as well as in the subjective realm enter into these matters. We cannot discuss so complex and vast a subject here but it is to the point to say that there are differences between the Westminster Standards and the earlier confessions at this point. It is also correct to say that the distinction Visible and Invisible church is not ^{necessarily} germane to federalism. However the concept of Covenant brings into clear focus that mankind is not only classified into two families; the children of God and the children of the world, but in as much as many who belong to the latter class are within the administration of the Covenant; those referred to in our confessions as "hypocrites"; federalism brings the matter into acute focus. It is the question of what is the relation of the hypocrite to the covenant? What they are in themselves is clear; they are unfruitful branches. But they are in the Vine; there is a union between them and Christ; yet not a fruitful one. Hence they belong to the Covenant, but as a communion of life it is not realised in them.

- 9.3 The problem emerges in federalism from another perspective too; when the matter of the parties to the Covenant from man's side is taken up. The Covenant as it exists in the Divine Counsel; in the Inter-trinitarian Pact; in the fullest sense of Covenant as an end in itself; a Union and Communion of Life with God in Christ; must be accounted to be with the Elect. We have already referred to Turretin's dismissal of the distinction with the Elect in Christ or with Christ for the Elect as being of no real significance. L. Berkhof in his Systematic Theology cites a large number of the most eminent federal theologians, from the time of Caspar Olevianus to the present day who support the view that the Covenant is made with the Elect. Henrich Heppe quotes Olevianus as follows, "Thus God's holy love would only yield to the human race by allowing a recompense to be given through a Mediator, the value of which outweighed the guilt of entire humanity; by announcing to one section of humanity the gravity of his punitive righteousness; and by entering into a covenant of grace with the other section of it. This is why the Father's covenant, which was in and of itself universal, could only be effectual for one section of humanity".⁴¹
- 9.4 But there were others who stated the matter differently, Boston, Gib, Dick and A Kuyper among them. These affirmed the Covenant to be made with sinners of mankind, not distinguished in that respect into elect and non-elect. Boston in his work on the Covenant of Grace rejects with considerable force the position of those asserting the Covenant to be with the elect. Now these differences of statement, important though they are, are not irreconcilable. They result primarily from the manner in which the Covenant is dealt with, as a two-fold Covenant, or as one-fold Covenant. This explains the difference to a large degree but there is another factor involved in it for which the above is not the complete answer. Those who say that the Covenant is made with sinners of mankind bring out into sharper focus that the Covenant in its administration is of wider application than the Elect. The point at issue is highlighted in the somewhat different statements that we have in the Westminster Standards. The Larger Catechism says, "The Covenant was made with Christ as the Second Adam and in him with all the elect as his Seed". The only fair interpretation of the Confession's statement is that the Covenant was made with fallen man, not distinguishing at that point between Elect and non-elect. The Shorter Catechism, Question 20, must be judged to be supportive of the position of the Larger Catechism. It is clear however that the Catechism is dealing with the Covenant in its essence whilst the Confession in that particular statement, Chapter VII, paragraph III, is looking at the Covenant from the point of view of its administration.
- 9.5 This raises many profound, and existentially pressing questions. None more challenging theologically or homiletically, ^{more} important and existentially ^{more} acute than the matter of the relationship of election and Covenant administration.

If anywhere at all in theological research, it is at this point, that undue scholasticism must be guarded against and just as surely on the other hand must leap into "Irrationalism" be shunned. There is on the one hand the danger of evacuating the covenant administration of any spiritual reality, to treat it as empty and formal churchianity and there is the other kind of danger to make the irrational leap of denying the sovereignty of electing love and the irresistible energy of the will of God's good pleasure in order to preserve the meaningfulness of the Covenant's administration. Federalism rather than looking at this as an unacceptable dilemma understands that it is God's way, which is as high above our way as the heavens are high above the earth. Our Confessions assert both these aspects of the truth not arrested by the tension of holding in faith what appears impossible to harmonise.

9.6 The outward administration of the Covenant is recognised in all our Confession to consist principally in the ministry of Word and Sacraments with a profession of faith in and obedience to the Lord on the part of the sinner. Federal theology exhibits the awful solemnity of this Divine administration by placing it explicitly in a covenantal setting. From the inception of federalism this Covenant bond between God the Lord and the people to whom he addressed His word and favoured with the ministry of the sacraments was heavily underscored as in the case of Bullinger with his theocratic concepts and later on, on a national scale, by Knox in Scotland through the Covenanters and the Solemn League and Covenant. The Socio-political factors operative here must be passed over at present, what comes to overt expression here is that a people favoured with the outward administration of Covenant favour and professing their acceptance of and submission to the Word of the Lord are to that extent under covenant to God. This is to a great extent the motivation that impelled them on towards national reformation of religion. For us it is adequate at this point to observe the tremendous solemnity and advantage of gospel administration from a Covenant perspective. In this respect it is not to God that we turn as penitent sinners but to "OUR God" and "He will multiply pardon". In a scintillating passage from a work of sheer brilliance throughout, Hugh Martin puts it thus, "When God invites lost sinners to Himself, it is in terms like these: 'Incline your ear and come unto me, hear and your soul shall live, and I will make an everlasting covenant with you even the sure mercies of David' (Isa. 55:3) When moved by such entreaties, sinners ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherwards, it is with the mutual exhortation, 'Come and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten'. (Jer. 1:5) When after entering on this blessed relation with God, they would express their full satisfaction with it in the midst of all life's troubles and afflictions, they are wont to say: 'Though my

house be not so with God, yet he hath made an everlasting covenant with me ordered in all things and sure; this is all my salvation, and all my desire". (2 Sam. 23:5)" ⁴³ In the words of Samuel Rutherford as quoted by Walker "If the doctrine of the covenant of its own nature", says Rutherford, "may be so preached to all nations, without exception, in every difference of time, then must all the nations of the earth, in all difference of time, be in a capacity, to be a covenanted people of God". ⁴⁴

10.1

Scriptures such as Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-28; Hosea 2:18-20; Hebrews 8:10-12 reveal to us very explicitly the wealth of blessedness in a life of union and communion with the Lord, that accrues to all those in whom the Covenant is truly realised. This is the emphasis that must be carried through in all our presentation of it. When the Lord holds out the Covenant to sinners in the administrative sense, it is the Covenant in all its fullness that is proposed to the sinner: "I will make an everlasting covenant with you even the sure mercies of David". Isa. 55:3. There must be no thought of a truncated version of the Covenant being proposed to a non-elect community. This is utterly foreign to the scriptures and to our Confessions. And when any sinner professes faith in Christ and obedience to him, that person must be seen by the church as being in covenant with God in all the fullness of redemptive grace. Of course it is only God that knows the heart, and the scriptures sound out sufficient warning to every person professing faith in Christ and obedience to him, "to examine themselves whether they be in the faith; to prove themselves and know themselves, how that Jesus Christ is in them, except they be reprobate. II Corinthians 13:5.

10.2

Does this mean that after all election in Christ and Covenant administration are parallel lines which never meet, or at least never meet in the life of the redeemed sinner in time. It is not so. In the first instance if the covenant is not realised in the fullness of grace in the life of the sinner the fault of this is from the unbelief of the sinner. The blame cannot be transferred to the way in which the Covenant is administered for it is administered in precisely the same way to those who attain to the enjoyment of the fullness of its redemptive power and those who do not. But on the other hand the praise of attaining to the possession of covenant grace and salvation belongs not to the sinner but to God "who worketh in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure". Now this is just saying that as sinners we must ever relate to God in the light of his revealed will. There is no esoteric access to the "secret things of God". Under the word of the Cross the sinner turns his mind to the EVANGELION TOU CHRISTOU to know God's mind and will if he truly receives HEE DIAKONIA TEES KATALLAGEES not only may he believe that he is elect in Christ but he ought to do it. As a conclusion to this brief glance at what is an extremely important subject - a summary of Vos may be given.

Speaking of the way in which federal theologians were wont to put things, he says in substance, this does not mean that covenant administration proceeds from election but that it rather means that assurance of ones election must develop out of a strong covenant consciousness; that in all aspects of covenant administration the sinner must look towards God's Ordinances - The Word and the Sacraments, and that in the ultimate the covenant is only realised in all its fullness in the elect. Thus far Vos. One Covenant, one administration of the Covenant, if not realised fully in those to whom it is administered the fault is theirs, in all those who attain to the unspeakably precious enjoyment of its life and favour the praise is God. SOLA GRATIA; SOLO DEO GLORIA.

11.1 All our Confessions emphasise the SOLE FIDE and in covenant theology 'faith' in Christ Jesus receives its due place. There is not a hint of a suggestion in either the Confessional documents or in the writings of federal theologians, that anything other than faith in Christ, is the means of our appropriation of Covenant grace. This is so incontestably the case that it requires no cited attestation. James Walker in his work on Scottish Theology and Theologians says that some complained against federal theologians that they thrust Christ into the background and doctrine into the foreground and thus interposed a system of theology between the sinner and Christ. His rebuttal that those who made such a charge must have been ignorant of the passion and clearness with which the likes of Gillespie and Boston proclaimed Christ is most appropriate and sufficient. In the above section it was emphasised that the sinners attention must be focused on the "Outward Means" of Covenant administration, this is ofcourse to obviate either an unhealthy mysticism or a paralysing prying into the secret things of God. The danger of resting in external administrative means must not be ignored. In these means we are to seek and appropriate the "Lord our Righteousness" who was given "a covenant for the people". Union with Christ by faith is the only way of participating in covenant life and favour. As the Belgic Confession states it, "And faith is an instrument that keeps us in communion with him in all his benefits which, when they become ours, are more than sufficient to acquit us of our sins".⁴⁵

11.2 One of the most controverted of issues in federal theology was whether faith must be seen as a condition of the Covenant. The issue ofcourse is not exclusive to federal theology because no matter what system of doctrine is adopted it is incontrovertible that without faith (so far as people capable of a right use of God's appointed means are concerned) there is no salvation. "He that believeth not is condemned". John 3:18. But in covenant theology this tends to become more prominent because of the tendency to think that "Covenant" has the notion of condition inherent in it. It would be expanding this paper beyond desirable proportions to deal with the history of this controversy. Various ways of solving the issue were put forward by some of the most eminent theologians and

whilst it is fair to say that all can be faithful to the truth from the perspective adopted it is difficult to put forward a solution, in short compass, that takes all aspects of the problem into account. It should not be seen as being either a condition or not a condition. Faith must be considered from a two-fold perspective. As a believing act it is the deed of the sinner, as to the capacity to believe it is of God's grace and power. As the Belgic Confession puts it, "We believe that this true faith, being wrought in man by the hearing of the Word of God and the operation of the Holy Ghost".⁴⁶ Always remembering that God's work is prior to, and the efficient cause of, man's working. The Covenant as made by God with the Elect in Christ secures for them the effectual operation of the Holy Spirit to enable them to appropriate Christ as the summation of covenant promise. Nothing less than this is assured them in the promises of God's word as noted above concerning Jeremiah 31; Ezekiel 36 and Hebrews 8. And it must be said, ^{that} however carefully the idea of condition is defined even as a SINE QUA NON yet there is always the danger of introducing an element of legalism, as Boston so clearly saw. It must also be borne in mind that the idea of conditionality has tended to open a door for universalism in respect of the Atonement as John Owen makes clear in his "Death of Death".

11.3

More importantly the emphasis on the SOLE FIDE excludes any notion of a mechanical communication of covenant grace by way of sacramentarianism. This is why the Confessions are so insistent on the fact that the Sacraments do not confer grace but rather confirm it. As Pierre Ch. Marcel so aptly puts it, "The object of the Word is to engender and strengthen faith, while the sacraments contribute only to its strengthening".⁴⁷ So the reformed doctrine of the SOLA FIDE is prominently set forth in covenant theology emphasising that to God alone belongs the glory of salvation. This again is not something that is mechanically brought about but rather as something achieved through the consciousness of the redeemed sinner. This becomes apparent in the way that our Confessions treat of "the life of God in the soul of man", to borrow Henry Scougal's description. The Gallican Confession says, "We believe that by this faith we are regenerated in newness of life, being by nature subject to sin. Now we receive by faith grace to live holily and in the fear of God, in accepting the promise which is given to us by the gospel, namely: that God will give us his Holy Spirit".⁴⁸ The Second Helvetic Confession says, "And surely this is true repentance - namely an unfeigned turning unto God and to all goodness, and a serious return from the devil and from all evil. Now we do expressly say, that this repentance is the mere gift of God, and not the work of our own strength."⁴⁹ Nowhere is it more clearly stated than in the section on Effectual Calling in the Westminster Standards. Speaking of those who are made partakers of this calling it says,

"All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his word and spirit, out of that state of sin and death in which they are by nature, to grace and salvation by Jesus Christ, enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone and giving them an heart of flesh, renewing their wills, and by his almighty power determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ; yet so as they come most freely, being made willing by his grace".⁵⁰ This statement on "Effectual Calling" has been subject to kindly criticism by the late Professor John Murray but this does not affect the point being made that in federal theology God's redemptive grace was seen as enlisting all the faculties of man and in no way did ^{it} present a view of things in which man was to be inactive either in seeking his salvation or "working it out". The quickening of the soul was God's work alone, all synergism at this point was anathema but where God did a creative work in Christ it was in order that the sinner might with all his energy "work out his own salvation" and "bring forth fruit unto God".

12.1

Covenant Theology not only knows the blessings of God's grace in Christ in our justification, creation anew in Christ and our adoption into God's family, it also knows of a "Sealing of these things to the covenant people. There is a twofold sealing, "Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the Covenant of Grace".⁵¹ Already we have drawn attention to the fact that sacraments do not confer grace but confirm it. A general doctrine of the sacraments is not necessary here. In the work of confirming grace there is no mechanical strengthening through the mere physical participation. Their sealing is linked up with their being "signs" and as signs their true spiritual intent is only discerned by faith. In this respect they are not different from the Word, indeed as our Confessions uniformly state they presuppose faith - the case of infant baptism was never thought of as prejudicing that position. We only add that faith is principally directed to the Word of Institution and Interpretation; and by means of the word, faith discerns the heavenly reality in the earthly sign. Far from any tendency to disparage these seals of God's Covenant of Grace, on account of the apparent weakness, they are desired by faith as powerful in the hands of omnipotence and therefore are ardently desired. But the Reformed faith and especially Covenant Theology knows of a Sealing of the Spirit. The importance of referring to this matter here is that a balance is maintained between subjectivity and objectivity. There is always a danger where the emphasis on the Covenant is strong that the Covenant bond will be over externalised. The recognition of and giving due place to the sealing of the Spirit obviates the danger and irradiates the life of communion between God and his covenant ^{people} with warmth that only his own love shed

abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit can impart to it. In the words of the Heidelberg Catechism, Question 53, "What dost thou believe concerning the Holy Ghost? Answer: "First, that He is co-eternal God with the Father and with the Son. Secondly: that he is also given unto me, makes me a true faith partaker of Christ and all his benefits, comforts me, and shall abide with me forever". 52

13.1

This brings us to one of the most vital and also most difficult question in federalism; the place of the Seed of believers in the Covenant. The Reformed church, in large measure followed the historic position in the church on this matter. The baptism of the infant children of believers is not peculiar to federal theology. But when the validity of the practice was challenged by the Anabaptists it was in the doctrine of the Covenant that they found a defence against the attack on the practice. This does not mean that the doctrine of the Covenant was invented as an expediency to justify the practice. The doctrine of the Covenant is biblical first and foremost. Also there was an inchoate federalism in the church since the days of the "early fathers". But with the clear vision that characterised the spiritual perception of the reformers they recognised that the doctrine of the church was locked into the idea of the Covenant. And the scriptures clearly stated God was in Covenant not only with Abraham but with his seed. Also the New Testament scriptures made it explicitly clear, that however accentuated "Individuality" was in the light of the right of access of each believer to God through Christ by the Spirit, yet the organic aspect to God's building up of his congregation was not discontinued. The place of infant children in the Covenant as the seed of believers was not abrogated as a result of the fulfillment of the promise in Christ. And so the reformers held that inasmuch as they were in the Covenant by the express declaration of God, that consequently the Seal of the Covenant belonged to them. Baptism as a sign signified precisely what circumcision had previously signified, allowing for the fulfillment in Christ and subsequent cessation of the Ceremonial Law. It was thus the sacrament of initiation into the Church for the Covenant people. So far there is more or less full agreement on the part of the Confessions and Reformed Theologians. The real difficulty comes with the attempt to determine the relation of the infant children to the Covenant. In what sense do they belong to the Covenant? or perhaps better in what sense does the Covenant belong to them. In considering this point we may begin where we have a consensus if not complete unanimity.

13.2

We have already stated that all are agreed that God's Covenant is not only with believers but with their seed. Detailed scripture affirmation of that point is not needed. Any one who knows his bible and especially even a little of the scripture evidence constantly adduced in support of this will be familiar with the

relevant scripture data on the point. An example of Confessional statement may be taken from the Belgic Confession: "Therefor we detest the error of the Anabaptists who are not content with the one only baptism they have once received and moreover condemn the baptism of infants of believers who, we believe ought to be baptised and sealed with the sign of the Covenant, as the children of Israel formerly were circum^scised upon the same promises which are made unto our children. And, indeed, Christ no less shed his blood for the washing of the children of the faithful than for adult persons; and therefor they ought to receive the sign and sacrament of that which Christ has done for them". ⁵³

The Second Helvetic Confession is to the same effect: "Why, then, should not the sign of the Covenant of God be given to them? Why should they not be consecrated by holy baptism, who are God's peculiar people and are in the church of God". ⁵⁴ None of the other confessional documents, except the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort, treat the baptism of infants with the same fullness. In what sense ^{then} do they belong to the Covenant? That is the crucial question. There is an observable difference between the unqualified statement of the Heidelberg Catechism and the Westminster Larger Catechism at this point. Heidelberg Catechism: "Are infants also to be baptised?" Answer: "Yes; for since they, as well as their parents, belong to the covenant and people of God, and both redemption from sin and the Holy Ghost, who works faith, are through the blood of Christ promised to them no less than to their parents". ⁵⁵ The Westminster Larger Catechism: "Infants descending from parents, either both, or but one of them, professing faith in Christ, and obedience to him, are in that respect within the Covenant and to be baptised." ⁵⁶ When placed side by side the element of qualification in the Westminster document is apparent. What is reflected there is what Vos points out, ^{that} in the time of the second reformation, a less forthright confession, ^{was made} that the essence of the Covenant belongs to the child of a believing parent, ^{that} than was made at the time of the first reformation.

13.3

There has been a consensus even down to recent times that the infants of believers dying in infancy were saved in virtue of their inclusion in the covenant by the promise of God. This is put very forcefully in the Canons of Dort: "Since we are to judge of the will of God from his word which testifies that the children of believers are holy, not by nature but in virtue of the covenant of grace, in which they together with their parents are comprehended, godly parents have no reason to doubt of the election and salvation of their children whom it pleaseth the Lord to call out of this life in their infancy". ⁵⁷ The statement of the Westminster Confession, Chapter X, para. lll, "Elect infants dying in infancy are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit, who

worketh, when and where, and how he pleaseth". This statement has come under attack and was subject to the Declaratory legislation in relation to the Confession in the 1890's Free Church: A dispassionate consideration of the statement does not allow it to be used as a weapon against the consensus opinion of federal theology that the infant children of believing parents dying in infancy are saved although it has been construed as not supporting this. It does raise a merited caution against the assertion that all children dying in infancy are saved regardless of whether they are children of godly parents or not. It does not even contradict that statement though it does state a needful caution in respect of it. But the crucial point of the statement is that at that juncture it draws the Covenant back into the decree of election in a way that was not done in Chapter VII of the Confession, and contrary to Dort, and this casts light upon the caution that we have cited from the Larger Catechism above; that infants are in the Covenant IN THAT RESPECT.

13.4 To claim, without qualification, that, infants are in the Covenant so that they have the Covenant realised in their lives at birth or at baptism or shall have it certainly realised in their experience later on in life has its difficulties. First of all it encounters the problem that some of those who come to maturer years clearly prove that this is not the case that all children of believing parents belong to the true family of God. Secondly it has led to many unhelpful theories being put forward as to the sense in which the Covenant has been realised in their experience; which indeed we still find being put forward; such as presumptive regeneration; still strongly argued for in many parts. But on the other hand the danger of reducing to absurdity the baptism of infants is ever present, where covenant participation is thought of exclusively in terms of a fully realised covenant as in the case of the adult true believer. Principal Cunningham did this when he concluded that there is no difference between the baptised child and the unbaptised child. If that is so it ought not to be practiced at all. We will conclude this part of the subject with one or two practical observations and two quotations from Calvin. First should not the baptism of an infant be given the same significance as that of an adult? Which is the acceptance of them as belonging to the Covenant people so long as they do not controvert this with their disobedience. Granted that an adult may have given evidence of his covenant participation in a way that an infant has not but in the latter case the hope is grounded wholly on the covenant promise. And in the case of the adult his acceptance as a covenant child is contingent upon his obedience to the gospel just the same as in the case of the baptised child growing into a fully informed faith. This does not rule out decisive experiences in the life of a baptised youth. The predominant nature of religious experience

with Covenant children is that all through their lives they have been gradually taught of the Lord though frequently the person arrives at a religious crisis. But the crisis experience is not the commencement of the work of God in the soul. This is one of the reasons why effectual calling is treated of as a drawn out process, rather than an instantaneous act, in the Westminster Standards. We must not lose sight of the fact that all are born children of wrath and unless we are born again that we cannot enter into God's kingdom. There is no suggestion that to be born a child of the Covenant dispenses with the need for justification, regeneration and adoption. Is it not to the Covenant people that these very blessings are promised? God does not take to himself a people to enter into Covenant ^{with them} because they have ^{been} already regenerated but he takes them into Covenant with Him in Christ in order to regenerate them. Regeneration does not precede God's making a Covenant with sinners but it follows it as the fruit that grows on the plant of federal union. Therefore the believing parent trusting to the promises of God expects the regeneration of his child and prays for it. Abraham against all hope believed he would have a son because God promised him that it would be so, in the same faith he circumcised his son, and in the same faith he yielded his son to God upon the altar, believing in God's power to raise from the dead, ^{from} which indeed he received ^{him} in a figure from God.

13.5

At this point it may be in order to remind ourselves of Calvin's position on the matter. In a Confession of Faith, in Name of the Reformed Churches of France, which Calvin drew up, he says, "Moreover we believe that since baptism is a treasure which God has placed in his church all the members ought to partake of it. Now we doubt not that little children born of Christians are of this number, since God has adopted them, as he declares. Indeed we should defraud them of their right were we to exclude them from the sign which only ratifies the thing contained in the promise: considering, moreover, that children ought no more in the present day to be deprived of the sacrament of their salvation than the children of the Jews were in ancient times, seeing that now the manifestation must be larger and clearer than it was under the law. Wherefor we reprobate all fanatics who will not allow little children to be baptised".⁵⁸ In what is a still more interesting statement, Calvin says, "We are not now speaking of secret election, but of an adoption manifested by the word, which sanctifies infants not yet born. But as baptism is a solemn recognition by which God introduces his children into the possession of life, a true and effectual sealing of the promise, a pledge of sacred union with Christ, it is justly said to be the entrance and reception into the church. And as the instruments of the Holy Spirit are not dead, God truly performs and effects by baptism what he figures".⁵⁹ Two brief comments on this quotation. First, the distinction between "an adoption manifested by the Word, which sanctifies infants not yet born" and "Election" is exceedingly interesting. Second, there is evidence that the heat of controversy

has led him to use very strong language in regard to the efficacy of the sacrament virtually making it a grace-conferring ordinance when he says that "God truly performs and effects 'by baptism' what he figures".

We have but touched the problematic questions related to this issue. The history of our churches on the continent of Europe, in the United States and in Great Britain furnishes chapter after chapter of painful controversy that has centred round this issue. In the United States over a prolonged period of debate some of the ablest Reformed theologians that graced the church of God on earth wrestled with it over decades of Committee study and Synod Debate and unanimity could not be achieved. Surely it is not perversity that makes our churches persevere in the practice of an ordinance fraught with such possibility for controversy. It is nothing other than the unshakeable persuasion that the Covenant God has given to us a promise that Covenant blessing belongs to our children with ourselves and that consequently he has not only granted the privilege of the Seal to them but has commanded us in faith to submit them to the initiatory sign of the Covenant of Grace. The manner in which God effects in the lives of our children the favour and grace of the covenant promise is, in some respects, beyond our comprehension but it is in another respect tied in with our faithfulness as parents and their obedience to the Covenant precepts, the sign of which they bear upon their bodies. God says of Abraham, "For I know him that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgement, that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him". Gen. 18:19

Tied in with the question of infant baptism is the question of christian nurture and education. Where ever infant baptism is taken seriously the instruction of the young must be of paramount importance. Catechetics should have as important a place in our churches as Homiletics. Sadly with many of us this is not the case. The Revivalist mentality dominates the American and United Kingdom scene. We envy our brethren in Holland in this respect; with their schools and the way church life is organised to maximise the effort put into the inculcation of the youth of the church in the doctrines of grace; with responsibility for its oversight placed where it should be in the hands of the local Consistory or Kirk Session. This was the way it once was in Scotland too.

14.1 Any consideration of the doctrine of the Covenant would be altogether incomplete if no reference was made to, what used to be called its "Fixity". All our Confessions assert the doctrine of the Saints' perseverance. If other reformed doctrines draw strength from the Covenant this one does, even more so. The love of God nowhere shines more brilliantly in scripture than in his Covenant faithfulness. It is the theme of Hosea's prophecy throughout as it is of many other parts of scripture. The Canons of Dort states that believers would undoubtedly perish in their backslidings so far as their own power is concerned,

"But with respect to God, it is utterly impossible, since his counsel can not be changed, nor his promise fail, neither can the call according to his purpose be revoked, nor the merit, intercession and preservation of Christ be rendered ineffectual, nor the sealing of the Holy Spirit be frustrated or obliterated".⁶⁰ In the Westminster Confession it is said the perseverance of the saints depends not on their own free will, but on the unchangableness of the decree of election and the love of God the Father, the efficacy and merit of Christ intercession, the abiding of the Spirit and the seed of God within them, "and the nature of the Covenant of Grace from all which ariseth the certainty and infallibility thereof".⁶¹ What countless millions of God's tried people have pillowed themselves on God's blessed promise by Isaiah! "For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness (the Covenant - CHESED) shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee". Isa. 54:10

14.2 Finally we conclude by reiterating that each Confessional document is a product of its age and perhaps this is nowhere so apparent as in respect of the doctrine of the Covenant. The sixteenth century Confessions clearly show that, as an organising principle in Dogmatics, the Covenant had not as yet taken fast hold on the mind of the church as it had done by the time that the Westminster Confession and the Formula Consensus Helvetica were produced. Yet on the other hand there is clear evidence that the organic principle involved in God's way of continuing the church; namely the Covenant as embracing within its promises not only believers but their families; that this was confessed with greater energy in the earlier Confessions than in the later ones. In an age when the individualism and subjectivism that is inhospitable to so much that the early reformers stood for, and when it has all but undermined completely the Reformed doctrine of the sacraments of Baptism, the time is surely ripe for the church to return to the great Biblical theme of the Covenant. The emphasis in Biblical Studies in our day makes it also a prepositious moment for a re-evaluation and re-affirmation of the doctrine of the Covenant and we can engage in this not only comfortable in the knowledge that we are keeping faith with our confessional history but knowing that it would be to our great spiritual advantage to return with resolve to our deepest spiritual roots.

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 - 2 Westminster Confession of Faith. Chapter 7 para. 1
 - 3 The Gallican Confession Art. JX
 - 4 The Heidelberg Catechism. Question 6
 - 5 The Irish Articles of Religion 1615 Art. 21 (Schaffs Creeds)
 - 6 The Second Helvetic Confession. Chapter XII para (Schaffs)
 - 7 The Belgic Confession Art. XLV (Schaffs)
 - 8 The Scotch Confession Art. XV
 - 9 The Formula Consensus Helvetica Chapters VIII & IX
 - 10 Geerhardus Vos. The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Confessions
 - 11 Herman Bavinck "Our Reasonable Faith" translation by Henry Zylstra
 - 12 The Scotch Confession Art. 11
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 - 16 The Canons of Dort Art. 1
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- 51 Ibid Chapters XXVII para. 1
- 52 Heidelberg Catechism Question 53
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THE RELATION OF THE SACRAMENTS TO NEW LIFE IN THE SPIRIT

*referring to the
Address delivered by
Professor MacLeod*

Introduction: General Points

1. Most Christian traditions tend to exaggerate the importance of the sacraments.
2. It is perilous to argue from the vocabulary of this subject, e.g., sacramentum, mysterion.
3. Discussion on the sacraments has taken place within a markedly polemical framework.
4. The divine authority of the sacraments does not depend on any theory of their efficacy.

I. The sacraments presuppose new life in the Spirit.

1. This is clear in the case of circumcision
2. And baptism
3. And the Lord's Supper.
4. The special problem of Infant Baptism : Presumptive/Presupposed regeneration.
 - (1) Such a presumption is wholly unbiblical
 - (2) We should rest our case on the fact of divine appointment
 - (3) What is pre-supposed is spiritual life in the parents

II. The sacraments nourish new life in the Spirit

1. The biblical and theological terms make this plain.
2. But it is in this very connection that the most serious questions arise:
 - (1) special sacramental grace
 - (2) invariable efficacy
 - (3) the real presence

III. The sacraments express our new life in the Spirit

1. Obedience
2. Confession
3. Communion
4. Hope
5. Eucharist: Priesthood?

IV. The sacraments symbolise new life in the Spirit

1. It is a new life.
2. Communal.
3. Festal
4. A life of sincerity and truth
5. Interim/ Provisional

V. The sacraments bind together all who live the new life in the Spirit.

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THE EXERCISE OF INTER-CHURCH RELATIONS

(A paper delivered at the first meeting of the International Conferences of Reformed Churches meeting in Edinburgh, Scotland, September 3-10, 1985.)

Introduction

The last held General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches (1983) requested that a number of topics be introduced and discussed at this first meeting of the International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC) meeting in Edinburgh, Scotland. These topics included: "The Doctrine of the Church in the Reformed Confessions", "The Doctrine of the Covenant in the Reformed Confessions", and "The Exercise of Inter-Church Relations." It was the opinion of Synod that a thorough exchange of opinions on these matters would aid the Conference as it seeks to promote greater understanding and unity among the member Churches.

In order to make a contribution to that end I have been "approached" to deliver a paper on the third subject. Perhaps a better word would be "conscripted" seeing that efforts to have others deal with it failed and the ball was tossed back into the lap of the Synod's Committee for Correspondence With Churches Abroad, of which I am the convener.

In any case I am sure that all of you will agree with me that this topic is a rather complex, even sensitive one. So much so that any hopes for a quick and easy consensus are sure to be dashed. Nevertheless, consensus should remain our aim, and to that end I would crave your attention as I make a number of comments and put a number of questions to you about inter-church relations, comments and questions that will hopefully stimulate a fruitful discussion.

To begin with I would like to give you some background information that will hopefully enlighten you as to why the Canadian Reformed Churches have placed this matter on your agenda. At bottom there are three reasons that stand out. The first is that this issue was recommended to the General Synod by its Committee for Correspondence With Churches Abroad. The second is that the Synod felt a need to address this subject because of recent developments among the sister-Churches. Thirdly, it realized that membership in the ICRC would also have certain implications for inter-church relations.

With regard to the first reason, it should be stated that the Committee for Correspondence made its recommendation to the Synod because of what had transpired at the Constituent Assembly of the ICRC in Groningen, the

Netherlands, three years ago. At that gathering the Rev. P. Van Gorp of the Netherlands delivered an address entitled, "The Unity of Faith and Mandate and Its Significance for the Reflections on Contacts and Rules with Other Churches." In the discussion that followed it soon became clear that this was a topic that would require further attention. While there was a considerable amount of agreement in certain areas, there were others that generated disagreement. A consensus could not be reached and it was suggested that this matter be dealt with again at a future meeting of the ICRC. Our delegates took note of this suggestion and passed it on to the Committee for recommendation to Synod.

The next reason why Synod decided to place this topic on the agenda of the ICRC has to do with the fact that over the past number of years a certain perception seems to have developed that our Rules for Correspondence are somehow inadequate as contacts and relationships are considered with the Presbyterian world. This has led to calls to either revise our rules or else to augment them with an additional set of rules. Needless to say, it would be beneficial if a tendency to fragmentation could be avoided and a measure of uniformity retained.

Finally, it was recognized by Synod that in joining the ICRC we would be confronted with Churches, other than our immediate sister-Churches, who have a different view on inter-church relations and a different set of rules to govern these relations. This has the potential to make the situation even more confusing. Will it be so that in the future each Church will go its own way in this matter? Will we end-up in a situation where all kinds of relationships and rules begin to proliferate? In order to avoid such a scenario and to promote greater unity on this point, it was felt that the ICRC might be the ideal forum in which to discuss our differences, to learn from each other and, perhaps, I say this cautiously, we might even begin to hammer out some form of common understanding on this topic.

Different Types of Relationships

In order to move in that direction I would propose that we now look for a moment at the different types of relationships which are currently in existence. When we do so we eventually come to the conclusion that while there are all kinds names for these relationships, they seem to fit into one of two basic frameworks or categories.

a) The Fraternal Category

The one category might best be called the "fraternal category." It describes that group of relationships which is marked by a few basic rules which give tacit recognition to the fact that the Church of Our Lord is truly catholic in nature. On the whole, this category does not demand a great deal of involvement by the participants in each other's affairs. The rules which govern this kind of relationship bear this out, for they usually include the following components:

- i) the exchange of fraternal delegates at each other's major assemblies;
- ii) an exchange of official Acts or Minutes;
- iii) an exchange of information on matters of mutual concern interest.

In some instances rules relating to access to each other's pulpits and communion celebrations are also included.

Now when we examine this "fraternal" framework closely, there are a number of positive remarks that should be made. For one it does give formal recognition to the catholicity of the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ in that it proceeds on the assumption that one's local Church federation is not the sum total of Christ's Church gathering work in this world at that particular time. Another plus that has to be mentioned is that this category presents a set of basic rules that all Churches can work with and live up to. They are neither unmanageable nor onerous. Another advantage is that this form of relationship places a fair amount of value on personal representation at each other's broadest assemblies. It thus recognizes that written communications are often less than satisfactory when it comes to developing closer ties.

On the other hand, there are also negative sides to this category. While it is true that personal representation can be conducive to strengthening the contacts between Churches, it must be admitted that at times the persons sent are designated not so much because of their understanding of the particular Church to which they are sent, but because of their geographical proximity. Ecclesiastical contact is thus given a personal flavour, but whether that flavour is always as profitable as it could be remains debatable.

In addition, there is another deficiency here and that relates to the fact that while these rules may be manageable, they may not be all that helpful. Of course they give some recognition to the fact that the Church is

universal, but does this recognition really go beyond tokenism? At times one gains the impression that this framework does little more than let us live with our ecumenical consciences. The amount of commitment demanded of each other is kept to a minimum. The amount of responsibility that we assume for each other's well-being is also kept to a minimum. There is little sense of being a hand and a foot to each other. On paper we may call ourselves "sister-Churches", but in reality, the "sisters" do little more than recognize each other's legal existence by exchanging the odd letter and greeting.

b) The Correspondence Category

Besides the "fraternal category" there is also another one which we might call, for want of a better name, the "correspondence category." Like the previous relationship, it too has its variants. Basically, it describes a situation in which two Churches enter into discussions together and come to a mutual recognition as being true Churches of Christ. Once this recognition is given correspondence is entered into under more or less the following rules:

- i) to take mutual heed that the corresponding Churches do not deviate from the Reformed Confession in doctrine, liturgy, Church government and discipline;
- ii) to forward to each other the agenda and decisions of the broader assemblies and to admit each other's delegates to these assemblies as advisors;
- iii) to inform each other concerning changes of, or additions to, the Church Order and Liturgical Forms, while the corresponding Churches pledge to express themselves on the question whether such changes or additions are considered acceptable. Regarding proposals for changes in the Three Forms of Unity, the sister-Churches abroad shall receive ample opportunity (at least three years) to forward their judgment before binding decisions will be made;
- iv) to accept each other's attestations and to permit each other's ministers to preach the Word and to administer the Sacraments;
- v) to give account to each other regarding correspondence with third parties.

These five rules are taken from the Acts of the Canadian Reformed Churches. Other Churches of Dutch origin here present have the same rules, with minor modifications.

Again, when we examine this category we see that here too there are certain positive aspects. There is the same implicit recognition of the catholicity of the Church as we saw in the "fraternal category." There is an awareness that third party relationships can have a bearing on first party relationships. And most fundamental of all, this category proceeds from the assumption that the only meaningful relationship between Churches is a comprehensive and intensive relationship.

The "correspondence category" stresses that profitable and helpful inter-church relations demands that "mutual heed" be taken in the areas of doctrine, liturgy, polity and discipline. It places a great premium on consultation and advice from the sister-Churches when it comes to changes in the confessional, church-political and liturgical areas. It recognizes a need for consistency and consultation when it comes to relations which sister-Churches may have with third parties. In short, this framework allows Churches to make a serious attempt to become a real hand and foot to each other.

Still, as committed as the Churches are that I serve to this kind of relationship, it has to admitted that there are negative aspects here as well. Probably the chief criticism against the "correspondence category" is aimed precisely at its strongest asset. A comprehensive relationship may be a laudable aim, but is it possible? Does it not rest on too many common denominators? And when they are removed does it then not become impossible to work with? These rules may work relatively well when applied to members of the same theological, cultural and linguistic family, but are they able to cross family ties? We must admit that these rules are basically Dutch in origin and implementation, but can those who are of a different origin and historical background identify with them and use them profitably?

There is also the question as to whether they can be implemented in a world that has so many linguistic barriers. The Australians, Canadians, Irish and Scottish publish their Acts or Minutes in English. The Dutch, the Koreans, the Taiwanese, the South Africans publish theirs in their own particular languages. How will Babel be overcome?

Another point that is open to criticism has to do with the whole matter of prior consultation on changes in confession, polity or liturgy. It sounds very interesting but is it all that practical? Does it really work and is it really taken into account when decisions are being made in these areas?

Finally, it may be asked whether the matter of giving account regarding relationships with third parties does not imply interference in each other's internal affairs? If the Canadians decide to recognize the Pakistanis, what business is that of the Dutch?

Other Approaches

a) The Dual Approach

Thus far we have looked at two of the most common approaches to the matter of inter-church relations as it is exercised by the members here present; however, we have not exhausted the list of possibilities. For there are Churches which do not make a choice between these two categories, instead they recognize and employ both. Among the Churches which are then recognized as "sisters", there are "fraternal sisters" and "correspondence sisters." *(excuse the contradiction)*

Now it has to be admitted that in this way a measure of flexibility is incorporated into the exercise of inter-church relations, however, at what cost? I would say, "Probably at the cost of having first-class sisters and second-class sisters." For it stands to reason that a Church will have closer contacts with those Church federations that it recognizes as sisters in the "correspondence" sense. But is that proper? If a Church has been recognized as being a true Church of the Lord, is it then defensible to accord to such a Church second-class status because of what may be termed "practical difficulties?" Does the oneness of the catholic Church not imply a calling on the part of those local Churches that recognize each other as true Churches, to deal with each other on an equal footing?

This approach may be attractive when viewed from a purely practical side, but it raises serious difficulties of a theological nature. Either we are all sisters equally, or else we are a family of sisters and step-sisters. The Scriptures teach the former, not the latter.

b) The Gradual Approach

Another approach which is being taken these days also uses both models, but then in a different manner. In this case the "fraternal category" is made preparatory or introductory to the "correspondence category." What happens then, and one can cite the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands here present as an example of this procedure, is that when you come into contact with a Church federation which is faithful to the Scriptures and has a proper creedal basis, but with which several difficulties remain to be ironed

out, you offer it a kind of preliminary relationship called "ecclesiastical contact" which is almost synonymous with the "fraternal category." This contact then becomes an umbrella for further contact and discussion, and hopefully will smooth the way to the goal which is "correspondence."

Now it has to be admitted that the Canadian Reformed Churches have had a hand in this development. In order to promote its long-standing discussions with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., the Canadian Reformed Churches decided at their 1977 Synod to offer a temporary relationship called "ecclesiastical contact" to the O.P.C. However it should be understood that this relationship was applied in an isolated case and was never meant to function as a new and general approach to building and expediting future ecclesiastical relationships.

Our sister-Churches in the Netherlands, however, analyzed this decision of the CRC and decided that this might be a useful procedure to imitate on a general scale and proceeded to standardize it. Hence, whenever they meet a Church which has sister-Church potential, they begin by offering that Church "ecclesiastical contact" and then use it as a building block to come to "ecclesiastical fellowship" or correspondence.

Do the Canadian Reformed Churches applaud this development? General Synod 1983 went on record urging "the sister Churches to maintain Correspondence according to the adopted rules as the only form of permanent ecclesiastical relationship." (Acts 1983, Art. 110, D, 1.) What motivates this statement? It is the fact that Synod was of the opinion that if one uses "ecclesiastical contact" as a precursor to "correspondence", it is very well possible that what is meant to be preliminary becomes finalized. After all, it is a reality that some Churches are unfamiliar and perhaps uncomfortable with "correspondence", but have little difficulty embracing a less sweeping relationship. And so the question remains whether the Dutch procedure will not result in a host of "step sisters" but not too many real sisters? Will it then not be a case where two relationships are maintained as permanent, the one higher and the other lower, the one first-class and the other second-class?

Are there ways around these difficulties? There are but they may prove unattractive. The one would be to set a time limit on the use of the "ecclesiastical contact" relationship. This would stress to one and all that it is not meant to be regarded as a permanent fixture, but as a stimulant to something better.

Still, this suggestion would be viewed by many as too drastic and artificial. It would force Churches to negotiate under the pressure of deadlines. Perhaps more helpful would be to make this form of contact renewable. It would then go into affect for so many years, after which time it would face an automatic review by the General Assembly or Synod. Signs of progress would lead to a renewal of the contact; whereas, no movement towards correspondence would lead to termination of the contact.

Far more drastic an option would be to terminate this preparatory stage altogether. And yet, even that would have certain advantages. For when you enter into an official preliminary relationship like "contact" what you are actually doing is formalizing what is essentially a negotiation stage. With the result, that precisely at that point where you would otherwise want to leave your options open, you end up limiting them. At the same time, you draw a lot of attention to a process which is incomplete and thereby risk creating a certain level of expectation that may never be rewarded. Besides, it is also a fact that terminating negotiations is not nearly as difficult as terminating an official agreement, albeit an interim one.

In short, one is led to wonder whether using categories like "fraternal" and "correspondence" in tandem is really all that advantageous.

c) The Variable Approach

Leaving these different frameworks behind, it is also possible to turn to other approaches, some of which may never have been tried but which are being contemplated. The one such approach might visualize a situation in which a Church decides to call all of its contact Churches by the same name, but then varies the rules that apply to each. Under such a scheme a list of rules are drawn up, and then depending on the particular Church with which a relationship is being contemplated, the rules that would best fit in that particular situation are applied.

A variant on this approach would be to have no ready made set of rules handy at all but to give all contact Churches the same name and then to proceed to tailor-make rules that would be considered the most conducive in that particular situation. In such a case the situation would dictate the rules, and, not as might be the case in the previous instance, be made to fit the rules.

What shall we say about these alternatives, real or imagined? No doubt a great deal could be said but in the end it would come down to this that unity would be sacrificed on the altar of flexibility. The danger would

then become very real that the different sets of rules in existence would cause endless confusion, especially in the case of third parties. Still, that kind of confusion might even be tolerable if all of the Churches kept their distance; however, the moment they would seek to find themselves in a body such as the ICRC where common aims, common purposes, and common procedures are the aim, misunderstanding and friction would result.

A Way Out?

All of this brings us to the question, "What now? Is there a way out? Is there a solution, a common denominator, that we can all agree on when it comes to inter-church relations? Is there a relationship that we all see as ideal? Are there a set of rules that we can all applaud because they are totally fitting?" Before we attempt to answer some of those questions a word of warning is in order. There is no perfect relationship and there are no perfect rules! Surely our review of existing relationships and rules has underlined that fact.

What then? Well, we must make a choice. We are at the crossroads. We can go in basically two directions. We must choose either to opt for a future as Churches together which entails little more than recognizing each other's existence and exchanging the odd greeting or we opt for a future which demands quite a bit more from us in terms of care and commitment, in terms of help and guidance. If we opt for the first we shall be able to live with our rules but we may be forgetting our real calling over against each other. If we opt for the second we may have to live with rules which can never be perfectly implemented but our commitment to help each other as best we can will dominate.

Perhaps my leanings are becoming obvious, but before they become plain I would ask you to address the following questions in our discussion. First, I will state them and give my opinion. Kindly consider both the question and my answer, and then react to both.

Question 1: Does the ICRC have a role to play in this matter of inter-church relations or is it a strictly internal matter for each member Church to consider?

I am of the opinion that the ICRC can play an important role in the consideration of this matter. Its purpose should be to provide a forum for debate on this issue, and if possible to draw-up certain recommendations for the member-Churches to consider. In this way the ICRC will also be acting in complete harmony with one of its purposes, namely, "to encourage the fullest

ecclesiastical fellowship among the member Churches." (Constitution, Article III - Purpose, 2)

Question 2: Can the delegates agree that in this matter of inter-church relations a common relationship with a common set of rules is a laudable and desirable aim to work towards?

The constitutional stress on encouraging the "fullest ecclesiastical fellowship" would be best served not by all kinds of relationships and rules but by the striving towards a consensus on this matter. The multiplication of relationships and rules will do more to undermine this fellowship than to promote it.

Question 3: How would you evaluate correspondence and its rules as the relationship to promote our fuller fellowship?

I have already described correspondence and its rules so there is no need to do so again. I may also mention to you that at the Constituent Assembly in Groningen 1982, an informal meeting was convened of all delegates who were involved in inter-church relations for their respective Presbyterian and Reformed Churches. At that time some aspects of this topic were discussed and a reaction was requested to the Rules for Correspondence as the Canadian Reformed Churches have adopted them. A number of suggestions were made as a result of this unofficial international meeting which resulted in the following re-formulation of these rules:

- i) to take mutual heed that the sister-Churches do not deviate from the Reformed Confessions in doctrine and practice;
- ii) to exchange Acts/Minutes of each other's Assembly/Synod and to invite delegates to each other's Assembly/Synod;
- iii) to inform each other regarding changes in confession and polity;
- iv) to exchange attestations or certificates of membership;
- v) to allow each other's ministers to preach the Word and to administer the sacraments;
- vi) to inform each other regarding relationships with third parties.

A number of comments are in order as consideration is given to these matters. Under (i) it would be more precise to keep the current phraseology which stipulates "doctrine, liturgy, church government and discipline." The condensation "doctrine and practice" is rather vague and undefined. Under (ii) it would also be better to retain the CRC wording instead of stipulating Acts/Minutes. I say this with a special eye on linguistic difficulties which

are often encountered when it comes to official documents. Assuming for a moment that the English language is a kind of common denominator, it is manageable for the Korean Churches, for example, to send a digest of their Assembly decisions in English but it would be totally impractical to expect them to translate their entire Minutes. The same would apply to the Dutch and many other Churches. Under (iii) both formulations are not without their difficulties. It has to be said that the current CRC formulation under which corresponding Churches "pledge" to express themselves as to whether changes in confession, polity or liturgy are acceptable has never worked all that well in practice. Either a Synod is reluctant to react to what are still proposed changes and may never become reality, or it fears that its reactions might be interpreted as interference, or it is not in existence and hence unable to deal with the matter. On the other hand, the proposed change might be considered not constructive enough. To simply inform a sister-Church about changes could be better augmented with the stipulation that that sister-Church "address each other concerning such changes when this is either requested or deemed necessary." As for (iv) and (v) they might best be combined as is done in the current CRC rules. Finally, on point (vi) the revised wording has a basic aspect to commend it. The present phrase "to give account" conveys the impression of interference in the life of a local Church. Besides, it has to be said that when a sister-Church decides to enter into a relationship with another Church it does not feel a need to defend its actions over against its other sister-Churches. What it does is inform them of the decision, along with its grounds. Any sister-Church which dissents knows where to send its objections. In addition, in most instances it is so that sister-Churches keep each other informed about their contact with third parties, especially if such a contact has the potential to lead to disagreement.

If all of these modifications are taken into account then the Rules for Correspondence would assume the following shape:

- i) to take mutual heed that the sister-Churches do not deviate from the Reformed Confessions in doctrine, liturgy, church government and discipline;
- ii) to forward to each other the agenda and decisions of the broader assemblies and to admit each other's delegates to these assemblies as advisors;
- iii) to inform each other regarding changes in confession and polity and to address each other concerning such changes when this is either requested or deemed necessary;
- iv) to accept each other's attestations or certificates of membership and to permit each other's ministers to preach the Word and to administer the Sacraments;

- v) to keep each other informed regarding relationships with third parties.

By now it has probably become apparent that it is my conviction that the member Churches of the ICRC should move in the direction of a correspondence type of relationship. My objection to the "fraternal category" is not that it is unscriptural, but rather that it is a relationship in which the participating Churches end up setting their sights too low. We must go beyond a mere recognition of each other to a real involvement with each other. We must go out of our way to learn from each other, to support each other and to promote each other.

Should we move in this direction there is no doubt that problems will be encountered from time to time. I have already touched on a few of the difficulties which surround this type of relationship and more may be encountered. Nevertheless, if some of the changes which have been mentioned are made quite a few of these difficulties will disappear. Others can be resolved in due time.

In close connection with this, it should also be said that this type of relationship should even take precedence over membership in the ICRC. The Canadian Reformed Churches did not join the ICRC with the intention of making it the premier forum for inter-church relations. No, the relations that we have with our sister-Churches remain in the foreground and it is our hope that the ICRC will help to promote and solidify these relations, as well as lead to the establishment of new ones.

Question 4: What characteristics make for a potentially acceptable sister-Church?

I would suggest to you that in this regard there are basically five criteria that must be applied. In the first place, does the Church under consideration give proof that it possesses the marks of the true Church, namely, the pure preaching of the Gospel, the proper administration of the sacraments and the faithful exercise of Church discipline? In the second place, does the said Church govern all things according to a polity which is presbyterial? Is Christ honoured as the Head of the Church? In the third place, does the history and the actions of this Church indicate that it has fought and continues to fight the good fight of faith? In the fourth place, does this Church promote relationships with other Churches and organizations which are reformed in doctrine and practice? In the fifth place, does this Church pursue its ecumenical calling in a serious manner and seek to unite with neighbouring Churches that stand on the same scriptural

and confessional basis or is it content to simply perpetuate its own existence? Any Church which can answer these questions in the affirmative should be regarded as a potential sister-Church.

In conclusion, it is my hope and prayer that the issues raised in this paper will lead to a discussion and down the road to decisions that will further that part of the Purpose as outlined in Art.III, 1,2, of the Constitution of the ICRC, namely, "(1) to express and promote the unity of faith that the member Churches have in Christ; (2) to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the member Churches."

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