

ILLUMINATION*

To "illuminate" means "to give light to; light up." It also means "to make clear; explain; elucidate," or "to inform; instruct; enlighten." We often use the word "illumination" when we speak about the work of the Spirit in guiding us into the truth of the Word of God. In his book "The Glorious Body of Christ," R. B. Kuiper writes about two views of the illumination of the Christian church which represent opposite extremes.

On the one hand, the Roman Catholic Church holds to the view that the church is illuminated to the point of infallibility. It lays claim to an infallible Bible *and* an infallible church, and therefore to the infallible interpretation of the Bible by the church. Rome actually declares the pope to be infallible in his official pronouncements on matters of faith and morals and holds the church to be divine; it deifies the church. Obviously this position goes far beyond anything taught in the Bible and does violence to the Word of God.

On the other hand, certain Anabaptists stressed the right of private interpretation of the Word of God to the point of practically ruling out the illumination of the church by the Spirit of truth. They fell into the serious error of flippantly brushing aside the historic Christian church's interpretation of the Word of God. They did not have an eye for the illumination of the Christian church by the Spirit of truth.

The Roman Catholic theologians and the spiritual descendants of the Anabaptists are still among us today, and they continue to perpetuate and propagate the same serious errors. When we closely analyze their views, we will see that both of them suffer from extremism. The truth lies between them.

"An elderly church member once said to his youthful pastor: 'In my study of the Word of God I have a great advantage over you in your study of the Word. You are biased by your knowledge of the church's creeds; I have no such bias but am led directly by the Holy Spirit.' That was a highly presumptuous saying. It ignored the significant fact that throughout the centuries the Spirit of God has been leading the church into the truth and that the truly great creeds of Christendom are the products of that guidance." (a) By means of its confessions the church guards the Word of God against every wind of doctrine. The confessions, by means of which the church repeats Scripture, keep the church on the scriptural track.

"Jesus' promise 'When he, the Spirit of truth, is come he will guide you into all truth' (John 16:13) was addressed to the twelve, not as so many individuals, but as the nucleus of His Church... The apostle Paul states that to the church of the old dispensation 'were committed the oracles of God' (Rom. 3:2). Likewise the church of the new dispensation is custodian of the Word of God. The same apostle describes 'the church of the living God'... as 'the pillar and ground (bulwark) of the truth' (1 Tim.3:15)." (b)

God's truth is preserved in the church, for the church is the dwelling place of God in the Spirit. It is the place where the Holy Spirit manifests itself. The Spirit of truth will continue "to make clear; explain; elucidate," and "to inform; instruct; enlighten." The Spirit will continue its work of illumination of the Christian church. "Truth, therefore, is not extinguished in the world, but remains safe, because it has the church as its faithful custodian, by whose work and ministry it is sustained. And if this custody rests in the prophetic and apostolic ministry, it follows that this safekeeping of the truth wholly depends on whether the Word of God is faithfully kept and preserved in its purity." (c)

Kuiper notes that "in spite of all the errors that have at different times crept into the church, and in spite of the frequent prevalence of error, the Spirit of truth has never departed from the church, nor will He depart at any time in the future..."

In one sense the church of Christ is not infallible. Most assuredly it can err. It has erred grievously in the past. It errs exceedingly grievously today. But in another sense it is infallible. It will never lose the truth. The truth will never perish from the church. As there always has been a body of believers upholding the truth of God, so there always will be. The church of the past was, the church of the present is, the church of the future will be 'the pillar and ground (bulwark) of the truth.' In that respect, too, the Christian church is indeed glorious." (d)

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(a)(b)(d)R.B.Kuiper, *The Body of Christ*.

(c)Calvin, *Institutes*.#2 p.1161

The Free Reformed Churches in South Africa

Although a number of readers know South Africa and the church situation here, there are many church members who are unfamiliar with our history and present situation. To help us become more familiar with one another it might be helpful to pass on some more information about the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa (FRCSA), and the recent local church situation here.

History

First, I want to give you a small introduction on the church history of the Reformed Churches of South Africa(RCSA), starting at the beginning of the previous century. In 1859, a few years after the Disruption (1834) in Holland, Rev. Dirk Postma, together with others, founded the first Reformed Church in Rustenburg, South Africa. He was also the founder of the Theological College in Kampen in 1854. Since that time the RCSA has grown and in 1980 there were more than 400 RCSA congregations. They also had established their own Theological College in Potchefstroom and were active in hundreds of mission churches of the RCSA.

In 1945 the "Vrijmaking" took place in Holland, and the RCSA chose the "Christelijk Gereformeerde Kerken"(Christian Reformed Church) [known as the Free Reformed Church in North America – ed.) as sister church / corresponding church. In 1950, a few Dutch families, from the Liberated Reformed Churches in Holland, immigrated to South Africa. Because they originated from the Liberated Reformed Church, they didn't see their way open to join the RCSA, and founded the first Free Reformed Church in South Africa. It grew to 3 congregations in 1970. In 1969, the congregation in Pretoria split up because of the work and ways of Rev. C. van der Waal, and half of the congregation (supporters of v/d Waal) went over to the RCSA. The rest formed a separate congregation, and stayed with the FRCSA. Both of them have established their own Reformed Primary School, one called "Johannes Calvyn", and the other one " Dirk Postma."

Recent situation

In the beginning of the nineties, the political situation in South Africa changed, and Nelson Mandela became President of South Africa. It was not only a new era for the country, but also a new era for the Church in South Africa. The "Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk"(NGK), which developed as the state church during the past two centuries, slowly but surely, took over the "new" Modern Theology, both in the churches, as well as in their Theological colleges. Scripture criticism affected, and is still strongly affecting the NGK. Some congregations are slowly moving to the pietistic way of worshipping and theological thinking. In the past few years, the Lord led four ministers from the NGK to the FRCSA because of the theology of the NGK. They are now serving as ministers in both the local congregations and the mission churches of the FRCSA. One of them, Rev. Nel, came over to the FRCSA with app. 70 people from his previous NGK-congregation. This group has now grown to more than 100 people in the past year. They have founded their own Free Reformed congregation in their town, Bethal.

So at this stage there are two congregations in Pretoria, one in which Rev. Rob Visser is serving, the other one is vacant. There is also a congregation in Cape Town where Rev. Eugene Viljoen is serving, and one in Johannesburg, and also one in Bethal. There are five mission churches around Pretoria and Cape Town.

Next year we hope to start our own Theological College in Pretoria, where the local ministers will act as lecturers. We will also receive help in the form of guest-lecturers from Kampen and Hamilton. May the Lord's blessings be on this college.

Future

Many South Africans are searching for the Lord. Some have had Christian instruction and others are complete heathens. It is very humbling for a church to be faced with so much unbelief and also searching people. The FRCSA can play an important role in giving answers to these people. Although this task is very humbling it is also a large responsibility. We pray that the Lord will have mercy on us and use us as humble tools in His church gathering work here in South Africa. Soli Deo Gloria!

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International Conference of Reformed Churches Convenes in Seoul, South Korea

(This article has been formulated by combining parts of several reports from United Reformed News Service - Darrell T. Maurina - and from daily Internet reports from the ICRC by theological student Karlo Janssens).

The Kosin Presbyterian Church of Korea is this year's host of the current quadrennial International Conference of Reformed Churches (ICRC). The Conference is scheduled from Oct. 15 - 23. All the meetings will take place at the Seo-Moon Presbyterian Church in Seoul. At a half-million members, the Kosin Presbyterian Church is the largest member of the ICRC. The conference, originally organized by the Vrijgemaakt (Liberated Reformed) family of churches which seceded from the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (synodaal) in 1944 under the leadership of conservative Dutch seminary professor Dr. Klaas Schilder, now includes a number of other Dutch Reformed and Presbyterian denominations. Much of the recent growth in the ICRC has occurred as churches have withdrawn from another group of Reformed churches, the Reformed Ecumenical Council, because of the REC's refusal to expel the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (synodaal) despite its decision to allow practicing homosexuals to be ordained ministers and members in good standing.

The 1988 refusal to expel the GKN-s from what was then known as the Reformed Ecumenical Synod led to the withdrawal of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. Other ICRC members which were formerly in the REC include the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland, Free Church of Scotland, Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland, and Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia. Four of the seven denominations applying for ICRC membership this year -- the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, Reformed Churches of New Zealand, and Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America -- were formerly REC members. A fifth, the United Reformed Churches in North America, is mostly composed of members who seceded from the Christian Reformed Church in North America, which for many years has been one of the REC's strongest supporters.

In addition to the three Vrijgemaakt (Liberated) members -- the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (vrijgemaakt), Canadian Reformed Churches, and Free Reformed Churches in South Africa -- the conference's current membership includes the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland, Free Church of Central India, Free Church of Scotland, Free Church in Southern Africa, Free Reformed Churches of North America, Gereja Gereja Reformasi di Indonesia NTT, Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, Presbyterian Church in Korea (Kosin), Reformed Church in the United States, and Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland.

One 'Liberated' denomination, the Free Reformed Churches of Australia, has withdrawn from the ICRC out of concern that the ICRC no longer represents the original intentions of its Vrijgemaakt founders and has changed its purposes to become a broader fellowship of both Reformed and Presbyterian denominations.

This year's meeting is expected to mark a decisive expansion of the ICRC as seven more denominations apply for membership: the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, Christelijke Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, Evangelical Presbyterian Church in England and Wales, Gereja Gereja Masehi Musyafir NTT, Reformed Churches of New Zealand, Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, and United Reformed Churches in North America.

Seven other denominations and one independent church are attending as observers. Five of the seven are current or former REC members: the Independent Presbyterian Church of Mexico, Presbyterian Church of Australia, Reformed Church of East Africa, Reformed Church in Japan, and Reformed Churches in South Africa. The Korean

American Presbyterian Church and Reformed Presbyterian Churches in Cardiff (United Kingdom) will also send observers, as Messiah's Congregation of Brooklyn, NY, an independent congregation the Alliance of Reformed Churches, a smaller group of congregations which seceded from the CRC but have not federated into a synod.

Why did the Orthodox Presbyterian Church and other former REC members decide to join what was until recently a largely Vrijgemaakt group of denominations? "By the time we left the RES in 1988, the ICRC had been formed and we were certainly not about having more division among Reformed people," said Rev John P. Galbraith, minister in the OPC and nine year moderator of the RES. "We gave no thought whatsoever to trying to start any other organization. We don't believe in division unless it's necessary, and we didn't believe it was at all necessary at that point because of the nature of the churches that were involved."

According to the secretary of the International Conference of Reformed Churches, Rev. M. van Beveren, two of the major issues at this year's meeting will be missions and church unity.

"There is a growing desire for cooperation and possible coordination of activities on the various mission fields," said van Beveren. "Some progress in this respect has been made. Under the auspices of the ICRC we have had a few regional mission conferences, one in Latin America and one in South Africa during the past four years. Yet while much information about missionary activities of the several churches has been published, we believe that not all that information has been utilized sufficiently."

"We realize that cooperation and coordination do not materialize overnight," said van Beveren. "It is hoped that the conference will give some realistic guidelines."

So far, two proposals have been submitted by the Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland (vrijgemaakt) on the subject of mission and the ICRC will hear two study papers on the subject.

Van Beveren expected another major subject at the ICRC to be church unity. "Another issue that will be discussed, I assume, is the visible unity of the member churches, or in other words, the urgency of recognizing and accepting each other as sister churches with all the implications that go with it," said van Beveren. "The latest General Assembly of the OPC produced some important resolutions in this respect with the purpose that they receive the attention of the conference. It would be useful if those resolutions would be discussed as being in line with the second stated purpose of the ICRC, namely, 'to encourage the fullest ecclesiastical fellowship among the member churches.'"

The formal agenda of the ICRC includes a letter from the Free Church of Scotland regarding its support for constitutional revision proposals under consideration by the ICRC, two proposals from the GKN-vrij., and five study papers.

The GKN-vrij. propose that the agenda "provide room for a discussion on how the member churches can more concretely and effectively utilize the relation they have with each other" with attention "given to contacts and exchanges between institutions for the training for the ministry, combined projects in areas such as evangelizing, mission, assistance, as well as consideration of dogmatic and ethical questions." A second proposal urges that the ICRC "bring about a regional cooperation of the member churches in fulfilling their calling to be missionary churches" mandating the ICRC's mission committee "to have a stimulating and, if necessary, coordinating role in this request" on the grounds that "the contacts of the Reformed and the Presbyterians within the ICRC have proven to be stimulating for the international cooperation" but that "the attempts to achieve regional cooperation of the member churches as to mission have not yet resulted in the desired effect and should be continued."

The five formal papers include Dr. R.C. Beckett of Northern Ireland on "Biblical Principles for the Relation between Church and State," Mark Bube of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church on "The Principles of Reformed Mission," Dr. Richard Gaffin of the OPC on "Challenges of the Charismatic Movement to the Reformed Tradition," Dr. Soon Gil Hur of the Kosin Presbyterian Church on "Women in Office, Especially about 'Deaconesses,'" and Rev. David John of the Free Church of Central India on "The Ministry of the Word amongst Asian Religious People (Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Zoroastrians)."

Van Beveren said some of the discussion focusing on the papers and informal contacts could be at least as important as the formal motions proposed by conference. "Another important aspect of the conference is that the churches through their representatives meet each other," said van Beveren. "They have to get acquainted with each other, know each other, and trust each other before a fruitful cooperation can be established. Meeting each other and having discussions are a very important tool for the functioning of the purpose of the ICRC during the four-year interval between the assemblies."

Galbraith said his experience with the ICRC was in some ways quite different from his prior experience as the longtime moderator of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod. "They're still feeling their way, and they do not have an

agenda of what will help the churches. It is going to be more and more influenced by what the churches bring to them rather than the ICRC itself creating issues," said Galbraith. "One of the issues that are going to be brought up through the OPC is how we are able to make better use of our fellowship in helping each other in the problems that face us rather than just meeting every four years."

Despite not having a structured and pre-planned agenda, Galbraith said membership in the ICRC could be an important benefit to the United Reformed Churches and similar conservative Reformed denominations. "An organization like the ICRC can be of great benefit to a group like the URC in helping them to see the oneness not just of the Reformed body but of the body of Christ," said Galbraith. "It helps us to be not isolated but to share with others of a different tradition our common faith."

At 7:30PM on Oct.15 the delegates and members of the Seo-Moon congregation assembled in the 'sanctuary' of the building to attend the opening Prayer Meeting. Here we were treated to the beautiful sounds of the Seo-Moon Church Choir before and during the service. The service opened with a call to worship, issued by the president of the service, Dr. S.G. Hur, and the congregational singing of "Come Thou Almighty King" in Korean and English (at the same time). Thereupon the Apostolic Creed was confessed by joint recitation and Dr. W. David J. McKay led in prayer. After having listened to three presentations by the choir Rev. John P. Gailbraith (OPC) with Dr. Young J. Sohn as interpreter ascended the pulpit. Rev. Gailbraith spoke to us on "perfect fellowship". As Scripture passages he had chosen Isaiah 5:1-7; Jer 1:7,8,17 and Eph 6:10-18. His sermon may be summarized as follows:

Introduction: The Church has not always been a perfect church. See the two read prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah; a vineyard that was torn out by God. But, for the warfare that faces the church that does remain faithful to God, God has provided armour. And so we seek a perfect fellowship.

1) OUR FOUNDATIONS. The command came from Christ to teach ALL that He had spoken. God said to Jeremiah "Say to them EVERYTHING that I command you." (1:17). That Word is inspired by the God (1Tim 3:15). And to bring that word we are given protective armour by God (Eph 6). While many churches have left their foundation, the ICRC knows the Word as its only authority. It is founded on the Word of God.

2) OUR PURPOSES. We can express the purpose of the ICRC in brief as: (1) to show unity; and (2) to practice unity. There are many groups in the world. There are those who reject God, who refuse to believe. There are also those who are called evangelicals but are no longer bound to the Word, we call them neo-evangelicals. Thus too there are Reformed people no longer bound to the Word, we might call them neo-Reformed. Ours is then a ministry not merely to the world, but also to the whole Church. Athanasius was such a minister. When told "the whole world is against you" he responded "Then I am against the whole world."

3) OUR RESPONSIBILITY. Among the ICRC purposes we can read "to study common problems." It is curious that we appear to have but one common problem: we have no COMMON problems. We have problems which are different. And so we keep them to ourselves. We ought to advise each other, not in ICRC format, but as individual churches. This presumes, of course, that such help, such advise is asked for. And on this point we lack. Because we keep our problems to ourselves, we end up in different corners. Php 2:4, an address to individuals, tells us "Let each of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others." We are to lay our needs before our brothers, share with them in weeping and joy (Rom 12:15; 1Cor 12:24-26). We are gathered here in the name of unity. But that unity requires humility. And unity will only be found in love. It is my prayer that we do not wander from the purposes we have, as others before us have done. We must speak the Word as we have time and opportunity: in 50 years we, and those to whom we speak, will probably not be here anymore. May God grant this prayer: that the ICRC may speak while there is time. Eph 6:18 tells us of prayer: such prayer should be part of all our labour. We may put it this: the Church must go forward on her knees.

After the sermon Luther's "A Mighty Fortress" was sung and the blessing was bestowed by Dr. S.G. Hur.

The moderamen for the conference, as selected from among the delegates, is: chairman: Dr. Hur; vice chairman: Rev. Jack J. Peterson (OPC); Secretary: Rev P. vanderMeyden (FRCNA).

During part of the morning session of Oct.16 and the first half of the afternoon session the applicant churches were accepted as members, the ARPC with the noted abstention of voting by the PCEA and the further abstention of two other members.

Regarding the letter from the withdrawn Free Reformed Churches of Australia an excerpt from the proposed minutes read: "The Chairman read a letter from the corresponding secretary of the Free Reformed Churches informing the Conference of their withdrawal. The Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (lib.) and the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa expressed their regret about this withdrawal. A motion was moved and adopted to instruct the Interim Committee to formulate an appropriate response expressing regret about this decision and to report to the Conference at its next meeting."

Regarding the letter from the OPC dated June 24, 1997, about proposed policies for interchurch relations entitled, Biblical Principles of the Unity of the Church, it was decided:

- a. That the Conference receive with deep appreciation the letter and document submitted by the OPC.
- b. That a special paper or papers on "Biblical Principles of the Unity of the Church" be prepared for the ICRC 2001 utilizing the material submitted by the OPC, with contributing speeches from both the Presbyterian tradition and the (Continental) Reformed tradition, the speakers to be decided at a later session of this Conference.
- c. That the latter part of the letter concerning policy regarding other churches be referred to Advisory Committee 3 and that this Committee report to a later session of the Conference.

Adopted.

Dr. Hur presented a paper entitled "Women in office: especially about 'deaconesses'"

The discussion on this paper could be summarized as follows:

The discussion focuses on the developing appreciation within the churches of the position of women in the church, the difficulty of determining the precise task of "deaconesses" in the New Testament church if "deaconesses" indeed existed, and the unofficial teaching by women that is recorded for us in Scripture (e.g Acts 18:26).

Points brought into discussion include the absence of clear post-apostolic sources for the work of women in the early church, the difficulty of determining whether deacons are officers/office-bearers in the church, the ordination of deacons, the implications of a particular culture for determining the structure of the offices within the church, the use of the Old Testament in the issue of women in office, and the uses of the terms "office" and "service".

Other decisions read as follows:

- That the Conference requests the Missions Committee to encourage the member churches to hold regional mission conferences and assist the member churches in holding and coordinating such conferences.
- The ICRC suggests to the member churches that, for the purpose of assisting one another and furthering the unity of the churches, they adopt the following or similar procedure:
When a matter arises that would affect the relationship of the ICRC member churches to each other, such as a change being contemplated by a church in its doctrinal basis or ethical practices, the church should:
 - a) inform the interchurch relations committee of the member churches concerning the proposal;
 - b) ask them for the official position of their church on such a matter, for their advice (and/or that of colleagues) with regard to it, and their help in the study of the matter;
 - c) keep the churches informed on developments in the matter as it is progressively dealt with by the church.
- . The ICRC suggests to the churches that they would do well to seek cooperation in areas such as evangelization, missions and diaconal assistance, and to promote contacts and exchanges between institutions for training for the ministry.

Correction: Delegated to Regional Synod - Western Canada: Rev. E. Kampen, not Rev. D. Moes