

## **Reformed Polemics**

### *Volume Seven*

You are holding in your hand the first issue of Volume Seven of Reformed Polemics. Why are you reading it? Why have you subscribed to it? Is the time you are using to read it spent in a responsible manner?

Although our commitment to living a God-fearing life may not be put on hold during the summer months, the Lord does give us a good example for resting and rejoicing when we read of Sabbaths and jubilees for His people in the Old Testament. But now that the majority of people have had some summer vacation, renewed energy will be expended on the 'normal' things of life. Our focus is again directed to regular daily life, and that includes Bible Study and Church issues. It is the hope of the editors and contributors that we may be of some help in these areas by presenting regular thoughtful and edifying articles to assist our readers in Reformed Polemics.

### *Reformed*

It may be useful to pause briefly at that term 'Reformed'. Those who have gone before us have seen great value in this adjective. It describes what kind of people we are, it describes the Church we belong to. When Jesus Christ walked on the earth it was sufficient to identify yourself as His follower by calling yourself a Christian or a follower of 'the way.' Later there came to be so many aberrations of 'the way' that Christianity was not a sufficient description of those who followed the doctrines of Scripture completely and solely.

As the history of Christianity continued to unfold the most difficult aspect of its teaching has been, and is, that God is self-sufficient. He is the starting point of all things, and in Him are all things that exist. To differentiate this understanding from that of those who ascribe some measure of autonomy to man the term Reformed has been introduced.

The Bible teaches us that all of mankind fell into sin and that only God could and did provide the solution. Man needed to be re-formed by someone other than himself. God, Himself, was the only one who could do that - and He did.

In the letter to the Hebrews, chapter 9:10 we find the word 'reformation'. It is translated from the Greek 'diorthosis'. It has been translated variously as 'making thoroughly right', 'improvement', 'reformation', 'new order', and 'a making straight'.

Being Reformed is maintaining 'the way'. In the context it is found in Hebrews it speaks about the fulfilment of the Old Testament regulations that could not complete the task of redemption from sin. They could only foreshadow the real solution, Jesus Christ, the Redeemer. The reformation that Hebrews speaks about is the bringing of the Levitical ritual into the correct subordinate relationship to the eternal priesthood of Jesus Christ.

But even though the real solution, the man and God, Jesus Christ has come and fulfilled all the requirements of salvation many do not believe the truth that He, and He alone, is the sole solution to sin and its consequences. To differentiate between those who believe this truth of God's Word and those who alter it with the addition or substitution of some form of merit from man's side, the teaching and followers of the constant truth of Scripture have been called Reformed.

Over against the idea that we can receive forgiveness by doing certain good works, the church has maintained that sinners are saved by faith in Jesus Christ apart from good works. Even this faith is not a work on man's part but is a gracious gift from God. This continues to be the teaching of Reformed churches.

### ***Polemics***

It is this Reformed understanding of reality that must be defended and fought for continuously. The history of the world shows is a constant reminder of this. Mankind always wants to exert his own power, his autonomy. This fundamental error of man affects so many of the issues we are also facing today. It affects our view of, and attitude toward family and marriage, church unity and confessional membership, hermeneutics and apologetics, life style and worship, law and order, politics and justice, etc., etc.

As the world and the false church continue to tempt the people of God with attractive, unreformed ideas it remains necessary to study and discuss the Reformed faith. We must remain vigilant and alert in the spiritual warfare that is waging madly in and around us.

In the very early years of the Canadian Reformed Churches, when the Acts of Synod were still written in Dutch, Rev. W. Loopstra spoke the following words, "The Churches are not without difficulties and tests...Just because of the various difficulties that appear first here and then there in the local churches we may realize all the more that as members of the Church we display no less unfaithfulness and no less wickedness than those around us that we so easily accuse." Acta van de Generale Synode, Hamilton, 1962; Artikel 1 (Trans. PdB)

In the front page article of March 15 of Reformanda (Nr.11) H. W. van Egmond writes, "The uncertainty ...in the churches is not to be denied. When we look around and listen to the various conversations about church life you can see the people, so to speak, look for clear answers. On the one hand you read in the church press about the call for a more liberal view of the sanctity of the Lord's Day; while at another time you can read about the necessity to keep this day holy. The same goes for women in office or the liturgy. Beyond that there exists some uncertainty about the authority of the offices and even the position of office bearers."

The Word of our God exhorts us to put on the armour of faith so that we may be strong in the Lord. We must put on the full armour of God so that we can take our stand against the devil's schemes. That armour consists of truth and righteousness, readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. We must take up the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. And finally, we may use the power of prayer.

It is in this warfare that Reformed Polemics wants to be of assistance. Of course we can not take the place of God's Word, but we can be workers in the vineyard who help one another, who encourage, admonish, warn and comfort each other as we strive together to withstand error and evil and promote the righteousness, thankfulness and obedience.

So don't put this first issue of Volume Seven of Reformed Polemics down until you have read the whole thing. And then file it away in a binder for later reference. We will strive to make it worthwhile for you to pick it up every time again.

PdB

## **PERSONAL REPORT OF VISITS AND CONTACTS WITH THE REFORMED CHURCHES IN THE UNITED STATES (RCUS) OVER 1999 AND 2000**

By Rev. J. Moesker

### ***BRIEF HISTORY OF THE RCUS***

The RCUS presently consists of around 40 congregations in 4 classes located mainly in the central US and California. Total membership is 4,257, which means most churches are small. These Churches subscribe to the Three Forms of Unity and have a very interesting history.

The Reformed faith flourished in the major German principality of the Palatinate after 1545. Elector Frederick III of the Palatinate protected the Reformed faith and ordered the Heidelberg Catechism written in 1563. However, a number of subsequent wars caused a great upheaval in this principality. The 30 Year's War of 1618-1648 pitted Protestant and Roman Catholic against each other and caused much loss of life and ruin. In 1689 the French invaded Germany, including the Palatinate, and re-imposed Roman Catholicism on the people. Finally, the War of Spanish Succession swept over western Germany between 1701 and 1714. These wars brought many Germans to look for a better life in the new world, and specifically to Pennsylvania where many Moravian Germans had already emigrated earlier.

Many of the Germans who moved to Pennsylvania were Reformed. They were led by a schoolmaster named John Philip Boehm. Under his leadership a number of Reformed congregations were organized with a church order and subscribing to the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dort. In 1729 Boehm was ordained as minister by the Dutch Reformed Church in New York. This church along with other churches in the new world was part of Classis Amsterdam in the Netherlands. 1747 a classis was formed consisting of 53 small churches with approx. 30,000 German Reformed people. The churches then adopted the Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession and Canons of Dort as standards, and the Church Order of Dort. Christian schools were organized.

In 1793 the German Reformed Church became independent of Dutch Reformed Church and organized as a church on its own and had its first synod. At that time it consisted of 178 congregations and approximately 15,000 members. In 1825 these churches started their own theological college in Pennsylvania. This college became a source of the so-called Mercersburg Theology which emphasized the Lord's Supper as a main means of grace. Typical of this movement was that an altar stood in the center of the church, while the pulpit was situated at the side.

A second "wave" of German Reformed immigration to the US took place in the 1800's. Many German people immigrated to Russia between the 1790's and the early 1800's at the invitation of Empress Catherine II and Czar Alexander I. They settled along the Volga River and in the Black Sea region. Many were Mennonites, but among them were also people of the Reformed faith. Czar Alexander II revoked many privileges of these German settlers, including exemption from military service for the Russians. Life became difficult for the Mennonites in particular, but also for the

Reformed Germans. Between 1849 and 1879 many Germans immigrated to North America. A large contingent of Mennonites ended up in southern Manitoba. Groups of Reformed Germans settled in the Dakotas and Nebraska, USA. There they established churches which soon joined the RCUS. A South Dakota Classis was founded in 1887, and the Eureka Classis was founded in 1911

In 1930 RCUS consisted of 1,685 churches in 58 classes with 348,189 members! Liberal influences, however, became strong and by 1900 only the Heidelberg Catechism was left as standard of faith. A 1934 decision to merge with the Evangelical Synod of North America (similar to Evangelische Kirche in Germany, a union of Lutheran and Reformed Churches with Augsburg Confession, Luther's Catechism and Heidelberg Catechism as standards) to form the Evangelical and Reformed Church caused distress among churches in the Midwest. The Eureka Classis of the RCUS did not go along with merger because of the doctrinal liberty it espoused, and continued with a few churches located in Wisconsin, Nebraska, and California as the RCUS (total approx. 20 churches with less than 300 members). Attempts to heal the break were unsuccessful. In 1957 the Evangelical and Reformed Church merged with Congregationalist Churches to form the United Church of Christ, which has practically lost all Reformed character.

In the 1980's Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated) came into contact with RCUS people in Zaire (Rep. of the Congo) where they were doing mission work. This contact led to working together and, in 1992 to sister church relations. In 1988 Rev. George Syms of the RCUS visited Carman to investigate the Canadian Reformed Churches, which are sister churches of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated). In 1989 Rev. P. DeBoer and elder H. Veenendaal visited the RCUS Synod and exploratory talks between Carman church and RCUS took place. At Synod Lincoln 1992 there was a request from RCUS for sister church relations with the Canadian Reformed Churches. Synod gave the contact with RCUS to the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad. In 1995 the RCUS re-adopted the Belgic Confession and Canons of Dort as official confessions of the church. The RCUS maintains official relations with Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Reformed Presbyterian Church, Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (liberated), and is a member of the International Conference of Reformed Churches as well as the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council.

### ***MEETING MANITOWOC, WISCONSIN – JANUARY 2000***

From January 15 to 18, 2000, the Subcommittee for Relations with the Reformed Church in the US (br. W. Gortemaker, Rev. K. Jonker, br. A. Poppe and myself) went to Manitowoc, Wisconsin (120 km. north of Milwaukee) in order to meet with the Interchurch Relations Committee of the RCUS.

We were very hospitably billeted in the homes of members of the Salem/Ebenezer Reformed Church near Manitowoc. Again, it was good to meet with RCUS church members and to interact with them. We discovered that we have a lot of things in common when it comes to practices and customs. For instance, devotions at mealtimes were usually accompanied by prayer before and after, and Scripture reading. The church there had recently had their annual congregational meeting to discuss financial matters, and it was conducted in very similar manner to our annual financial and budget meetings. What struck us again was the beautiful church building with large kitchen and foyer and lots of meeting space and equipment for instruction, etc. The people take pride in their church buildings.

Before worship on Sunday morning we joined the 8:45 am Bible study groups. I sat in on the Bible study for young people. An interesting discussion took place on the topic of what Scripture says about dating or courting, led by Rev. Ron Potter. We could hear the children's Bible instruction accompanied with singing, taking place in another room. There was also an adult Bible study class which attended by the other brothers of the committee.

At 10:00 am the church bells rang to call the congregation to worship. Rev. J. Merica from California spoke to the congregation for a few minutes about the churches in California and the work of home mission there. He is minister of a recently instituted church there himself. After his address the worship service started in very similar fashion to our worship. Again, it included a reading of the Heidelberg Catechism, this time all in unison, with a short explanation. Two office-bearers were ordained, and stood at the front of the church as the form was read. The sermon applied to the standards expected of office-bearers and so of all in the church as related in I Tim.3. I found the sermon strong in practical instruction, but somewhat weak in Christology. The singing was still a bit meek compared to what we're used to. The church choir also participated in the worship with one song. A collection was held for the needy.

At 9:00 p.m. there was a monthly Bible study, which we attended. There were around 30 people of various ages. The main topic was the matter of women's voting rights, and the discussion centered on 1 Pet.2. and the place of the woman in the church. Women's voting in the election of office-bearers is generally quite strongly rejected in the RCUS. There was a stimulating discussion in which we were also welcome to participate.

We spent Monday morning touring the Manitowoc Marine Museum. In the afternoon we met as committee to establish our approach. After a good supper in the church provided by the ladies aid, the two committees had a preliminary meeting. We continued to meet the following morning. Our purpose was to discuss with the RCUS committee what Synod Fergus 1998 wanted discussed as yet (Acts 1998, Art.51 IV and V, p.43 & 44):

1. Proper supervision of the Lord's Supper
2. Sunday observance
3. The doctrine of the church
4. Clarification about the concept of erasure
5. The RCUS's involvement in the National Association of Presbyterian and Reformed Churches (which has suspended the Christian Reformed Churches)

I won't go into exactly what came out of the discussions. That still needs to be established by the committees when we exchange reports. Let me just pass on the following personal notes concerning each:

1. Though they do not know attestations, guests are interviewed before they can attend Lord's Supper. They were open to the practice of attestations in their relations with the Canadian Reformed Churches.

2. Sunday observance varies, for instance with some members eating out at restaurants on Sundays, but there is a desire to resist this and keep the day holy. One worship service has always been the practice, with Sunday Bible study.
3. The concept of invisible and visible church has a history in the RCUS, but there is growing appreciation for what the Belgic Confession says about the church.
4. Erasure is a removal of a member's name from the church roll only if that member refuses to make himself available for church discipline over a long period of time. It is not a replacement for church discipline as such.
5. The RCUS has had a positive influence in NAPARC. It was involved in bringing about the suspension procedure against the Christian Reformed Church due to the decision to open the offices to both sexes. This organization now has as aim also to see if there can be working towards organic union of churches.

The discussions were very frank and amicable. I found the members of the RCUS committee sincere in their desire to be Reformed and also open to listening to our concerns and suggestions. It was an excellent meeting and good contacts were made and literature exchanged. We planned to meet again as committees DV in May, around the time of their Synod. As they do not have their own theological college, they are also interested in our college in Hamilton, and asked me if I would make a presentation about our college at their synod.

We were quite pleased with the meetings and looked forward to continued discussions. Rev. J. Merica closed our time together with a meditation on Matt. 16:18, where the Lord says, "...on this rock I will build my church." He noted that it is the Lord who builds His church. That's a great comfort to know in this world of human fears and failings.

With this issue we will begin a new series of articles that will have as its theme the various attributes of God. Br. Wayne Pleiter of the Canadian Reformed Church at Yarrow, BC intends to do his best to provide us with regular articles for every second issue of Reformed Polemics. May these articles serve to direct our thoughts toward God, and His Word and cause us to ponder anew at the greatness of our Almighty God.

The Editors

## **In the beginning... a Solitary God.**

By Wayne Pleiter

Solitary! Most times, when we hear this word we are reminded of the advertising slogan "A Diamond is Forever." In our minds, we visualise beautiful engagement and wedding rings that feature a unique sparkling diamond – a solitaire. Not very often do we connect the word 'solitaire' or 'solitary' to God. Indeed, God does 'stand out' like a solitaire diamond, but to contemplate God as a 'solitary God' is a notion that is both foreign and abstract to our secular minds. It sounds like a doctrinal concept, one that is likely to appeal to the intellect, yet offer little assurance or comfort to the heart and life of the Christian.

In our modern evangelical age, there is the unnerving temptation to minimize our understanding of the person and character of God to basic concepts and simple truths. While we may take comfort in our confession of God as being great in wisdom, almighty in power, and full of mercy and grace, yet how many of us still have the desire to more fully know our Lord God? How many are willing to undertake the necessary commitment to examine what the scriptures have to say about the very character of our awesome God?

With this in mind, J.I. Packer aptly reminds us, that to "disregard the study of God, [is to] sentence yourself to stumble and blunder through life blindfolded, as it were, with no sense of direction and no understanding of what surrounds you" (pg. 17, *Knowing God*) In doing so we limit ourselves to a small understanding of God and are therefore inclined the sooner to worship a small god; the less we know of God, the less awesome He will be, and the more likely we will think of God in our limited earthly way. We do well then to be humbly reminded of the eternal perspective that the prophet Isaiah presents: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Is. 55:8, 9)

### ***A Solitary God***

In order to taste the greatness of our God, it is important to consider the normal use and application of the word 'solitary' in the English language. The word 'solitary' is best described by those who live alone, without companions and in relative seclusion. They are generally lonely people that desire an intimate relationship with another or sadly mourn its loss. (Ps 25:16). A second dimension to the word 'solitary' is that of complete and involuntary isolation. Here, we have the image of a person, who - against his will - is isolated from the world for weeks on end, alone without family or friends.

Considering these particular definitions of solitary or solitaire, how are we to understand the solitariness of God? Is God a Solitary God in the sense as we would humanly interpret the word solitary? Rather than turning to our popular applications of these words, we do well to search the scriptures. The Word of God opens with; "In the beginning, God." (Gen. 1:1) Before even the concept of time was ordained and the creation of the universe established, there God dwelt alone, in solitary confinement. Before 'the beginning' God lived in the eternity, all alone, as God (in which

there are three persons, yet one single essence c.f. BC Art 8). There was nothing, no one but God living in complete contentment, without the distractions of mankind and creation. Yet despite being alone God was in need of nothing.

In contrast to our explanations of solitary, our God is solitary in the sense that He is self-contained and self-sufficient and does not have any cravings or need for external relationships. God did not need to create mankind in order to find personal satisfaction or fulfilment. Neither was God lonely (as we would understand it) or in need of our companionship. And certainly God was not forced into complete isolation, against His power. As God does not change (Mal. 3:6) we know that He was no more complete in Glory and Majesty after the creation of the heavens and earth, as He was before the creation.

### ***The Purpose of Creation***

In our sinful desire to think more of ourselves than we ought, we like to ask the question why God would create mankind if He was in no need for our companionship. Yet it is foolish pride that prompts this question as we would love to believe that God was under some emotional stress to bring us 'into His life' as though God could not exist without us. But nothing could be further from the truth. There was absolutely no need or obligation in God that would make it necessary for Him to create the universe or mankind. Rather we are to profess the amazing act of creation as of purely sovereign design and determined by God's own good pleasure.

Instead of looking for the answer within ourselves as to the purpose of our creation, we should seek the council of the Word of God. And then we can see clearly from the scriptures that God 'works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will...' (Eph. 1:11) God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them, simply because He wanted to, because it pleased Him! Indeed we are to understand that it was the good pleasure of God's Divine will to elect us as His covenant children to the praise of His glorious grace. (See Eph. 1:5-ff)

'In the beginning, God.' - but where does this leave man - don't we offer praise and worship to God? Does this not add to God's Glory? If the glory, honour and thanks that we offered up to God with a sincere heart should cause the twenty-four elders in heaven to break into praise (see Rev. 4:9,10), will not our worship increase the honour of our Heavenly Father? Once again we are reasoning from a warped human perspective. Our praise and worship is principally the fruit of our thankfulness, and our good works are our duty owed to God. (Luke 17:10). The reformed preacher, Arthur Pink states it in this way: 'It is perfectly true that God is both honoured and dishonoured by men; not in His essential being, but in His official character. It is equally true that God has been 'glorified' by creation, by providence, and by redemption. But all of this has to do with His manifestative glory and the recognition of it by us.' (Pg. 11 Attributes of God, emphasis added.) Indeed, as the gentle radiance of the moon reflects the powerful illumination of the sun, so mankind, as through a faded mirror, reflects the majestic Glory of God.

### ***To Know the Solitary God***

God is not found by our trivial pursuit of seeking Him on our own terms or by attempting to bring God down to our secular level. Nor is God found through natural spiritualism or as appealing to the inner man. To truly comprehend what it means to know God as our solitary God, is to turn away

from our human insights, and look to Christ alone. It is through the redemptive work of Christ, that God the Father is made known to us in His infinite Glory. (John 14:9-14) And it is by faith that is worked in our hearts by God the Spirit, through the gospel of Grace (Heb 1:16) that we can experience this truth and be assured of God's solitary excellence. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb.13:8) and "...is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for [us]" (Heb. 7:24). Surely the confession that we are able to experience God's Majestic Glory through the redeeming work of Christ should motivate us to a life of service. Is that true for you? Is it your desire to serve in His Kingdom and reflect His Honour in your life?

While we may be intrigued by the sparkle of a solitaire diamond ring, it is not until we begin to comprehend the complexities of the diamond, like its clarity, cut, colour, and carat, that we do assuredly marvel at its intrinsic beauty! Indeed the magnificence of the solitaire diamond was always there, but it is our comprehension and appreciation of its beauty that was lacking. Likewise, it is through the redeeming work of Christ that we experience in this life, but a shadow of the full unapproachable glory of our God (1 Tim. 6:16). May this inspire us to heartfelt worship and provoke us to hallowed praise! Let us then joyfully acclaim; "Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you - majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders? (Ex. 15:11)

Extracts from the Report of Rev. C. Van Spronsen:

**VISIT TO THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY OF THE REFORMED CHURCHES OF BRAZIL**, July 5 – 8, 2000, in Sao Jose da Coroa Grande, PE.

*"The Lord has done Great Things for us . . ."* Psalm 126: 3  
Reformed Churches in Brazil Federate

Introduction:

It was a solemn and joyful occasion when close to twenty brothers signed the "Act of Constitution of the Federation of the Reformed Churches of Brazil" on July 5, 2000 in the school building located in Sao Jose da Coroa Grande. Five instituted Churches were represented: Camaragibe, Colombo, Maragogi, Sao Jose da Coroa Grande and Unai while representatives of another five mission congregations signed as well: Barra Grande, Barreiras do Boqueirao, Ibura (Recife), Jardim Eucalipto e Pinhais (Curitiba) and Maceio.

By their signature they expressed agreement that the Churches are one in Christ, adopted the three ecumenical creeds and the Three Forms of Unity as their confessional basis and promised to live together under a Church Order which is very similar to the well known Church Order of Dort, adapted to the Brazilian situation.

It was a great pleasure and privilege for me to be present at this occasion as representative of the sending Church of Surrey, BC and its supporting Churches and also as being the first missionary of our Churches to begin mission work in the North-East some 30 years ago. One could not help but stand amazed and in awe at how greatly the Lord has blessed the preaching of the Good News. What wonderful developments in a rather short time: from not even knowing anyone in the area to this large gathering of representatives of an ever growing brotherhood; from a few individuals who responded with little more than "sim, senhor" to whatever you said, to brothers and

leaders who defend the reformed faith on the solid basis of the reformed confessions; from a small gathering of people who were there to receive, to a large gathering who are eager and anxious to share the Good News with many others! All this the Lord granted using as instrument the work of several sending Churches conducting mission work in the North and the South as well as the settlement of a group of Dutch people in Unai, more in the centre.

### ***The Constituent Assembly***

Opening: On Wednesday morning, July 5<sup>th</sup>, Moizes, on behalf of the convening Church of Maragogi, opened the meeting. He welcomed and introduced every one. Moizes read Prov. 1: 4 – 8 and Cledinaldo, elder of Maragogi, led in prayer. We all sang together Luther's reformation hymn: "A Mighty Fortress is our God". Credentials were read and accepted.

Representation Churches Abroad: The Churches abroad were represented by the brs. J. (Ko) Joosse and Rev. P.K. Meijer of the Dutch Churches as delegates of the BBK (Committee for Contact with Churches Abroad, section 5), Rev. A. deGraaf and br. H. Plug as representative of the CanRC at Hamilton, ON and the Revs. K. Wieske and C. Van Spronsen as representatives of the CanRC at Surrey, BC, while the latter was also there as observer of the C.R.C.A. (Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad).

Executive: Eld. Laertes (Colombo) was chosen as chairman, Rev. Manoel (Colombo) as vice-chairman and Adriano (Ibura) as secretary. (A desktop computer was set up to serve the secretary.) Preliminary Discussions: The agenda for this meeting and all the necessary documents were neatly bound in a spiral format. It took some time to discuss who would be signing delegates of the Act of Confederation, what the position was of the representatives of the mission congregations as well as that of missionaries and representatives from foreign churches.

Another item of some discussion was whether the Act should be signed at the beginning or at the end, whether a Church Order should be adopted first, or later. It was decided that the Act should be signed first, after it would be properly re-written to also serve as a legal document. Recognition of Westminster Confession: The draft Act suggested that they would also recognize the Westminster Confession as a reformed confession. After some discussion this statement was deleted, not because they did not agree with the statement but rather because it did not serve any purpose in the Act of Confederation. This would be more in place when the relationship with the I.P.B. would be discussed.

Signing of the Act of Confederation: This solemn and joyful event was definitely the highlight of the meeting. All delegates of the five instituted Churches, as well as representatives of the mission congregations signed this document. The names of those present from foreign Churches were mentioned as having witnessed this signing.

"Book of Praise": The Committee for the Brazilian "Book of Praise" did not complete their work. A new committee was appointed to come with a complete (provisional) church book for the next meeting, consisting of Psalms, Hymns, Forms as well as the Church Order.

Church Order: A committee was appointed to finalize the draft Church Order, which had already been available to the Churches for comments etc. After a number of changes and corrections the

Church Order was adopted. The end result is a Church Order very similar to ours but with adaptations to the Brazilian situation and present phase of church life.

Study Material: An inventory was made of all study materials available for Sunday School, Catechism classes and VBS. Ways are to be found to publish and distribute this material.

Recognition of R.C. Baptism: The practice of recognition of such baptisms will be continued. In cases where there are doubts, the matter can be brought to the Regional Council (Classis).

Visitors at the L.S. table: This matter was settled by accepting article 50 of their C.O. similar to our article 61 with the added phrase that other cases are to be decided upon by the local consistory.

Theological Training: Various options were discussed, including the possibility of making use of the International Theological Faculty by Internet. In general the consensus seemed to be that there ought to be a Theological Training by and for the Reformed Churches. A Committee was appointed to come with a definite proposal for the next General Synod. They will also be represented at the ICRC Mission Conference and the Mini-Conference in October, 2000, where Theological Training will be one of the main topics.

Church Paper: The meeting approved the publication of a "Church paper" called "Bandeira de Graça" (Banner of Grace).

Student Preaching: It was agreed that students would present their own sermons only after the third year of seminary training.

Diaconal Conference: A Diaconal Conference for the training and assistance of the deacons is scheduled to be held in Sao Jose in July, 2000.

Contact with Churches Abroad: It is decided to request fraternal relations with the following churches abroad: The Reformed Churches of the Netherlands (Liberated) and the Canadian Reformed Churches. These are both Churches they know well as being Churches who conducted the mission work there. A committee was appointed for this purpose as well as for contact with the ICRC. They were also charged to look into contacts with other foreign sister Churches.

Youth Conference: A committee was appointed to organize a national conference to provide opportunities for the young people of the congregations to meet. Seeing that some of the churches are very small and isolated such contacts were considered very important.

Contact with the Presbyterian Church of Brazil: The Dutch Churches have requested the Church at Unai to take a stand in their position towards the IPB. The members of the executive were charged to function as a committee to deal with the relationships to other national Churches. They are to report to the next meeting, giving priority to their relationship to the IPB. The Dutch Churches will be requested to deal with caution in their relationship with the IPB.

Relationship with Foreign Missions: Based on art. 40 of their C.O. it is proposed that agreements of cooperation be established between the IRB and reformed sister Churches responsible for mission work in their midst. Existing cooperation and previous agreements are to be maintained.

Addresses by Observers: Rev. P. K. Meijer spoke words of good wishes on behalf of the BBK of the Churches in the Netherlands and offered some books. He explained the present relationship

with the IPB and stated that so far they only have an agreement of cooperation in mission work. No official recognition as sister Church has taken place as yet. It is the task of all to seek the unity of the body of Christ. The IRB must therefore also explain to the IPB why this confederation was established.

Rev. C. Van Spronsen on behalf of the Canadian Churches expressed the joy and thankfulness to God for the formation of a federation of Reformed Churches in Brazil. The hope is expressed that fraternal relations can be established with this new federation. The wish is expressed that the missionaries from Canada, Rev. E. Venema and Rev. K. Wieske will be able to continue to work together with the IRB.

Continued Mission Work: The meeting decided to request the Dutch Churches if they would study the possibility to continue mission work in Brazil, implying a review of the decision to discontinue this work.

Next Meeting: The next National Synod is scheduled to be held in Curitiba, September 2002, the Church at Colombo being the convening Church.

Closing: Rev. P. K. Meijer was asked to lead in the closing of this meeting. He read Acts 20: 24-35 and led in prayer and thanksgiving. The chairman closed the meeting.

Sunday Activities: Sunday morning we attended a worship service in Sao Jose, conducted by Rev. Manoel, the only Brazilian pastor at present. For lunch we were invited to a potluck supper put on by the congregation of Maragogi. For the evening service and celebration of the Holy Supper we were all invited to Maragogi. Rev. Meijer, as ex-missionary of Maragogi, conducted the service.

Conclusion: In conclusion we can only rejoice in all we were allowed to experience. It was good to see that by the guidance of the Holy Spirit the brotherhood in Brazil seeks to be true Churches of Jesus Christ, embracing the reformed faith. I would also like to express my thanks for receiving the opportunity to be present there and witnessing all this. A very rewarding and encouraging experience!

Praise the Lord for these rich blessings! "The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy"! (Ps. 126: 3)

C. Van Spronsen