

THE WESTMINSTER VIEW ON THE CHURCH

“Too Presbyterian and not Sufficiently Reformed”

We concluded our previous editorial “Presbyterian or Reformed?” (Nov. 25/00) with a question. This question was a restatement of the concern expressed at the Westminster Assembly (1642-49) by the Scots about their English colleagues during the debate about church government. And the question was simply this: Do we need “to fear that some of us are becoming too ‘Presbyterian’ and not sufficiently Reformed?” We noted that this question was first asked by Presbyterians themselves in the context of their debate about Presbyterian church government.

Yet, having asked this question, they chose a form of church government that - in the words used by Presbyterians themselves - is “inconsistent with the scripture and principles acknowledged by reformed churches” and “essentially hierarchical.” It is based on the Presbyterian distinctive “concerning the power of the Presbytery” and “subordination of the congregational assemblies.” (Robert S. Paul) They adopted this Presbyterian form of church government INSTEAD OF the Reformed form because they considered the Reformed emphasis on the “place and primacy given to the local church and its consistory” to be out of accord with the Presbyterian distinctive “concerning the power of the presbytery.” Based on the statements made by Presbyterians themselves we can readily agree that the Presbyterian form of church government is neither scriptural nor Reformed. It is collegialist (a) and hierarchical; it denies the legitimate rights and authority of the local congregation.

PRESBYTERIANS AND DENOMINATIONALISM

The choice of a form of church government that is neither scriptural or Reformed was accompanied by the acceptance of an unscriptural and un-Reformed view on the Church. The debate about “the form of the Church” led to the notion of “plural forms of the church” and the first clear philosophy of denominations; the “denominational theory of the church.” In a previous editorial (b) we stated: “The ‘denominational theory of the church’ occupies a prominent and dominant place in Anglo-Scottish-American Presbyterianism.” The truth of this statement is categorically confirmed by Bruce Shelley, church history professor at Denver Theological Seminary. In his article “Denominations - Divided we Stand” (c) he writes that at approximately the same time as the cessation of the religiously motivated Thirty Years War (1648) “the first clear philosophy of denominations was being articulated by the Independents at the Westminster Assembly (1642-49).” From Bruce Shelley’s account of what happened at the Westminster Assembly we learnt something about the ingenuity of the Independents (Congregationalists) who were known as the “Dissenting Brethren of Westminster.” “Keenly aware of the dangers of ‘dividing the godly Protestant party’ these ‘Dissenting Brethren of Westminster’ looked for some way to express Christian unity even in disagreement.” The result was a “denominational theory of the church” with its four attendant principles. Denominationalism became the basis for a new ecumenicity; “Divided we stand!” (Bruce Shelley)

And this new ecumenicity is sanctioned by and in harmony with the third principle of the “denominational theory of the church” which reads: “Since no church has a final and full grasp of

divine truth, the true church of Christ can never be fully represented by any single ecclesiastical structure.” Simply put, the true church of Christ consists of a plurality of ecclesiastical structures, and none of these structures may lay claim to a final and full grasp of divine truth because the whole truth cannot be fully known. And since the truth cannot be fully known “all serious interpretations of scripture would learn (or earn, RD) mutual respect.” (Robert S. Paul) The various denominations could live on in peaceful coexistence, somewhat “sectarian,” since each preserved its own independence, yet also deeply “ecumenical,” since each showed little hesitance in giving the other recognition and cooperation. So “Christian unity” as expressed by the “Dissenting Brethren of Westminster” was a unity based on the shared belief that “the true church of Christ can never be fully represented by any single ecclesiastical structure... since no church has a final and full grasp of divine truth.” Therefore “any Christian group ‘denominated’ by a particular name was but one member of the larger group - the church.” (Bruce Shelley)

POLITICS AND PLURAL FORMS

In our continuing study of Anglo-Scottish-American Presbyterianism we have often quoted Professor Bruce Shelley. And there is no doubt about Prof. Shelley’s conclusion. The “denominational theory of the church” is the innovation of the “Dissenting Brethren of Westminster.” Denominationalism continues to occupy a prominent and dominant place in Anglo-Scottish-American Presbyterianism. Robert S. Paul concurs with Prof. Shelley’s conclusion. Paul’s book “The Assembly of the Lord,” is described as “the fullest and most profound analysis of the religion and politics operating in the Westminster Assembly.” (d)

From this book we learn that politics played an important role in the debate about Presbyterian church government. Politics was also a major component in the debate about “the form of the Church.”

Robert S. Paul writes that “politics was interwoven into the struggle at several points - first, and most obviously, because of the essential relationship between Church and State. Whichever form of the Church was finally adopted, it would have to be endorsed, maintained and protected by civil government... Politics would also intervene in the work of the Assembly at a very practical level. There were honest differences of opinion in interpreting scripture, but because practical decisions had to be made, those decisions could be made effectively only by political means. No form of truth can be proved ultimately by a majority vote, ...but because choices have to be made and decisions have to be translated into laws, there is no other way of accomplishing practical objectives than by acting politically... ..the only way to resolve the issue in the Assembly was to debate it, agitate for it, lobby for it, and ultimately vote on it.” (e)

The Independents attracted the support of those who stood to lose most by the imposition of religious uniformity of any sort. They were forced to join with Baptists, Separatists, Antinomians and others prepared to fight for freedom of worship, and soon they began to discover unsuspected breadth within their own ecclesiology. Robert S. Paul writes: “By cooperating politically with other sects, and by fighting side by side with them in the same regiments, the Independents learned to respect other Christians’ faith and Biblical integrity. People whose views of the Church started out as extremely narrow began to recognize that other churches might also be true churches, and hence to concede that there might be several legitimate ways of interpreting the scripture which all

confessed to revere. Ultimately, therefore, this pointed to a society in which none would be persecuted because of religious conviction, a society in which all serious interpretations of scripture would learn mutual respect. It is no accident that in this seventeenth century debate we discern the first tentative moves towards an ecclesiology that had room for plural forms of the Church.” (f)

PRESBYTERIANS AND CHURCH-PLURIFORMITY

From Robert S. Paul’s coverage of the proceedings at the Westminster Assembly and the debate about “the form of the Church “we discern the first tentative moves towards an ecclesiology that had room for plural forms of the Church.” Note the term “plural forms of the Church!”

Pluriformity - many forms of ecclesiastical institutions - was the answer to the notion that “there might be several legitimate ways of interpreting the scripture” We recognize in the debate about “the form of the Church” the emergence of the unscriptural theory of the “pluriformity of the Church” which a few centuries later was openly espoused by Dr. Abraham Kuyper. (1837-1920)

“Dr. Kuyper made a number of distinctions; the distinction between the visible Church and the invisible Church, and between the Church as an organism and the Church as an institute... By ‘the church as organism,’ Kuyper understood the activities undertaken by believers apart from their institutional church life, for example in all kinds of Christian organizations in the field of politics, science, and so forth. It may be sufficient to summarize his ideas as follows: The visible Church - which may be distinguished into the Church as an organism and the Church as institute - has its marks, but only the invisible Church has the attributes which are presented in the Apostles’ and the Nicene Creed. It should be clear that this concept inevitably lead to the theory of the pluriformity of the Church: the invisible Church manifests itself in a great variety of visible churches.” (g)

Furthermore, Kuyper “taught that the wisdom of God was so wide and broad, that each individual church possessed and confessed only part of this wisdom.” (h)

Kuyper’s theory of the “pluriformity of the church” brings to mind the view on the church as found in the first and second principles of the denominational theory of the church: “First, considering the human inability always to see the truth clearly, differences of opinion about the outward form of the church are inevitable. Second, even though these differences do not involve fundamentals of the faith, they are not matters of indifference.” Note that the “differences of opinion about the outward form of the church” are not considered to “involve fundamentals of the faith.”

And so we see that Kuyper’s theory of the “pluriformity of the church” and the “denominational theory of the church” as drafted by the “Dissenting Brethren of Westminster” have a lot in common. Both of these theories are guided by the fundamental belief that the Church of Christ is basically invisible and manifests itself in several forms and/or in various denominations or throughout denominations, also in varying degrees of purity. Both of these theories came into being when people were looking for “some way to express Christian unity even in disagreement.” And the outcome was pluralism and/or denominationalism; “Divided we stand!”

DENOMINATIONALISM AND THE CHURCH

“There is an important aspect to be noted when speaking about denominationalism. Russel E. Richey has formulated it as follows: ‘Never adequately articulated, but implicit in the self-understanding of the denominations was the recognition that there was a unity of the church which transcended the observable unity.’ In other words, each denomination is a segment or a particular manifestation of the one grand invisible Church, and basically, although each denomination remains on its own, all the churches in principle are one.

Winthrop Hudson said it as follows, ‘The basic contention of the denominationalist theory of the Church is that the Church is not to be identified in any exclusive sense with any particular institution.’ Each denomination may freely emphasize its own viewpoints, but may not deem its own doctrine to be fully the whole truth.” (i)

In the editorial “The Denominational Theory of the Church” (Oct. 28/00) we already examined the Westminster Confession (article 25) and the OPC’s Form of Government (IV.4 p.14.) In Article 25 of the Westminster Confession we can read that the Catholic (or universal) Church is invisible, consisting of the whole number of the elect, whereas the visible Church consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion together with their children. The Westminster Confession renders the invisible Church as “the whole number of the elect.” We said that “given the Westminster definition of the church, it is (also) difficult to see how the OPC can avoid the practice of pluralism or pluriformity of the church.”

We also stated that “the OPC’s Form of Government (FOG) seems to confirm this practice of pluralism or pluriformity.” There we encounter a view on the church that is guided by the fundamental belief that the Body of Christ is basically an invisible thing which manifests itself in several forms, but that all the denominations together form the one Body of Christ. All denominations have a right to exist since pluralism and pluriformity are important characteristics of the one invisible Church. And this view on the church is supported by the terminology used in both the Westminster Confession (article 25) and the Presbyterian Form of Government. (FOG, IV .4 p.14)

“It is not surprising then, that the OPC allows into membership those who will not baptize their children, that members are not required to hold to the confessions of the church, that ministers and elders are required to hold only to the system of doctrine contained in the confessions, and that the OPC allows to the Lord’s Supper Table all ‘earnest Christians’ even if their confession is incompatible with the confession of the OPC.” (j)

AN OBVIOUS CONCLUSION

The Westminster Assembly chose a form of church government that is neither scriptural nor Reformed. It is collegialist (a) and hierarchical; it denies the legitimate rights and authority of the local congregation. This choice of church government was accompanied by the acceptance of a view on the Church that cannot be squared with either Scripture or the Three Forms of Unity. Prof. C. Trimp in “Our Responsibility” (k) writes: “It is and remains absurd that in one location there are two or more churches of Christ.” As Reformed believers we fully agree with him. What is the Presbyterian response to Prof. Trimp’s statement? Let us once more listen to Blue Bell’s Rev. John

J. Mitchell: "The 'one true church in each locality,' as that idea developed in continental, particularly Dutch circles, has no grounding in Scripture... To strive to develop a 'one true Church' in Blue Bell is an unbiblical goal." (1) Such then is the historic "Westminster" perspective; "plural forms of the Church" or church-pluriformity.

Obviously the Reformed view on the Church is incompatible with the Presbyterian view as drafted by the "Dissenting Brethren of Westminster." The reluctance or refusal of some to accept this obvious conclusion brings to the fore a few pertinent questions: "Is it possible that in our attempts to find "some way to express Christian unity even in disagreement" we are already "discovering unsuspected breadth within our own ecclesiology?" Could it be that we, in our view on the Church, are becoming "too Presbyterian and not sufficiently Reformed" to be of help to those who truly seek to know the whole truth even though they have been taught that in the Church of Christ the truth cannot be fully known? More about that, the Lord willing, in our next installment.

Ron Dykstra

- (a) "Collegiality", noun. The doctrine of the Roman Catholic church's hierarchy (bishops), who collectively determines church policy with the Pope.
- (b) The Denominational Theory of the Church, Reformed Polemics, Oct. 28/00.
- (c) Denominations - Divided We Stand, Bruce Shelley, Christianity Today, Sept. 7/98.
- (d) Horton Davies, Henry W. Putnam Professor of Religion in Princeton University.
- (e) The Assembly of the Lord, Robert S.Paul, p.47-49.
- (f) *ibid.*, p.51.
- (g) The Church - Its Unity in Confession and History, G. Van Rongen, p.49.
- (h) Reformation Day Speech - Oct. 31, 2000, Rev. J. Ludwig, Reformed Polemics, November 25/00.
- (i) Denominationalism, Rev. Cl. Stam, Clarion 1978, vol 27 no 18.
- (j) Presbyterian or Reformed?, Rev. K. Kok.
- (k) Our Responsibility, C.Trimp, Clarion, Sept. 29/00.
- (l) Letter to the Pulpit Committee of the OPC in Blue Bell, Rev. John J. Mitchell, Oct. 16/83, p.2.

CAN AN OLD METHOD BE USED TO IMPROVE REFORMED THINKING?

The Columbine massacre has made many people more aware of the dangerous influence of the ethical decay in our society, especially on their children. Hollywood, television and the Internet are commonly blamed for this moral deterioration. As a result numerous articles and books are written for possible solutions of this problem. Even TV rating systems and special associations, e.g. the Parents Television Council, came into existence but all these actions have had little effect.

The deterioration of modern culture has also strongly influenced Reformed¹ churches. Reformed Dutch immigrants, visiting the 'old country' after many years, are often shocked by the incredible decline of the biblical attitude in Reformed circles. They often do not realize that a similar decay in the biblical thinking and behaviour is, in a somewhat slower tempo, going on in the New World as well.

Discerning, god-fearing parents, sometimes wonder how to improve the upbringing of their children in the fear of the Lord so that they will be better armed against the present, anti-godly culture. It is striking that in the past, some teenagers², well known for their dedication to Christ,

were even willing to sacrifice their lives for Him. Famous examples are the teenager martyrs of the 2nd and 3rd century, Blandina, Ponticus and Perpetua, and in the 17th and 18th century the young Huguenots during the persecutions by king Louis XIV, supported by the Pope. These Huguenots thoroughly knew the Holy Scriptures, especially the Psalms, and abhorred the false doctrines taught in the Roman church. It is a pity that very little is known about the parent/child relationship of these youngsters because it may help today's parents to improve the spiritual education of their children.

However, it is not necessary to turn to the attitude of teenagers in foreign countries many centuries ago. More recently members of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands³ also needed to stand up (and they did) against the Nazi propaganda during the times of the Second World War.

Germany invaded the Netherlands sixty years ago and occupied it for five years. Other countries like Belgium, France, Norway, and Poland were also occupied but the attitude of the people in those countries was very different from the Dutch. This can be easily seen by studying their resistance movements.

A few months after the capitulation of the Dutch armed forces, the German government instituted in the Netherlands a 'Building-up Service'⁴, to be attended by the Dutch military. For several hours each day they would be exposed to Nazi philosophy, a kind of heathen religion, propagated by the German government. At the same time they instituted so-called Nazi schools for teenagers as a replacement for the Dutch military draft system. The danger of this propaganda was recognized by nearly all Reformed people so that some leading Reformed personalities held a secret meeting to discuss if, and by which means, resistance would agree with the letter of the apostle Paul to the Romans. They concluded that a Dutch active and/or passive resistance movement was in agreement with Roman 13 since it was not a revolt but an act of war, commanded by the legal government (the queen and her ministers in London). Consequently, the Dutch resistance became unique, being the only one which was started by Reformed Christians in obedience to biblical requirements, namely to protect people, especially their teenagers, from the Nazi philosophy. They were, during the first few years of the war, far more involved than any other group in the Netherlands. The Roman Church did not support any action against Hitler (some priests and monks supported the resistance movement privately), Communists started their resistance movement only after Hitler declared war with Russia. Relatively few socialists saw the necessity to join, especially after they discovered the severe punishment if they were caught: death or concentration camp.

The purpose of the resistance movements in all of the other countries was to be freedom fighters against the German army (not protection against the Nazi philosophy).

The attitude of the Reformed Dutch people during the Second World War was the result of a strong conviction that biblical principles must be applied to all aspects of life. This conviction was strongly promoted by Dr. Kuyper (1837-1920) and remained strong for more than 25 years after his death. The RCN had a large core of members who were more knowledgeable about, and dedicated to, a Christian life style than most present day Reformed people. Excellent Reformed literature was available and people were still interested in reading a lot. The influence of so-called worldly entertainment and culture was relatively low in Reformed circles. Most of the teenagers had never entered a movie theatre or participated in a dance and/or drinking party.

Of course, not all Reformed families were like this, but even less dedicated ones were influenced by the above mentioned core of devoted Reformed Christians. It is interesting to know how parents, with the Lord's help, could bring up their teenagers so that many of them became dedicated Christians during those difficult times of economic depression, unemployment and mobilization of the armed forces due to the Nazi threat.

Some factors contributing heavily to the promotion of this Reformed life style for teenagers were the availability of excellent Reformed reading material, the influence of Reformed parents and the Young Men/Young Women societies⁵.

1. The Reformed study literature

The Lord blessed the RCN after its formation in 18926 with ministers and scholars who had a thorough understanding of the Word of God. During the first decades of the 20th century a lot of Reformed literature, including an excellent commentary of all the Bible books⁷, was published. Two outstanding Reformed Christian leaders and prolific authors, namely Dr. A. Kuyper (1837-1920) and Dr. K. Schilder (1890-1952) shaped the biblical thinking of Reformed church members during the decades prior to the Second World War more than all other people of that period.

a. One of the most important actions of Dr. Kuyper was the publication of a new, Christian, weekly in 1872. 'De Standaard'⁸, extremely beneficial to a large number of Reformed church members, became so popular that within a few years it justified its change to a regular daily paper. Dr. Kuyper's weekly editorials strongly emphasized the required biblical principles for a Christian political party as well as for other Christian aspects of life. It is amazing that very soon Reformed people, belonging to what he called the Petite bourgeoisie⁹ who were not used to reading anything else except their Bibles, now became avid readers of this paper and discussed its topics with their friends. He taught them to think biblically in evaluating any activity in their lives. It is interesting that one or two generations later the Petite Bourgeoisie contained many Christian teachers and that most of the readers of De Standaard, at the beginning of the 19th century, belonged to all classes of society. Their descendants were the fathers and grandfathers of the pre-World War II decade generation. After Kuyper's death de Standaard lost much of its importance but his books became well known references for study societies.

b. The Lord gave another outstanding scholar, teacher and author to the RCN after the passing away of Dr. Kuyper, namely Dr. Schilder. He also had a large influence on the spiritual thinking of Reformed church members. His books are wonderful and his articles in the weekly 'De Reformatie'¹⁰ were also outstanding in illustrating biblical principles to be applied in the Church and personal lives of its members. Additionally he also explained in many articles the anti-biblical ideas of Barthianism, pluriformity, baptism based on assumed faith, Nazism etc. Although his writing and preaching styles were sometimes difficult to understand, a large number of Reformed Christians, including teenagers, loved to read at least some if not all of his articles.

The RCN, blessed by the Lord, reached its peak during the pre-war decade through the work of the above mentioned leaders and other ministers. - The members of these churches generally became highly respected in the outside world. The Queen of the Netherlands twice selected Prime Ministers who were members of the RCN, namely, Dr. A. Kuyper and his successor, Dr. H. Colijn. The Dutch people were, in general, satisfied with their government, although no more than

approximately 18% of its population belonged to a “conservative” Reformed Church. In fact, the RCN was so well respected that at least one national bank considered its membership a strong recommendation for every job opening. - The large membership also had the advantage that it was unusual for teenagers to have close friendships with non-reformed ones.

2. The Reformed family.

Although Christian family life prior to the 2nd World War was officially based on biblical principles, people’s interpretations of them varied. Most of the families in the RCN during this period agreed officially that they desired to raise their children in Christ, but not all of them did. The following features were commonly accepted in these families..

a. Respect for older people, especially the parents, was a basic rule in the upbringing of children during these years. Fathers, mothers, teachers and all older people were to be addressed respectfully, which meant one had to use at least their family name. The present, revolutionary idea that all people are equal and, therefore, everyone can be addressed by their Christian name, was not accepted in Reformed circles. Today even some ministers give a wrong example by saying or writing (for example) Klaas Schilder instead of Dr. K. Schilder.

b. Nobody disputed the biblical principle that fathers were the heads of the family.

This enforced the rule that they must be obeyed unless their commands were unbiblical.

They were responsible to a large extent for the spiritual well being of their children. Many of them, aware of this responsibility, tried to improve their knowledge by reading Reformed literature. Especially popular was the weekly De Reformatie by Dr.K.Schilder, although several more Reformed magazines were also available.

c. All meals were eaten together as a family. No family member was allowed to stay away from a meal unless he/she had an excellent excuse (sport-events were never accepted as an excuse). All meals started with prayer and ended with Scripture reading and thanksgiving by the father (if he was not available, the mother took over. This would be needed, for example, during the lunch hour). Supper at night was always important because it was the time for talking about daily events like school happenings. The father, of course, encouraged these talks. It often gave him an opportunity to enlighten every one about the Scriptural context of a particular event.

d. The Sunday, the Day of the Lord, was the spiritual highlight of the whole week for many families. Going to church and related church activities were well accepted, and teenagers were frequently very involved.

Every Reformed person agreed that the Sunday was a feast in honour of the Lord and showed this by dressing in their Sunday-best throughout the whole day except for necessary chores like milking the cows on a farm. It was commonly accepted that leisure clothing on Sunday does not fit the commandment to keep the Sabbath day, the Day of the Lord, holy.

After the morning worship service the whole family, including visitors if there were any, went home to discuss the sermon while enjoying coffee with a delicious snack. It is interesting that these discussions frequently revealed that the different views of the 1834 separation churches and the 1886 Doleantie churches still existed at that time, 45 years after their union in 1892. The

descendants of the Separation churches desired covenantal sermons while the followers of Kuyperian thought were not very interested in that basic topic.¹¹

Obviously, care must be taken that these conversations did not become a sinful breaking down of the sermon's content but would give a positive, spiritual contribution by explaining and discussing a difficult or enjoyable part of the sermon.

After the coffee break, a special lunch, suitable for a feast day, would be served. Until the afternoon worship in church, the different family members had their own special Sunday activities. Children would play with their toys, teenagers would attend their study associations and the parents would keep themselves occupied with reading a Reformed weekly, e.g., *De Reformatie*, or just take a short "siesta".

The Sunday evening was an extremely interesting time because the teenagers were allowed to bring one or two of their friends home with them. Since the groups could be large, the families took turns being hosts. The evenings were filled with discussions about interesting topics (often promoted by the father) and singing of psalms and hymns. Therefore, a musical instrument such as a reed organ to accompany the singing became so important that newly married couples frequently considered its purchase more necessary than any other part of their furniture.

e. The closer relationship of family members and the possibility of discussing proper Christian behaviour in particular situations sixty years ago, made it much easier for parents to encourage and teach teenagers to think and act in agreement with biblical rules. An excellent example is the going to movies. This, and similar topics, were frequently discussed at home as well as at the study society meetings. The arguments did not deal with particular movies but centered around the proper Scriptural attitude toward watching them. Reformed people agreed with Hollywood that a good actor must impersonate the character to be played. However, the consequence of the impersonation is not accepted by movie stars. The fact that any one who play-acts a sin is also actively sinning himself in his thoughts and in his actions of the person he is portraying is not recognized. Obviously, a viewer who encourages this sin by watching it is also an accomplice in that particular sin. This reasoning is rather logical and easy to understand. It is a surprising fact that at present many Christians, who claim to follow Christ, do not or do not want to understand this. Sixty years ago, Reformed teenagers tried to live up to these Scriptural directions. Even though such obedience was not always based on their convictions, it was also respected and expected because theatre going was strictly forbidden by parents. It was a rare occasion if Reformed member of the RCN would watch an actor-played movie. At times some teenagers would sneak into a theatre but they knew that they were eating forbidden fruit, and would barely dare to mention it to their own friends. The same principle should be applied to the present curse of TV watching in my opinion. I wish that more fathers would follow the example of a very tiny minority of Reformed fathers who have forbidden TV watching and these types of videos on the Internet. Such fathers (should) encourage their children to spend their time with other hobbies; preferable reading but also sports or crafts may be satisfactory.

3. Study Societies

Many church members, already starting with 12 or 14 years old children, belonged to a study group. These study groups, especially the Young Men - and the Young Women Societies were interesting and well attended. Some of their features were different from contemporary ones.

The weekly meetings of a particular society were, generally, so well attended that its members had to come together in separate groups.

The meetings were mainly study meetings with free, extensive discussions and debates.

The society members took turns in introducing a special topic at the weekly meetings.

The topics were very much directed to the application of Reformed doctrines and the Scriptures.

Each society had a large library of reference books, that would include e.g. all the works of Kuyper, Bavink, Schilder, Holwerda, and Greydanus just to mention a few of them.

These libraries were, generally, open one evening a week. On such an evening members would come to exchange their books and, interestingly, their casual talking reflected a lot of knowledge concerning doctrines, etc. Topics like infra - and supra lapsarism, Barthianism, baptism, evolution theory, pluriformity, Nazism, the Covenant of Grace were just a few of the many topics studied and discussed.

Every local society celebrated its anniversary once a year. A church building was rented, a topic was selected, a member of the society who could give the talk about a specific theme was chosen, and the meeting was announced. Mind you, ministers or other outstanding speakers were never invited to give these talks because the purpose of these yearly meetings was to show that the society members could handle such topics themselves without any help. The churches were filled to the brim at these meetings because the members of other local study societies attended also, including other church members. All attendees, teenagers, elders, ministers etc. were allowed to partake in the discussion (and they did), and were treated the same: the word of a minister was no more accepted than one of a youngster.

Once a year all of these societies in the Netherlands celebrated together a special, national meeting where famous speakers were invited to give the introductions.

It should be noted that a lot of boyfriend/girlfriend relationships were formed during these national meetings, which resulted in good, Reformed marriages.

4. A final remark

The description of Reformed life during the pre-war years may seem to be an exaggerated fantasy. Yet, the above mentioned facts were the reality as was testified by the late Rev. VanDooren, who mentioned them once in a private discussion because he had been brought up in the same way. However, the Reformed attitude, the amount and type of study and knowledge has dwindled a lot during the last sixty years due to an increased, satanic, temptation filtered into society by Hollywood, the Internet, the rejection of the antithesis and many more anti-Christian factors. Nobody knows if this trend will continue until the Lord returns for the last judgment, or if it is just a temporary set back, allowed by the Lord as a means to test and improve our faith.

In reality, we do not need to know this since we still have the assignment to fight against indifferent attitudes, also those shown by the younger generation in the church. Maybe a variation of the old way of bringing up our children in Christ may be possible. Undoubtedly, the Reformed family way of life as well as the Young Men and Young Women Societies contributed heavily to Reformed Biblical living. A father, when exposed to this today may claim that he has neither time nor the knowledge to bring their children up in this manner. The cure is to reconsider priorities by forbidding movie and TV watching and allowing the Internet only for authorized, educational usage. By eliminating these pastimes more than sufficient time would become available necessary to embark on the desired articles. Reading good Reformed literature would then also decrease ignorance, needed for the creation of a more Scripturally and task-oriented society.

A. Vander Jagt

1. Reformed in this article refers to the “conservative” Reformed people or Churches, like the Can. Ref. Churches.
2. In this article ‘teenager’ means young people between the ages of 16 and approximately 25 years.
3. In this article referred to as RCN.
4. Building-up service = Opbouwdienst (Dutch).
5. These are, in the Dutch language, called: de Jongelings en Meisjes Vereenigingen.
6. The churches which seceded from the Dutch Reformed Church in 1834 united into the Christian Reformed Church in the Netherlands (1869). The 2nd secession, called the Doleantie, of approximately 200 churches occurred in 1886. In 1892 both groups united and formed the RCN
7. De Korte Verklaring van de Heilige Schrift, Kok (Dutch)
8. De Standaard (Dutch). The Standard began as a weekly but within a few years became a daily paper.
9. The Petite Bourgeoisie = ‘De kleine luyden’ (dutch), the so-called working class, the lower income people, who work for other people.
10. De Reformatie (Dutch) = The Reformation, one of the Reformed weeklies in the Netherlands.
11. The Churches of the 1834 separation understood the Biblical meaning that the Lord made His Covenant of Grace with believing parents and their children. Dr. Kuyper and his followers claimed wrongly that the Covenant is made with the elected children of believing parents only.

Letter to the Editor:

I would like to make a few remarks about Rev. van Oene’s article in readers Response in Clarion, June 23, 2000 entitled, Length of days - plus nights”. Maybe I do not have much understanding or ability, but Rev. van Oene’s contribution confuses me even more than I was already. No rain before the flood? No seasons before the flood?

I consulted a few commentaries about that. First I went to Calvin's Commentary on Genesis. He points to chapter 2:5. There we read, "In that day the Lord made the earth and the heavens..." When no plant was yet on the earth and no herb had yet sprung up - for the Lord had not caused it to rain (NIV: God had not sent rain). About this Calvin says, "he (Moses) intimates that it is God Who opens and shuts the cataracts of heaven, and that rain and drought are in His hand." According to Calvin, there is a reason that it is stated that "the Lord had not caused it to rain", namely to show that rain and drought are in His hand.

I also consulted Dr. Aalders' Korte Verklaring on Genesis. He comes to the following conclusion. (My translation) "The most plausible inference is that it means that in this way the first growth of plants and shrubs came into being, "for the Lord had not sent rain." Aalders continues, "In any case, it is certain that it (the mist) is about the forming of rain clouds out of the mist." I can not see any reason to conclude from this text that it did not rain upon the earth until the flood. Rev. van Oene does not prove it. He just makes a statement.

About the seasons with regard to Gen.8:22 Calvin says, "The deluge had been an interruption of the order of nature. For the revolutions of the sun and the moon had ceased. There was no distinction of winter and summer. (Noah and his family had been in the ark for about a year.) Every living being outside had died. God had purified the earth.

Aalders also notes that Gen.8:22 can not be given as good grounds for the beginning of the alternation of the seasons. He says, "it simply means that the normal alternation in nature, without interruption, shall continue."

In my opinion there is no ground to state that length of days and nights was affected. I dare to say it was not. In doing so I would like to refer to three theologians.

1) Prof. Dr. K. Schilder in *Wat is de Hemel?* says, "Every page of the Bible is an extension and a continuation of the first three well-known chapters from Genesis. For, if not, then the world and the world to come, as well as heaven would be different. They would be worlds which have nothing to do with our creation. We believe that He brings the first creation back to itself." (Reprint of 1954, page 50.)

2) Prof. Dr. H. Bavinck in "The Last Things" says, "The renewal of creation follows the final judgment. According to Scripture, the present world will neither continue forever, nor will it be destroyed and replaced by a totally new one. Instead it will be cleansed of sin and recreated, reborn, renewed and made whole." (Translated from the eschatological section of Bavinck's *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, page 155.)

"By the recreating power of Christ, the new heaven and the new earth will one day emerge from the fire-purged elements of this world.", (ibid, page 160)

3) Prof. Anthony Hoeksema in *The Bible and the Future* says, "The question is, will the present universe be totally annihilated so that the new universe will be completely different than the present cosmos or will the new universe be essentially the same cosmos as the present one, only renewed

and purified? We must reject the concept of renewal for the following four reasons: (For the sake of brevity let us look only at the fourth reason) “If God would have to annihilate the present cosmos, satan would have won a great victory. For then satan would have succeeded in so devastatingly corrupting the present cosmos and the present earth that God could do nothing with it but to blot it totally out of existence. But satan did not win such a victory. On the contrary satan has been decisively defeated. God will reveal the full dimensions of that defeat when He shall renew this very earth on which Satan deceived mankind, and finally banish from it all the results of Satan’s machinations.”

And now my point: About periods of light, of sun and moon and seasons - if indeed the flood should have been the cause of such changes as length of days, rain instead of mist out of the earth, and seasons. Would that not have been a victory for satan? He deceived Adam and Eve, and so mankind. But he was not able to destroy what God had made “very good” (Gen1:31.)

After the flood things continued like God had made them. The old earth had been polluted by wicked beings. For that reason it was purified by water, and for that reason it will be purified by fire (2 Peter 3:5-7).

In my opinion, Rev Van Raalte, in Christian Renewal mad a very valuable point. He said, “All those writings about all those things are a grinding of wheels. Dangerous for equipment. Also dangerous for believers. For satan definitely will do his utmost to work it out in his favour.”

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