

## **In Defence of a Synodical Committee**

On Tuesday, May 1, 2001 sixteen delegates will meet in Neerlandia, Alberta to constitute Synod 2001 of the Canadian Reformed Churches. In accordance with their mandates various committees, appointed by the previous synod, have sent their reports to Synod Neerlandia to the churches for perusal and discussion. In Clarion of January 19, 2001, Vol.50, No.2 Rev. C. Stam has chosen to use his editorial to criticize one of these committees for their report.

At Reformed Polemics we have been reluctant to discuss committee reports destined for debate and decision at upcoming Synods. In spite of encouragement to engage in pre-synod discussions about reports to Synod, sent to the churches, we have decided not to pre-empt synods. Some people are of the opinion that these reports concern the whole federation; and matters that have been in debate for many years should be aired among the membership for healthy and upbuilding discussion. In a recent Church News in the Fraser Valley of British Columbia a remark was made that anyone interested in some or all of the reports for Synod Neerlandia only had to ask. Rev. J. Van Vliet also contributes an article in the above mentioned Clarion about the overtures to be dealt with at Synod 2001. And Rev. R. Aasman prepares us "for more such articles in the upcoming months."

We believe that there is good reason to inform the membership of the churches about the matters being dealt with by the churches on the federative level, as was done in the article by Rev. Van Vliet. But we doubt the wisdom of delegates articulating their arguments in the press about matters they will eventually be dealing with at synod. Therefore we regret the editorial by Rev. Stam in which he not only deals with the manner of reporting of the Committee for Contact with the Churches in the Americas (CCCA), but also with the issue of church unity.

Considering that both Rev. Stam and the undersigned are delegated to Synod it is expressly our intention not to debate the agenda of Synod 2001 prior to synod even being constituted. At the same time we feel strongly that Rev. Stam's editorial incorrectly intends to colour and/or marginalize the report of the CCCA and therefore want to provide a defence of the committee.

In his article Hierarchy in the Canadian Reformed Churches Rev. Stam says, "But here a general committee interrupts and undermines this process by cutting off the subcommittee at the pass, suggesting that the subcommittee has no right to make the proposals it made." He deplores the fact that a sub-committee expresses itself to its full committee and attempts to bolster his argument with the fact that the CCCA, as part of its report, requests Synod Neerlandia to give further directions regarding the mandate. Only at the end of his editorial do we find the comment that Rev. Stam is sure that none of the brothers intend to lord it over one another.

Interwoven in this article is the opinion of the co-editor of Clarion, delegate to synod, about the matter of unity discussions with the RCUS and the OPC. Is it possible that the concern about the manner of reporting by the CCCA is mingled with the unhappiness regarding the content of their report?

Let us look a bit more closely at the structure of the CCCA. Is it possible to look at the situation from a different perspective? What would we see if we took a more benevolent approach? The CCCA points out in their report that they have had several general meetings to discuss their

mandate. They have also discussed the findings of the subcommittees together. They have clearly operated as a general committee with subcommittees to deal with the various aspects of their mandate due, in part, to geographic distances. They have dealt with their mandate as a general committee with subcommittees that would report to the general committee. It would have been very unusual if the subcommittees had bypassed the general committee and gone directly to Synod Neerlandia. That would not have been decent and in good order.

It was wise of Synod Fergus to appoint the CCCA in the way it was done. As there are a number of unity discussions going on at the same time in North America, it is good to strive for continuity, as well as an objective approach. In arranging the CCCA in the way it was done by Synod Fergus a better opportunity was provided to ensure continuity and an objective analysis of the discussions and issues involved.

There is likely no one in the Canadian / American Reformed federation who does not know that our discussions with the OPC have travelled a road none of us are happy about. Therefore it is understandable that an effort is made to stabilize the situation. To have a larger committee one step removed from the actual contact is likely to increase objectivity and give a broader analysis. Hopefully this will prevent the teeter totter effect of decisions made.

Perhaps the way the report is presented (in that the general committee disagrees with the recommendations and analysis of the sub-committee for contact with the OPC) points to a very real problem with church unity discussions. It is important that the committee members do not get so wound up in the relationships they establish with each other that the relationships between committees and their members gets confused with the church relationship. Of course, no one sets out with such an intention, and surely the committee members are aware of this danger. Yet, there is wisdom in providing for a situation where a larger committee of equally dedicated and ordained men review the work of those very close to the fire. A review by a larger general committee becomes increasingly valuable when we realize how divided the Canadian Reformed churches and synods have and continue to be about this matter.

In view of the long history of these discussions it seems that the re-organization of the CCCA has led to a more thoughtful approach. At the same time the CCCA is to be commended for its forthrightness by publishing the report of the sub-committee with which it disagrees. It was prudent of the committee for two reasons. Firstly, this is the first time the committee is operating as an umbrella committee with sub-committees. Secondly, the issues involved have strong proponents on both sides, and it is appropriate to allow both sides to be on the table of synod. On the other hand, the CCCA would have been perfectly correct if it had sent its own report on contact with the OPC with mere reference to the report of the sub-committee. But rather than leaning in the direction of hierarchy the CCCA opted for publication, in full, of the sub-committee's report and merely added its own report at the end.

It is our opinion that the CCCA dealt properly with its mandate and is to be commended for the brotherly manner in which the report has been presented.

PdB

## **I am surely going to destroy... the power of God**

*By Wayne Pleiter*

It was February 2000, and the wet season opened with a vengeance. Over four long weeks, the torrential rains came down upon the parched plains in Mozambique. The dried out creek beds converted into bursting rivers that overran their banks, transforming the typical dry and arid land into a raging sea that engulfed several countries in the southern regions of Africa. Relief efforts, hampered by washed-out roads and bridges, were stretched to the limit as they simply could not cope with the large scale of flooding. As a result, more than half a million African people lost their homes during this massive flood and as many as four hundred people perished.

As terrible as the African floods were, they were only a shadow of the great destructive force that occurred in the days of Noah. 'I am surely going to destroy' said the Lord to the righteous Noah and this is precisely what transpired (Gen.6:13). Indeed the great flood reflected God's immense power in His judgment over the sinful generation. In comparison, as terrible as the natural disasters of modern times are, they are more of a reflection of God's mercy and patience than of His judgment. But, during the days of Noah, God's patience for that wicked generation had simply come to an end (Gen.6:3).

### ***The Reason of the Flood***

The consequences of the original fall into sin did not stop with Adam and Eve. In fact the events described in the following chapters (4-6) of Genesis demonstrate an intensifying of man's sinfulness and disobedience. Not only was the wickedness of man's actions alarming, but his attitude toward God is absolutely appalling.

First, we learn about Cain, who abused his physical strength to cold-bloodedly murder his brother Abel. Cain goes further than his parents who shifted the blame, he openly denied all responsibility when questioned by God; "Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen.4:11).

Next, there was Lamech who revealed his complete lack of reverence for the Almighty God. Lamech openly bragged of his presumed power claiming that while God may have promised to avenge Cain seven times, he would retaliate seventy times seven times (Gen.4:23,24). While Cain's attitude toward God was bold and brazen, Lamech was blatantly boastful as he asserted himself greater and more powerful than God!

So it was that along with the rapid advancement of humanity in terms of population growth and cultural development came the increased disrespect and denial of the Sovereignty of God. The greater the progression of society, the greater the procession of man's sin. The Lord became very impatient with man's unbridled depravity (Gen.6:3), for He "...saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time" (Gen.6:5). As a result, God tells Noah of the pending judgment, vowing 'I am surely going to destroy...' the earth and all its inhabitants (Gen.6:13). This was no idle judgment.

With the gracious exception of the righteous Noah and his family (Heb.11:7), God caused the earth to be engulfed by the most powerful flood ever experienced in the history of civilization. Through the immersion of the flood waters, the earth was completely cleansed of its corruption. Essentially

the flood was the reversal of creation, going back, as it were, to the original condition prior to creation. (Gen.1:2, 6-7)

As we review the brief history of the world up to the great flood, we may begin to grasp the focus of God's eternal power – first creation, then the fall, and later in regeneration. But before we do so, we first need to consider God's Almighty Power within the context of His Sovereignty.

### ***The Power of God and His Sovereignty***

When we think about the individual attributes of God, we must consider them within the context of the totality of God's character. For our God "...is eternal, incomprehensible, invisible, immutable, infinite, almighty, perfectly wise, just, good, and the overflowing fountain of all good" (B.C. Art.1). We cannot have casual thoughts of God as all-powerful if at the same time we are not willing to acknowledge Him as all-knowing and all-wise. For God would not be God if He was ascribed power without wisdom, or power without sovereignty. Indeed, for God to be Sovereign, He must be eternally omnipotent – the theological term for almighty or all-powerful!

The human concept of power is usually aligned with the concepts of authority and control. However, with God, the authority and dominion reside in His Sovereignty, while His almighty power relates to the capacity to perform whatever He decrees. As the Puritan preacher, Stephen Charnock writes; "...the power of God is the ability and strength whereby He can bring to pass whatsoever He pleases, whatsoever His infinite wisdom may direct, and whatsoever the infinite purity of His will may resolve" (Existence and Attributes of God, V.2. Page 12) Therefore, to aid in our human understanding - by artificially separating the attributes - we may say that God's power is governed by his infinite knowledge and guided by His eternal wisdom. 'His wisdom is profound, his power is vast' (Job 9:4). 'To God belong wisdom and power; counsel and understanding are his' (Job 12:13, see also 36:5).

### ***The Power in Creation***

The Word of God opens in the most unassuming and understated manner; 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth'(Gen.1:1). It is amazing how accustomed we have become to hearing these ordinary words, and all too quickly lose the sense of how miraculous and powerful the works of the Lord really are.

Man labours strenuously, using all his physical and mental abilities and the assistance of various tools, in order to complete his tasks. For God however, the act of creation did not consume all of His strength, nor deplete the valuable resources of His power. Rather, God created and completed His decree with a simple word: 'For he spoke and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood forth' (Ps.33:9). Just like that! 'He commanded and they were created. And he established them for ever and ever; he fixed their bounds which cannot be passed' (Ps.148:5).

So effortless was creation for the Almighty that the psalmist tells us that it took little more than the lifting of God's finger to establish the heavens (Ps.8:3). Elsewhere, creation is spoken of as God's calling, as He '...calls into existence the things that do not exist' (Rom.4:17 RSV). Indeed, 'Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that power belongs to God' (Ps.62:11 RSV). It is clear that for God, the act of creation was an easy task – one that did not sap God of any of His strength or power.

As difficult as it is for mere mortals to comprehend the power of God, the wonders of His creation can be freely discerned, and render man accountable before God. 'For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse' (Rom.1:20).

### ***The Power in the Fall***

We can be thankful 'that power belongs to God', and that His power is maintained in the preservation of the fallen creation. While the earth groans as a consequence of sin (Rom.8:19-23), we may confess that God will 'by His almighty and ever present power still uphold the heaven and earth and all the creatures in His hand' (HC LD 10). God does not abandon us to chance; rather, He graciously preserves the world, so that it will provide and sustain its inhabitants. In this way, God is known as the Preserver of man and beast alike. (Ps.36:6). Even natural disasters, like floods, are controlled and restrained by God. 'This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt' (Job 38:11).

The fall not only demonstrates God's power in the preservation of creation, but also His dominance over Satan and the corruption of mankind. While the 'devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour' (1 Pet.5:8), he is still restrained by the power of God, and is subject to God's wisdom. In testing Job's faith, God illustrates the limitation He places on Satan's power when He commands Satan not to lay a finger on Job's life (Job 1:12).

In the same way, the evil of mankind is bridled. While man's total corruption is evident in his continual apostasy and rejection of God, it is still none-the-less subject to God's power and judgment. Just as it was with the flood in the days of Noah, so today God will open the floodgates to engulf the wickedness of man. Without Christ, we will all surely perish in the terrible power of God's judgment over sin. For us to have Christ as our Head, we can be assured that by His power He will defend and preserve us against all enemies of God (HC LD 19 Q&A 51).

### ***The Power in Regeneration***

If the creation of the heavens is accomplished by the power of God's fingers (Ps.8:3), then His power of regeneration is said to be achieved by His arm (Is. 53:1). Comparing these scriptural passages gives the sense that God's power in man's redemption through Christ was in fact greater than manifest in creation. But that's not the point being made. What we need to understand is that our regeneration is an incredible display of the Almighty's power through the Holy Spirit. As the Canons of Dort explain; 'regeneration is not inferior in power to creation or the raising of the dead...it is, however, clearly a supernatural, most powerful, and at the same time most delightful, marvellous, mysterious, and inexpressible work' (Chpt.3/4 Art.12).

In creation, God took nothing and changed it into something spectacular – the heavens and the earth. In regeneration or conversion, God took man who was accustomed to doing evil and transformed him into doing what is good and perfect; changing what was earthly into something heavenly. (See Jer.13:23, and Canons of Dort Chpt.3/4 Art.11). This gracious transformation was foretold by the prophet Ezra, when the Lord declared; 'I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws' (Ezra

36:26). So by the power of God's Word and Spirit, we too may by faith partake in the powerful promise of regeneration. (Rom.1:16).

At baptism, we share in the great flood that happened in the days of Noah. The flood represents a beautiful illustration of the promise of baptism (c.f. 1 Peter 3:18-22). As God washed away the wickedness of the world in the days of Noah, so we receive the comfort of the covenantal promise that God will surely wash away the impurity of our souls - that is, all our sins (cf. LD 26, Q&A 69, BC Art.34).

God completed this through His Son at the cross. For it was in the power of Christ - who 'drowned' in the flood of our sins - that God's righteous justice would be completely satisfied (1 Cor.15:21-22, 45-49). Just as the flood in the days of Noah, washed away the sins of the world and welcomed a 'new' creation, our baptism represents the passing of the old and the coming to life of the new creation in Christ (2 Cor.5:17, Gal.6:15). 'In baptism the sign is water' wrote John Calvin, 'but the thing is the washing of the soul by the blood of Christ' (Calvin's Commentary on 1 Peter 3:21).

### ***The Comfort in the Power of God***

When we understand that all power belongs to God, we must also realize that we only see the tip of the iceberg that is God's omnipotence. We see '...but the outer fringe of his works; how faint the whisper we hear of him! Who then can understand the thunder of his power? (Job 26:14). If we only experience the whisper of God's power, what a great reason to trust in His might!

All too often the limitations of our human power are apparent, and we find ourselves flooded by the fears of this life. We lose the sense of control in our lives, our relationships and at our work. Spiritually we become depressed, fearful of the weaknesses of our flesh and oppressed by the wickedness around us. 'But seeing that He is clothed with omnipotence, no prayer is too hard for Him to answer, no need to great for Him to supply, no passion too strong for Him to subdue; no temptation too powerful for Him to deliver from, no misery too deep for Him to relieve' (A. Pink, Attributes of God Page 51).

Knowing that God is with us, and in us, may we show extreme confidence in His almighty power, trusting that He is capable of doing far greater things than we could ever imagine for the honour of His holy name (Eph.3:20,21). Indeed, what an amazing comfort the power of God brings to His covenant children! 'The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?' (Ps.27:1)

In the first issue of Reformed Polemics we editorialized about the Bride preparing for the marriage feast. We considered the historic struggle of the Church against the world and the false church and the certain victory. At the same time Dr. P. van Gorp had, unknown to us, written on a similar subject in Reformanda. We are happy to pass it on in translated version.

### **On the Road to the New Earth**

Where is the Lord's promise of the future? That's what they asked the apostle Paul and that's what is still being asked today. For more than ever it appears that the kingdom of God is in receding. Today secularism continues to spread its arms as it also has done in the earlier christian world. Noah worked for 120 years to build the ark, all the while calling people to repentance. But in all that time nothing has happened, the people said. And they laughed at him. And just like the Lord

Jesus Christ has predicted, that is what is happening again in our day. What may and should we expect for the coming year?

### ***All is Vanity***

We take our starting point in 2 Peter 3. Nothing changes, they said then. We don't see anything of the promise of the Lord Jesus Christ that He will return to the earth and make all things new. In short, everything continues as it always did. All remains vanity and a striving after wind. That was the witness of the Preacher in the Old Testament, but how come that this is still so now that the Lord has been exalted and allowed to place Himself at the right hand of God? But the Lord allows Peter to reply that everything continues as it is because God is making all things new. It is He Who controls all things. During Old Testament times it was He Who allowed the nations to continue to walk in their own ways. He was not absent when history continued repeating itself, as the Preacher has written so much about. So to speak, the Lord has forced all of history between the fall in Paradise and the coming of His Son on earth. Also at that time things continued as they always had paving the way for the work of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Today things are still the same. The Lord continues to allow the kingdom of Satan to exist. The Lord controls the earth and all who live on it so that the day will come in which He will make all things new. So we don't say: All things continue as they were and nothing changes, but we say: All things continue as they were for God is busy making all things new. The image, the scheme, of this world is busy passing away (1Cor.7:31).

### ***Saved for Fire***

We live and work, we have joy and sadness, we are allowed to be happy and involved - and all that on a volcano. After all, under our feet there is a fire that burns with unimaginable heat. And above us there is a fire, the so-called sun storms are bursting with the unimaginable sun energy. With that we have only spoken about the known sun. But there are stars that have even more energy. There are also many more galaxies. In short, there is an amazing amount of fire above us! Even if only one star were to fall on the earth it would mean the end of all life.

It is the Lord Who makes the separation between the fire above and the fire below. Just like He made separation between the waters above and the waters below until he allowed these waters to meet in the flood. That was a work of the Lord by His Word. It is by that same Word that the Lord saves heaven and earth today for the fire that will one day come (2 Peter 3:5,7). That is our comfort: the Lord is at work everyday with His power. He constrains the fire above and the fire beneath. And when there are earthquakes and volcanic eruptions they do not happen without His knowledge. They are warning signs of the future coming of the day of Christ. It is our Lord Jesus Christ by Whom the Father is ruling all things. He protects us as His own possession. It is He Who constrains the fires. We are safe with Him.

### ***Saved in Fire***

When the fire finally comes the elements shall be burnt and melt. We can not imagine how the Lord will save the world and renew it during such a fire. Just like we can not imagine how a human body, of which nothing has been left over during the centuries, shall still one day rise - that same body shall be made new. The Lord promises this to us: this creation will continue to be protected and will be purified by fire. And that means: blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, their works follow them. Their works, it says, without any conditions. The Lord saves the works we have been busy with our whole lives. Peter is allowed to put it this way, "the earth and the works on it shall be found". That means nothing less than that in the incomprehensible fire the Lord will save the works of His children. They are carried in, into the shed.

It is beyond our understanding, but it is true! What a tremendous comfort! These things are only possible because it is Lord Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, Who purifies our works and thereby uses them. They are actually His works that He has worked through us. That is why they may remain. That's why they are building blocks for the New Jerusalem.

### ***Yet the Kingdom of God Will Come***

What causes people to think that the kingdom of God is receding? True, secularization is busy destroying and wiping out any last vestiges of the Christian character of our society. But does that mean that the kingdom of God is disappearing? What is the kingdom of God? What does it consist of? How will it be revealed? Often people with upright minds think that the kingdom of God only exists when we have a Christian government and laws that are based on God's law as well as a society that can carry the name Christian. That's what the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ thought too. They could not accept that their Master would obtain the Lordship over the kingdom via suffering and humiliation. That is also, then, the reason why Peter denied Him and why, on that last evening, all the other disciples were offended by Him. Note well, Peter did not deny Him out of fear and the others did not flee out of fear for their lives. No, the Lord said, you will be offended by Me, you will be put off by Me. They were certainly willing to go through fire for their Master, they were even willing to suffer death for Him. Peter surely meant it when he said that, and he also spoke for the others. But when they saw that he allowed Himself to be captured (and they knew that with one word He could cause His captors to flee - hadn't He shown that when with one word He had caused the soldiers to fall to the ground in Gethsemani?!) - then they left Him alone. That's not the kind of kingdom they wanted. And when Peter saw that his Master, Who he knew and had confessed to be the Son of God, allowed Himself to be ridiculed and spit upon, he said I don't know him, that is, that's not the kind of king I want, I don't belong with him.

That was and remains the basic error in the thinking and expectations of so many of God's children. They expect a visible king. People want to be able to see that the kingdom of God really is busy coming. Something of this can be seen in the alliances that are made, for example in politics, where people help each other to form power groups to accomplish something for the kingdom of God.

But the Lord is busy in a completely different manner. When the Lord sends His disciples out He warns them to also consider the possibility that some cities will not receive them.

When that happens they are to shake the dust off their feet. But at the same time they are to explain that the kingdom of God has been near (Luke 10:11). De-Christianization does not go on outside of

the kingship of our Lord Jesus Christ. Stronger yet, His program runs like that - let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile (Rev.22:11). The Lord also says that he will send a strong delusion to those who do not turn their heart to Him, causing them to believe the lie. For these reasons, in the present age of deformation and rebellion against upright doctrine we may see that the Lord Jesus Christ is King and that His kingdom is actively coming

### ***Speed on the Day***

“In holy expectation, hasten to the coming of the day of God. Therefore, beloved, do your utmost to be undefiled and irreproachable as you see the day coming.” What shall we expect from the coming year?. How shall we go about our business? How shall we be able to keep it up? And what is the meaning of our work? We should anticipate that the contrasts will become increasingly focussed. The strength of temptation will become greater and it will become more difficult to discern errors and to hold on to true doctrine. At some point it will even become so difficult that if the Lord would not shorten the days no one could be saved, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened (Matt.24:22).

We must be His witnesses. When the church of the New Testament (the last days) is depicted in this manner, it is added that the two witnesses are clothed with sacks. They are prophets, heralds of the coming judgement. By their witness they have so “pained” (provoked) the people that the people give each other gifts when the two witnesses have been nullified and can no longer provoke the people (Rev.11). So we must continue to just live normal lives in word and deed, keeping ourselves safe from blemish of idolatry and take nothing away from the fact that we are set apart by the Lord and “are completely different”. We must always believe that the kingdom of God continues to come also during times of apostasy.

How shall we persevere? The two witnesses in Rev.11 are compared with olive trees and lamp stands. They are able to let their light shine before men. That’s the reason they received the Holy Spirit. We can only maintain our service in the world for the Lord by means of the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit comes to us in the first place through His holy and godly Word. How important it then is that the church remains faithful in its preaching. Even if there are many things in church that sadden us and by which the love for the church is tainted, as long as we can be fed by the preaching one could continue there. Therefore it is our fervent prayer that, also in the present year, the preaching will be the true proclamation of salvation, full of power and of the Holy Spirit.

In conclusion: what is the meaning of our labours? That we speed on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. In 2 Peter 3 it says that we are speeding toward the day of the Lord Jesus Christ. It can also be translated that we speed on that day. For that day comes when the program of the Lord Jesus Christ is completed. That program speaks about the completing of the antithesis. And that is what the Lord wants to use us for in our prayers and our witness.

So we shall not only pray for His coming, Who will make all things new and destroy the kingdom of sin, but we shall also prepare his return by our witness and our prayer. A new year awaits us: there is so much to do and so much to expect. But most importantly we may know that we have a sure foundation for our lives. For He Who is coming carries everything in the world as well as in my life, also for the coming year, through the Word of His power. Maranatha, the Lord comes.

