

## REFORMED CHURCHES IN AUSTRALASIA

RAYMOND O. ZORN

### *Introduction*

As we begin with the theme of this series of essays,<sup>1</sup> "The History of Reformed Churches in Australasia," it is best in this first segment to go back to the beginning and start with the general subject, "The Coming of the Gospel to the Lands 'Down Under.'" The first thing, then, to consider is how Christianity came to Australia and New Zealand.

When we think about Australia and New Zealand, we should recognize that they are in fact two separate countries. It is a mistake to think of New Zealand as offshore islands of Australia in the same way as Tasmania is, to the south of Australia. People may mistakenly think that on a clear day, one should be able to see New Zealand from the Sydney harbor bridge. But some fourteen hundred miles separate New Zealand from Australia, though it is not that remote by plane—within three hours flight time.

Let us now have a look at the religious history of both countries. For, while there are similarities, there are also important differences (as to original inhabitants, first European settlers, and subsequent social and religious developments).

When the white man first came to both countries in the eighteenth century, he found two different peoples in each country. The black aboriginal natives of Australia were entirely different than the brown skinned Polynesian Maoris of New Zealand. The latter came to New Zealand around the twelfth century from the Pacific Islands to the north. Being cannibals they not only ate one another, but they may well have eliminated any earlier inhabitants in New Zealand in the same way. In fact, at the time the white man came, the largest animal in New Zealand was the dog, being the animal the Maoris brought with them.

The Aborigines of Australia were not cannibals and were in Australia much longer than the Maoris in New Zealand. Archaeologists

---

<sup>1</sup>This is the text of lectures delivered at Mid-America Reformed Seminary as the Fall Lectures of 1990.

will say that they've been there for forty thousand years. This dating is obviously affected by evolutionistic presuppositions and must be evaluated in that light. At any rate, Aborigines have been in Australia from very early times. Like the Maoris and other primitive peoples, they were nomadic, with a stone age culture that had virtually remained unchanged over the centuries until the coming of the white man.

Who, then, were the first white settlers to the two countries, what did they find, and what kind of cultural and religious society did they establish?

### *The First White Settlers*

It is a question whether Australia was first discovered by the Dutch or the Portuguese. The recent discovery of some wrecked sailing ships off the Victorian southern coast seems to point in the direction of the Portuguese being the first explorers of Australia early in the seventeenth century before the Dutch explorer, Abel Tasman.

Vaguely referred to as *Terra Australis* (land of the south), it was more probably regarded by them as *Terra Nullius* (land of nothing, or empty land). At any rate, while it was the Dutch who originally named the land New Holland, and Tasmania at first was Van Dieman's Land, the Dutch didn't show much interest in it. After all, the western part was chiefly sand, desert heat, and flies! Perhaps they saw a few Aborigines, but that observation did little to kindle interest in trade or natural resources which might be exploited for the homeland of the Netherlands.

Captain James Cook later discovered the more fertile eastern shores in 1770. In doing so, he sailed past Sydney's beautiful harbor without apparently seeing it, and later on the same voyage ran aground on the Barrier Reef to the north!

Australia entered modern history after Great Britain lost the Revolutionary War (begun in 1776). Georgia was no longer open to the British as a penal colony, but a new one seemed readily available in distant Australia. What could be a better idea than getting rid of a prison population (and on the other side of the world too—that should be far enough away!). And why not at the same time put some settlers on this distant continent which Captain Cook had claimed for the British Crown?

So, in 1788 the first settlement took place. There were five hundred sixty-eight males, one hundred ninety one females, and thirteen children

who survived the eight month voyage. Were their troubles over, as they might have thought? Actually, they were just beginning!

Survival in the new land soon became a major priority. The land was hard and forested with hardwood eucalyptus (gum) trees that shed their bark rather than their leaves; it had laughing Kookaburra birds in their branches and poisonous snakes on the ground as a danger to the unwary. The diet of the Aborigines (who kept pretty much to themselves) was not appealing for white tastes (fish perhaps, but grubs, kangaroos and anything that moves). The arrival of a ship from the motherland, England, was a major event!

But more convicts continued to be sent (some one hundred sixty thousand during the first eighty years); and the white man battled to domesticate a land almost the size of the United States. Australia has twelve thousand miles of coastline, is two thousand miles from north to south, and twenty-four hundred miles from east to west.

Fifty years after the first settlement, there were perhaps some seventy thousand white settlers in far-flung towns between Sydney and Hobart. The Aborigines at this time perhaps numbered between two hundred and three hundred thousand, but were rapidly being reduced as the white man took their land over. In Tasmania they actually were completely eliminated. The white man's diseases also played a lethal part in the decimation of the native population.

While some Aborigines wandered as nomads, the large majority of them had clan structures within larger groupings of some six hundred tribes. Their religion was animistic, with so-called "Dreamtime" legends about how things came to be, sacred sites and taboos in a land of which the Aborigine considered himself inseparably a part. It is a question in how far Aborigines actually engaged in formal acts of worship. There may have been such (with priestcraft, etc.) but there doesn't seem to be much evidence for it. For the most part, at any rate, Aborigines did not readily mingle with the white man whose ways were largely incomprehensible and whose predatory take-over of the land made him a constant danger and threat.

A compelling description of the Australia the first white settlers found is given by Iain Murray. He states,

Australia is a different land in much more than its southern hemisphere seasons, its short June-August winters and its hot summers. Harsh in its droughts, bush-fires and deserts ("like the entrance into hell" the explorer Charles Stuart said of one of them in 1845), the sun-drenched landscape has often a

compelling beauty, with shimmering colors, unique gum trees, fragrant "wattles" and bird life greater in variety than exists in Europe.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps it is well at this point to leave Australia temporarily and take a fourteen hundred mile journey to the southeast over the Tasman Sea to where the two major islands of New Zealand are located, in order to have a look at its early beginnings.

### *New Zealand*

New Zealand was first sighted by the Dutch sailor-explorer, Abel Tasman, who gave the islands their present name, and from whom Tasmania and the Tasman Sea derive their names. In the year 1642, more than one hundred twenty-five years before Captain Cook's time, he made initial contact with the native Maori people. But he found them much too fierce for his liking and sailed away, never to return. As a result, New Zealand remained a Maori preserve for another one hundred fifty years, until Captain Cook's time, for whom Cook Strait (between the two islands) is named.

Were the Maoris a fierce, barbaric, cannibalistic race? Today, this question is played down and even denied. In a day when religion is relativized, with all religions being regarded as pretty much the same and the savagery of heathen culture being purposely overlooked lest one be charged with racism, it is easy to depict the primitive Maori as a noble savage, more sinned against than sinning. One consequence of this is the current agitation to restore his lands, give his language equal time on television, rehabilitate his native religion, and promote his separate identity and culture.

The history of the early Maoris, however, is well documented in the religious experience of the first missionaries to New Zealand.<sup>3</sup>

Already in 1820 the *Quarterly Review* (a British magazine) reported that "New Zealanders were never the fierce and savage race they have been represented to be, and to say that cannibalism was practiced by this people was an absurdity."<sup>4</sup>

Williams' book is not anti-Maori; on the contrary, it is a very favorable report of missionary work among the Maoris in the nineteenth

---

<sup>2</sup>*Australian Christian Life from 1788* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1988), xviii.

<sup>3</sup>W. Williams, *Christianity Among the New Zealanders*, first published in 1867 and republished by Banner of Truth Trust in 1989.

<sup>4</sup>Williams, *Christianity Among the New Zealanders*, 31.

century and the success, on the whole, of the Church of England Missionary Society (C.M.S) in evangelizing them during that time. But the book tells it like it is—or was—and it is quite a hair-raising story!

By their own testimony, the Maoris believe that they all came from one family, arriving in New Zealand by boat from the north, with little more than their wives, children, and dogs. As they gradually spread through the land, rivalries and hostilities between the tribes also became an increasing reality. Inter-tribal warfare became the practice. Victory in battle would give the victor valuable canoes and mats without having to make them, and captives made slaves who could be made to work and even eaten on occasion when the need arose!

When did cannibalism arise, and why was it practiced? Some sociologists have tried to justify it as a social necessity. A country with no animals larger than the dog would furnish the natives with little protein—with the exception of fish. Therefore, according to these primitive people's reasoning, why not, after you've killed your enemy, eat him? His strength becomes yours, and it is a good way to insult his survivors who are disgraced by this action. Rev. Samuel Marsden, one of the first to do missionary work among the Maoris, has this to say about the practice:

I have met with no family, but some branches of it had been killed in battle and afterwards eaten. If any chief falls into the hands of a tribe which he has oppressed and injured, by the chance of war, they are sure to roast and eat him; and after devouring his flesh, they will preserve his bones in the family as a memento of his fate, and convert them into fish-hooks, whistles and ornaments.<sup>5</sup>

The book contains many more lurid examples of this sort of thing which were actually witnessed by missionaries who had no axe to grind and no reason for fabricating what would otherwise have been lies jeopardizing their work! One of the missionaries, a Mr. Kemp, reported that a friendly Maori, Hongi by name, offered him some freshly roasted human flesh and invited him to eat some, telling him that "it was better than pork."<sup>6</sup> So the Maoris roamed the land of New Zealand and were masters of it—until the beginning of the nineteenth century.

---

<sup>5</sup>Williams, *Christianity Among the New Zealanders*, 27.

<sup>6</sup>Williams, *Christianity Among the New Zealanders*, 33.

What kind of religion did the Maoris have before the coming of Christian missionaries? Their religion was a mixture of superstitious animism like their Australian Aboriginal counterparts, though perhaps developed a bit more than the latter. Evil powers were ready to punish the unwary and needed to be placated. Sickness was due to witchcraft practiced by some hostile priest of another tribe (which might furnish an excuse for war) or unfortunate slave who was soon dispatched and eaten as a result. Correct living consisted in the proper observance of the taboos, and not injuring family and friend.

The Maoris' contact with the outside world was virtually nil except for the occasional South Sea whaler which might put to shore in search of provisions and water.<sup>7</sup> Surprisingly, the Maoris did not consider outsiders fair game for a meal. One needed an excuse for eating people—readily provided by provocation, of course! But if the foreigners offered things they desired in exchange for what they had, they were happy to barter and obtain things in this way. They soon noticed and were attracted to the effects of the white man's civilization.<sup>8</sup>

It is time now to consider the factors which brought about the dramatic changes in the lives and into the society of the original New Zealanders.

#### *What the First White Settlers Found*

New Zealand was opened up because of the settlement of Australia. Rev. Samuel Marsden was not the first Christian preacher in Australia. That honor belongs to Richard Johnson who accompanied the First Fleet and who conducted ministerial labors for the whole colony for the first twelve years of its existence until his return to England in 1800.

Marsden was the second minister of the colony and its first official chaplain, arriving with his wife and infant daughter in March 1794 as a relatively young man of twenty-eight and laboring in the new world until his death in 1838 after forty-four years of pioneer work for the Lord in the new world.

Marsden came into contact with the New Zealanders in an almost casual way. Some Maoris became curious enough to come to Port Jackson (Sydney) with a returning trading ship, where the infant colony of Australia was engaged in whale fishing and seal skin harvesting that

---

<sup>7</sup>Williams, *Christianity Among the New Zealanders*, 5.

<sup>8</sup>Williams, *Christianity Among the New Zealanders*, 18.

brought these ships to New Zealand and into contact with the Maoris from time to time.

Marsden became interested in the Maoris and began to entertain the hope of missionary endeavor among them. He entertained some in his home (as many as thirty at a time) and possessed an extraordinary influence over them. His view of them was that, "They are a noble race, vastly superior in understanding to anything you can imagine in a savage nation."<sup>9</sup> This statement may also be a negative reflection of his evaluation of the Australian Aborigine.

In 1808 he returned to England and laid the foundation of the Church of England Mission to New Zealand. Six years later he himself went to New Zealand at his own expense and with three missionary families he took with him! With the help of a Maori chief whom he had befriended, he preached the gospel on Christmas day (in 1814) for the first time to the natives. Marsden was incredibly brave in all this, for this meant working (even sleeping) among natives who did not understand English and who had shortly before massacred and eaten a captain and his crew whom some Maoris fancied he had wronged. In fact, this event delayed Marsden's initial going to New Zealand for a few years prior to 1814.

Marsden has been much maligned by some Australian historians who make too much of what was necessarily circumstantial. It is true that the state appointed him as a magistrate which, since this made him a judge, did not make him popular with the convicts. It is also true that he became a prosperous farmer, but this work was begun by necessity. Later, just because he was prosperous, he could subsidize missionary work in New Zealand.

Moreover, at the end of his life it could be said of him that, for forty-five years, Australia's second preacher "had taught justification by faith, the necessity of regeneration and holiness as indispensable."<sup>10</sup> He was truly God's man for that time both in Australia and New Zealand. I personally have nothing but the utmost admiration for him, both as a brave man and a heroic Christian saint.

#### *Missionary work*

From that time, missionaries began to work successfully in New Zealand. Their preaching, sacrifice of personal safety, but continued

---

<sup>9</sup>Williams, *Christianity Among the New Zealanders*, 3.

<sup>10</sup>Murray, *Australian Christian Life*, 40.

persistence, is a story of untold heroism. To the Maoris at first the gospel was an idle tale and their hearts continued to be stony ground. But the missionaries persisted and after ten years the first convert was baptized. While Christian growth was slow, by the time New Zealand formally became a British colony in 1840 (with the Treaty of Waitangi), the Maori church was in its infancy with twenty-nine communicant members. In another ten years, by 1849, the number of communicants had increased to approximately twenty-eight hundred.

As settlers from England began to arrive in increasing numbers, stresses and strains between Maori and *pakeha* (the Maori name for the white man) developed in matters such as land, civil law and education. In the early 1860s, the Maori wars were fought chiefly over land rights, but already by this time the Maoris were largely under Christian influence and were no longer cannibalistic savages. After these unsuccessful wars (from the Maori point of view!), the Maoris slowly integrated with the growing white populace as they increasingly embraced the gospel. Their evangelization is a success story of the nineteenth century for the gospel!

### *Benefits of the Gospel*

What did the gospel of Christ bring to the Maoris? At least six or more benefits may be seen that the gospel brought to them.

*Socially*, they adopted and promoted civilized ways. Negatively, they soon gave up their cannibalism and learned to live at peace with each other. The later war against the white man was due to their dispossession from the land. They became industrious farmers and began to export wheat and potatoes to England. They were next involved in industry, building flour mills, using threshing machines, and raising horses and cattle.

*Spiritually*, they increasingly manifested the reality of their new-found faith. They erected places of worship and began increasingly to support their own ministers. In the 1860s there were twelve native clergymen supported by their own congregations. By 1865 a Maori synod was meeting annually. Maori integration has been so complete that, while they still have their own land rights and identity, it is said that only the Maori queen today is a full blooded Maori. People who live next door in New Zealand are just as likely to be Maoris.

At the present time paganism is making a comeback in New Zealand. But then, the same is also true for the so-called Christian West.

## *Australia*

### *Social and religious development*

Australia's penal colony beginnings impeded neither its social nor its religious development all that much. As we have seen, convicts were evangelized from the very beginning. They may have had hard hearts but Christianity was always present and influential.

New settlements began in other parts of Australia (Victoria, South Australia, Queensland, Tasmania, Western Australia) which were not of penal origin. These people from the Church of England, from among Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Baptists, and Roman Catholics who brought their faith with them, and churches were planted in this new world.

Moreover, Australia was as much affected by the nineteenth century evangelical revival as was England and America. We will have more to say about this in a later segment.

The development of society made steady progress in the original colony of New South Wales and elsewhere. A brief chronology of development may be seen in the following. The first harvest was reaped in 1789, one year after the colony's establishment. In 1790, the first convict-settler took possession of the land allotted him. The first church was built in 1794. In 1803, the first newspaper was printed. In 1810, the first census was taken, and the Free-school, tollgates, police, and Sydney market were established. The Orphan Institute was founded in 1819, and the first Wesleyan Chapel was opened. The first Archdeacon was ordained in 1826. In 1830, the first college (Sydney University) was founded. In 1835, the first Protestant (C. of E.) Bishop of Australia was appointed. Sydney was incorporated in 1842, with a population of forty thousand (today one hundred fifty years later, it has a population of over four million, or one-fourth of the total population of Australia). By 1850, the colony was an exporter of grain, gold and other minerals; it produced cotton, sugar, tobacco, hemp, timber, and wine, all in demand in Europe. In sum, it could be said that it was already a flourishing colony, "enjoying the blessings of God's good providence," with the various denominations, led by the Church of England keeping stride with the growing and prospering populace.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup>Murray, *Australian Christian Life*, 207.

*The Aborigines*

But what about the Australian Aborigines? Was their evangelization and integration similar to what was occurring in New Zealand with the Maoris?

The evangelization of the Australian Aborigines was anything but a success at first. But it was not for lack of trying! The first minister to Australia, Richard Johnson, took Aboriginal children into his home and even gave his daughter an Aboriginal name. For the first three decades of the nineteenth century, both individuals and agencies worked to bring spiritual and material help to Aborigines. Lancelot Threlkeld was one of the first missionaries to learn a tribal language.

Most of these missionary efforts ended in failure by the 1840s. A bit later, the Moravian Mission, established in 1851, prospered and obtained encouraging results.<sup>12</sup> Slow progress with the Aborigines has been achieved since.

There are three popular wrong reasons that are given for the failure of early missionary work among the Aborigines: the scattered nature of six hundred tribes of perhaps three hundred thousand over the vast continent of Australia (this is less than correct, for the Aborigine had his land, his sacred sites, and his living locale);<sup>13</sup> the Aborigines were an inferior race (it is surprising how current this view was in the nineteenth century, but it's actually a baseless insult);<sup>14</sup> and the poor modeling of Christianity by the populace at large (while there may be some truth in this, the Aborigines would nevertheless have seen the difference in the missionaries).

The two main reasons were, first, the ruthless take-over of the Aborigines' land which occurred almost immediately. In New Zealand this did not happen for the first twenty-five years of mission work among the Maoris and when it did, it also led to war between the white man and the natives; while in Australia, the average white settler considered the best Aborigine a dead Aborigine, as was also apparently true in the nineteenth century with regard to the American Indian. Second, the justice administered between black and white was unequal.

---

<sup>12</sup>Murray, *Australian Christian Life*, 160.

<sup>13</sup>Cf. Dorothy Tunbridge, "Aboriginal Spirituality and an Australian Theology," *Australian and New Zealand Religious History: 1788-1988*, R.S.M. Withycombe, ed. (A.C.T., Australia: The 1988 Joint Conference Committee, 1988), 67.

<sup>14</sup>Tunbridge, "Aboriginal Spirituality," 64.

The white man could kill a black man and get away with it, but not vice versa!<sup>15</sup>

Another mistake was to remove Aborigines from their lands and put them into settlements where many of them still are today. This made the Aborigine dependent and encouraged shiftlessness. By the 1850s many Christians could see the mistake in doing this, but it was already too late.<sup>16</sup>

And yet, the evangelization of the Aborigines has slowly but steadily occurred over the years. In the 1971 census, seventy-two per cent of the total Aboriginal population (one hundred sixty thousand) claimed Christian affiliation. For white Australians, it was eighty-six per cent. In 1976, the Aboriginal figure was seventy-one per cent (out of a total population of one hundred sixty-one thousand) while white Australia had declined to seventy-eight per cent (which is only marginally better). Almost one half of the Aborigines are affiliated with the Church of England (twenty-seven per cent) or are Roman Catholics (twenty-one per cent), with the rest being members of other denominations.<sup>17</sup>

Missions work still goes on among the Aborigines. The Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship (A.E.F.) is an active example of this. They have their own training college in southern New South Wales. The Anglicans and the Uniting Church, in addition, have a training college at Darwin. Hence, there are ordained clergy and an increasing number of Aboriginal churches.

Have the Aborigines integrated with the society of the white man, like the Maori in New Zealand? Though they may be found among the white population in Australian cities, they are not yet really integrated; for in most places they seem content to live in ghettos, not yet really being at home in the society of the white man. Nevertheless, despite many mistakes, the success of evangelistic efforts among the Aborigines can be seen. The Lord has made it obvious that he has his elect here, too, who have heard the voice of the Good Shepherd in the gospel and are now followers of him.

There was a time when six out of ten adults were normally at public worship on a Sunday in Victoria in the nineteenth century.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup>Murray, *Australian Christian Life*, 160.

<sup>16</sup>Murray, *Australian Christian Life*, 161.

<sup>17</sup>Cf. D. Hynd, *Australian Christianity in Outline* (Homebush West, N.S.W.: Lancer Books, 1984).

<sup>18</sup>Bruce Mansfield, "Thinking About Australian Religious History," in Withycombe, 13.

## *Presbyterian and Reformed Growth*

### *Introduction*

In our first segment, we described how Christianity was brought to the new world of Australasia in the eighteenth century, and how it developed in the nineteenth. While Australia was largely a penal colony, at its beginning anyway, New Zealand was settled by English citizens who were encouraged to settle there and make New Zealand a truly British colony, much like the original thirteen colonies of America had been before the War of Independence.

The colonists in both countries brought Christianity with them. In Australia, Christianity had more of a struggle, at first anyway, with the "prodigal sons" of Great Britain and with indifferent Aborigines who correctly viewed the white man as a danger and increasing threat. Nevertheless, Christianity made good progress both among the native and imported populace, especially in the nineteenth century, as the various denominations, transplanted from the mother country, engaged in active evangelistic and missionary work. What was true of Australia was likewise true of New Zealand. In fact, the success of evangelizing the Maoris was greater than what it was with the Australian Aborigines.

In this lecture, we wish to concentrate attention upon the Reformed faith in Australasia. We believe it to be the most consistent expression of biblical Christianity, and so we're naturally interested to see how it has fared in the "lands down under." Moreover, since the Reformed churches of Australia and of New Zealand (they are sister churches but separate denominations), have close ecclesiastical ties with the Christian Reformed and Orthodox Presbyterian churches in this country, we also have, I trust, an especial interest in learning of their establishment and activity in Australasia.

In this segment, therefore, I would like to call attention to the more general subject of Calvinism in Australasia; more specifically, the Reformed churches of Australia and of New Zealand and give some reflection to the continuing mandate for these churches.

### *Calvinism in Australasia*

Professor A. Barkley, the first Principal Emeritus of the Reformed Theological College, has written an article, "The Impact of Calvinism on Australasia," in the book, *John Calvin: His Influence in the Western*

*World*.<sup>19</sup> This article is a good short history of the Reformed faith prior to and after the coming of the Dutch.

The first Anglican chaplains, Richard Johnson and Samuel Marsden were evangelicals who wholeheartedly subscribed to the Thirty-Nine Articles. They left a permanent legacy of Reformed Anglicanism which survives today in the Sydney diocese of the Anglican Church and in Moore Theological College.

Reformed Anglicanism today, while exercising considerable influence in Sydney, is nevertheless a minority movement within the Anglican Church, as a whole, which is more broadly liberal and Anglo-Catholic. Often the two seem to go well together.

Nevertheless, Moore College trains ministers of other denominations in addition to Anglican priests. The Sydney diocese continues to elect Reformed archbishops. Marcus Loane has been succeeded by D.W.B. Robinson, both former professors at Moore. Religiously, it opposes women in office, socially it opposes abortion, politically it supports "The Festival of Light" (an evangelical-political movement of reform) and even has a representative or two in government. All of these things are of significant value, like salt in society. The Reformed churches of Australia are thankful for the presence and witness of these Anglicans. We have cordial personal relationships with a number of them and value their friendship very much.

### *The Presbyterians*

The Reformed faith, in the form of Presbyterianism, was established by the Scots—not the convicts, for they were some of the worst—but later by the Scottish free settlers.

John Dunmore Lang was an early minister of note who was active in politics as well as religion. He successfully argued for separation of church and state against Bishop Broughton who favored making the Anglican Church the established church in Australia. Lang's principles were: universal (male) suffrage, perfect political equality, and popular election, together with a free and united Australia consisting of separate states with social and political justice for all. Though Australian politics, like the countries of the western world, have been influenced by the secular principles of the Enlightenment (natural rights, democracy as the ultimate standard), the influence of Presbyterianism upon early

---

<sup>19</sup>W. Stanford Reid, editor, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982).

Australian politics should not be overlooked, for it was as influential upon the latter as it was upon the United States' early politics.

The first presbytery was formed in 1832 and Lang was instrumental in establishing churches, procuring immigrants, and ministers and teachers from the home country.<sup>20</sup> By 1861, the census showed that sixteen per cent of the population belonged to the Presbyterian church.

Presbyterians also played a large part in the establishment of education in Australia. Their ideal (received from John Knox) was "to fill the land with day schools staffed by teachers of godly character with the Bible as part of the regular curriculum."<sup>21</sup> This Christian education, spearheaded by the Presbyterians and supported by other denominations, came to an untimely end when the churches relinquished control of education by placing it in the hands of the state in 1871. Thereafter, education became "free, compulsory and secular." The Bible was removed and the Christian faith excised from classrooms.

Churches since have sought corrective means but the battle in the public schools has been lost. A half-hour per week is allowed for religious instruction/education by denominational volunteers but this is not even icing on the secular cake of secularism/humanism. Private schools still had the option of being Christian but they received no state support and after a generation tended to become snob schools for the well-to-do and with less and less that was distinctively Christian education. To this day Australia has no Christian college or university as a Christian alternative to secular/humanistic education. Young people are still placed in the hands of the Brahmins of unbelief who either ignore Christianity or actively oppose it.

The winds of unbelief began to blow into open windows of the Presbyterian church in the latter part of the nineteenth century. In 1882 the Declaratory Act was adopted which stated how certain doctrines in the Westminster Confession of Faith were to be understood: i.e., re: the divine decrees and human responsibility; "God has provided a salvation sufficient for all, adapted to all, and offered to all in the gospel. . ." (i.e., the truth of election was toned down as it is taught in the Confession, III, 1); the salvation of infants dying in infancy ("it is not required to be held that any who die in infancy are lost"); the dealing of God with pagans ("God may extend his grace to any who are without the pale of ordinary means, as it may seem good in his sight"); and the creation of

---

<sup>20</sup>Reid, 327.

<sup>21</sup>Reid, 328.

the world in six days ("liberty of opinion is allowed. . . as to the interpretation of the six days").<sup>22</sup>

Ironically, the Declaratory Act was introduced into the church by conservative theologians who sought thereby to strengthen those points in the face of attacks occurring against them at this time. But declaratory acts, invariably, are less watertight than the original statements and open the door to further interpretive opinions, if not unbelief, especially when "liberty of opinion is allowed on matters not essential to the doctrine taught. . . ."

The "Angus Affair" is evidence of the consequences of weakening the doctrinal position of the Presbyterian church. Samuel Angus was Professor of New Testament at the Presbyterians' Sydney Seminary, St. Andrews, from 1915 until his death in 1943. Of the Trinity he made this astonishing statement, "This doctrine is not a matter vital to the Christian faith and upon which liberty of opinion is allowed. The Presbyterian church has no doctrine of the Trinity which it declares to be valid or vital."<sup>23</sup> He also rejected the deity of Christ, his atonement for sin, and bodily resurrection.

Though action against him in the courts of the church dragged on for the last ten years of his life, no action against him was successful, and he continued until his death to poison the teaching of Presbyterian men for the ministry.

The Union of 1977 with the Methodists and Congregationalists (the result being the Uniting Church) left the Presbyterian Church in a remnant position. The inclusivist position of the Uniting Church is expressed in her willingness to learn from the witness of Reformation Fathers as expressed in various ways in the Scots Confession of Faith (1560), the Heidelberg Catechism (1563), the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), and the Savoy Declaration (1658). In like manner she will listen to the preaching of John Wesley in his *Forty-Four Sermons* (1793).<sup>24</sup>

While the Uniting Church continues to decline, the continuing Presbyterian church with three good seminaries, one in Queensland, New South Wales, and Victoria, is making a comeback. It has keen young men in the seminaries who are interested in the Reformed faith. Their building program in the churches to which they go, however, will

<sup>22</sup>Cf. for the complete text of the Act, R. S. Ward, *The Bush Still Burns* (Wantirna Victoria, Australia: Rowland S. Ward, 1989), 281.

<sup>23</sup>Ward, *The Bush Still Burns*, 331.

<sup>24</sup>Ward, *The Bush Still Burns*, 331.

take a generation of patient, intensive work. They face Freemasonry, traditionalism, and people who have only been taught the milk of the Word. Moreover, the Declaratory Act is still in place as a necessary part of their constitution to ensure their continuing status as the Presbyterian church in the eyes of the law, which also gives them the property rights of their church buildings. This is perhaps a high price to pay for bricks and mortar.

However, an encouraging action of continuing biblical reformation has been the courageous decision of the triennial assembly, meeting in 1991, no longer to ordain women as ministers. The decision to ordain women had previously been taken in 1974 before union with the Uniting Church took place.

We have not yet considered other Presbyterian churches which have arisen over the years in Australia. There are at least five others (not to mention a small denomination of Reformed Baptists). We will mention these in greater detail later. But we should cross the Tasman Sea now to see how the Reformed faith has fared in New Zealand.

### *The Reformed Faith in New Zealand*

New Zealand's early settlers were principally Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Roman Catholics. Unlike the early Anglican leadership in Australia, the first bishop, George A. Selwyn, was a High Churchman. Two things may be said about him: under his leadership the Anglican Church experienced rapid growth, chiefly due to immigration, and there was not only little sympathy for Calvinism, but he even opposed the evangelical Church Missionary Society. The pattern for the Anglican Church in New Zealand has thus, since its beginning, followed the High Church emphasis. Recently, the New Zealand Anglicans elected the first female diocesan bishop, the Rev. Penelope A.B. Jamieson.<sup>25</sup>

As in Australia, the main impact for the Reformed faith has been made by Scottish Presbyterians. The first minister was John MacFarlane who came from Glasgow in 1839 with a company of immigrants, and they settled in Wellington. Gradually, as immigrants and ministers continued to arrive, other congregations were formed in other New Zealand cities.

At first there were two Presbyterian denominations. The one on the South Island stemmed from a settlement in Dunedin in 1847 and became known as the Presbyterian Church of Otago and Southland.

---

<sup>25</sup>*The Banner* (Grand Rapids: Christian Reformed Publications, January 22, 1990), 18.

The denomination on the North Island held its first General Assembly in 1862 and it became known as the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand.

During the latter half of the nineteenth century, both denominations exercised a strong influence upon social, educational, and religious life. Schools were established and carefully selected teachers were brought from Scotland. Both churches agreed to establish a seminary in Dunedin, Knox College, where for many years future Presbyterian ministers were taught the Reformed faith.

When union of the two denominations took place in 1901, a Declaratory Statement was likewise adopted. It was, however, even weaker than the Australian one. It declared

that, while diversity of opinion is recognized in this church on such points in the [Westminster] Confession as do not enter into the substance of the Reformed faith therein [but left open and undefined, R.O.Z.], the church retains full authority to determine in any case which may arise, what points fall within this description and thus to guard against any abuse of this liberty to the detriment of sound doctrine or to the injury of her unity and peace.<sup>26</sup>

The adoption of this statement was obviously due to the presence of those in the denomination who by this time could no longer fully subscribe to the creedal position of the Westminster Confession of Faith.

By 1917, proposals for union with the Methodists and Congregationalists were being made. This was successfully opposed by certain stalwarts of the Reformed faith. Thomas Miller, the father of J. Graham and Robert S., was one of them. To date, there has been no union, though in 1967 another proposed union was made, this time to include Anglicans and the Church of Christ as well as the Methodists, Congregationalists and Presbyterians.

Just how far the Presbyterians in New Zealand have slipped from the moorings of the Reformed faith was made clear when the Geering case came to trial in the General Assembly of 1967. Lloyd G. Geering was the Principal of Knox College which for years had remained true to the Reformed faith. But it had been slipping over the years, though no

---

<sup>26</sup>J.W. Deenik, *Will Presbyterianism Survive in New Zealand?* (Auckland: Reformed Publications, n.d. [1965]), 10-11.

one knew just how far down it and the Presbyterian church had gone until the trial of Principal Geering took place.

Geering had studied abroad in Germany before assuming his teaching and administrative duties at Knox. Over a period of time he was on record as denying such things as the infallibility of the Bible (he called it "a fallen idol"), the deity of Christ, miracles, the resurrection of Christ and the immortality of the soul.<sup>27</sup> So outrageous were Geering's denials of the faith that even the Roman Catholic newspaper, *Zealandia*, commented in an editorial that he had forfeited his right to teach. At the trial in 1967, a particularly disappointing aspect was that so little was done by ministers and members of the Westminster Fellowship, a Reformed group within the Presbyterian Church which had been formed in 1950 to raise a rallying voice for the Reformed faith in the Presbyterian church. This group published a quarterly magazine, *The Evangelical Presbyterian*, and was active, among other things, in alerting the church to Geering's defections from the Reformed faith.

The debate on the floor of the Assembly was desultory and charges against Geering from the Westminster quarter virtually unsupported by any of the organization's ministers. No action against Geering was taken by the Assembly and a later pastoral letter to the churches stated that the Assembly declared "its confidence in Professor Geering as a minister, theological teacher and Principal of our Theological College."<sup>28</sup> D.F. Sage's comment (Sage is one of the Presbyterian ministers) in connection with this was that "the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand had ceased to be a confessional church since the decision of the Assembly was passed."<sup>29</sup> Geering soon afterwards left his position at Knox College for a teaching post at a New Zealand university. While it was not made public, one may well ask, was he pressured to do this?

At any rate, the survival of the Reformed faith in that denomination today is in grave doubt. This doubt is further confirmed by the fact that, with the opening of all offices to women, the Presbyterian Church has gone on record to bar all candidates to its ministry who may be opposed to this ruling, and has done so with at least two candidates, Ian McIver in 1982 and David Bayne in 1984. This effectively excludes all

---

<sup>27</sup>Alexander Barkley, "The Impact of Calvinism on Australasia," *John Calvin: His Influence in the Western World*, edited by W. Stanford Reid (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 393.

<sup>28</sup>Barkley, "The Impact of Calvinism on Australasia," 393.

<sup>29</sup>*Evangelical Presbyterian*, (New Zealand: Jan.- Feb. 1968), 7.

candidates who train elsewhere than Knox, i.e., Australia and North America, and who in returning to New Zealand cannot get into the ministry of the Presbyterian Church. It would seem that "Ichabod," the glory has departed, is written over this declining church in New Zealand.

### *The Reformed Churches in Australasia*

Both the Reformed Churches of Australia and of New Zealand, though established independently, are first generation churches. The Australian churches celebrated their fortieth anniversary in 1991, and have published a commemorative book about their history, entitled, *A Church En Route*.<sup>30</sup> The New Zealand churches first began a few years later, in 1953. They also are preparing a commemorative book about their history.

Both churches began as immigrant churches, made up largely of Dutch people who came to Australasia after World War II and mostly in the 1950s. At the present time, immigration from Holland and Europe has slowed and is only a trickle that has virtually dried up.

Why did these immigrants start churches of their own? And who were they anyway?

To answer the second question first, approximately eighty per cent were from the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands, (G.K.N.), with the remainder from other Reformed churches in the Netherlands. The G.K.N. came into existence as a result of what we may regard as two revivals of the Reformed faith in the Netherlands, i.e., the *Afscheiding* in 1834 under Rev. Hendrik de Cock, and the *Doleantie* in 1886 under Dr. Abraham Kuyper. In the union of the two groups which took place in 1892, most joined to make the new denomination, the *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland*, though a few refrained from joining the union because of Kuyper's teaching about presumptive regeneration and common grace.

Later, in 1944, the G.K.N. experienced a split largely over these same unresolved issues that brought into existence the Liberated Reformed Churches (Article 31) who have maintained their separate existence in Holland, Canada, America, and Australia, but not in New Zealand where most of these people joined the Reformed Churches of New Zealand. All of this is interesting history with its own lessons to

---

<sup>30</sup>*A Church En Route* (Geelong, Victoria: Reformed Publishing House, 1991).

teach us. But we must leave it with this, being mentioned here only by way of background.

At first, the Dutch immigrants were not minded to establish their own churches. The G.K.N. had advised their members to join the Presbyterian Church. After all, wasn't it also an heir of the Calvinist tradition, with John Knox, the founder, being a disciple of John Calvin?

In New Zealand, with fewer immigrants than Australia, this is what was done by the early arrivals, though as they learned English, understood the less than biblical sermons, saw the practices of Freemasonry associated with the church, they gradually concluded that all was not well.<sup>31</sup> Dutch Protestant communities began to be established for Bible study and fellowship in this spiritually drought-stricken situation.

The Auckland group contacted the G.K.N. Emigration Center for help and as a result the Rev. J.W. Deenick was called for leadership and counsel. Often at first his salary was paid by means of a collection gathered from members of the Protestant Community. Rev. Deenick's evaluation of the prospect for continued association with the Presbyterian Church was not hopeful, for its liberal doctrines and practice were undeniable and, despite the newly formed Westminster Fellowship within it (in 1950), Modernism was virtually universally present.

Despite opposition and pressure not to form a separate denomination, the Dutch Reformed Community of Auckland became the Reformed Church of Auckland on April 4, 1953, with Rev. Deenick as its first minister. In its protocol, it stated that it did this because its members "to our distress have been unable to find in New Zealand a church which is faithfully retaining the scriptural confessions of the Reformation." The statement concludes,

We have come to the conclusion that there is only one way left; the establishment in New Zealand of a new denomination based on a full persuasion of the infallible truth and divine authority of the Holy Scriptures as given by inspiration of God to be the rule of faith and life, and a cordial acceptance of the Reformed Confessions. . . .<sup>32</sup>

Following this basis, other Dutch Communities also formed themselves into churches both on the north and south islands, so that today

---

<sup>31</sup>D.G. Vanderpyl, *Why Did We Establish Reformed Churches in New Zealand?* (Hamilton, New Zealand: n.p., 1990), 16.

<sup>32</sup>Vanderpyl, *Why Did We Establish Reformed Churches in New Zealand?*, 20.

almost forty years later, there are in the Reformed Churches of New Zealand twenty churches in the principal cities, with twenty-eight hundred members and fifteen ministers, ten of whom have been trained at the Reformed Theology College of Geelong.

In Australia, with more immigrants and families rather than single persons as had been true for New Zealand, an active attempt was made to become associated with the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (F.P.C.A.). As a result of previous contacts made by Mr. A. Warnaar, Jr. (a businessman with international trade outlets) and Rev. J. Kremer (who surveyed the Australian ecclesiastical situation in 1950 on behalf of the Deputies for Emigration), the conclusion he recommended was that two ministers be sent—at the invitation of the F.P.C.A.—to work with this denomination in the integration of Dutch settlers in this denomination. Rev. Kremer noted the prevalent liberalism in the P.C.A. and therefore did not recommend it. He also noted the stricter view of the purity of worship principle in the F.P.C.A., but did not feel that this justified the starting of a separate denomination.

Consequently, two G.K.N. ministers took up residence in Australia later, in 1951, and began their work among the Dutch settlers (as part of the F.P.C.A.). The Dutch communities were large enough so that separate services could be held in the Dutch language. Rev. S. (George) Hoekstra (arriving in March 1951), labored in the Melbourne area, with a parish of several congregations (not yet churches) in different suburbs many miles from each other (Melbourne, Mt. Evelyn, Dandenong). Rev. John Vander Bom (arriving in May 1951) labored in the Sydney area under the same circumstances. Dutch services were held in various, widely separated communities, with pretty much the Dutch liturgy but usually without musical accompaniment, in keeping with the doctrinal position of the F.P.C.A.

As the Dutch communities rapidly grew, several developments increasingly took place. The Dutch communities were larger than many of the original F.P.C.A. congregations with which they were affiliated. The Dutch communities began to be located in areas where there were no F.P.C.A. churches, and the growing Dutch communities felt increasingly comfortable with the idea of perpetuating their own liturgical tradition and increasingly saw little need to adopt a new one which they hardly favored anyway.

Rev. J.A. Schep (who later became one of the first two teachers at the R.T.C.) arrived in Tasmania in mid-1951 and ministered to several immigrant groups on that island which, at that time, had no F.P.C.A. churches, since Tasmania is removed from Australia by several hundred

miles of Bass Strait ocean. This isolation made continued meaningful contact with the F.P.C.A. increasingly tenuous. Rev. Schep became convinced that a separate denomination should be formed, while nevertheless maintaining fraternal relations with the F.P.C.A. Consequently, the Reformed Churches of Tasmania were established on October 13, 1951.

By December three more congregations were instituted. Rev. Peter Pellicaan had gone from Holland to Brisbane to minister to the Dutch there. On November 25, 1951, a church was formally instituted there, with the Rev. Pellicaan as its first minister. On December 16, 1951, the Sydney Church was instituted with one hundred forty five members signing the protocol and with the Rev. Vander Bom as the first minister. (I have some nostalgia for this church, as I was its third minister for seven years).

In Melbourne, the congregation voted on two choices: either to affiliate with the G.K.N. (Rev. Hoekstra favored this), or to organize separately (the first synod of the R.C.A. was yet to be held). The congregation voted for the latter, and the church was instituted on December 30, 1951, as the Reformed Church of Melbourne, the Rev. Hoekstra being its first minister. (I have some additional nostalgia for this church, too, as I was this church's minister—called the Reformed Church of Dandenong—for two years before being called to teach at the R.T.C.).

The Reformed Churches of Australia (R.C.A), came into existence with the first synod which was held on June 24-27, 1952. The confessional standards adopted were the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Confession of Faith provisionally. The latter was later adopted at the 1957 Synod with the proviso that where it exceeds the teaching of the Belgic Confession, the latter is to be followed. Today the R.C.A. numbers over ten thousand members in forty-three churches and six classes. It has fifty-three ministers, ten of whom are in special service. Forty-four have been trained at the R.T.C.

Was the action of the Dutch immigrants in instituting the R.C.A. schismatic? We have concluded that the action of the New Zealand churches was not, because they decided not to join a church that had been progressively denying both Scripture and its confessions since the Declaratory Statement of 1901 was adopted by the Presbyterian Church.

The Australian immigrants, however, were in a different category, at least with the F.P.C.A. It is and remains a faithful church with whom the people and ministers of the R.C.A. were associated and with whom the R.C.A. continues to remain in ecclesiastical fellowship today.

The answer must be sought not simply in the attitude of the Dutch who did not favor the F.P.C.A.'s interpretation of the purity of worship principle. For, were this all, their action might well be regarded as schismatic. Obviously, however, the F.P.C.A. did not regard the Dutch action in instituting the R.C.A. as schismatic. Why? Let me suggest three reasons: first, they saw the need of the Dutch to perpetuate their own tradition in order to conserve and consolidate the Faith with which the immigrants were most familiar; second, they feared being "overwhelmed" by a new influx of people who, besides being ethnically different, were also doctrinally different at certain crucial points; and third, they were unwilling to regard their purity of worship principle as negotiable. As a result, even the suggestion by the Rev. Vander Bom that the Dutch congregations stay under the F.P.C.A. roof but have their own form of worship and church government was regarded by them as unacceptable.<sup>33</sup>

### *The Continuing Mandate*

Briefly put, this is expressed in the founding protocols of both the Australian and the New Zealand churches, the essence of which was as follows: for God's glory and by his grace, the R.C.A. and the R.C.N.Z. are determined to establish true and faithful churches, as defined by the Word of God, in which the faith of our Fathers, as summarized in our Reformed Creeds and Confessions will be preserved and perpetuated. The Word of God (the whole counsel of God) will be truly proclaimed for the evangelism of the lost, for the edification of the saints and for the covenant nurture of the generations to come.

In the first place, the churches soon became completely English-speaking in their worship services, facilitating this by calling ministers from sister churches in North America (the Christian Reformed Church and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church) who were English-speaking. And in the second place they established churches in increasing numbers, catechized their youth, founded a theological seminary, and promoted the establishment of Christian schools for the giving of a God-centered education to the coming generations.

In the fulfillment of this task the Reformed churches have been helped to a great extent over the years by sister churches overseas; at first by the G.K.N., and then by the C.R.C. and the O.P.C., both with manpower and finances.

---

<sup>33</sup>Ward, *The Bush Still Burns*, 376.

The Reformed churches have in the past forty years of their existence truly become a part of the Australasian scene. How will they fare in the days ahead as they continue to fulfill their divinely-given mandate? Here's how Professor A. Barkley, an Australian and good friend but one who is outside the Reformed churches, summarizes it as he sees it:

The Reformed Churches of Australasia have now become a part of the ecclesiastical edifice. They are open to the theological changes that are rocking the churches in the Netherlands. They have seen the devastating effects of continental theology in Scotland and subsequently in Australia and New Zealand. To ignore the warnings of history will simply mean a repetition of mistakes and failures of the past.<sup>34</sup>

He goes on further to say,

With the growth of nationalism in Australia and the development of what might be termed Australian culture, there is need for the promotion of a Calvinism that is somewhat detached from its ethnic background. To speak of Westminster theology and Dutch theology is quite irrelevant to the situation that has to be faced in Australia [and N.Z.]. The content must remain essentially the same but it must be adapted to the culture of the nations and presented without foreign tags.<sup>35</sup>

A great opportunity and responsibility to be of strategic help in the fulfillment of this mandate lies with the cause of Christian education and theological education. It is therefore to the R.T.C. that we will turn our attention in the next lecture.

### *Consolidating Through Christian Education*

The title of this segment really involves two subjects which are related and yet separate. To begin with, I wish I could give a glowing report about Christian education in Australasia. But there are no Christian colleges or universities in Australia or New Zealand as we know them in North America. There is no Dordt, Calvin, Wheaton, Gordon College, etc., "down under." There are secular universities and the humanistic education they give is comparable to what is given

---

<sup>34</sup>Barkley, "The Impact of Calvinism on Australasia," 340.

<sup>35</sup>Barkley, "The Impact of Calvinism on Australasia," 335.

here and in England. And bright graduates do go overseas for advanced degrees and do well in the academic world.

Until the coming of the Dutch there was only the public school for children, with its free, compulsory, and secular education, plus a few rather exclusive private schools—if one could afford them. Within ten years of the coming of the Dutch, at considerable sacrifice, the vision of Christian Parent-Controlled Schools began to be realized when, in 1962, the first Christian school (Calvin) was established in Kingston, Tasmania.

Gradually others were founded and today the National Union has about fifty schools with a total enrollment of over 8,000 pupils. New Zealand has ten Christian schools. Unlike North America, some subsidy is given by the government which, of course, is a big help.

The constitutional basis of these schools varies, with members being required to subscribe to the Reformed confessions or to an educational creed. The latter allows a broader membership constituency but these schools perhaps are also weaker doctrinally.

In the meantime, evangelicals have also gotten behind the Christian school movement, and an association similar to the National Union is present in the Christian Community Schools. They are more Baptist in character and about the same size as the National Union. Some fundamentalist churches support the Accelerated Christian Education program (A.C.E.).

The fundamental problem which the boards of Christian schools perennially face is, where to find Christian school teachers? That is, not just teachers who are Christians, but teachers who are Christians and who also know how to teach Christianly. For Christian teachers must pretty much pick up Christian pedagogy on their own in a rather hit and miss fashion. Hence, there is a definite need for a Christian college that will be able to give Christian school teachers the training they should have in order to be properly qualified and equipped for their task of teaching in a Christian school. We feel that we have made a beginning in this at the R.T.C. But more of this later.

The second and major part of this lecture will be about theological education. This, too, is very strategic, for seminaries, of course, train the future ministers of the churches. Since there are Presbyterian and Reformed seminaries in Australia, it is to these we now turn our attention, and we will do so in the following way, as we consider: Presbyterian theological education; the Reformed Theological College (Seminary) of the R.C.A. and R.C.N.Z.; and then briefly prospects for the future.

The union of the Presbyterians with the Methodists and Congregationalists in 1977 to form the Uniting Church had positive and negative effects on the Presbyterians who chose not to unite.

Negatively, they were largely a remnant of what they had once been. The effects of Modernism over the years in high places and low had already made them a declining church before the union (remember what the Rev. Kremer had said about them). After the union, they were even smaller, with decimated congregations made up largely of older people who wished to perpetuate Presbyterianism, but not always for the right reasons. There was, and is, a good deal of traditionalism and "stand-patism" in many people's thinking rather than the need for contending for and perpetuating of the Reformed faith. They could keep their property, provided that in the eyes of the law, they remained as the continuing Presbyterian Church. So they continued to be saddled with the compromising Declaratory Act and with the presence of Freemasonry, not to mention the presence of some liberals who may have preferred to remain Presbyterians rather than becoming a part of the Uniting Church.

Positively, they still had their own places of worship in the towns and cities of Australia, with many pulpit vacancies now that needed to be filled. They were at the crossroads, with the need of new leadership, either to perpetuate the declining old ways, or to lead them in a new and more biblical direction.

The future obviously lay with the course theological education would take. Fortunately, most liberal ministers and elders had gone with the Uniting Church, leaving conservatives largely in control of the continuing Church.

The three theological seminaries needed to be reorganized, and promptly were. Already in 1975, the seminary in Victoria could claim unbroken continuance of its operation, and the one hundred and tenth academic year began in Melbourne with a full-time staff of two. The principal, Rev. Robert Swanton, was soon joined on a part-time basis by Professor Allan Harman, borrowed from our seminary in Geelong. Later he continued with this seminary as a full-time teacher and its Principal. Since then, this seminary now operates with a staff of four regular professors and several part-time lecturers. (I was a Visiting Professor of Systematic Theology there for three years until coming to Mid-America). Its student body averages thirty students who are young men, keen to learn the Reformed faith. Their entrance into the ministry of the P.C.A. is an encouraging prospect for the denomination.

The seminary in Brisbane was re-organized in 1976 and operates with two full-time staff, the Rev. Norman Barker and Dr. Nigel Lee, together with several part-time lecturers. It is smaller than Victoria, with a dozen students or so, but effectively services the Queensland Presbyterian region.

In New South Wales, Presbyterian theological training has for years been an adjunct of the Anglican Moore Theological College, with St. Andrews (the Presbyterian Seminary) being closely associated with Sydney University. The continuing presence of Liberals on the teaching staff made the re-organization of this seminary more difficult. Eventually, the services of the Principal and another professor were terminated, and the seminary was relocated in 1983. The Sydney B.D. course of training was removed in 1985, and the seminary presently operates with the Rev. J.A. Davies as Dean, plus a suitable staff of part-time lecturers, with Moore College remaining an acceptable alternative.

Rowland Ward writes, "The Continuing Presbyterian Church is still going through a process of change and adjustment."<sup>36</sup> Of the one-hundred new ministers admitted to the P.C.A. since 1977, some have not had a full appreciation of the Reformed faith and others have had the zeal of new converts with little wisdom to go with it. Obviously this has created difficulties in local churches and on the denominational level. At the time of union, perhaps forty per cent of the ministers in New South Wales could be described as evangelical. Today, the number would be about eighty per cent, with liberalism being limited mostly to the older generation of ministers. Attendance at worship has risen, with the average being about sixty-five per cent of professing members.

### *The need of discipline*

The delicate but necessary task of discipline is needed, not only in the matter stated above, but also with Freemasonry and theological liberalism. Predictably, with the Declaratory Act still in place, the P.C.A. will probably allow these factors to "wilt on the vine," though with the women in office issue, the 1991 General Assembly showed uncommon courage in reversing the 1974 decision to ordain women to office.

We can perhaps agree with Ward's concluding assessment:

---

<sup>36</sup>Ward, *The Bush Still Burns*, 465.

Men of ability as future leaders are evident in the P.C.A. ministry today. The leadership they give will determine the judgement passed by a historian another century on. May the P.C.A. be found faithful to her stewardship! May she not fail in the time of testing!<sup>37</sup>

### *The Reformed Theological College*

As we turn our attention to this seminary, we hardly need to emphasize the fact that it is of strategic value to the R.C.A. and R.C.N.Z. both for the present and the future. And we might add, even more widely for the Christian school movement and, hopefully, for the furtherance of God's kingdom in Australasia.

The Reformed Theological College (R.T.C.) was born in 1954 when the second synod of the R.C.A. decided that there was need

for a theological college whose faculty would adhere unequivocally to the authority of the Bible as the inspired Word of God, while at the same time covering in a scholarly way all departments of theology from the standpoint of the Reformed faith as set forth in the Three Standards of Unity and the Westminster Confession of Faith [with no qualifications regarding the latter].

Moreover, the model which the Synod adopted for the College was along the lines of the Free University in Amsterdam. The association operating it would be independent and the College eventually was to have, in addition to an initial theological faculty, other faculties that would develop the school into a Christian university.

The Association was originally called "The Association for Higher Education on a Calvinistic Basis." Later the name was shortened to "The Association for a Christian University," and today the Association is more modestly known as "The Association for Christian Tertiary Education" (A.C.T.E.). While the Association is independent of the churches (Kuyperian sphere sovereignty!), it has from the beginning operated under contractual conditions laid down by the churches who in turn have given the College financial support. The conditions specify that professors be appointed only with the full consent of the Reformed churches and synodically appointed deputies supervise instructions given to students training for ministry in the Reformed churches. The teaching of the College must be in full accordance with the Reformed

---

<sup>37</sup>Ward, *The Bush Still Burns*, 466.

Confessions of Faith, and must cover all departments of theology in a scholarly way.

Over the years these rules have formed an important supplement to the Association's *Constitution and Regulations*, specifying the doctrinal and ecclesiastical commitment of faculty members, giving the deputies the right of attending classroom lectures, of interviewing and approving students for ministry in the Reformed churches, and of reporting to Synod on the affairs of the College.

At the official opening on April 25, 1955, the presiding chairman, the Rev. Peter Pellicaan, spoke of the purpose for establishing the seminary which, among other things, was "to share and to disseminate the Reformed faith with the Australian people." Other dominant themes expressed in the opening of the seminary reflected the purpose for which it was established in training men for the ministry. It was that there be commitment to the authority of Scripture, the riches of the Reformed heritage, together with a combination of excellence in learning and warm-hearted piety as a continuing standard that faculty, board, and deputies have sought to maintain. Thus "an acorn was planted that, it was hoped and prayed, would one day grow into a large oak tree" (from the address by the Rev. W.R. McEwen).

In keeping with other theological schools in Australia, the course of study was opened to students who qualified for university entrance; the course of study leading to the equivalent of the B.D. degree, taking four years. (It is now five years unless the student has a college degree which usually shortens it to three). Lectures began in 1955 in the Sunday school room of the Reformed Presbyterian Church, with three students in attendance.

The seminary's first two professors were the Rev. Alexander Barkley, minister of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Geelong, and later, the seminary's first Principal. He had previously taken an active part in the original vision and planning for the seminary, together with the Reformed Church of Melbourne's minister, the Rev. Peter Pellicaan. The other professor was the Rev. John A. Schep, minister of several immigrant Reformed Churches in Tasmania at the time. While not having doctorates, both men had done additional graduate study abroad, were successful pastors, and appeared well qualified for their professorial assignments which, including Hebrew and Greek, were considerable!

In the next few years the original faculty of four was completed with the coming in 1957 of Dr. Klaas Runia from the Netherlands to be the Systematic Theology professor. He was a prodigious worker for the seminary but not always above criticism (by some anyway) for some of

his views (e.g., the Sabbath and creation, as reflected in several articles in the unofficial Reformed churches magazine, *Trowel and Sword*, in the 1960s). However, he was appreciated, also in evangelical circles outside the Reformed churches.

The fourth member of the faculty was the Rev. Gerard Van Groningen who had accepted the call of the Reformed Church of Geelong, in 1958, to be a loan pastor from the Christian Reformed Church for five years. He was installed at the seminary in 1962 as the Professor of Old Testament. Professor Van Groningen was a staunch advocate of Reformed orthodoxy during his ten year period of teaching, and his return to the United States in 1971 was received with regret. Professor Runia also returned to Holland that same year, thus creating two vacancies which needed to be filled. We will give more details about succeeding appointments later in this lecture.

### *Consolidation and growth*

In 1965 the seminary celebrated its tenth anniversary. By this time there had been a number of significant developments. The present thirty-eight room blue-stone building it now occupies was purchased in 1961. It provided lecture rooms, faculty offices, a library and single male students' accommodation.

The student body consisted of twenty-three dedicated young men, while twelve graduates were already serving as ministers in the R.C.A. and R.C.N.Z. Two graduates were missionaries, one in Taiwan and the other was working with an Aboriginal mission in Western Australia.

Professor Schep was the first of the original faculty to retire in 1965, and he was replaced by the Rev. Tom Wilkinson, a former Presbyterian minister who had earlier joined the R.C.A. and was then serving the Box Hill Reformed Church (Melbourne).

### *Constituency of the student body*

Over the years of its thirty-five year history, the seminary has pretty much maintained the average median of twenty-five students in the student body, though in 1981 and 1982, the number was as high as forty and thirty-eight respectively. On average, two out of three students are members of the R.C.A. or R.C.N.Z. The third may be from another denomination (R.P.C., F.P.C.A., Independent) or from overseas (Nigeria, Sri Lanka, Indonesia). The R.T.C. is happy to have the privilege of having been and continuing to be of service to other churches beside the R.C.A. and R.C.N.Z. At the present time negotia-

tions continue with the Aboriginal Evangelical Fellowship to have an Aboriginal student for the ministry take up study at the seminary.

### *Recent diversification of the curriculum*

Recently, the seminary has diversified its curriculum in order to offer different streams of study besides the B.D. course. The two year Bachelor of Religious Studies (B.R.S.) course (approximately forty-eight hours over four semesters, or two years) is intended for pastors, evangelists and church workers from the Third World. It does not require the learning of Greek and Hebrew as is true for the B.D. degree. Three overseas students were enrolled in the course this past year (1990). There are also one year Christian Growth (twenty-four hours) and two year Certificate of Biblical Studies (forty-eight hours) courses for those who wish to be better equipped for service in the Lord's church and Kingdom. There were nine students in these courses this past year.

The latest development, which was begun this year, has been the establishment of a first chair of a Christian Education faculty which will ultimately develop separately from the theological faculty with which it is presently linked. This is the next step in the realization of the original vision of the founding fathers ultimately to establish a Christian university. There were four students enrolled this year for the one year (twenty-four hours) Christian Education Certificate (C.E.C.); a two year (forty-eight hours) Christian Education Diploma (C.E.D.) can also be taken. Hopefully, there will be more enrollments in this department next year. While for the present, would-be teachers are still required to obtain a university degree in order to be qualified for teaching in school, the R.T.C.'s courses cater for three types of students: those who wish to become Christian school teachers; those who have been in Christian education but wish to learn more about what it means to think and teach Christianly; and those who may not be actively involved in schools but wish to gain biblical perspectives in the field of education which will better enable them to serve the church in general.

### *Questions concerning the continuing identity of the seminary*

#### *The Sierd Woudstra matter*

After Professor Van Groningen returned to the U.S. in 1971 and before his successor was appointed, the F.P.C.A. became a contractual

member of the A.C.T.E., giving it the same rights as the other contractual members (R.C.A., R.C.N.Z., and R.P.C.).

Besides obtaining voting rights, deputies' supervision of the seminary, and membership on the Board, the F.P.C.A. suggested that the Old Testament chair be filled by one of its qualified ministers. One was ready at hand in the person of Dr. Allan M. Harman who, at the time, was teaching Hebrew and Old Testament at the Free Church College in Edinburgh. The Board was happy to appoint Professor Harman and he took up his duties in the latter part of 1974.

After Professor Runia returned to the Netherlands, also in 1971, the Board could not find an immediate successor to the chair of Systematic Theology. Dr. Sierd Woudstra in the meantime had come to the seminary on loan from the C.R.C. and at first filled the Old Testament chair until the coming of Dr. Harman, after which he was moved temporarily to the Systematics chair.

Not long after this, complaints from the student body about Dr. Woudstra's views on: the margin of error in Scripture; the denial of reprobation as part of God's eternal decree; and church government (the exclusion of women from ecclesiastical office), came to the attention of the Deputies. After conferring with him, they became convinced of his deviations from Scripture and the Confessions. Consequently, they advised the Board to terminate his teaching, which the Board proceeded to do. Dr. Woudstra's case went all the way to the Synod of the R.C.A. in 1976. In the end Synod asked the A.C.T.E. to erect an independent board of appeal for Dr. Woudstra's benefit, but he never availed himself of it, quietly serving out his loan time in the Hobart (Tasmania) church as its pastor until his return to the U.S. in 1977.

#### *The Henk Vander Laan case*

The F.P.C.A. was less than satisfied with this development, but two other additional events caused it to withdraw from the A.C.T.E. in the latter part of 1976.

Dr. Henk Vander Laan had been hired by the Board in 1975 to fill the newly created chair of Philosophy and Christian Education. He had gotten his doctorate in Holland, having studied under Berkouwer, Zuidema, Dooyeweerd and Vollenhoven. He had also taught in Indonesia. The F.P.C.A. felt aggrieved in not being consulted before his appointment—which they would probably have forgiven if another (third) matter had not arisen at this time.

An F.P.C.A. student was aggrieved by another student. When he was not satisfied with the seminary's action, he complained to his presbytery. It proceeded to withdraw F.P.C.A. students "until such time as they consider that their spiritual welfare is in no way jeopardized."<sup>38</sup>

The increasingly shaky relationship with the A.C.T.E. was thereafter soon broken by the F.P.C.A. Synod's decision to withdraw from membership in the A.C.T.E. The seminary, however, still educates some of its students, though the F.P.C.A. officially supports the Presbyterian seminaries in Melbourne and in Edinburgh.

Meanwhile, Dr. Vander Laan's teaching continued to raise questions with the students about, the normativity of Scripture; the virtually uncritical acceptance of general revelation in science and history; the doubtful place of the antithesis; the pervasiveness of common grace; multiplied sphere sovereignty, not to mention the questionable authority of the creeds, especially the Westminster Confession of Faith.

Moreover, while Dr. Vander Laan helped in the establishment of the Institute for Christian Education in Melbourne (I.C.E.), with a Dooyeweerdian emphasis for which he may not have been wholly responsible, he did nothing to begin teaching Christian education courses at the seminary. Matters would soon have come to a head, but Dr. Vander Laan ended these adverse developments by returning to the Netherlands and the G.K.N. in 1979 after the conclusion of his initial four year appointment.

#### *Professor Schep's Pentecostal views*

A third matter which "troubled the waters" scarcely affected the seminary. Dr. Schep, after his retirement from the seminary, began advocating Pentecostal views which disturbed the local church of Geelong and necessitated action eventually by Classis Victoria and Synod 1970, with both bodies making pronouncements about Dr. Schep's unreformed views. Dr. Schep, however, left the denomination before Synod was held. Though the seminary lost a few students who were sympathetic with Dr. Schep, matters soon returned to normal at the seminary. Dr. Schep died in 1972.

---

<sup>38</sup>Ward, *The Bush Still Burns*, 380.

*The present faculty at the R.T.C.*

At the end of 1975, the Board appointed the Rev. Raymond O. Zorn to the combined chairs of Systematic Theology and Practical Theology. In 1978, with the retirement of the first Principal, Professor Barkley, Professor Zorn was appointed as the Principal.

In 1981, the Rev. Keith V. Warren was appointed to the chair of Practical Theology, increasing the number of faculty members to five. Professor Zorn remained in the chair of Systematic Theology which included Apologetics and Ethics.

In 1981, the Rev. Henk DeWaard was appointed as the replacement of Professor Barkley in the chair of Church History and Missiology.

In 1985 the Rev. Stephen Voorwinde was appointed to the chair of New Testament after the retirement of Professor Wilkinson in 1982.

The Rev. Alastair McEwen was appointed to the Old Testament as a lecturer in 1980 after Professor Harman became full-time Professor of Old Testament at the Presbyterian Seminary. The Rev. McEwen, after further study overseas, was appointed by the Board as Professor in 1986.

The sixth full-time member of the faculty is Mr. Don Capill who was appointed by the Board as Professor of Christian Education in 1988.

Professor Zorn retired at the end of last year (1989), although he finished the teaching requirements of Systematic Theology for 1990 earlier this year. A call was made to someone to be his successor but he declined the call. The Board then decided to call the Rev. W. Berends who is a graduate of the R.T.C. and has a further degree from Westminster Theological Seminary and a doctorate from the Australian College of Theology. There is every indication that he is disposed to accept the call and will fill the position at the beginning of 1992.

*A Survey of the Australasian Ecclesiastical Scene*

*The case made by John Smith*

John Smith is an Australian evangelist with an evangelical Methodist background who has successfully worked with "Bikies" (motorcycle riders who have formed their own subculture in society). He organized a Christian motorcycle group called "God's Squad" and has had good success in evangelizing many of the so-called Bikies. He has also organized a non-denominational church which caters for dislocated people in society. He is a successful speaker in high schools, conducts evangelistic rallies, is good in personal witnessing, and is quite a discerning critic about the ills and needs of Australian society today.

A few years ago, he wrote a book entitled, *Advance Australia Where?*<sup>39</sup> The title is a parody of the Australian national anthem, "Advance Australia Fair." Some points he makes in his book can already be seen from the chapter headings: "Australia—A Case of Cosmic Orphanhood"; "Who Am I in Your Brave New World?"; "The Aussie Male"; "Ostriches, Not Emus," etc.

On page seven he quotes John Pilger (an Australian writer) as follows:

Happy (white) Australia began. . .among. . .the scum of England and the inflammable matter of Ireland. From George III to Margaret Thatcher, the problem of the poor and the Irish has been a difficult one for the English establishment. Two hundred years ago mass deportation to a great south land was to be the final solution.

Smith goes on to say,

Australia is still nursing some deep scars which may trace back to injuries inflicted two hundred years ago but which may well affect to this very day our view of ourselves, our world and our gods.<sup>40</sup>

Early clergy, being an educated part of the establishment, were often of necessity also the judges and jurists in the enforcement of law and order in a convict society. Smith quotes Michael Cannon (*Who's Master? Who's Man?*):

Good God, what hypocrisy and deceit is here manifested! The most cruel, the most unjust, the most atrocious deeds are committed and carried on under the cloak of religion!. . .Those hypocrites who pretend to be so scrupulous, that rather than submit to have their most holy religion endangered, they. . .are some of the first to separate man and wife, to send some to banishment, and others to the Poo-law prisons; to oppress the fatherless and the widow. From all such religion as this, "Good Lord, deliver us!"<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup>Douglas Hynd, *Australian Christianity in Outline*, Homebush West, N.S.W.: Anzea Publishers, 1989.

<sup>40</sup>Hynd, *Australian Christianity in Outline*, 8.

<sup>41</sup>Hynd, *Australian Christianity in Outline*, 12.

Smith obviously feels that a fair degree of Australian society's present ills may be traced back to its convict roots. Of modern Australian society, he gives the following statistics:

There are an average of 110 suicide attempts in Australia each day. . . . One in ten adolescents attempts suicide. . . . At any time, one in four women and one in six men are suffering from a depressive illness. . . . One in ten Australians will spend time in a psychiatric hospital at some time of their life. . . . eight to fifteen per-cent of the population in all age groups are affected by depression.<sup>42</sup>

Much of this despair arises from life which is meaningless without God, but even views of God express ignorance if not indifference. Smith jokingly refers to two drunks who challenge each other about their religious faith. Says one, "I bet you can't even say the Lord's Prayer." Says the other, "Bet you two bob (twenty-five cents), I can." "Go ahead," the one challenges. "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep." "You win," says his mate, "here's your two bob."

Smith correctly notes:

There is no foundation for loving, caring behavior apart from God and Christ. The intellectuals who told us so confidently twenty years ago that we didn't need religion are now running scared because they have no alternative to offer. They can't blame the church any more for what is happening in society; we've been distinctly pagan long enough to face the fact that paganism and not Christianity is destroying Western society.<sup>43</sup>

While we may have our reservations about some aspects of Smith's book, it is nevertheless most challenging, for it is about a large segment of Australian society with which he obviously rubs shoulders in his evangelistic work.

#### *Causes in the decline of religion and morals*

What is the cause of this sad decline of religion and morals today? John Smith, of course, lays his finger on a major cause when he points to a steady turning away from God by people who no longer hear the

---

<sup>42</sup>Hynd, *Australian Christianity in Outline*, 33.

<sup>43</sup>Hynd, *Australian Christianity in Outline*, 70.

gospel in the mainstream church denominations. In fact, the second half of his book is a collective indictment of the Australian church. Some chapter titles tell it all, e.g., "Poor, Marginalised and Powerless" and "The Delinquent Church."

Young people especially find the church irrelevant. On a holiday Sunday during the winter in a resort town along the southern Victoria coast, my wife and I went to one of the few churches in town, which happened to be a Uniting Church. We were struck by the fact that there were only older people present at this morning worship service. There were no young people, children, or even young families present. And after listening to the minister's humanistic platitudes which he gave his congregation instead of the gospel, we no longer wondered why only members of the "old guard" were left. What we actually wondered about was why they had stayed, for they were certainly being fed only stones instead bread.

#### *Increasing pressures upon the family*

Another contributing factor in the destabilization of society are those increasing pressures upon the family which are steadily undermining and eroding it. Dick Vanderpyl is a regular correspondent to *Trowel and Sword*, the unofficial religious magazine of the Reformed Churches of Australia and of New Zealand. He contributes a regular item, "Letter from New Zealand."

In the May 1990 issue, he quoted from a newspaper editorial that describes the "Demise of the Family." It's about the New Zealand scene, but see if some of the things mentioned sound familiar?

The nation's social experimenters might well admit it: their chipping away for years at our foundations has finally succeeded. They can now officially announce the near-demise of the New Zealand family as once we knew it. Far fetched?

Today's (once normal) mum, dad and children families now comprise less than a third of the nation's households and are getting fewer and fewer every year, according to the Planning Council. Meanwhile, more than a third of the nation's children will be brought up by a single parent eking out an existence on a low income. More than half of our moms with dependent children work and one in eight New Zealanders simply lives alone. Only one in eight households now has a working father and housewife mother. So no longer does Dad bring home the

bacon while Mum stays home to cook. Instead, we have a whole generation of latch-key kids who often miss meals.

The reason tax-payers now face a near-impossible task in footing the bill for this family fall-out, is that recent social reform has favored this self-indulgent lifestyle at the expense of the basic cornerstone of the community. Defacto relationships, which by their very nature lack the permanency of a marriage contract, have been given equal social and taxation status. The right to be gay, to have abortions, to pursue whatever may take your fancy, rather than be a responsible parent has been trumpeted about so loudly for so long that bringing up children in the good old-fashioned way has been made to seem drab by comparison.<sup>44</sup>

The things mentioned here (working mothers, latch-key children, de facto relationships, gay rights, abortions, etc.), are just as much problems in Australia and in North America as they are in New Zealand. The countries "down under" don't have a corner on family miseries and break-ups but they too certainly have a good share!

### *The Decline of Mainstream Christianity*

While we have already noted the decline of gospel preaching in the mainline churches of Australia, further mention of this needs to be made. Modernism (religious liberalism) has immobilized the gospel witness of Australia's mainstream churches, as it pretty much has done with the churches of the English speaking world generally. But, then, what can we expect of a religion whose premises are largely built upon rationalistic unbelief? Modernism in a church is like a parasite—it contributes nothing but slowly saps the life out of that to which it is attached.

### *Results of the decline*

A good case for this can be seen in what has been happening to the Australian churches over the years. An editorial which appeared in an Australian religious monthly had this to say,

Many churches are experiencing declining attendance, financial difficulties and a general lack of interest. Yet, interestingly, it

---

<sup>44</sup>Hynd, *Australian Christianity in Outline*, 15.

is the churches which have forsaken the gospel, denied the inerrancy of Scripture and belief in a literal Genesis 1-3 which have, by far, met with the greatest demise. By contrast, it is the evangelical churches which have on the average increased in numbers and wealth. . . .<sup>45</sup>

When one compares the 1954 census with the 1986 results, the trend is striking. In 1954 the three churches (Methodists, Presbyterians, Congregationalists) which now make up the Uniting Church claimed twenty-one per cent of the population, but by 1986 it had declined to seven per cent. The continuing Presbyterians on the other hand rose from a small remnant to now numbering almost half the size of the Uniting Church. The *IPA Review* (Oct/Dec.'89) reports that evangelicals and fundamentalists generally "went from almost two per cent of the populations to just short of five per cent." The *Review* notes that there is "at least a close correlation between the extent to which the churches have taken to theologically 'modernistic' and/or politically left-wing policies and public pronouncements and the extent to which they have lost supporters."<sup>46</sup>

The reasons the editor gives for the decline of the mainline churches cannot be missed, for such things as forsaking the gospel, denying the inerrancy of Scripture and belief in a literal Genesis 1-3, are general characteristics present in liberal churches here as well.

It is therefore not surprising that these declining churches seek to unite with one another as came about in the union movement which resulted in the Uniting Church of Australia (in 1977). But unions of declining remnants don't solve the problem, for the uniting church simply continues to decline after the union. And why not, for such unions are usually on an ambiguous, vague consensus basis rather than on the dynamic, biblical doctrines of the gospel.

By contrast, as Jeff Kendal has pointed out, the continuing Presbyterian Church, which was made up largely of only a remnant of conservatives after the Union, has grown to four-tenths per cent of the population, i.e., a membership of forty-five thousand, and continues to grow. It has three good seminaries, one of which is in Melbourne, with a full-time faculty of which two, the Revs. A. Harman and D. Milne, are

---

<sup>45</sup>Jeff Kendal, *Evangelical Action* (February/March 1990).

<sup>46</sup>Kendal, *Evangelical Action*, 3.

graduates of Westminster Seminary. (I had the privilege of being Visiting Professor of Systematic Theology for three years prior to my retirement from the Reformed Theological College in 1989 and coming to Mid-America Reformed Seminary as Visiting Professor of Theology in fulfillment of a two year appointment). The Presbyterian seminary has a student body of about thirty keen students who are eager to learn the Reformed faith, and preach and teach it after they graduate. It is also true that they must do battle with Freemasonry and entrenched traditionalism among the older generation, but as long as they remain true to the Word of God, we may hope that time is on their side.

The editorial also mentions other alternatives to the declining mainstream churches. Fundamentalism in Australia is beginning to be a growing force. And this leads us to the next point, namely, our consideration of alternatives to the declining liberal churches. We will seek to do this humbly, yet discerning from a biblical perspective.

#### *What About Alternatives?*

Like everywhere else, Australia has, besides the regular Pentecostal denominations, the Neo-Pentecostals who have made their appearance at one time or another in most major denominations. While charismatic churches continue to grow, a factor involved in this growth is the dissatisfaction of people in mainline churches who in seeking more substantive spiritual fare are attracted to the biblical witness of Pentecostalism. However, Pentecostals also lose a proportion of their membership as some become dissatisfied with these churches' superficiality and unbiblical spiritual demands.

We cannot judge to what extent God may be at work in Pentecostalism. After all, he can and often does use a bent stick by which to strike a straight blow for his own cause and for his own glory. Moreover, Pentecostalism may well be a judgment of God upon apostate churches; an unpaid bill, so to speak.

At any rate, because it is not fully faithful to the authority of Scripture—and even goes beyond it—Pentecostalism could never be recommended as a suitable alternative to Modernist, mainline Australian churches.

#### *Fundamentalism?*

While we applaud Fundamentalism's commitment to the Scriptures as the inspired Word of God, we must often deplore the ways by which it interprets Scripture. It is in Fundamentalism that we find Dispensa-

tionalism, prophetic interpretation of current events which often regards the Bible as a newspaper written in advance (Hal Lindsay), Zionism, Arminianism, et. al.

Fundamentalism, however, is a growing force in Australia. A journalist states, "Bible-based fundamentalists, the only Christian groups gaining large numbers of converts, are here to stay and will get bigger. They could eventually be as important in Australia as they are in America,"<sup>47</sup> and then he gives two reasons for this judgment: the decline of the mainstream churches will continue because of Modernism and increasing irrelevance to society's needs; and the increasing American influence,

Americanization of politics, the TV media, American culture, has provided fertile ground for the biblical fundamentalists whose emphasis is upon the Book and the preacher. People become followers of charismatic personalities—Falwell, Swaggart, etc. As this trend creates its own sub-culture, its influence will increase.<sup>48</sup>

Aside from Fundamentalism's doctrinal aberrations, a Christianity built upon cult personalities is not the way to go. Australia should see this and take note of the fate of the Jimmy Bakker's and the followers of Jim Jones, and be warned accordingly. Following mere men, no matter how gifted, is always a mistake. We remember how the Apostle Paul repudiated this tendency among the Corinthians.

#### *Evangelicalism as a suitable alternative?*

Some see a bright hope in evangelicalism for Australia. David Parker, an editorial associate for *Interchange*, the semi-annual religious journal of the Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students (A.F.E.S.), has written an article in a recent issue entitled, "The Future of Australia's Evangelical heritage."<sup>49</sup> In it he points out that, despite Australia's rather shady, penal beginnings, by the end of the nineteenth century, Australia had shared in the evangelical revival of that century so that, contrary to the popular notion that Australia has always been

---

<sup>47</sup>Greg Sheridan, "Australian Churches Go the American Way," *The Weekend Australian* (February 10-11, 1990).

<sup>48</sup>Sheridan, *Australian Churches Go the American Way*.

<sup>49</sup>Parker, "The Future of Australia's Evangelical Heritage," *Interchange*, No. 44, 1988, 30-40.

godless and secular, society was largely at least nominally Christian, claiming ninety-six per cent of the country's three million citizens.

At this point we might pause to ask, just what is an evangelical? Mark Noll and David Wells, editors of the book, *Christian Faith and Practice in the Modern World*, define the heirs of the Evangelical Revival as "emphasizing lay initiative, active social involvement, evangelistic preaching, and strenuous piety."<sup>50</sup> The word "evangelical" thus is a flexible, though rather ambiguous term.

To this definition Parker would add that the evangelical is committed to the authority of Scripture as the Word of God, together with a "strong voluntarist tendency in ecclesiastical polity."<sup>51</sup> This last factor leads not only to ecclesiastical independency but to Arminian individualism as well.

### *Evangelicalism's basic lack*

The evangelical, therefore, can be found doing alot of things, many of which are commendable, but also being influenced by varied doctrinal winds that blow sometimes in contrary fashion to the Word of God. As with liberalism, the evangelical tends to gravitate to social action and pragmatism. Success is measured by results. Loss of direction and fragmentation often are the consequence of the movement.

Parker himself is an evangelical, but his own evaluation of the movement, interestingly enough, is that, while evangelicalism

has stood, over the years, as a more biblical alternative to a ritualistic and sacramental version of Christianity in the mainstream churches, with their barren scholasticism, liberalism, skeptical biblical scholarship and the social gospel movement, what it needs is a better theology; in fact a sophisticated skilful theology at that.<sup>52</sup>

We can only agree! But where is needed leadership to be found in evangelicalism for this purpose? May I suggest, in the spirit of humility and with no triumphalistic attitude whatever, that this is where a consideration is needed of the contribution the Reformed churches and the Reformed Theological College as their seminary can make.

---

<sup>50</sup>Mark Noll and David Wells, editors, *Christian Faith and Practice in the Modern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 3.

<sup>51</sup>Parker, *Australian Churches Go the American Way*, 34.

<sup>52</sup>Parker, *Australian Churches Go the American Way*, 39.

### *The Place of Reformed Churches*

The Reformed Churches of Australia, with whom I've been associated for the past twenty-three years, plus an earlier association of six years with the Reformed Churches of New Zealand, are not the only Reformed churches in Australia. There are at least six others and a brief description of them is warranted here.

The Presbyterian Church of Australia has already been mentioned, and since its re-formation in 1977, there are encouraging prospects in the long run for this church. The R.C.A. ever more actively seeks to work with and to encourage this church wherever it can. Moreover, synodical committees from both denominations are in dialogue with a view to foster closer relations.

The Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (Free Presbyterians, or F.P.C.A.), are committed to exclusive psalmody, no organs, etc. While they are orthodox, they continue to decline in membership, now having less than 2,000 members in a dozen or so churches. They have basically an isolationist mentality in the interests of preserving the Faith, and a too narrow definition of the purity of worship principle.

The Reformed Presbyterian Church is a sister church of the Reformed Presbyterian Church of America (Covenanters), but they only have three churches and recently closed down a fourth. Doctrinally, this denomination is very close to the F.P.C.A. but differences, nevertheless, keep them apart. Their future, humanly speaking, is not too hopeful.

The Westminster Presbyterian Church has been present in Australia for the past twenty-five years. Originally founded by the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod, who were invited to help out in missions work among the Aborigines in West Australia by an independent missionary, Miss Jones; they have stayed on and now have a half dozen or more churches in the Perth and Brisbane areas. They are friendly enough but pretty much remain committed to doing their own thing. Oftentimes, it seems, that some members from other Reformed churches, for one reason or another, wind up here.

The Evangelical Presbyterians are about thirty years old. Their origin lies with a group of Baptists in Tasmania who grew to an understanding of the Reformed faith. They formed their own denomination and have gravitated in the direction of hyper-Calvinism, with an increasing emphasis upon the sovereignty of God at the expense of human responsibility. Recently, they became embroiled among themselves in a controversy about the two natures of Christ. The more

docetic view, which denies the full humanity of Christ, won out. They number about six churches.

The Free Reformed Churches consist of three churches in Perth and one in Launceston, Tasmania. They were formed by the Article XXXI people of the G.K.N. Their churches are viable but they deliberately maintain their Dutch isolation which makes them seem more interested in their roots than in their future. In the past they have steadfastly resisted establishing any ties with the R.C.A., feeling that these churches share with the G.K.N. in the sin of 1944 that led to the separation of the Article XXXI people. Recently, there seems to be a softening of attitude taking place on their part, especially since the R.C.A. terminated its relationship with the G.K.N. They have Christian schools but to be a member one must belong to the Free Reformed churches. It would seem that community outreach remains at a minimum.

### *The Reformed Churches of Australia*

These churches were founded by the Dutch immigrants who came to Australia and New Zealand in the early 1950s. Originally, their intention was not to establish their own churches. At first they sought to cooperate with the Free Presbyterians and the Reformed Presbyterians, but this was not successful, not only because of these denominations' excessively rigorous (from the Dutch viewpoint anyway) interpretation of the purity of worship principle, but also because of fears on their part of an ethnic take-over. For, as long as doctrinal comity with the Dutch was lacking, their increasing numbers in the smaller Presbyterian churches could well be viewed as a threat of sorts.

After a short time Dutch groups began to organize their own churches under the leadership of ministers who had come from the G.K.N., i.e., Revs. Hoekstra, Vander Bom, Schep in Australia, and Deenick in New Zealand. Soon a theological college (seminary) was organized in 1955 to train students for the ministry. But the need for English speaking ministers became increasingly urgent, so Reformed churches in America were asked for help. The Christian Reformed church responded by sending ministers on a five year loan basis, i.e., Dick Bouma, G. Van Groningen, A. Arkema, J. Senneker, J. Morren for Australia, R. Venema and S. Cooper for New Zealand, plus others later. Ministers from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church had to cut the ties to this denomination when they accepted a call, for they did not go to Australasia on a loan basis. Rev. Raymond O. Zorn was the first of the O.P.C. ministers, then Gerry Williamson, Tom Tyson, Bob Nilson, and

Carl Reitsma followed. All of these ministers, except Zorn, eventually returned to the United States. After spending fifteen years in pastoring three churches (Hamilton, N.Z., Sydney and Dandenong, Australia), Rev. Zorn was called to teach at the R.T.C, where he taught for another fifteen years until his retirement at the end of 1989.

The R.C.A. and R.C.N.Z. have grown over the years so that there are ten thousand members present in the forty churches of Australia, and twenty-eight hundred members in the twenty churches of New Zealand. Of the fifty-six ministers presently serving these two denominations, thirty-two (or almost two-thirds) have been trained at the R.T.C., which means that most are yet comparatively young men.

### *Encouraging things*

Besides slowly growing churches that for the most part keep their young people, there is present a steadily growing Christian school movement of more than fifty schools and associations. The R.T.C. recently began a Chair of Christian Education and in its first year (1990), had four full-time students studying for the Christian Education Certificate (C.E.C.). This development should be a real boost for the Christian schools, because all of the teachers must first train in secular universities and then learn to teach Christianly on a rather hit or miss basis.

The R.C.A. and R.C.N.Z. are showing increasing interest in evangelistic outreach, which in some areas, at any rate, is beginning to bear fruit, though winning the lost to Christ is always a tough job requiring patience and perseverance, for souls are not won by the bushel, but are more often hand-picked one by one.

### *Things that are problems*

In this first generation of their establishment, the R.C.A. and R.C.N.Z. still have the ethnic immigrant image to contend with. All worship services, however, are in English; "Dutch" is not a part of the churches' name; but outsiders are nevertheless still tempted to feel that the churches are really only for Dutch people. This of course will become (and is becoming) less of a problem as the next generation progressively takes over, as it is already proceeding to do. But prejudices and misconceptions take time to overcome—which is necessary if an evangelistic program is to be successfully sustained.

The problem of having enough ministers to pastor the churches appears to be diminishing with an increasing enrollment of young men

at the R.T.C. in the past few years, though at the present time there are more than a dozen vacancies. This has prompted the New Zealand churches to advertize in *The Banner* for ministers from overseas. However, even where the procurement of ministers in this way is successful, past experience has indicated that this at best is a stop-gap measure, for these ministers' stay is usually only temporary.

Since Australasia is very much a part of the world, the Reformed community must struggle and do battle with secularism, materialism, and humanism, as everywhere else in the Western world. Nor are they isolated from the influences of the charismatic movement. The women in office issue is currently in the hands of a synodical study committee, with the outcome uncertain at this point. Often problems seem to be imported from overseas through the influence of the members of the Reformed Ecumenical Council, links with family, sister churches, etc. We are all part of and remain linked together in a world-wide Reformed community. And what takes place in that community, whether for good or ill, likewise affects the other members of that community.

### *The continuing challenge*

The Australasian churches sometimes tend to feel alone, if not isolated. While it has never been easy to be a Christian, to be consistently Reformed is even more difficult. And yet, that is our task if we are properly to fulfill our calling as the people of God in this world.

We tend to feel that we desperately need another strong leader, such as A. Kuyper, to give us influence and direction. But the Lord in his wisdom doesn't give his church leaders like this too often. What we need, therefore, are workers who are faithful to the truth of God's Word, and who will properly discern and speak to current issues and problems with skill and courage in order to maintain and propagate the precious biblical, Reformed faith, the faith once for all delivered unto the saints. This is the continuing challenge!

We must remember the exalted Lord's word of encouragement to his small church in Philadelphia which "kept the Lord's Word and did not deny his name" (Rev. 3:8). His promise to this church was, "I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut."

May the Lord continue to give open doors of fruitful service here, even as we pray that he will do the same for the R.C.A. and R.C.N.Z. as they seek to serve him in his kingdom "down under."

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barkley, Alexander. "The Impact of Calvinism on Australasia," *John Calvin: His Influence in the Western World*, W. Stanford Reid, ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982.
- Breward, Ian. *Australia: "The Most Godless Place Under heaven"?* Melbourne: Beacon Hill Books, 1988.
- Deenik, J.W. *Will Presbyterianism Survive in New Zealand?* Auckland: Reformed Publications, N.D., (Approx. 1965).
- Den Brave, W.B. *Seeking a Homeland*. Melbourne: Reformed Churches of Victoria, 1976.
- Franks, H. George. *Circuit*. The Hague, The Netherlands: Emigration Board of the G.K.N., October 1965.
- Hynd, Douglas. *Australian Christianity in Outline*. Homebush West, N.S.W.: Lancer Books, 1984.
- Murray, Iain H. *Australian Christian Life from 1788*. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1988.
- Penberthy, Jefferson, ed. "The World of 1788: A Nation Is Born," *Time Australia*. Special Issue, January 1788-December 1792, Melbourne: John Fairfax/David Syme, 1988.
- Smith, John. *Advance Australia Where?* Homebush West, N.S.W.: Anzea Publishers, 1989.
- Turnbridge, Dorothy. "Aboriginal Spirituality and an Australian Theology," *Australian and New Zealand Religious History 1788-1988*. R.S.M. Withycombe, ed. A.C.T. Australia: The 1988 Joint Conference Committee, 1988.
- Vanderpyl, D.G. *Why Did We Establish Reformed Churches in New Zealand?* (Published privately), 1990.
- Ward, Rowland, S. *The Bush Still Burns*. Wantirna, Victoria, Australia: Rowland S. Ward, 1989.

Williams, William. *Christianity Among the New Zealanders*. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989.

Williamson, G.I. *Our Reformed Faith*. Hamilton, N.Z.: Reformed Churches of New Zealand, 1987.

Withycombe, Robert, ed. *Australian and New Zealand Religious History, 1788-1988*. Jamison Centre, A.C.T.,: The 1988 Joint Conference Committee, 1988.