

THE REFORMED ECUMENICAL SYNOD

ITS MISSION PERSPECTIVE AND PROBLEMS

By Prof. G. VAN GRONINGEN

Mr. Chairman, Board members, fellow teachers, students and friends:

It was requested of me to address you today on the subject of the R.E.S. particularly the Synod's work at the present time and its ecumenical importance. Having attended the Synod, having taken part in its deliberations, discussions and decisions, and having been appointed to participate in the activities of one of the larger standing committees, I gladly comply.

Permit me to state first of all that it was an honour, a joy and a real blessing to have attended the Synod. It was an honour to be counted among the representatives of the Lord's church as it exists in various countries. It was a joy to fellowship with brothers in the faith, regardless of colour or nationality, but who were united in creed, in faith, in hope and love. It was a real blessing to learn from brothers in the faith, to be used to strengthen the faith in brothers, to mutually encourage one another and to share in the riches of our Lord and His church.

It would go far beyond the scope of a commencement address to deal with all of the Synod's activities and ecumenical perspectives. I must limit myself to some aspects for particular attention. However, desirous to present to you the scope and range of the R.E.S. as to membership and activities, I will present some facts first. Then I will concentrate on the Missions aspect of the Synod's work, particularly the ecumenical PERSPECTIVE and ecumenical PROBLEMS which we as churches, members of the R.E.S., face.

I. The Statistics of the R.E.S. are as follows:

At present there are 22 member churches. These churches are all Reformed in faith, though they bear various names such as: The Church of England in South Africa, The Church of Christ in the Sudan in Tiv, The Gereformeerde Kerk, Dutch Reformed Church in Ceylon, Reformed Church, Irish Evangelical Church, Free Church of Scotland, Reformed Presbyterian Church. The countries represented in the R.E.S. are: (1) South Africa, (2) Nigeria, (3) France, (4) Ireland, (5) Scotland, (6) The Netherlands, (7) Ceylon, (8) Japan, (9) Australia, (10) New Zealand, ((11) Argentina, (12) Brazil, (13) Canada, (14) U.S.A.

At the 1963 Synod gathering eight churches had sent official observers and these churches are, with one or two exceptions, considered possible members of the R.E.S. Should these churches indeed become members, then Korea and Mexico will be added to the list of nations represented. One of the member churches did not send a delegation to the R.E.S. Two churches which have shown some interest initially failed to communicate with the organizing committee, the Gereformeerde Kerk of Indonesia and the Reformed Church of Hungary. The latter however was indirectly represented by former members who sat in as individual guests: Dr. A. S. Ungvary and Dr. J. Zsiros. Beyond a doubt, the number of churches who can and should become members of the R.E.S. is not exhausted. We think particularly of some of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands and their counterpart in the U.S., Canada and Australia, and of emerging churches as the Presbyterian church (or Reformed) in Formosa, the Philippines and in Cuba.

The total membership of the churches now officially members of the R.E.S. is 2,481,394. This does not include the membership of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, simply because this church did not present this information. The largest member churches are Die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk of South Africa 1,177, 958; De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland 778,052; The Christian Reformed Church in the U.S. and Canada 256,015. The three smallest churches are: Irish Evangelical Church 700 members, the Reformed Church in Argentina 1,400 members, the Reformed Church of Brazil 1,500 members. Next in line up the ladder are the Reformed Churches of New Zealand 1,807 members.

It is our conviction that the two and a half million members in the churches, holding membership in the R.E.S., could be and should be a mighty witness and force for our Lord and His church throughout the whole world. Located on every continent, quite evenly scattered, except for the mass of central and northern Asia, people of Reformed conviction, filled with the Spirit, saturated with the Infallible Word, zealous to serve in the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ could and should initiate and lead in a most thorough going Reformation of the Church and be used to bring salvation to millions now living in darkness, going to a Christless eternity.

II. The Agenda of the Synod of 1963:

What have the churches done while in session for two weeks in August 1963? For a time some churches' leaders had considered that it would not be advisable to convene the Synod as yet. Too many of the study committees had not completed their assigned studies. However the organizing committee considered it necessary to convene the Synod in the interest of maintaining the R.E.S. and to give it the necessary impetus to proceed in its work. The committee has been proven to have had sound judgment. The agenda for the R.E.S. was such that almost two full weeks were required to deal with the materials at hand. Quite a number of the delegates, judging that the Synod would not require the time that it did, had made commitments which required them to depart before the Synod was adjourned. It was much regretted that attendance had dropped at the last session when some of the most vital issues were finally discussed and decided upon.

Synod planned the re-organization of its working methods, particularly in reference to the period between the Synodical gatherings. The study committees had not been functioning properly and a lack of concentrated leadership from some qualified recognized source was evident. Hence a permanent secretariat was established and regional study committees were appointed. Financial arrangements were made to enable the secretary to work efficiently and to have various committees meet in the intervals between Synodical gatherings.

An International Reformed Agency for Migration was viewed with favour. This agency is to facilitate, co-ordinate and assist individual churches and countries, solve problems involved in migration.

Mission and Evangelism work and related problems required much of the Synod's time.

Race problems were discussed and a seven-point resolution was drawn up as a testimony to the world and as a guide for member churches which have to deal with specific race problems. It is well for us in Australia to become intimately acquainted with this resolution in view of the presence of Aborigines in Australia and the colour bar policy in our immigration work.

Social action and witness required much study and discussion. Definitive and guiding principles were delineated which are of utmost importance to us in Australia and New Zealand. A united work and witness is called for in social and political areas of life.

Ecumenical matters under discussion were varied and intensely relevant, e.g., (a) what should the R.E.S. say to its constituent members who exist side by side in the same country? It unhesitatingly said that these churches should seriously address themselves to the establishment of closer fellowship and united action and witness.

(b) What should our attitude be to the Roman Catholic church, particularly in view of present day happenings at the Vatican? The Synod said that to date there was no basic change in Rome and hence it is our duty to increase our witness to Rome, calling it from the errors to which it has clung for centuries in worship, life, doctrine and organization.

(c) What should our attitude be to the W.C.C.? The R.E.S. was strong in its protest against this organization and strongly disapproved of membership or co-operation with the Council or its work.

Theological discussions required much of the Synod's time. All the items referred to above have definite theological assumptions, implications and applications. But specific doctrines were also discussed, three in particular:

(a) **INSPIRATION OF THE SCRIPTURES:** The statement of the 1958 Synod was in effect heartily endorsed and those who raised some questions concerning the statement were requested to make a more thorough study on the questions raised and report, if desired, to the next Synod gathering.

(b) **ESCHATOLOGY:** The teachings of Scripture concerning the future were laid before the Synod. Preliminary work on this important aspect of Biblical teaching has only begun. Our churches have much studying to do on these matters.

(c) **THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH AND ITS TASK AND CALLING ON EARTH:** In a real way, this is one of the most fundamental problems confronting the R.E.S. Our dividedness, our lack of united witness stems directly from the confusion evident in the member churches regarding the Biblical teachings concerning the Body of Christ. The discussions on racial problems, our mission task, relief and migration work revealed an uncertainty. Hence the Synod appointed the largest and most inclusive study committee to deal thoroughly and profoundly with this doctrine. As many nations as possible are represented in the committee to insure a broad cultural and international approach as the churches seek to determine just what the Scriptures hold forth as the essence, nature, task, life for every member church of the R.E.S.

This last item has taken me directly into one of the major aspects of the Synod's work to be done and to which the Synod has addressed itself for the next five years. In addition to this various other mandates were given.

III. Mandates of the Synod of 1963:

Synod, through its secretary, interim committee and various study committees and regional committees must continue to organize itself and seek out an efficient method of working. This is of fundamental importance. Scattered around the globe, the churches must work together, positively, efficiently, harmoniously. Pray much for the men in charge of this aspect of the Synod's activities.

A Literature committee has been appointed. This committee is to survey all that is being done in the way of preparing and publishing sound Reformed literature. The committee is to assist the various organizations, co-ordinate their activities, help prevent duplication and seek out the most pressing needs. It is also to bring before churches the materials available, and literature channels available. It was not considered necessary to initiate the publishing of a special R.E.S. Journal, rather, initially to stimulate the use of the many and varied publications now already in existence.

Race problems will continue to be studied in the light of Scripture; particularly the relevant cultural, national and ecclesiastical problems. A real pressing issue concerns the relationship of native churches, born of mission work, to the home church. This problem confronts the Reformed Churches in Australia. What status are we to accord the Brookton Mission Church, now under Miss Jones' jurisdiction, but possibly to come under the jurisdiction of the Mission Board? Will the Reformed Churches grant the Mission Church equal status? Will its elders have equal voice in classical meetings? Will some of the congregation there be readily received in the ministry of the churches at large? This problem confronts the Christian Reformed Church in regard to the Indian churches in New Mexico, and the South African churches particularly.

A committee on Women and the Office in the Church has been appointed to study the Scriptural basis of the Reformed position that women are not eligible for office. A clear, unequivocal Scriptural statement on this matter is a necessary testimony to the church world of today.

Polygamy on the mission fields continues to present basic problems to the young churches on the field which are seeking to establish a positive, clear witness in their communities. A fact of great interest is that whereas the home churches had decided that in some instances converted polygamists can be admitted to church membership, the pastors and elders of the Nigerian Churches of Christ strongly protested the earlier decisions of the R.E.S. Continued study of the problem is necessary.

A committee has been appointed to make a thorough study on the tragic fact that thousands of people are becoming estranged from the church. Some of Synod's most gripping and stirring moments were experienced as it wrestled with this problem. Why has missions gone into reverse? Why do so many born in the bosom of the church and why do so many converts absent themselves from the church and become identified with the world? Where does the church fail? Do its members no longer know the joy of being Spirit filled? Does the churches' lack of concern for pure, Scriptural teaching lead to estrangement? Is the church becoming too ascetic in its relation to the world? Does the church consider itself so other-worldly that men in this world are totally strangers to the church if they take a positive stand and place themselves in the midst of life's stream in this world?

This committee must also make a thorough study of the relationship between word and deed in Missions. Is it possible to do mission work by deeds of mercy and not accompany the deed with the spoken word? Must the church be engaged in relief work when it cannot preach to those it helps by deed?

A Standing Committee on Missions has been appointed which must organize itself, seek information re churches' potentialities, world needs, give

advice and counsel to all in need of it. Thus greater strides could and should be made to fill the earth with the knowledge of God unto salvation in Jesus Christ.

The committee to study the Scriptural teachings on future events has been mandated to study Scripture and to evaluate the teachings of modern theologians. Various theologians have presented widely different views on eschatology. The churches need advice and assistance in the face of these new teachings.

The Christian Reformed World Relief Committee has been requested to effect the organization of a "Reformed Ecumenical Relief Committee" which is to be world wide in outreach. This committee is to be co-ordinate if possible with the various projects of the individual churches now already engaged in world relief activities, e.g., the Gereformeerde Kerken's work in Pakistan and Hongkong and the Christian Reformed Church's work through its World Relief organisations in Korea, Cuba, Guam and other places.

The task confronting the member churches of the R.E.S. is most impressive, ambitious and necessary. How the Holy Spirit's guidance is required! How important that as men study, they pray, submissively, eagerly, searching for the guidance of the Spirit.

Now as we look at the working programme of Synod for the next 5 years, we see that there are a number of direct and indirect references to the mission task of the church of Jesus Christ.

Four committees must deal directly with mission and evangelism problems: (a) Committee on Polygamy, (b) the Committee on Estrangement, (c) the World Wide Relief Committee and (d) the Standing Committee on Missions. Then three committees must deal with problems that have mission implications: (a) Committee on Race, (b) the Committee to study the Church; its nature, task and ecumenical calling, and (c) the Committee on Women and the Offices (what place do women have on our mission fields?)

Furthermore, the committee on Organization will be most directly involved in problems relating to mission work. Because missions is so closely involved in the various aspects of our church life and problems for study, a former Synod had deemed it not necessary to appoint a Standing Committee on Missions. The Synod of '63 did find it most necessary to appoint this committee, for this committee must advise, counsel, stimulate and encourage the churches to assume more fully their wide and varied mission task.

IV. The R.E.S. Mission Perspective:

At this juncture it is my intention to stress 4 vital facts that face us as we go into the world with the glorious gospel of redemption and life in our Lord Jesus Christ.* These points are vitally important to us here in Australasia in view (1) of large unconverted masses of people, (2) the varied character of the older, larger churches, (3) the division into 5 bodies of those adhering to the Reformed confessions and (4) in view of the Reformed Theological College's existence here where men can be prepared for the gospel ministry.

A. We have an all sufficient Lord who has given us a clear, positive mandate, and who has given us His Word and Spirit.

*In this part, and the next part of my address I report on actual discussions and decisions but I also make commentary on these facts. I also add personal viewpoints. I assume responsibility for all I write.

The Lord Jesus made it very clear that He is all sufficient. "All authority is given me in heaven and on earth," Matt. 28 : 18-20. This authority is the sovereign authority of the omnipotent One. Our Lord Jesus is the Creator and Master of this Universe. He holds the whole world in His hand. He turns kings' and dictators' hearts to suit His purposes. He holds in derision those who rail at Him and seek to laugh Him to scorn. Ps. 2.

This all sufficient Lord, the King of the Church and its mission task is Himself the message of the Church. He is the Word, living, sharp, bringing life and light into hearts in darkness. He is the Saviour of the lost. He is the redeemer of the condemned. He brings the love of God to those abiding under the wrath of God.

Furthermore, this all sufficient Lord has provided us with the Spirit who quickens dead men. The Spirit energizes men with zeal to go out into the world. The Spirit, promised throughout the O.T. ages, granted in full measure on Pentecost, leads men into the Truth, directs them to proclaim the Truth and causes men to rejoice in the Truth. This Spirit of God, author and finisher of Regeneration, Conversion, Faith and Sanctification is the rich inheritance of the Reformed Churches. The R.E.S. member churches are richly blessed, magnificently endowed, powerfully enabled to meet the challenge of the mandate given it.

B. The all sufficient Lord, having blessed us with the gospel and the mandate to preach it, made us a debtor to all nations. He specifically said, "Go ye into the whole world, and preach the gospel to all nations." Matt. 28 : 19. Paul understood this point very clearly. He wrote "I am a debtor to the Jew and to the Greek." Rom. 1 : 14, cf. also I Cor. 1 : 23, 24. In Paul's language that meant to all men. The Jew represented the class that had heard the gospel in the O.T. era, the Greek represented humanity at large who had lived outside the sphere of the O.T. covenant. Thus, debtor to all men, Paul born again, converted, living the sanctified life, thoroughly indoctrinated in the Word, filled with the Spirit, went forth a mighty missionary of the Lord Jesus, bringing life to Jew and pagan, establishing the church of the Lord Jesus as he went from place to place. Thus Paul sought to pay his debt to his fellow men according to His Master's gifts and mandate to him. Today, the whole world is still the field of the church. We as Reformed churches are debtors to all nations. That means to every nation. Being debtors by God's gracious gift and positive mandate to every nation, we must therefore feel ourselves debtor to every continent, to every country, to every city, to every village and to every community.

Actual, practical problems confront us. Here is where the committee on Missions will have to serve the churches with advice. In spite of advanced means of travel and communication, we are not able to reach every nation and every city simultaneously, even as Paul was not able to reach every nation nor every city in his day. Where then shall we labour? Where shall we concentrate our endeavours? In short: where are OUR mission fields?

It must be maintained that the first city, nation and continent to which we are debtors of the gospel are the very cities, nations and continents in which the Lord has placed us. "Begin in Jerusalem, then Samaria, and then the uttermost parts of the world." Acts 1 : 8. This must be the perspective of all Reformed churches. However this modern age has glam-

orized missions — brought the gospel to the uttermost parts of the world, gave Samaria some attention but Jerusalem seems considered to be able to come of itself. This is the very reverse of what the Lord Jesus gave us as mandate, method and programme.

What is a mission field? Truly the term mission field must be properly defined. Robert P. Evans considers Europe the most needy mission field in the world today. His book, LET EUROPE HEAR, Moody Press, Chicago, 1963, presents much material to prove his point. Calcutta, India, hears the gospel more than does Paris. Whole sections of India are more thoroughly evangelized than Spain. A recent news release to the newspapers stated that of the 27,000,000 baptized Church of England people in Great Britain, only 3,000,000 attend church and this figure includes those who attend only at Easter and Christmas time. Delegates from the churches in The Netherlands stated on the floor of the R.E.S. that increasingly the masses of their homeland are strangers to the gospel.

What are the facts confronting us in Australia and New Zealand? The percentage of Britons practising Christians is said to be the figure for Australia and New Zealand also. And what of the masses of migrants that have come to Australia and New Zealand in the last two decades? What percentage of the Dutch, the German, the Greek, the Hungarian, the Italian are living the Christ-like life or are even being taught the gospel? A very small minority indeed. We as Reformed churches, whether our name is Reformed, Presbyterian, Church of England, have not begun to carry out our mandate and to pay our divinely imposed debt to Australia's and New Zealand's citizens until we have really gone out. And going out is more than preaching in some stationary place, be it a hall or church, in a cosy historically oriented and culturally conditioned sphere.

The fields of New Guinea, the fields of Taiwan, ripe unto the harvest are on our debit list also. But God have mercy upon us, if we pass by our mandate at home, closing home mission posts, refusing to go to Samaria in order to facilitate our pet projects for ourselves.

What is a mission field? We know! Actually we do not need a committee's advice. How vitally important that every born again Christian turns to the Word of God and be instructed. Then our perspective becomes clear and our vision (view) in focus.

But the fact remains, many churches, Reformed churches, Anglican churches, and Presbyterian churches enmeshed in their cultural and historic traditions, have found sachrine satisfaction in reaching out to the ends of the world. They maintained their "joys" at home and wondered why they missed the joys of fruitful church life at home and fruitful work in the ends of the world.

How important that all the churches involved in the R.E.S. engage in serious self-examination. May the committees appointed by the Synod, led of the Spirit, enabled by God's grace be a powerful means unto a fruitful look at ourselves and the world.

C. Jesus had more to say. He said "Go YE." He had gathered a working force. He prepared them for service. He sent them out, each according to ability, but yet as ONE force of workers.

The Reformed, Presbyterian and Anglican churches involved in the R.E.S. are a mighty force. We are well equipped. But we are too often fragmented in our obedience to Christ. But a mighty programme of mission outreach could become a reality. It is amazing what some small bodies have been able to do in the past and are doing at present. But more must be done.

The perspective of the R.E.S. is not that of a strong super church. The vision before our eyes is not that of a big central organization which controls and directs every aspect of the churches' mission programme. In fact, it was emphatically stated while Synod was in the midst of its deliberations that a central controlling agency was undesirable. The Standing Committee on Missions is to be advisory and consultative in nature.

What does the R.E.S. envisage?

A harmonious united action in which each congregation, communion or larger federated body, retaining its identity and autonomy, nevertheless functions within the scope of the whole programme of Christ's church. At almost every one of the R.E.S. gatherings, since its inception, the R.E.S. has been burdened by the fragmentation, duplication, competition — name it what you will — of the Reformed witness in the world.

The various churches have been able to get together — to study, discuss, deliberate and decide on various important aspects of the churches' task. Now the time has come to act. The Synod envisaged action. This action is to be begun by the various member churches informing each other on what each one is doing, what the immediate needs are at home, what the possibilities are at home and abroad. The churches are seen as increasingly helping each other carry out their respective tasks; e.g., the Chr. Ref. church sent missionaries to Australia to assist the churches in Australia meet its debt to the nation in obedience to Christ. The Reformed churches provided sisters (nurses) to work on the field in Africa where the Orthodox Presbyterian church is labouring. Such actions are but a sample of what must be increasingly done.

The R.E.S. envisages the stronger churches lending assistance to the younger smaller churches by means of personnel, financial support, prayer support and by no means of relief activities in making materials available to alleviate distress and misery.

The R.E.S., as it looked at the member churches, realized that a mighty working force is present. Though the churches are not operating unitedly as they should, the R.E.S. is hopeful that by God's grace, under the Spirit's guidance great things will be increasingly done in the outreach of the gospel to the whole world.

D. The Churches of the R.E.S. have been singularly and bountifully blessed with varied means to carry out the mission mandate. Consider the following means:

1. There are almost 2,500,000 members all told in the various churches. Imagine, how many personal emissaries would go forth if men and women went forth in the service of the Lord as men do when drafted in national wartime emergencies! A draft call is before the churches. This call is more than a volunteer call. There is a personal directive issued to each member "Go ye!" "As I was sent, so send I you!" John 17 : 48; 20 : 21. The R.E.S. realized that there was an abundance of possible recruits. The

R.E.S. envisages the churches training men at home; yes, the Nigerian churches, the Argentinian churches as well as the larger churches long ago established. Thus we see that our Reformed Theological College here fits into the vision. The College can and must take a very active part to prepare men for Australasia, Asia, and the whole world.

2. The printed word remains a mighty force in the world today. Reference was made before to what the R.E.S. has initiated in regard to literature. Indeed, how well we know that Bibles, pamphlets, doctrinal treatises and tracts, study manuals and correspondence courses are available and can be increasingly available if the churches join hands in producing the materials as well as in the distribution of the same.

3. Mass communication medias can be and should be increasingly utilized. The use of shortwave stations, local wireless stations, broadcasting companies, T.V. channels should increase rapidly. By pooling of resources, assisting one another in evaluating needs and opportunities the gospel could be presented more extensively and intensively.

There was discussion, limited to individual conversation and some committee work on the possibility of having one Reformed Radio witness in the world. The Back to God Hour was mentioned as a very likely project to become increasingly an international programme, presenting the gospel proclamation of the R.E.S. member churches.

4. The increasing scope of relief to refugees and emergency areas, due to tragedies or prolonged natural conditions, was envisaged as a real possible aid to as well as a means to increase our mission endeavours.

As the mission programme of the various Reformed churches are brought into proper perspective, one is amazed at the potentialities, privileges and opportunities confronting these churches. But, we must not minimize the scope of the problems that confront the churches individually and particularly in fellowship and united action. The R.E.S. in its 1963 session gave convincing evidence of its awareness of these problems.

V. The R.E.S. Mission Problems :

A. One of the most fundamental theological problems underlying an effective united mission programme is the problem of the church, its nature and ecumenical calling. Discussions on the floor of Synod revealed not only a lack of clarity in thought and understanding of the Scriptural teaching, but also a dire need for a clearer understanding. To arrive at this clearer understanding will require much dedicated, prayerful study of the Scriptures. But more is required. Whilst the views, insights and convictions of the various member churches are presented and carefully evaluated, men must at the same time be thoroughly objective in their study and understanding of the Scriptures. A complete submission to the Holy Scriptures and an utter reliance upon the guiding Holy Spirit are absolutely necessary to arrive at the proper objectivity necessary for this study. Men are so prone and bound to their historic views and to their culturally conditioned convictions.

In addition to the psychological problem referred to are the theological givens and their interrelation. The Church is the body of Christ. It consists of the redeemed sinners. Every member has his gifts, talents and opportunities. This body of believers is built upon the truths of the Scriptures. Eph. 2. Simultaneously, the Church is the pillar and ground of

truth, I Tim. 3 : 15. To the Church a tremendous gift has been given — the revealed truth, to be cherished, preserved, proclaimed and applied. Every member of the churches has individual rights of interpretation. Each individual must consider it his or her responsibility to cherish, preserve, proclaim and apply the revealed truth which may not be compromised, confused nor ignored. Thus, to bring a general unity in insight, conviction, preservation, proclamation and application is a pressing need, while individual freedom is assured.

Furthermore, the churches must become more Spirit conscious and Spirit filled. This is very difficult, if not impossible, to achieve by study, deliberation and decision. Yet, the study of the Scriptures on the Spirit's essential and absolutely necessary activity in the churches is required. Thus men must so study, discuss and deliberate that the Spirit will not be grieved or fenced in, but given free reign. Men must so work in the truth that the Church becomes spontaneously submissive, and receptive to and filled with the Spirit.

As the Scriptural doctrine of the Church is restudied and discussed, the mission task of the Church must be brought into clearer focus. This task is part of the very nature of a Spirit filled church to which the Gospel truth has been committed.

Most difficult of all will be to gain a clear insight into the meaning and realistic application of the Scriptural truth concerning the essential unity of the Church. One body, one Spirit, one hope, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all. Eph. 4 : 4-6. Unity amidst diversity is the popular phrase. But which diversities have Scriptural warrant? Peter was pointedly informed that the Lord is no respecter of persons, Acts 10 : 34. Paul outrightly would have nothing of a culturally oriented Jewish church and a culturally oriented Gentile church at its side in the same city. Gal. 2 : 11-21.

Many of the member churches of the R.E.S. have a long history and deeply rooted convictions which in some instances are at variance with those of other member churches. All have sought Scriptural evidence for their views and practices. Which of these are truly Scriptural and in harmony with the basic aspects of Scriptures' teaching concerning the church? Indeed, pray much for the various men who are appointed to this task.

B. We return again to the tragic fact that many people are becoming total strangers to the Church. People who should be intimately acquainted, deeply involved, zealous participants in the church have turned their backs to the church. If the churches are to bring the gospel to the unsaved millions and bring the estranged and straying into the fellowship of the Church, then the churches certainly must become a cheerful, comfortable, attractive, cherished, longed for haven for these redeemed ones. The churches should spontaneously offer a rich and deeply satisfying experience of fellowship and a thrilling participation in its activities.

It is immediately evident that every church is committed to a serious self-examination now that the problem is raised. Self examination always calls for repentance and confession. Furthermore, it demands a dropping of those sins which were confessed and a changing of its ways. Which church will be able to humbly take the advice and counsel of all its sister churches? Which church will have the grace to confess its failures and amend its ways, regardless of cost in historic and culturally cherished habits, customs and ideas?

What a tremendous task for the committee assigned to study this problem! Pray much for them and all our churches involved.

C. We return at this point to the matter of defining a mission field. We have seen the necessity of this in a former part of our address. Two of the many and varied problems involved in defining missions fields are:

1. Aside from the Scriptural injunction to begin at home, proceed to environments and then to utmost parts, are we justified in our attempts to categorize the various parts of the world under headings such as primary fields (referring to those places where the gospel has not yet been preached), secondary fields (referring to those places where there has been some gospel work or where there has been serious backsliding), and tertiary fields (referring to those areas that have long been subjected to gospel proclamation)? Robert Evans in his book on Europe refers to this problem, but he has no definite answer other than: where men live in darkness, there the gospel must be preached.

Another facet of our problem has to do with the cultured and uncultured areas of the world. If men have attained a high degree of culture, often as a result of earlier Christian influence, but are not committed to Christ, are they any less in need of renewed gospel preaching than the Inca tribes of South America?

Another way of stating our problem is by asking the question: when have men forfeited their rights of hearing the gospel? Have they forfeited their right when parents and grandparents turned their backs to the gospel? Do children share in the guilt of their parents and do they have to forgo an opportunity to have the gospel preached to them so that people in Africa and Asia whose forbears, possibly milleniums before, rejected the gospel can hear the message of salvation?

2. Will the people of the various nations, cities, committees, etc., resent having these areas considered a mission field? How must the conclusions of the study and defining of mission fields be reported? Robert Evans states that France is one of the most needy mission fields in the world today. But the French Protestant is hurt by and deeply resents the thought that his nation is one of the most Godless pagan countries in spite of its long church history and illustrious cultural traditions (p.153). But Evans points out that the Catholic church, by far the church in pre-eminence in France, openly considers France a mission field, while the Protestants, less than 900,000 in number, deeply resent having their unsaved millions of fellow Frenchmen considered mission potentials.

To label one's own country a mission field, to consider the environment in which one has made his home a mission field seems to hurt men's pride and injure his self esteem. But, whether a place is considered a mission field or not should be determined by the masses of unsaved people, regardless of culture, neighbours or friends. A deep compassion for unsaved sinners should prepare one and all to consider any place a mission field. Indeed, it will require much grace and humility as well as a thorough Christian compassion. May the Lord supply the need of the men at study and every church and individual involved.

4. We have made reference a number of times, directly and indirectly to the necessary co-operative and united mission outreach of all the churches involved in the R.E.S. We wish to point out a few problems involved. And they are real problems.

First of all, an absolute prerequisite for such joining in hands is a ready acceptance of each other as true faithful churches of the Lord Jesus. Though we as churches are able to meet in fellowship, study and discussion on Synodical levels in some foreign country, on the local level there is too much mistrust and lack of confidence in each other. The causes for this tragic phenomena are varied. I am convinced that if the problems referred to above (III : 1, 2, 3) were solved in the light of God's Word under the leading of the Spirit, and if all churches would seriously apply the Truth revealed and clarified to themselves, the mists of suspicion and clouds of mistrust would soon evaporate.

A second closely related problem concerns the attitudes of the smaller and larger churches to each other as they co-operate in various activities. Should each church, regardless of size have equal responsibilities as others? Should the larger churches, which can assist smaller churches with their task at home, give money and materials, and require no account of how their means given have been utilized? Should the larger churches join in the administrative work of the smaller churches? This is truly a vexing problem between the mother churches in Europe and America and its mission churches in other continents. The problem also comes to the fore in the Australian and New Zealand situation when aid was received from Europe and the U.S.

We would also want to mention the various barriers between churches caused by historic, national and culturally differing backgrounds.

The focal problem concerns the legitimacy of maintaining these differences in a modern world which is increasingly a shrinking world due to modern transportation means and fast communication systems. Increasingly the world is becoming one world, industrially, scientifically and politically. Must the churches sharpen their differences in the midst of this? God forbid! Rather, united in revealed truth, united in worship and sanctified life it must present one front, one action, one message to the lost world.

God help every member, every church, every one involved in the solving of the problems involved in bringing our witness as one effective, efficient, witness to the world.

5. The last problem I refer to at this time concerns the development of what I would call the common sense sanctified attitude in regard to our mission task. There are, among others, two issues which we as churches should face. The one concerns our proper use of means and the other concerns our daily life in which a strong witness should be given.

A common sense, yes, plain common sense, pervaded by the Spirit, saturated by the wisdom of Christ is a dire need. When the means at disposal for the performing of a job are not used properly, men are said to lack in plain common sense. In other words, as churches we need real wisdom as we consider the world's needs and our opportunities and then allocate our funds, assign our assets for specific purposes and implement the channels at our disposal. Let me illustrate: If there is a limited amount of funds available for a field, then it will have to be wisely decided if the circumstances, need, etc., warrants a broad, extensive work without concentrated activity in but few, if any particular place. Or should there be concentrated activity in a number of places and permit a wider field to go unreached? Or, should funds be allocated for an intensive educative programme in an area of limited

possibilities where one church is working, and meanwhile funds are short for a larger medical programme with greater possibilities in an other area where another church is working and is not able to meet the challenge due to lack of means?

Inter action and co-operation on the designation of means and allocation of funds could measurably assist in extending our outreach with the gospel. Again, it will be very difficult to organize a co-operative use of means which will safeguard the autonomy of the participating churches. Yet, in view of the fact that our resources are scattered among twenty plus churches and in view of the fact that within some churches there are seemingly competitive organizations, duplication remains a fact and fragmentation a hindrance to our outreach.

Indeed, the mandate to go out to the whole world demands that we as churches together make a serious, concentrated and inclusive study of our means, the use of these and the opportunities and possibilities before us, including those fields and challenges which as yet have remained untouched.

It will be difficult for a study committee to give advice and counsel on this problem. The various churches will likely consider their specific projects most important, needful, etc. It could be very difficult for some churches to retrench in an area in favour of advancement in another churches' area and work. Sanctified common sense is direly needed. Advice and counsel from a central committee will be of little value unless all the churches readily agree to follow a Spirit directed course.

Finally, there is the absolute need of positive, Spirit filled, led and dedicated individual lives on the part of the members of all the churches. The sanctified life which indeed gives real evidence of the re-birth, the joy of justification, the hope of glory remains an indispensable condition for a positive mission outreach on the part of the churches. Beyond a doubt, all the churches are aware of this problem. Unsanctified living in business, industry and social activities have proven to be tremendous hindrance in making funds available for the churches, in producing zeal for the Lord and bringing salvation to unsaved sinners. Unsanctified living raises questions in unsaved people's minds as to the sincerity of the churches, the efficacy of the gospel and the reality of the Spirit's activities in personal lives.

The churches will have to study this problem. But study will be but a beginning. The truth of God's word must be applied and lived by individuals. Individuals will have to pray for the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Individual members will have to be submissive to the Spirit and gladly led by Him.

A thorough study of the problems related to the sanctified life and mission work, e.g., christian liberty, the tithe, solidarity with the world etc., is a necessity. More difficult will be the presentation of the conclusion, the advice, the counsel in such a way that the churches, collectively and individually will be attentive, impressed and diligent to follow the advice.

In conclusion, we would posit that it is a tremendous blessing for all churches to be involved in the R.E.S. But, these blessings, beyond a doubt, bring added responsibilities. Every blessing brings a debt to the Lord. Every privilege involves an obligation. We were quick to reach out for the blessings of the R.E.S. Thus we became privileged. Now it

remains for us to prove our faithfulness as we strive to live according to God's revealed Word and the increasing light we receive from it as study committees, churches and individual members study the Word.

God bless the R.E.S., the member churches, richly!
