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Sound Doctrine
in

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*Serving Christ by equipping pastors,
teachers and lay leaders in Reformed,
Biblical doctrine in Central and
Eastern Europe and the former Soviet
Union*

NEWSITEMS

Summer Edition



HOW SHALL WE REMEMBER HIM?"

A TRIBUTE TO REV. NICK VOGELZANG

*By Dr. R. David Ludwick,
President of ITEM*

This is a second in a series of articles about Rev. Nicholas Vogelzang, founder of Christ for Russia, now ITEM.

Nick, as he was affectionately known to his friends, was born in Michigan, one of seven children, served in the U.S. Navy during WWII, attended Calvin College and Seminary, graduating in 1955 as a minister in the Christian Reformed Church. He and his wife Katherine (Kay) served congregations in Salt Lake City, Ogden and Brigham City as well as in First Lansing, IL, First Sheldon and Newton, IA, and in Bellevue, WA. He was preceded in death by Kay in 1989; he is survived by his wife Eleanor Bergsma Vogelzang, seven children, 18 grand children and four great grand children.

In retirement he worked for the Bible League and World Wide Christian Schools, organized Christ for Russia in 1992 and continued to preach and lead devotions and inspire others in the faith.

Rev. Vogelzang was a visionary in his efforts to establish Christ for Russia as a Reformed mission effort in the countries of the former Soviet Union beginning with two small works, one in Tivadarfalva in Central/Western region of Ukraine and one in Donetsk, Eastern Ukraine. Young men and women were trained as evangelists in Tivedarfalva and young men and women were trained to be pastors and teachers and lay leaders in Donetsk.

Christ for Russia came into being as a result of the conversations between Dr. Joel Nederhood and Pastor Nick. Dr. Nederhood was asked why the Back to God Hour broadcast did not do more than simply broadcasting into the Soviet Union, to which he replied, "It's not in our charter. You do it." And so he did.

Working with local evangelical Christians he and Rev. William (Bill) Ribbens, Rev. William (Bill) Renkema and Rev. Jim Bultman (and later Rev. Rod Gorter) organized the first groups of teaching pastors/professors to go as the first teams to the Donetsk Regional Bible Institute, beginning with 12 students (See pictures on page 2).

These efforts were truly visionary as within the next five years this particular school would grow into a Bible College and then a Seminary. Pastors/professors from (eventually) seven different Reformed denominations would go to Eastern Ukraine teaching this first class of students for six week terms each. Later, this was reduced to two weeks as the number of courses increased.

Having selected key men to serve as Board of Directors and Advisory Board, when cancer began to take its toll with Pastor Nick, Rev. Dr. Gerard (George) Van Groningen was called to be President and R. David Ludwick to be the Executive Director. This is the beginning of the second stage of Christ for Russia.

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HOW SHALL WE REMEMBER HIM?

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Serving for two years as President Dr. Van Groningen worked with Pastor Nick and Dr. R. David Ludwick, in order to stabilize the work in Eastern Ukraine and look for the possibility of further work in other venues. Dr. Ludwick undertook efforts to expand the work to other locations including Riga, Latvia, a work which Dr. Van Groningen accepted and developed.

The groundwork was being laid for further work and development which would come in ensuing years.

Part three of this series will trace its development and growth of His work through ITEM, the successor to Christ for Russia.

In every relationship where there is to be growth and development a vision must be kept alive, nurtured and fed by the Truth of the Word, if it is to be what it was originally seen to become. We believe that this is a part of the legacy of Rev. Nick Vogelzang.

Dr. R. David Ludwick, July 2006



Overview: Old barn looking building was the original meeting place of the students in Donetsk; with growth they moved into the church's classroom and fellowship room for lunch – apple juice, borscht, ham and bread; first graduating class.



MATTHEW 28: REQUEST? INSTRUCTION? MANDATE?



By Dr. R. David Ludwick, ITEM President

From the very outset Matthew 28 appears to be more than merely request or instruction! The use of the imperative "Go..." takes us out of the first two categories and puts us in the third.

This must lead us to conclude that all are issued the mandate to go and make disciples, and that does not apply to Apostles or disciples of the 1st century only!

As Reformed Christians we must take the imperative seriously. It is not for the Reformed Christian to say, "God's plan will be effective because it is His plan and he is God," but rather because He says "Go and make disciples..." And of equal importance we must assess the appropriate response to His Grace!

If we are Reformed, truly, then our gratitude is the only appropriate response to His Grace, so He does not only tell us to go and make disciples but we desire it because of His Grace lavished upon us. We desire to please Him. To be brought from a condition of unable not to sin to a condition of able not to sin and deliverance from the abyss of Hell itself, does truly work a gratitude of love in those, who unmerited, were given the gift of deliverance and regeneration.

This is the message of the Bible and Redemption History. God the Father promised God the Son a people who would love Him volitionally and who would spend the rest of eternity with the Son!

What Grace it is that He not only chooses, sustains, and adopts, but He has chosen us to share in His glory in part by making disciples of all nations, teaching them... This is the message also of ITEM, for when we serve our brothers and sisters, we serve Him in His work by His Grace and so we share in His victories! Hallelujah, Amen!

David Ludwick, July 2006

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UNITY IN DIVERSITY

By Alister Torrens, ITEM Professor

Unity in Diversity: Is there really a place for a distinctively Reformed Church in the former Soviet Union?

Sobornost' is the Russian word often used to characterize the Eastern Orthodox understanding of the Church. The popular 19th Russian Orthodox lay theologian, A.S. Khomyakov, first used the term to describe how the Orthodox Church alone had maintained a third way, as he saw it, between two errors: on the one hand the sort of authority imposed from above and seen in the Roman Catholic Church (which he called "unity without freedom"), and on the other hand the individualistic fragmentation of Protestantism (which he described as "freedom at the expense of unity".) Sobornost', which is perhaps best translated 'conciliarity', includes the Orthodox understanding that the Church is Trinitarian in nature. [1] One of the most fundamental aspects to the concept is that of unity in diversity.

In this article, however, I want to focus not on ecclesiology per se, but rather to reflect upon the relationship between doctrinal diversity and evangelical unity within 'evangelicalism'; especially in the Russian-Ukrainian context. I argue the case for helping build up a strong Church in this context, which on the one hand is distinctively Reformed, and which on the other, humbly seeks and maintains fraternal relations with other evangelical churches in the name of Christian unity, for the sake of God's glory (John 17:20-23; 1 Cor 12; Eph 4:3-6). Lastly, I argue that the ministry of ITEM is invaluable in engendering such biblical 'unity in diversity': it is uniquely positioned both to help train godly men who will build up strong Reformed Churches in Eastern Europe and to foster gospel unity between Reformed and other evangelical Christians.

Evangelical Unity - Past and Present

Perhaps, it is inevitable that in a country where there is a predominant State Church which not only understands itself as the only existing true Christian Church, but indeed which seeks in part to justify that claim by contrasting its supposed unity with the clear disunity of the Western schismatics, that non-conformists will seek to declare and display to as high a degree as possible, their own unity, sometimes even declining to forthrightly distinguish themselves from, or define themselves against, the State Church.

Due to a number of factors that can be traced back to the very beginnings of its pre-history there, this has been very much true of Protestantism in Russia, at least up until the Soviet period, when that (evangelically) ecumenical spirit was sometimes replaced by a palpable mistrust between the few Protestant denominations that survived during that time. [2] With the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, this mistrust remained amongst those in the existing Protestant churches. However, at this time there appeared many foreign Protestant missionaries and new denominations, most of them much more open to closer relationship with other (evangelical) churches, and some enthusiastic or actively encouraging this. [3] Since that point, the possibility of an 'evangelical movement' has been live once more, as have questions as to the need, desirability, or current existence of such evangelical unity. Moreover, since there are now scores of Protestant denominations and organizations in the country, and since the Orthodox Church, while on paper no longer the State Church, still thinks similarly about unity, the need for reflection on this topic is surely greater than ever before by evangelicals in Russia, Ukraine and their other ex-Soviet neighbors. Indeed, for missionaries coming from a Western context, familiar with 'evangelicalism' at home, and perhaps keen to see a similarly broad evangelicalism reproduced in Russia, the need for reflection is greater again, not least since some shortcomings and limitations of this same broad evangelicalism at home have become increasingly apparent in recent years to a number of people.

Unity in Diversity

A strong Reformed church in the CIS has an invaluable contribution not only despite its distinctiveness in comparison to other evangelical churches, but in many cases precisely because of it. (To create another evangelical denomination that is virtually identical in most aspects to twenty other current ones – that would indeed be a mockery of biblical unity.) Such a church will at the same time strive to maintain love for those brothers and sisters who will disagree with us on secondary matters of doctrine. Too often the Reformed churches have in practice adopted one of two polar errors: either emphasizing their distinctiveness to the detriment and neglect of maintaining love and fellowship with other evangelicals (and so becoming isolated, unheard, and at least from the perspective of the broader evangelical community, irrelevant), or, less often, have simply lost all distinctive expression of a

Reformed tradition, that is denominationally subscribed to on paper, but the deep theological and devotional riches of which have been long forgotten. A strong Reformed church in the CIS will have the need for humility as the 'new kid on the block' and as a numerical minority. We will have to remember that it is not unnatural that most Baptists and many Pentecostals whose denominations date back to before the October Revolution and who remained faithful through generations of Soviet persecution, will first respond with suspicion to a denomination or even tradition (Reformed) they have never heard of. The temptation in such circumstances will be to dismiss such a response and even to disregard it by failing to seek or maintain any degree of genuine fellowship. Our first motivation to take seriously the matter of biblical unity must be obedience to God. What is more if we truly believe that the most faithful expression of biblical faith is found within the Reformed tradition, then it will be our heart's desire to see those truths beneficially impact the whole church, and perhaps our influence will only be as great as our willingness to engage with those brothers and sisters in Christ outside our own denominational walls.

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The ministry of ITEM exemplifies this very conviction: on the one hand involved in helping train men at confessionally Reformed seminaries in the former Soviet Union who will be leaders in the growing Reformed churches within their countries; and on the other understanding that the sound theological riches of the Reformed tradition are too precious to keep to ourselves, and so seeking to provide teachers at any evangelical seminary of Bible college where there is a need and a request for help. May God indeed continue to build His Church for His glory, and graciously permit us to continue participating in humble ways in this great work!

Alister Torrens, June 2006

RIGA, VILNIUS, WARSAW AND KIEV – OUR VIGOROUS WORKS!

By R. David Ludwick, ITEM President

On a recent four week teaching and administrative tour of these four works I am pleased to inform you that the only needs extant are those of finances to accomplish the objectives sought: which are the preparations of men and women for service in the church, pastoring, teaching, evangelizing and shepherding.

In a sense, it is difficult to write this report as there is little new to report and because all is proceeding as planned and hoped. In that regard, it is then a report of the pursuit of excellence. In Riga the students continue to progress, four of them either having or being in the process of graduating from the State University, receiving their degrees, having taken the course requirements necessary and completing the writing assignments, and receiving a degree recognized throughout the European Union. The exciting aspect of this is that the faculty of the Religion Department under which our students and university students studied under some of the most recognized Reformed theologians of our time, all provided by ITEM. Costs exceed those in the other locations because of the volume of activities undertaken, etc.

It should be noted that four of the students will also be receiving degrees via Covenant Theological Seminary ACCESS program. This curriculum will be followed and completed within the next year.

Because of the changes in the administration of higher education in the European Union the school in Riga will be moved to Vilnius, Lithuania and professors provided by ITEM and the funds will continue to be administered through the administrative staff of Baltic Reformed Theological Seminary to effectively comply with the changing regulations.

The work in Vilnius is gearing up to receive the responsibility outlined above with professors and administrators visiting and working in Vilnius in order to procure the best academic advantage for our students using our Reformed faculty.

In Warsaw we have growth and the depth of knowledge (19) as the country moves from Communist government and economy to that of democratic and capitalistic. The students here, unlike in Riga, tend to be more entrepreneurial and interested in the education for education's sake, as well as for academic

advancement, should they choose to do so at a later date. The academic and practical exist here in Warsaw and to a larger extent in the other works, one main factor being that those who have been serving as pastors in the local churches most often do not have time for the pursuit of an academic degree, BUT see the true need for the training ITEM offers in the wholesome administration and shepherding of their flocks.

In Ukraine we see a mixture of all of the above. Highly organized the Kiev work, Kiev Regional Bible College, has an administrative staff, offers a degree in one and each of three categories: Pastor/Preaching, Teaching/Christian Education, Music and Worship. Within these three categories there is 40-60 per cent of the curriculum which each student must take in order to be properly equipped to complete his diploma in the specialty of his choice. The administration of KRBC is most reasonable given the circumstances and the fact that they are carrying a student population of 50+ (53 out of 57 students graduated this spring and received their diploma, some of whom will go on for further graduate work and the majority will go back to their churches to serve the generations that will follow).

Altogether these schools and the others which ITEM sponsors require the prayers and financial assistance of those who recognize mission mandate of our Lord, particularly set forth in Matthew 28 and Acts 1. We covet your prayers as these works grow and ask that you forward us information about any person who is apt to teach and who has a heart for missions, theological education missions in particular. I say "in particular" because other forms of mission, we believe, do not replicate themselves generation after generation after generation!

These fields are ripe to be harvested... the workers are few... there is room for you... What is your mission mandate as a church, as a congregation, as an individual person? What better investment of His money and His work than to teach them, who will teach them, who will teach them...

PS If we may send you any information or if you know of any such person as we have mentioned, please contact us. It will be our and your and their opportunity to share "in the preparation of the Bride!" What a blessing! Would you deny someone who does not know of ITEM's work the blessing of serving and seeing for themselves. Do not hesitate. Act now!

David Ludwick, July 2006

MISIJA LIETUVA: UPDATES

By Kris Holroyd, ITEM Missionary to Lithuania in preparation

Thank you all for your constant prayers. I have successfully completed both my written ordination exams and my committee oral exam. All that is left for ordination is examination that will take place on July 18.

Our support remains steady at about 35%. Now that my ordination exams are all but finished, we are concentrating our time and energy into raising the rest of our support so that we can leave in October.

We have not heard from the government about Jone's green card, but the process takes four to six months, so we expect to hear from the government sometime between August and October.

As mentioned above, I stand to take the exam on July 18. Immediately afterwards, we are leaving for the West. We will spend about six weeks in the Colorado, Wyoming, and Montana area raising support.

Thank you for your constant prayers and financial support of us. If you have not sent us a pledge card, please include a note with your next check indicating whether your support is monthly, quarterly, annually, or one-time. This pledge-note helps us know precisely where we are with regard to support so we can better plan our departure date.

Kris Holroyd, June 2006



Students from Kiev Regional Bible College on a Sunday evangelical outreach in a village of 100 near Kiev Ukraine, where gospel has never been heard before.