

BV

4070

T308A8

The University of Chicago  
Libraries



Associate Reformed church in North  
" America. General synod.

A

# LETTER

TO THE

*MEMBERS*

OF THE

ASSOCIATE-REFORMED CHURCH,

IN NORTH-AMERICA,

RELATIVE TO

**A Theological Seminary.**

---

NEW-YORK:

PRINTED BY HOPKINS AND SEYMOUR, NO. 118, PEARL-STREET.

1895.

The University of Chicago  
Libraries



Associate Reformed church in North  
" America. General synod.

A

# LETTER

TO THE

*MEMBERS*

OF THE

**ASSOCIATE-REFORMED CHURCH,**

**IN NORTH-AMERICA,**

**RELATIVE TO**

**A Theological Seminary.**



**NEW-YORK:**

PRINTED BY HOPKINS AND SEYMOUR, NO. 118, PEARL-STREET.

1895.

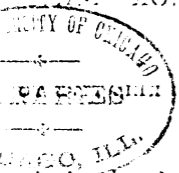
4070  
308 A8

CHICAGO, ILL.

RECEIVED

CHICAGO, ILL.

CHICAGO, ILL.



CHICAGO, ILL.

CHICAGO, ILL.

CHICAGO, ILL.

CHICAGO, ILL.

CHICAGO

---

## A LETTER, &c.

---

CHRISTIAN BRETHREN,

**T**HE printed minutes of the proceedings of the General Synod at their meeting in May last, will inform you, that, through the good hand of their God upon them, they have at length succeeded in establishing a theological seminary. This institution, the sole end of which is to prepare for the work of the ministry young men whose hearts God hath touched, will recommend itself to public-spirited Christians. A slight acquaintance with the situation of our country will convince them that there is a most lamentable want of men to "labour in word and doctrine," especially of "workmen who need not to be ashamed." And it is most certain, that not every pious and zealous man is fit to be a builder in the house of God. They who are to instruct, must be instructed. They who are to "bring out of their treasury things new and old," must have their treasury stored with old things and new. *The priest's lips should KEEP KNOWLEDGE; and they should seek the LAW AT HIS MOUTH; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.* It is not seemly that one invested with such a character, and called to such functions, should be "unskilful in the word of righteousness."

If he be "mighty in the scriptures," and prudent in his carriage; living under the power of those truths which he preaches to others; he will "commend himself to every man's conscience;" he will feed his flock "with knowledge and understanding;" and will reflect honour upon the gospel. If, on the other hand, his attainments be slender; if, with the exception of some plain doctrinal passages, the bible be to him a sealed book; if he be not able to remove ordinary scruples, nor to stop the mouths of gainsayers; if serious and sensible hearers do not obtain more satisfactory views of divine things and the divine word, *with* his aid, than *without* it; he may enjoy a transient popularity; he may even become the leader of an impassioned multitude; but he will not "build up believers in their most holy faith;" he will not be surrounded by steady Christians whose firmness may be counted upon in the hour of trial; nor, in the end, will he fail to bring contempt upon himself, and, what is infinitely worse, a reproach upon the religion of Jesus Christ. None decry talents and learning in the ministry but those who, being destitute of both, "understand neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm." And if they assume to be teachers themselves, it is the interest of their vanity to prevent others from rising above their own level. However such men rail against literature, be assured, brethren, that an ignorant ministry is a dreadful curse. You have only to inspect the nature of the case and the history of past times, to perceive its mischievous tendency. Yet this is the very evil to which the age inclines. You recoil at the thought of its progress; and you ask, How shall it be



arrested? We answer, that while the Lord alone can teach men to speak because they believe; and while he alone can thrust forth labourers who shall be ultimately successful, there are means within your own reach; means, the use of which you may lawfully connect with the hope of his blessing; and of which the *further* neglect will bring guilt upon your consciences, calamity upon your churches, and, it may be, ruin upon your children. The means to which we more particularly refer, is,

*Provision for the instruction of your*  
**FUTURE MINISTERS.**

The Synod, thus far, have done their part. They have seized the earliest opportunity of founding a seminary where youth may acquire much of that cultivation which is indispensable to a well appointed ministry. Had their encouragement been greater, they would have adopted this measure sooner; and it is not *their* fault that the churches are not now rejoicing in its happy effects. But though they have encountered many embarrassments; though they have seen, with anguish, the backwardness of their people in supporting their efforts; yet they cherish strong hopes from the turn which matters have more recently taken. The liberality of Christians abroad which has furnished them with an excellent library; the reviving spirit which pervades some parts of their own body at home; and their harmony in digesting the plan of instruction, they would consider as presages that their "labour shall not be in vain in the Lord."

On perusing their "*Act relative to a Theological Se-*

minary," you will observe that they aim at a more extensive and solid education for the ministry than has been usual in these states. They are sensible that their plan is at war with those loose and superficial habits which threaten the extirpation of all sound learning; that some will think the period of instruction too long—that others will suppose the extent of the country requires different seminaries—and that many will view the expense as an insuperable obstacle. All these things have been anticipated. The deliberations of the Synod were never more cautious, than when occupied with the affairs of their seminary. Difficulties were carefully surveyed; and, excepting a small division on a very few of the less important articles, you have, in their act, the expression of their unanimous voice.

1. Aware how criminal it is to trifle with those invaluable interests which are committed to the ministry of reconciliation, they resolved to inquire, not what is customary, but what is right: to make a stand against the inroads of destructive fashion; and to fix the education of their own youth upon a proper basis. Under such impressions they have appointed a course of studies which they *know* to be of the *first necessity*; and which, with the Lord's blessing, will repay the diligence of the student, and the patronage of the churches.

2. In the present relaxed state of preparation for the ministry, it is not unnatural that *four years* should appear to many an unreasonable length of time to be consumed in previous study. The answer is plain. Four years run rapidly by. Indolence or conceit may fret at the detention: but the modest youth who hus-

bands his opportunities will not find an hour to linger. Such as can form an estimate of Christian literature, will pronounce the period to be short enough. Such as cannot, and are therefore incompetent judges, should submit to the opinion of those who have made the trial; and have ascertained by sorrowful experience, how hard, often how impossible it is, *after* entering into the ministry, to complete those studies which ought to have been completed *before*.

“The wants of the churches,” have no force in this argument; because it is infinitely better for them to wait a little longer, and be well supplied, than to be condemned to spiritual penury for a series of years, by the settlement of unqualified men: and because the delay will be felt only for a year or two *at first*; after which, if the seminary be fed, there will be a regular succession of preachers.

3. The immense tract of country over which our congregations are scattered, and the hardship of travelling from the extremes, do certainly render it inconvenient to assemble our students in one place; and it may be asked, why steps were not taken to meet this difficulty in the beginning? Why several seminaries are not erected in such a manner as to consult our geographical positions? The questions are natural; and merit respectful notice. It may be replied, in general, that we cannot control circumstances, but are controlled by them. And a number of them have concurred to hinder, at present, the planting of more seminaries than one.

1st. It has been a work of nine years to plant *one*;

and common prudence dictates that this one should be watered, and take root, and gather strength, before we think of more. The whole supply will be little enough for its nourishment; and if it be distributed among a number, none of them will have sufficient, and all will languish.

2d. At the commencement of a new system of education, it is wise to have our attention and affections concentrated: that the experiment may be fair, the plan perfected, and a model framed for future and subordinate institutions. Communities, like individuals, succeed best by doing *one thing at a time*. If different parts of a body which has not yet organized its strength, pursue, at once, different objects of the same kind, more toil and money will be expended, and less done to the purpose, than if the whole act together, and bring their united force to bear upon the several points of a common system, as their need shall direct, and their means permit.

3d. A theological seminary, without a library, is good for nothing. Every one, therefore, must have its own library. To divide that which is already in the Synod's possession, would be to destroy it, and misapply the bounty of their benefactors. The books which would be most indispensable to other seminaries, are precisely those which can least be spared. And to furnish every seminary with a library for itself, would absorb a larger capital than can be raised; not to mention that a number of the most useful books are very scarce, and are not to be had in this country; and frequently not from Europe, even were there no want of money.

4th. The advantages of several seminaries would hardly compensate, as yet, for the additional trouble and cost. The distance from each, though certainly less, would still be great to a large portion of the students; and the *real* benefit confined to a few. Perhaps, too, the disadvantages, in other particulars, might overbalance the advantage of local accommodation. After all, both good and evil are magnified in prospect; and it is neither impossible nor improbable that our difficulties will be less formidable in fact than they are in speculation.

Lastly—*One* seminary is now adequate, and will be adequate for some time hereafter, to the whole number of our students. When it shall cease to be so, will be the proper season for projecting more.

4. The inexpediency of more seminaries than one being admitted, many may still suppose that the spot for that one has not been well selected. Cities are generally expensive; and New-York is undeniably so at this moment. Young men, who could support themselves comfortably at home or in some more retired situation, will find their resources too scanty for New-York; and many be deterred by that alone from the prosecution of their studies.

The difficulty is obvious; and is one of the most serious which we have to encounter. It is not, however, insurmountable; and there are considerations, which, when duly weighed, may reconcile the churches to the place as well as to the plan.

An effective seminary must be attended with ex-

pense, wherever it be fixed : and an expense greater than would be suspected by such as are not accustomed to the proper computations. The notion of an institution that shall cost nothing, or but a trifle, and shall yet educate, in a suitable manner, the rising ministry of a church respectable for numbers, and extending every day, is no better than a dream. Her friends, therefore, must either abandon the design altogether, and with it their own most precious interests ; or they must incur expense, and devise methods of meeting it. There is no other alternative ; and it would be folly to conceal or disguise the truth. In deciding on the *place*, their first inquiry is, *Where their object can be best obtained ?*

If there be a choice of situations, they will, of course, compare the advantages and disadvantages of each, with a special reference to their finances. And after they have reviewed all those which would answer their purpose, they may discover, that in a place where much would be saved on some accounts, much would be lost on others ; but that the difference, *upon the whole*, is not so great as to justify the smallest risk of injuring their institution.

Reasons will suggest themselves to a reflecting mind for preferring a spot among the *older* settlements. The state of society is more matured, more stable, and therefore yields not only more convenience, but also a surer rule of calculation : Pecuniary and literary aid can more easily be had ; and is less liable to interruption. Ordinances, ministers, judicatories, are more accessible. The students must be expected to bear some proportion to the population ; and it is prudent

to consult the comfort of the greatest possible number. But, to whatever district your seminary be assigned, you must select for its scite a country-place, or a village, or a large town or city. Without minutely examining their relative pretensions, it may be remarked,

1. That in either of the first two, it might be necessary to erect *buildings*, and to provide the whole support of the teacher, *neither of which are wanted at present*. Now the interest of the capital sunk in the one, with occasional repairs ; and the revenue appropriated to the other, would be more than the excess of other expenses attached to a city-establishment, above those of an establishment in the country, or a village.

2. That, in the nature of things, an extra-share of expense will fall upon that portion of the church which immediately encircles the seminary ; and therefore it ought to be set down in a place which will not be materially affected by such a circumstance. Were it endowed with ample funds, this argumentation would be superseded ; but in its infant state is decisive ; and, in conjunction with other things, will show that the Synod have not been ill-advised in pitching upon New-York.

Such a place has advantages which are worth paying for. Choice of Christian society ; all sorts of literary help ; opportunities of seeing a variety of gifts and excellencies in different stations ; of studying the human character under a multitude of aspects, and with little trouble, &c. all which are without price to an ingenious and observant youth. Our people in New-York have cherished the seminary with peculiar affection. Their contribution, always liberal, amounted for the

last year, to more than double any former sum\*. There is no prospect of its diminishing, but rather of its increase. The presence of the students will tend to keep alive this laudable zeal ; and to attract the patronage of individuals whom God has distinguished with this world's good. Nor is it unlikely that a removal of the seminary would be followed with a greater reduction of income than of expenditure.

Much being thus secured on the score of general utility, and nothing surrendered on that of economy, there can be no just ground of complaint against the existing arrangement : and it becomes the common concern to facilitate the operations of our long wished for institution.

Let our friends and brethren correctly understand what is expected. The students must apply to their studies without distraction. Some of them will require no pecuniary assistance : some must be supported in part ; and some altogether. That they may not "lose the things which they have wrought," the Synod must have it in their power to say to their youth, "Be under no anxiety for your maintenance ; produce what you can ; and if it be not enough, we will take care of the balance. Only be sober, be diligent ; and repay in improvement what you receive in money." If this be not accomplished, past efforts and liberality are thrown away ; and, humanly

\* The aggregate of contributions to the public fund, for the year ending May 1805, is 1380 dollars ; and of this, 804 dollars are from the city of New-York.



speaking, there is nothing now wanting to carry into effect a better system of preparation for the holy ministry than has been hitherto introduced into the United States, but a little exertion on the part of our churches ; nothing but a decent regard to some of the strongest obligations which can bind the soul of a Christian. We beseech you, brethren, by the tender mercies of our God ; by the value which you set upon his gospel ; by your sympathy with those who languish under a famine of his word ; by your regard for the spiritual welfare of your own children, when you shall have gone to give up your accounts ; that you refuse not to encourage and assist the youth who step forward to consecrate themselves to the service of the Lord your Redeemer. They are your property ; they are your hope. No man can tell what blessings he may be instrumental in bringing down upon himself, his family, his neighbourhood, his country, by fostering an institution from which are to issue future ambassadors of the cross. Such institutions were among the earliest cares of the primitive and reformed churches ; and to their influence, under the sanctification of the good Spirit of your God, do you owe the soundness of your faith ; the purity of your worship ; your religious light ; that very ministry which you profess to revere and to love—nay, that divine scripture which is in your hands. Far from you be the base and ignoble principle which would whisper that “ you have no more to do with those who dedicate themselves to the ministry, than with apprentices to any other employment, till they of-

“fer themselves, already prepared, for your approbation.” He is a singular Christian who can persuade himself that the church of God, which has a charge over every baptized infant, has no concern in the rearing of those who are to dispense to her the word of life. And far from you be the principle, equally base and ignoble, which stops the ears and closes the hand, whenever a pittance is asked for the most sacred use. A *little* from each of you will nurture a seminary which, so far as human means can go, bids fair to adorn your pulpits with “burning and shining lights.” Yours will be the consolation of compliance, and yours the guilt of neglect. You may say, that “we cannot tell whether the young men whom we propose to educate for the ministry, will answer our expectations : that, after they have been trained up at our expense, they may desert our connexion, or betake themselves to other professions ; and, therefore, that it is profusion, and not charity to lay out money upon such an experiment.” Be it so ! but, for consistency’s sake, let the same doctrine govern you in other things. Never put a plough into the ground ; because you cannot tell whether your crop may not be blasted, and then you will lose your seed. Never send your son to school ; because you cannot tell but he may abuse his knowledge to the breaking of your heart ; and then it would have been better for him to be as ignorant as the beast he rides upon ; and you will lose the expense of his tuition into the bargain. There is no one duty which such an objection cannot set aside. Means are ours ; events are God’s. And we have no more right to ex-

pect that he will provide our churches with ministers, if we omit the appropriate means of obtaining them, than that he will clothe our fields and replenish our garner, if, under pretext of trusting in his providence, we never handle a plough or a sickle! If any one pretend, that in soliciting your beneficence to their public fund, the Synod have laid schemes for oppressing or incommoding you hereafter, he is either deceived or wicked. They have freely communicated their plans: Let facts interpret their motives. And when, on looking around, you behold every Presbytery under their inspection deriving benefit, directly or indirectly, from the application of their fund; pronounce for yourselves, whether they have plotted your hurt, or sought your happiness. With boldness, therefore, they appeal to you *again*. Thrice have they, in their judicial capacity, laid before you, on this subject, their ardent wishes founded on your own wants. In their act concerning a Synodical fund, passed May 1796; and in their pastoral addresses of 1801 and 1802. Their recommendations have been seconded by the voice of Presbyteries and ministers; yet it has been their mortification to witness a strange supineness in many of their congregations. Will you not permit them, brethren, to augur better things? Shall your name, year after year, be stigmatized with the reproach of withholding a trifle of your substance from a generous attempt to build up the church of your God? How does *such* a reluctance, in a matter involving both your honour and your privilege, consist with spiritual-mindedness, and "a treasure laid up in heaven?" How can you sit down under the shame of being less concerned for yourselves

than are Christians at the distance of 3000 miles, whose munificence has enabled you to begin your seminary with high advantage, and left to your public spirit the light and pleasant task of carrying it on? How can you reconcile it to your sense of justice, that a small portion of your brethren should lavish their property in bearing your burdens; while many of you, *more opulent than some who have set you an example*, not only decline bearing their burdens in turn, but even touching *your own* with one of your fingers? Had all acted thus; had all been eager to reap the profit of exertions not their own, what now had been our situation! Some congregations which are settled, would have been still vacant—some vacancies that were languishing, and begin to flourish, would have been dispersed. In other places ministers would have been worn out in extra duties, and their charges deprived of labours which they now stately enjoy. It is as clear as the light, that in so far as our public fund has been the instrument of our prosperity, those congregations and individuals who contribute not their quota, are really, though unintentionally, working for the common ruin. And if this same disposition continue, much more if it spread, the most sanguine will, at length, be discouraged, and the most patient grow weary\*. The fabric which we are striving to rear will crumble

\* Numbers who have contributed cheerfully from the very first, are so indignant at the indifferent, not to call it the sordid, conduct of many of their brethren who are at least as deeply interested as themselves, that nothing but a sense of duty and the habit of doing praiseworthy deeds, has induced them to persevere.

to pieces ; the hope of a skilful ministry will vanish ; and all the dismal consequences will lie at the door of those who withdrew their shoulders from the yoke.

If we use not flattering words, brethren, it is because we are deeply serious ; and because we are well assured, that if your seminary perish, there is no human expedient to save your churches from desolation. Here, then, is an object which entering into the essence of your social stability, prefers a claim upon your purse, which you cannot innocently resist. In vain do you “ pray that Satan’s kingdom may be destroyed, and the kingdom of grace advanced,” if you will *give nothing* toward the means to which the Lord has directed for that end. We repeat it, *a little* from each of you is enough. Who will grudge a few miserable shillings once a twelvemonth, in an affair of such magnitude ? Who will be the poorer at the year’s end ? or venture to insinuate that the Son of God, whose is “ the earth and the fulness thereof,” will remain in his debt for such a donation ? The duty is plain, the promise pointed. “ Honour the Lord with thy substance, and “ with the first fruits of all thine increase ; so shall “ thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall “ burst out with new wine.” Do not act, brethren, as if the word of your God were unworthy of your trust. Let it never be forgotten that he *will have a share of our property* ; and if we defraud him of our free-will offering,—of the “ first fruits of all our increase,” he will wrest from our hands that abused wealth for which we do not make him an acknowledgment *in kind*. Many a delinquency of this sort has been punished

Photomount  
Pamphlet  
Binder  
Gaylord Bros., Inc.  
Makers  
Syracuse, N. Y.  
PAT. JAN 21, 1908

2- 9655

BV

4070

.T 308 A8

*unacc.*

BV4070.T308A8 c.1

letter to the members of the Associa



090 244 725

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO