

The Outlook

Devoted to the Exposition and Defense of the Reformed Faith

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Call His Name Jesus

But while he thought about these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take to you Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she will bring forth a Son, and you shall call His name JESUS, for He will save His people from their sins."

Matthew 1:20-21.

Joseph had been prepared to deal secretly with the "problem" of his betrothed's pregnancy. You see, he was in a pinch. He loved Mary and did not want her to become an object of ridicule; but he also did not want to marry a woman who had already been with another man - and Mary's pregnancy gave every indication that she had. How was he to deal with this problem? Joseph decided that he would send Mary away without making a pub-

lic announcement - that she be somewhat spared.

While contemplating his dilemma, God sent His angel to alleviate Joseph's concern. The angel informed him about the child's conception by the Holy Spirit, and instructed him to call His name Jesus, "for He will save His people from their sins."

Here is the glorious gospel at Christmas: He will save His people

from their sins. Call his name Jesus, the Greek equivalent of "Joshua," meaning "the Lord (Yahweh) is salvation," or "the Lord (Yahweh) saves." You shall call His name Jesus, says the angel, not because that's a family name that goes back generations; not because Jesus is the sweetest name I know; not because there's just something about that name. No, Joseph, call His name Jesus so that His name will declare His purpose: He will save His people from their sins.

Simeon was one of the few people who seemed to grasp this great truth. When he took Jesus in his arms that day in the temple, he said: "Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation. . . a light to bring revelation to the Gentiles, and



Volume 51, No. 11 (ISSN 8750-5754) (USPS 633-980) "And the three companies blew the trumpets...and held THE TORCHES in their left hands, and THE TRUMPETS in their right hands. . .and they cried, 'The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon'" (Judges 7:20).

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the glory of Your people Israel.” Then he said to Mary, “. . . a sword will pierce through your own soul also. . .” (Luke 2:28-35) Simeon, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, was able to understand that while Jesus was the Lord’s salvation, the One who will bruise the serpent’s head, He was also the One whose heel would be bruised.

Few others, it seems, were able to understand this salvific purpose of Christ - at least, initially. Even John the Baptist, who had once declared Jesus to be “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world,” later asked Jesus, “are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?” (John 1:29; Luke 7:20)

Most notable, though, among those who did not understand was Peter. Matthew 16:13ff tells us that Peter, who did understand the divine personhood of Jesus (“You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God”), did not understand His divine purpose. Jesus had told the disciples that he would suffer, die, and rise again on the third day. “Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, ‘Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!’” (v. 22) Peter didn’t get it.

More striking than Peter’s ignorance, however, was Jesus’ response: “Get behind me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.” In effect, Jesus was saying, “I am Jesus and I will save My people from their sins. That means I am the Suffering Servant, the despised and rejected one. I will be accursed and hung on a tree. I, who know no sin, will become sin for you. That is why I have come. I am Jesus. And to

deny this, to ignore this, to reject this is of the devil, not of God.”

Before Christ was even born the angel had said to Joseph, “You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.”

What does this have to say to us now as we enter the Christmas season of 2001. Simply this: we must not worship the Christ child apart from His crucifixion. The Son of Joseph became sin for us. We must worship and give “glory to the newborn King” because of

We must
worship
and give glory to
the newborn king
because of
Gethsemane,
Golgotha, and the
empty grave.”

Gethsemane, Golgotha and the empty grave. To focus simply on Bethlehem, the baby in a manger, shepherds and wise men while ignoring the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ is not being mindful of the things of God, but the things of men. We must not allow the manger to steal the glory of the cross!

This is not just a theoretical or hypothetical danger. How many Sunday School Christmas programs ignore this? Read the words of your favorite Christmas hymns. Take notice of how few mention this central purpose of Christ’s in-

carnation: that he will save His people from their sins.

The angel sent from God made certain that his message to Joseph about the child focused upon His salvific purpose. The angel who became visible and audible to the shepherds in the fields also emphasized this point: “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David **a Savior**, who is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:10-11 - emphasis added) It is precisely because the one born is “a Savior” that his message is “good tidings of great joy.”

Since this saving purpose of Christ’s incarnation was the central message of that first Christmas, ought it not be central to every Christmas celebration thereafter? When you celebrate Christmas this year with family and friends, what will be central, and what peripheral? Will the presents, the food, and carols take center stage? Enjoy these things, dear Christian! Celebrate and feast! But do so mindful of, and for no other reason than this: the baby in a manger was Jesus, who saved YOU from your sins.

Rev. Derrick J. Vander Meulen is Pastor of Bethel URC in Jenison, Michigan.

Sound Bites

Torch and Trumpet 1957

January 1957

“It has pleased God to build His Church out of the church. This is one of the great blessings which God has given His people.”

* * * * *

“There is sometimes the tendency on the part of parents to entrust this training to the school and to the church. But if the parents do not instruct the child in these things, neither the school nor the church will be able to supply what is lacking.”

Profession of Faith
William Kok

“[T]he Christian school is for some an appeaser of a conscience that feels somehow a weakness of the Christian influence in the home life.”

* * * * *

The very forces that seek to undermine our deep consecration to God and His Kingdom are the forces that threaten the Christian school. They are the forces of materialism, worldliness, and secularism.”

*The Pillars of Our Church
The Christian Reformed Church
and Christian Education and
Secondary Education*
Cornelius Jaarsma

February 1957

“We must remind ourselves time and again, when Christian action comes to the fore, that we serve a King whose only weapon is the Word, the sword of the Holy Spirit.”

* * * * *

“In the world Christ is King, even though the demons oppose Him and the people reject His kingship. He rules over them, strictly independent of their will.”

Sharpening Our Meanings
Francois Guillaume

“[A]t no place do heaven and earth come closer together than at the Lord’s Supper.”

* * * * *

“The celebration of the Lord’s Supper is a celebration by the congregation. This is as it should be. It is especially at the table of the Lord that the unity of believers comes to expression.”

*The Celebration of the Lord’s
Supper*
William Kok

March 1957

“The reason for the decay of the home as a Christian institution is that we lose sight of the principle taught in the Holy Bible that Jehovah God must be the Master Builder.”

* * * * *

“The home is not held together by good meals, comfortable beds, adequate pay-check, or a color TV set. The Christian home is held together by thankful devotion to God, by respectful loyalty to His law which demands that we love Him and one another.”

* * * * *

“Our heroes are no longer those listed in Hebrews 11. They have become the false heroes of show business.”

* * * * *

[W]e may expect that the emphasis today which teaches that there are other ways to God than through Jesus Christ, God’s Son, will eventually lead to the rearing of a generation which worships other gods.”

Building Sound Homes
John W. Visser

“Lest the very elect be led astray, every minister of the gospel must warn the people committed to his care against wolves in sheep’s clothing that would devour the flock. And a school which prepares men for the gospel ministry is under solemn obligation to fit them for that part of their task. To that end the mere refutation of error will not suffice; truth must be set forth in contrast with error.”

* * * * *

“Militancy is the price which a church must pay for its continuance as a true church.”

*The Pillars of Our Church
Calvin College and Seminary*
R. B. Kuiper

April 1957

[I]t should not be denied that when a church or denomination actually proclaims salvation through the shed blood of Christ and is orthodox in that sense, elect of God may be assumed to be among its membership.”

*The Pillars of Our Church
Confessing a Holy Catholic
Church*
Nicholas J. Monsma

May - June 1957

“Unless we put safety first we shall not be safe. That slogan, as far as traffic is concerned, does not



interfere with traffic. On the contrary, it serves to expedite traffic because it tends to prevent carelessness and accidents. Similarly, making the safety of the Church, the preservation of its rich heritage of truth, our primary concern need not in any way interfere with its true progress.”

* * * * *

“We must bring the pure, unadulterated gospel to the nations. We must also preach it to our people and teach it to our youth. But it will be impossible to do all this unless we retain our heritage.”

* * * * *

[T]here is no promise that our denomination or any other will prove to be impervious to corruption.”

Safety First!
H. J. Kuiper

July - August 1957

“Man had the tremendous gift of language; he was given that most wonderful science and art; it flowed from that image in man which is of God, and was in response to God’s prior communication to him.”

* * * * *

“Only one animal, the serpent, did use language - and very powerfully. How strange that it should have usurped man’s prerogative and so tragically misled him with his own gift.”

* * * * *

“Man had some of the attributes of God and so in the garden of Eden he wanted to be as God. He forgot about the tremendous gulf between man and God in the essence of their beings. The animals show a similarity to man in physical and anatomical properties but that does not

mean that the animal should be as man.”

*The Great Barrier Between
Man and Animals*
Jacob Heerema

[T]here can be no genuine theological advance if we are unsuccessful in preserving and conserving our spiritual heritage.”

* * * * *

“There can be no progress in the knowledge of the truth if the Church fails to do its utmost to preserve its creedal heritage and to cling to the faith with undiminished tenacity.”

*The Safety-First Principle
Tested*
Henry J. Kuiper

“It is not sufficient to acknowledge the we commit sin; we must know ourselves as being sinful.”

* * * * *

“The true self-examination does not consist in putting our sins on one side of the balance and all the good we can find on the other side. We should come in the knowledge and with the conviction that in ourselves we are accursed by God, the Judge of heaven and earth, and that His judgment is right.”

*Self-Examination
and the Lord’s Table*
William Kok

September 1957

“The Church today must again study and practice the implications of the great fact that Christ’s people died in His death, rose with Him from the grave, and now are seated with Him in the heavenly places.”

An Apostle of Jesus Christ
Leonard Greenway

[T]he ideal of those who publish *Torch and Trumpet* is to enlarge our subscription list until this journal is self-supporting. Dear Reader, if you think well of our paper, will you please recommend it to your neighbors and friends? Also send us the names and addresses of those in your church or among your friends who might be inclined to subscribe. We shall be glad to send a sample copy to all for whom or by whom the request is made.”

Changes in Torch and Trumpet
Henry J. Kuiper
[Almost fifty years later we are still trying to make the magazine self-supporting. The offer made by Rev. Kuiper in 1957 still holds today.
-The editor]

In every period of life there is danger of forgetting that our time is not our own but God’s. But the temptation to squander or misuse it is particularly great in youth and old age.”

“My Time is My Own”
Henry J. Kuiper

“The results of the gospel certainly will transform all of life. But the power that does the transforming is the Word of God and His Spirit. We have too often handicapped our missionary effort by letting our attention be diverted from the preaching and teaching of God’s Word to trying to do for people things that they can do much better for themselves when the gospel takes control of their lives.”

*Pillars of the Church
Mission Work in the
Christian Reformed Church*
Peter De Jong

October 1957

“Our Christian institutions are a favorite target of the evil forces of our day. But the bull’s eye in that target is the Christian home. When Satan hits it he rejoices, for he knows that he has scored a perfect hit.”

* * * * *

“Schools cannot do a great deal for the child that has been thoroughly spoiled at home.”

* * * * *

“There are thousands of Christian homes today in which practically nothing can be seen or is done that makes them distinctively Christian. The magazines on the table, the music on the piano, the pictures on the wall, to programs on radio or television - all is non-religious.”

The Bull’s Eye in Satan’s Target
Henry J. Kuiper

“Membership in the church is not a human right; it is not a matter of social acceptance. It is a privilege conferred by none other than God Himself. Therefore church membership requires a mode of life in keeping with that high privilege.”

The Pillars of Our Church
Pastoral Care in the
Christian Reformed Church
Edward Heerema

[T]he world’s nations shall have the opportunity at one time or another during the course of history to hear the gospel. This gospel proclamation, moreover, will be a testimony: its acceptance or its rejection will be decisive.”

Outlines on the
Doctrine of the Last Things
William Hendriksen

“Seeds of delinquency thrive in the soil of idleness.”

Our School Year
Joanne De Jong

November 1957

“The thing that counts in most classrooms is getting ahead and doing well in this life. The here and not the hereafter receives the attention. That is all wrong according to the apostle Paul. The Christian’s chief good is his spiritual bounty in Christ. That is where his happiness lies.”

* * * * *

No love was more ancient than God’s love for His people. It was placed upon His people before time began.”

Blessed Be God!
Leonard Greenway

“The Church needs two kinds of laymen: those who work and those who think. Naturally, this is no hard and fast line of distinction. The best Christian workers are men and women who think, and laymen who think but refuse to work are in danger of becoming captious critics.”

* * * * *

“[N]o one can be a fruitful thinker unless he is a persistent and careful reader.”

* * * * *

“[N]o member should be considered eligible for nomination as elder who has not formed the habit of reading and giving serious thought to the teachings, government, and practical problems of the church.”

Laymen Who Think
Henry J. Kuiper

“[I]t is foolish to speak of man returning to barbaric animalism. That was not his beginning. His sin

is not a return to but a turning away from his original condition.”

Are You a “Rational Animal”?
Walter A. De Jong

“[M]any of those who have fallen away will still wish to pass as Christians. But their very manner of living will show that they are not true believers at all.”

* * * * *

“[T]his man is called Antichrist, not simply because he will be a person who opposes the Christ, but because he will be a rival Christ, that is, a person who arrogates to himself the honor that is due to Christ alone.”

Signs of the Times
William Hendriksen

“Every Christian, no matter what his task or station in life may be, must, of course, make a total commitment to Jesus Christ.”

The Christian Student at a
Christian College
William Spoelhof

December 1957

“We are astounded at man’s folly when we consider that as he inspects the vast workshop of the infinite and almighty God he fails to see his Maker. The reason is that, even though he can see inconceivably far into almost endless space, he has lost his spiritual eyes, the eyes of faith.”

* * * * *

“The salvation of man does not lie in his upward reach to the visible heavens but in the downward reach of our gracious condescending God.”

Not Sputnik but Christ
Henry J. Kuiper

TEEN SCENE

It's A Wonderful Life

And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger. Luke 2:12.

One evening, when I was in high school, I went over to a friend's house. It was around Christmas time and his family was watching a black and white movie. I couldn't help but think, "Who in the world would watch a black and white movie? This is going to be so boring!"

I sat down anyway and watched the movie with my friend's family. The more I watched, the more I was interested by the movie. It was the movie *It's A Wonderful Life*, starring James Stewart and Donna Reed. In some families, watching this movie has become a part of their Christmastime tradition.

For those of you who have not seen the movie I will give a short summary: Throughout his life, the main character (George Bailey) does things for others. He is constantly helping his family, friends, and people down on their luck. One example is that he lets his brother go to college with his money instead of going himself.

Through some mishap, not of his own doing, his business is short a large amount of money forcing him to consider foreclosure. George becomes fed up with life and is convinced that all that he has done throughout his life is a failure. He wishes he had never been born.

Through the supposed act of an angel George Bailey gets to see what everyone's life in town would be like had he not been born. He then is again put back into the real world and his friends come to his rescue and provide the money he needs for his business. He found out his life was important and wonderful because of love from family and friends.

Why tell you all this? Because this is the time of year we get caught up in Christmas lists. The world is telling us to buy, buy, buy. We are bombarded with messages that say you will not be satisfied with your life if we don't have a cell phone, the right clothes, or a good sound system in your car. The world tells us we **need** to have "stuff" and lots of it.

In the movie, George Bailey found out that there is more to life than money and travel. He found family and friends and the good we do for others are more important. These

are the things that bring satisfaction in life. They are what makes for "a wonderful life." George Bailey found out that we do have an impact on others lives.

While there is a heavy overtone of religion in the movie there is something missing in it: Jesus! While He is mentioned in the movie, the movie misses the entire point of Christmas. The movie glorifies Christmas and religion but forgets the purpose of both by forgetting about the mission of Christ.

We don't celebrate Christmas just for the sake that Jesus came to the world but with understanding of His death and resurrection. We celebrate Christmas for the new life we have in Christ now and forever. Jesus came so we wouldn't be satisfied with the things of this world but look to Him for a new home. When we have Jesus we can be satisfied but without Him we can never be satisfied.

Christ's surroundings at birth definitely wouldn't satisfy an earthly prince's family. But God the Father placed the Prince of Peace in that manger. Jesus, the son of God, was born in a stable where animals live and Jesus was satisfied with that because He knew it was God's plan for Him.

Are you satisfied with where God



has placed you? Will you be satisfied with your Christmas presents?

It is a wonderful life we have. God made us with a purpose to glorify Him and to enjoy Him. If you think of how the Lord has blessed you and tried to count the ways He has done so, you would never be able to stop counting. But your life can only be wonderful if you have Jesus in it. Otherwise you will just be unsatisfied with what you have.

Is your life wonderful? Or should I say, do you know Christ?

For Further Study: Being content or satisfied is something most of us struggle with. The temptation of not being satisfied with what God has given us or the situation He has placed us in, strikes teens as well as adults. Over the next week spend time reading the following verses. Read them over a few times, thinking about what the words mean and how the words apply to you. Close by praying for forgiveness in the sin of dissatisfaction and strength to be satisfied in all things. On Christmas Eve I would encourage you to read Luke 2:1-20 as a reminder of this study and to give praise to God for His Son Who came and died so sinner's could live!

Day 1: I Timothy 6:6-10

Day 2: Matthew 6:19-24

Day 3: Proverbs 15:16-17; 17:1; 23:4-5

Day 4: Proverbs 16:16-17; 22:1; 30:8-9

Day 5: Luke 9:46-48; John 13:1-17

Day 6: Luke 12:13-21

Day 7: Matthew 6:25-34

Mr. Dave Vander Meer is the Youth director of Cornerstone United Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

Doctrinal Sensitivity

Editor's Note: In 1957, the Torch and Trumpet celebrated the centennial of the Christian Reformed Church by presenting a series of articles concerning "The Pillars of Our Church." Rev. Henry Van Til wrote an incredibly insightful article about Doctrinal Sensitivity. The original article was ten pages long. For your reading pleasure, we present the introduction and conclusion of that article.

Sensitivity is a characteristic of life. It is the path to life's enlargement and enrichment. It also saves life. In the wonderful world of wild life sensitivity to foreign sounds and smells is the creature best defense. It constitutes a life-saving mechanism given by the Creator. Man has added many mechanical devices, both in peace and war, to aid his nervous system in detecting dangers.

In the spiritual world sensitivity is quite as imperative for preservation as in the physical. It is a kind of spiritual awareness by which one senses danger. It is made up of knowledge of the truth and a tender regard for the Word of the covenant God.

It is true that what I am about to say is my personal opinion and reflects merely my experience over the last twenty-five years, fifteen of which have been spent at Calvin College as student and instructor. I would speak plainly on this important matter; I may not do otherwise. So did Elijah and Amos. The latter was told to be gone from the king's private altar. However, the words of Amos we cannot escape even today: "Woe unto them that are at ease in Zion, and to them that are secure in the mountain of Samaria, the notable men of the chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel come" (Amos 8:1).

How pertinent this warning is today. There are far too many who are at ease in Zion. They show this in many ways. For many evidence of spiritual vigor is seen in great building programs - fine churches, palatial parsonages, modern school buildings. Then there are these who seem to think that all is well just so the quotas for Calvin College and Seminary are paid to the full. These things are not wrong in themselves, but they certainly are not measuring sticks of true spirituality.

These things do not measure the all-important matter of doctrinal purity and devotion. These things do not prove that there is greater joy in the service of God and in laboring for his kingdom. Such things may only prove that there is pride and efficient ecclesiastical machinery.

I am fully persuaded that our people are losing their doctrinal sensitivity. So many no longer judge a sermon on the score of its doctrinal soundness first of all, whether it maintains the purity of the faith. But depending on one's education and predilection, the sermon is good when it gives practical advice on everyday living, when it stirs us emotionally, when it has persuasive logic or beautifully turned sentences, and other equally superficial criteria.

This same attitude of doctrinal laxity



is to be observed in the songs that are sung. Just try to point out to an average audience that “He Lives,” one of the choruses that is most popular at our hymn sings, is both modernistic and fundamentalistic and not Reformed in its main emphasis. You’ll be amazed at the reaction. It is one of utter impatience and even rebuke. When one goes to many programs in our churches, whether a men’s rally or a Sunday School affair, he finds that many of the songs reflect subjectivism and experientialism if not maudlin sentimentalism about the cross of Christ.

Furthermore, we lack sensitivity on the doctrine of the covenant, which is being broken with impunity in many mixed marriages appearing in our circles.

Another distressing phenomenon is lack of personal piety among many of our members. Yes, many are “respectable people” and are counted as leaders in the church, some of them are elders and deacons, others are captains of drives or Centennial chairmen. But it is easy for them to stay home together at the cottage of a Sunday evening, or to drive most of the Lord’s Day to or from a weekend of personal pleasure; they have the Sunday papers scattered all over the living room floor, or even listen to the ball game on Sunday afternoon. All these things and many more indicate a lack of sensitivity as to the Lord’s Day, sanctification, the offices in the church and the keeping of the covenant. Where is the new

obedience to which we are called? Can anyone deny that to be strict about observing the Lord’s Day and to be exacting in the observance of religious duties is decried as narrow-mindedness? Here too Americanization has taken its heavy toll! We want to be like the other churches, as of old the Israelites wanted to be like the other nations, seeking a king other than Jehovah.

Our loss of doctrinal sensitivity is also illustrated in the ease with which many change their church affiliation today (witness the statistics in the Yearbook) and the ease with which we receive members from another church. Whether such new members know our distinctive doctrines or not does not seem to matter much in many instances, just so they are nice folk and the preacher gets a good impression when he calls on them.

And how many elders today are chosen on the ground that they with the preacher are able to maintain purity of doctrine, or apart from the minister are able to determine whether his preaching is sound doctrinally? In my experience of the last twenty-five years I have observed, and heard others complain about it, that the most distinguished and most successful men of the church community are often chosen as elders. Many ministers want the type of elders that will agree with them rather than an individual with sharp sensitivities spiritually. This is another result of Americanization, namely,

the great evil that the man of worldly success is equal to all things. But the Scriptures demand another standard: ability to exhort, being filled with the Spirit, knowledge of the truth, sobriety.

And finally, as church we no longer appreciate controversial preaching. We no longer can bear doctrinal debate (ever since the common grace issue we have more and more closed our official papers to debate for fear it would lead to schisms) while militancy in the church militant is often seen as belligerency. The watchmen upon the walls of Zion are shamed into silence by a fine scorn or snide remarks concerning heresy hunters. In classical meetings one’s motives are impugned if he stands up to question anything our boards may have decided, while on the floor of synod men are openly proclaiming themselves to be middle-of-the-roads on important issues and they prefer not to use the term “militant” in defining the task of Seminary professors.

Particular Cases

I now come to particular cases. First, I cite the notorious Wezeman case, in which a minister in good standing in the church was found guilty of teaching the evolutionary naturalism of the higher allies in his Bible notes prepared for the pupils at Chicago Christian High school. When faced with the evidence Dr. Wezeman pleaded ignorance. He was willing to retract his work; and synod ac-

Just try to point out to an average audience that “He Lives,” is both modernistic and fundamentalistic and not Reformed in its main emphasis.

cepted his confession almost unanimously. Then he went back to his work as teacher of Bible and as head of the school besides. Here is a case of dual insensitivity. First of all, Dr. Wezeman had no sense of the orthodox, let alone Reformed tradition; but nevertheless had a place of honor and great influence in our circles. Secondly, the people of influence in Chicago said in effect, when they permitted him a free hand to run the whole school, "We do not care whether a man knows and loves the truth, he is a fine gentleman and a scholar, and that is enough for us." Thus for many years one of our biggest Christian High Schools, which was one of the main feeders of Calvin College, was headed by a man who forfeited every right to our confidence in his leadership. And what of the Synod? When an ordained man commits a sin against the moral law he is forthwith defrocked, although his repentance is accepted and he continues thereafter a member in good standing in the church. Is not the sin of heresy according to both the Old and the New Testament just as heinous and detestable as the sin of fornication or theft?

Case number two. In a doctoral dissertation published a few years ago on Kierkegaard's time-eternity concept, the author maintains that he is going to criticize, not from an objective, foreign viewpoint namely, in this case, from the presupposition of our Reformed faith, but from a subjective, internal point of view. The result is some piecemeal, fragmentary criticism, but the basic anti-Christian character of Kierkegaard's thought is not signaled. Furthermore, the author agrees with Kierkegaard, thereby

taking his stand squarely against J. Cresham Machen, by saying that Christianity is not a doctrine and Faith is not knowledge, because Christianity is not a doctrine, and again, one cannot be offended at a doctrine. Although this is not the place to refute these errors. I wish to say that the catechism says very emphatically that the first part of faith is knowledge. It is also a well-known fact that Jesus' opponents were offended at his doctrine (John 6:10, 11), and it is exactly the doctrines of Calvinism on election and

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reprobation that constitute the real offense to many church people.

This same minister now wants the church to accept Masons into its membership before they have denied the blasphemies of their Masonic faith. Surely the kindest words we can use for this sort of approach is that it reveals a serious lack of doctrinal sensitivity.

There are also many among us who do not appreciate the doctrine of the antithesis, or perhaps one ought to say, they do not understand it. Some time ago, one of our ministers claimed on the basis of Ephesians 2:14-18 that Christ had abolished the antithesis. Paul, however, speaks of the middle wall of partition being broken down, Christ hav-

ing slain the enmity by his cross. Now what is he talking about? He is simply telling the people at Ephesus that they once were Gentiles, called Uncircumcision by the seed of Abraham; that they were aliens from God and his covenant blessings. But now they too have been brought nigh, and thus there is no longer a wall between Jew and Gentile. However, Paul says nothing about the basic spiritual warfare between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman being abolished. In fact, he exhorts these same new recruits for Jesus Christ to put on the whole armor of God, in order to carry forward this holy war. Just because a number of the enemy come over into our camp does not mean that peace has been established. This will not take place until our Commander destroys all his enemies and turns over the kingdom to God the Father.

Case number three. Another man writes a dissertation and tells the world that the Christian Reformed Church in the deposition of Janssen has snuffed out the progressive spirit and has become reactionary as a result. This indicates lack of doctrinal sensitivity with respect to the purity of the Word.

Case number four. Somewhere in our Church a man is trying to reach out and touch the modern mind in the student world. He calls the Bible "a mine of religious insight" Now with all due respect to the Pauline program of becoming all things to all men, I insist that this statement is perilous. For this statement perfectly reflects, though unintentionally, the modern evolutionary naturalism against which we have to fight all our lives. It fits the thinking that



makes religion a product of the human spirit, and so may constitute a denial of the supernatural element in revelation. Besides, pedagogically we don't gain any advantage, for the pagan will give you his religious insight, or that of Buddha. And then what norm does one have to hold that the religious insight of the prophets or of Christ was higher? As soon as we are ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (Paul made no apologies either in Athens or in Rome) we shall do despite to the cause of Christ. His Word ought to be proclaimed; it will not return empty.

Case number five. I wish to cite the editorials in *Chimes*, a student weekly that is sent throughout the land and reflects the training received in the church, in the home and especially in *onze* school. In a recent editorial, "God or Baal," the author advocates the idea that the struggle against Baal should be conceived of as our common opposition to Anti-Christ, which is to be sought outside of nominal Christianity. Therefore, we have no right to judge those who confess Christ, no matter how faulty

their confession may be. However, the Bible does not give us the impression that all men are equally close to the heart of Jesus, no matter what they think of Jesus. Here again we have lack of appreciation for doctrinal purity in the name of ecumenicity and brotherhood.

Finally, case number six. I have now finished a decade of teaching at our denominational college and have heard literally scores of chapel talks on the primacy of love on the basis of I Corinthians 13.

This is fine. But the speakers usually leave the impression that the faith, that is the creed and its defense, are secondary to the exercise of love. This is a grievous misinterpretation of the text, in which Paul is speaking of the subjective function of the heart in believing. But when Paul speaks of the faith, which he has kept and for which he fought, and for which we ought to contend (Cf. Jude) then it is an egregious error to say that love is more important than the purity of the faith or the truth of God. Yet

Just because a number of the enemy come over into our camp does not mean that peace has been established.

that is the impression one gets from such chapel talks. And we do not hear militant language exhorting the soldiers of Christ to do battle valiantly for their Lord and King.

Conclusion

These are all straws in the wind. One could multiply such instances, but my allotted space forbids further amplification.

The question finally is, how can we stem the tide of doctrinal indifference that is overtaking us? I would suggest that this phenomenon which I have sketched is a symptom of spiritual decadence; we are neglecting salvation because the tents of many are pitched toward

Sodom. It is the great peril of secularism and materialism from which we must repent. To the law and to the testimony! We must be recalled to the Word! We are in need of reformation and revival! Woe unto us if we are at ease in Zion! Woe unto us if we congratulate ourselves in snug complacency, citing our offerings and sacrifices and forgetting that the sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken heart and a contrite spirit! For to obey is better than sacrifices and to hearken than the fat of rams! We are become worldly minded. We scoff at child-like piety. We are proud of our program, of our achievements. We say, religion is not doctrine but the good life! And we are becoming an influence in the world. We are improving society, so why worry about the fine points of doctrine?

Let us not forget that Israel in the time of Amos was very religious and Micah tells us that the people asked God what more they could do to please God. But the prophet said, "Return unto me, and I will return unto you seek the Lord and ye shall live" (Amos). Does any one imagine that we are better than Israel of old? That the prophetic message does not apply to us in this age of apostasy? Are we still saying, "It cannot happen to us." Then we are wilfully blind. The Hebrews also in the times of Amos, Jeremiah and of Malachi said: "The temple, the temple! God will save his covenant people from such an overthrow." But Jehovah says that because he has given them his covenant he will bring them into captivity for their iniquities. Does anyone imagine that the Hungarians are more wicked than we are, that they suffer so? We ought to see in the rape of Hun-

gary the shape of things to come, unless we repent.

In short, doctrinal sensitivity will not be achieved unless we tremble at the Word of God, unless we again offer ourselves to him who brought us with his precious blood, Christ our Lord and King!

For the time will come when they will not endure the sound doctrine; but, having itching ears will heap to themselves teachers after their own lusts; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and turn aside unto fables.” St. Paul to Timothy

Rev. Henry R. Van Til [1906-1961] was an Associate Professor at Calvin College when this article was written. He was also on the Editorial Committee of the *Torch and Trumpet*.

Mid-America: An Academy with a Vocational Aim

The following is the text of Cornelis P. Venema’s inaugural address as the first president of Mid-America Reformed Seminary, September 27, 2001. The address will be printed, D.V., in three parts.

Rev. Blauw, members of the Board of Trustees, fellow faculty members, staff of the Seminary, students, distinguished guests and delegates, family and my good friends, I would like to begin my comments this evening, as is customary on an occasion such as this, with a few expressions of personal gratitude. The apostle Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, asks, “what do you have that you did not receive?” (1 Cor. 4:7) All that we have is a free gift of God’s grace toward us in Christ. We are to give thanks to God in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ for all things—including the opportunities He affords us to serve Him and His people. Tonight I am profoundly grateful for your presence here and the opportunity given me to address you regarding the special service of Mid-America Reformed Seminary to the church of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Allow me to express to you, members of the Board of Trustees, my gratitude for your trust in granting me the opportunity to serve as the first president of Mid-America Reformed Seminary. As you are aware, this was not a position to which I aspired or for which I readily made myself available. My greatest aspiration and privilege in life were to serve as a minister of the Word and sacrament in a Reformed church. I believe it was

Archibald Alexander who once expressed what is the testimony of any true minister of the gospel—“Preaching Christ is the best, hardest, sweetest work, on this side of beholding him.” When Alexander first began to serve at Princeton Theological Seminary, he also remarked, “As I have been so accustomed to preach, it does not seem pleasant to be altogether silent.”¹ My sentiments exactly! For this reason, when I was first approached to teach at Mid-America, I hesitated to do so because I enjoyed immensely the wonderful calling of serving as a pastor in a congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ. But I agreed to teach since it seemed at the time the next best thing to serving as a pastor.

But what of serving as president of a seminary? That might seem to be one step further removed from the pastoral ministry—a position fraught with the fearful prospect of endless committee meetings, administrative responsibilities, and promotional activities. Perhaps that’s why another seminary president greeted me recently with these words of congratulation—“you have my sympathy.” Apparently, he knows something that I do not yet know! I thank you, Board of Trustees, nonetheless, for giving me this opportunity, and especially for permitting me to be the kind of presi-



dent whose duties include preaching and teaching, as well as others more peculiar to the office of president. If teaching at a seminary is the next best thing to being a pastor, perhaps serving as a president is the next best thing to being a full-time professor—at least I’m still involved in the all-important business of helping to prepare pastors for service in the churches.

Allow me also to express my gratitude to you, my faculty colleagues. Throughout the brief history of Mid-America, we have worked together, not only in teaching, but also in a wide range of administrative duties and responsibilities. The day-to-day working of Mid-America has been, quite literally, a team effort. We had a Dean of Faculty whom we elected to a two-year term. But we had no CEO, not even a *primes inter pares* (“first among equals”). We were jointly and corporately responsible for the administration of the Seminary. But now the Board, in its wisdom (or folly) has determined that we should have a president. That could produce a subtle anxiety regarding our future, particularly when you consider whom they have selected for this position! God forbid that I should become the kind of president faculty members have reason to fear! You, however, have been gracious in accepting and supporting the Board’s decision. For that too I am profoundly grateful. Let me assure you that I come to this position as someone who is first and foremost a member of the faculty, and who believes that our prosperity as an institution demands that we work together in a collegial manner, each one placing the interests of the other above his own (Phil. 2).

I have chosen to speak on this occasion on the topic, “An Academy with a Vocational Aim: Training Pastors for Service in the Church.”² Though we are often tempted to play these off against each other—as though a seminary has to be *either* an academy *or* a vocational training school of the church—I would like to argue that what will best serve the church in our time is seminary training of her pastors that is rigorously and properly academic, yet not merely aca-

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demically. Rather, a Reformed seminary like Mid-America needs to be a school, an academy, where the theological formation and learning that takes place has a governing focus, a particular telos or end that shapes and characterizes everything. If I understand the unique place and service of Mid-America, it is that it seeks by God’s grace to combine the best of the academy with a singular focus upon preparing her students for the pastoral or preaching ministry in the church. We are an academy in the proper sense of the term, but one that is responsive to the church in its aim to train students who aspire to the pastoral ministry.

The Seminary as an Academy

It might seem strange to begin by emphasizing that the seminary is an

academy. On the one hand, it seems too obvious to require emphasis. A seminary is, if anything, a school, an academy. But on the other hand, it might seem somewhat problematic, even an emphasis strangely at odds with Mid-America’s particular history and distinctive focus upon preaching. You do not have to read long or listen much to the kinds of criticisms that are registered against seminaries and seminary training to find that many of them are aimed at the academy model. These criticisms are of two distinct kinds: first, there is the concern that the seminary as academy works at cross purposes with the interests of the church; and second, there is the concern that an academic training is ill-suited to the practical demands of the gospel ministry.

John H. Leith, for example, in his recent searching criticism of theological education in the main-line churches of North America, expresses well the first criticism:

Seminaries ... were established by the church to prepare pastors for the church. Contemporary faculties coming out of graduate schools tend to pressure the seminaries in another direction; namely, that of an academic institution. Seminary faculties increasingly like to think of themselves as centers for thought, for research, for the writing of articles and books and creative theological enterprises.³

The academy model for seminary training, as this comment of Leith intimates, threatens to divorce the

seminary from the life and ministry of the church. It represents the loss of what was once known as the “study of divinity” in which students were formed theologically and spiritually for the sacred ministry.

The idea of the seminary as an academy has come for many to be associated with the illegitimate separation between seminary and church, theology and piety, theory and practice. Seminaries as academies, especially when their faculties labor under the influence of post-Enlightenment modernism, are, in the judgment of many, the last thing we need. Consequently, when Lester De Koster wrote a pamphlet in support of the founding of Mid-America Reformed Seminary some years ago, he argued that a theological school, in distinction from a seminary, exists for the express purpose of calling into question “for purposes of rational examination the affirmations which underlie a seminary.”⁴ In this view, there is great gulf fixed between the seminary as an academy on the one hand, and the seminary as a school of the church on the other.⁵

This criticism no doubt expresses a legitimate concern, and therefore we will return to it at a later point. Indeed, one of the chief notes sounded by the founders and supporters of Mid-America from the beginning was the theme of the seminary’s intimate relationship with and service on behalf of the church. Nonetheless, the concern to emphasize the seminary’s close relationship to the church ought not to be used to deny the obvious—that it is an academy, a school.

However, there is another, equally pressing and perhaps even more

influential, challenge to the idea of the seminary as an academy. The trend in seminary education in North America, which is especially pronounced among many evangelical institutions, is to reduce theological training to the mastery of pastoral techniques or mechanics. Richard Muller, in his *The Study of Theology*, tells the story of his discomfort at a graduation ceremony at Fuller Theological Seminary, when a D.Min. graduate was asked to say a few words:

The academy model for seminary training, as this comment of Leith intimates, threatens to divorce the seminary from the life and ministry of the church.

Dressed in his new robe and elegant doctoral hood, he mounted the podium with words of praise for the seminary, words that, by his own admission, were as much a surprise to himself as to anyone else. He had always frowned on seminaries and seminary education. He had warned dozens of young people about the ‘ivory tower’ of academic study and its irrelevance to the ‘real work’ of ministry. ... Why, then, was he graduating from a seminary? He was there because of the practical, ‘how-to’ approach of the Doctor of Ministry degree. He was there because this degree was different—it demanded no theological speculation, no academic, ivory-tower critical thinking, no retreat

from the nitty-gritty reality of daily ministry. In fact, the ivory-tower courses—courses dealing with critical exegesis, the history of Christian doctrine, and philosophical and systematic theology—had not been a part of his program of education. He had studied only useful, relevant subjects.⁶

This incident reflects a long history of anti-intellectualism and anti-clericalism in North American culture, which has profoundly influenced the shape of theological education at many seminaries.⁷ The titles of several recent diagnoses of the evangelical church and the state of theological education in North America amply confirm the consequences of this history: *Fit Bodies Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don’t Think and What to do About It*,⁸ by Os Guinness; *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?*⁹ by David Wells; and *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind*,¹⁰ by Mark A. Noll. The common theme of these studies is captured well by the memorable opening line of Noll’s book: “The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind.”¹¹

Accordingly, many seminaries in North America have increasingly shifted their curricular focus to what is called “practical” theology. More practical courses mean fewer courses in biblical exegesis, history, systematic theology, and the like. Furthermore, students are presented in seminary with a smorgasbord of options, depending upon their career and vocational interests. Gone are the days when you could assume that a seminary stu-



dent was preparing for the gospel ministry, or that he would be taking courses in the biblical languages, exegesis, theology, and history. Is it any wonder, then, that we have succeeded in preparing a generation of ministers whose sermons, as I believe Os Guinness once quipped, are a mile wide and 1/16th of an inch deep? Nowhere more, he suggests, than in America are the churches fuller and the sermons emptier. Or that Eugene Peterson, somewhat with tongue in cheek, has observed that he “could take a person with a high school education, give him or her a six-month trade school training, and provide a pastor who would be satisfactory to any discriminating American congregation”? In this trade-school, exclusively practical approach to seminary training, the traditional four-fold division of the curriculum could be replaced, Peterson adds, with four courses: “Creative Plagiarism, Voice Control for Prayer and Counseling, Efficient Office Management, and Image Projection.”¹² When you add to this mix the new approaches to seminary education—distance education, the virtual classroom, off-campus teaching, and the like—the pressure to diminish the academic character of seminary training is intensified.

However necessary it is for a seminary to serve the church, and how- ever important it may be to equip students with the practical tools necessary to be effective in the

ministry—a seminary must be, if anything, a place of teaching and of learning. Careful, rigorous scholarship must mark the work of a theological school. The study and mastery of languages, particularly the biblical languages; the study of texts, biblical, confessional, and theological; the sympathetic and sensitive listening to the history of the church in her reflection upon the teaching of the Word of God; critical engagement with the intellectual currents and fashions of the present day—these are the “stuff” of which a seminary education is made. Though this is not the place to present the full curriculum of a good seminary education, suffice it to say that it must be “classical” in the sense that it works with the intellectual resources and tools inherited from the great tradition of Christian theological scholarship. Reformed seminaries ought to understand this as well as any. If the ministry is primarily a ministry of the *Word*, then the “stock in trade” of the minister is the study of the Word.

My point is one that J. Gresham Machen made in his address, on the occasion of the opening of Westminster Theological Seminary in 1929: “We are not conducting a school for lay workers at Westminster Seminary, useful though such a school would be, but a theological seminary; and we believe that a theological seminary is an institution of higher learning

whose standards should not be inferior to the highest academic standards that anywhere prevail.”¹³

NOTES

¹Quoted from David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary*, vol. 1: *Faith and Learning, 1812-1868* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1994), 59.

²Cf. Richard J. Mouw, “The Seminary, the Church, and the Academy,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 33 (1998): 457-68.

³*Crisis in the Church: The Plight of Theological Education* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 17.

⁴Lester De Koster, *Crossroads: Seminary Or Theological School* (Blue Island, IL: Marden Marketing, Inc., 1981), 12.

⁵In the Reformed churches of the Netherlands, a vigorous debate whether the seminary is an academy or an institution of the church took place at the end of the nineteenth century. Abraham Kuyper and the reformatory movement known as the “Doleantie” advocated the view that the seminary belonged in a university setting, as an academic institution distinct from the sphere of the church. The churches stemming from the secession of 1834, however, argued that the seminary belonged to the church and was not, strictly speaking, an academic enterprise. For a recent treatment of this history and its significance, see Richard J. Mouw, “The Seminary, the Church, and the Academy,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 33 (1998): 457-468.

⁶Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991, vii.

⁷For a documentation of this anti-intellectual and anti-clerical spirit in American Christianity prior to the Civil War, see Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

Many seminaries in North America have increasingly shifted their curricular focus to what is called “practical” theology.

⁸Os Guinness, *Fit Bodies Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What to Do About It* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994).

⁹David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth: Or Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993).

¹⁰Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994).

¹¹I am reminded, in this connection, of the first book I was asked to read as a college student in an introductory course on Christian philosophy—Harry Blamires' *The Christian Mind* (London: SPCK, 1966). Blamires' thesis was a simple one (and note: he offered it long before the books mentioned a moment ago): "Except over a very narrow field of thinking, chiefly touching questions of strictly personal conduct, we Christians in the modern world accept, for the purpose of mental activity, a frame of reference constructed by the secular mind and a set of criteria reflecting secular evaluations. There is no Christian mind; there is no shared field of discourse in which we can move at ease as thinking Christians by trodden ways and past established landmarks." Blamires was prophetic. Sadly, seminaries today are often as much a part of the problem as its solution.

¹²Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 5.

¹³J. Gresham Machen, "Westminster Theological Seminary: Its Purpose and Plan," in *What is Christianity?*, 226.

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Like Apples of Gold in Settings of Silver (Part 3)

Magazines

In our continuing look at the advancements of the Reformed faith in America, we cannot only talk about denominations and ministries. We should also look at magazines, which in addition to *The Outlook*, have a widespread influence.

First, there is *Tabletalk Magazine*, published by Ligionier Ministries, and edited by R.C. Sproul Jr. I know many of you are familiar with this publication. *Tabletalk* is a devotional magazine that has substantive, meaty articles, as well as daily devotions and a yearly Bible reading plan. Do you know how many magazines they put out? They distribute 60,000 devotional magazines a month.

God's Word Today, which the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals puts out (largely containing the work of Dr. James Boice who recently went to be with the Lord), publishes 7,000 devotional magazines a month. *Modern Reformation* another publication of the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals edited by Dr. Michael Horton, of Westminster Theological Seminary in California, publishes 11,000 issues.

Viewpoints, which is a periodical of Reformation and Revival Ministries by John Armstrong in Wheaton, Illinois, publishes 8,000 copies. They have a quarterly journal, which is more theologically substantive. Every quarter they publish 2,200 copies.

World Magazine, Joel Belz's work out of Asheville, North Carolina, has a circulation of 110,000 a week! A week! It is a news weekly magazine that is Reformed in nature and unashamedly so. And they are promoting the Reformed faith and propagating a world and life view, seeing all of life through the spectacles of Scripture.

Credenda/Agenda Magazine, published out of Moscow, Idaho, has a circulation of 25,000. And that is not to mention former publications such as *Antithesis Magazine*. *Contramundum Magazine* comes from the Athenesian inscription "unumcontramundum," one man against the world which was said of Athenasias. Antithesis has gone out of publication and has combined its efforts with *Contramundum*. *Contramundum* sought to overcome the cost of publishing print magazines by now putting out electronic magazines, and they now publish only electronically.

This of course is not to mention all the electronic, or e-zines, that are to be obtained on the web. Multitudes of websites that are Reformed in nature get thousands of hits every week. I went through a list of Reformed Faith links on the web just recently. It was interesting to see that the links numbered easily in the hundreds. Just Reformed links. I like to spend time on the Internet in a concentrated and focused fashion to do research and preparation for studies or lectures or even for ser-



mons, but I tell you I don't have the time to look at all those sites. But they are out there and they are getting hits. People are seeing them.

Book Publishing

Denominations, ministries, magazines, books that are being published propagating the reformed faith. Canon Press, again out of Moscow, Idaho, publishes at least a dozen new books every year. Soli Deo Gloria, Don Kistler's work, out of western Pennsylvania, began in 1988. In the last 12 years, they have published 200 titles. And in 12 years they have sold 500,000 copies in the US, UK, Australia,

New Zealand, Canada, Singapore, Korea, and the Philippines. And shocking, but most definitely encouraging, no one less than Moody Press now publishes books by Mike Horton and George Grant. Even Joseph Stohl of Moody Church in Chicago, claims to be a five-point Calvinist. When Moody Press starts publishing things that are Reformed, I tell you brothers and sisters, there is great reason to be encouraged by what God is doing!

Conferences

There are also conferences to be considered. The Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology begun at 10th Presbyterian Church some 20 years ago in Philadelphia has gone national, multiplying the number of conferences that they have with attendance in the thousands. Ligionier Ministries holds nine conferences a year with attendance exceeding 12,000 people. Reformation and Revival Ministries has one conference in October in Wheaton Church in Wheaton, Illi-

nois, which has attendance of 1,000. In Toledo, there are two conferences. One is a Toledo Conference on Reformed Theology on the east side of Toledo, and the other is a conference on Reformed theology on the west side of Toledo. Soli Deo Gloria has had conferences in Pennsylvania, down south, and also in Toledo. The Banner of Truth conference has now gone bi-coastal, not only meeting in Pennsylvania but also in California.

When Moody Press starts publishing things that are Reformed, I tell you brothers and sisters, there is great reason to be encouraged by what God is doing!

In Moscow, Idaho, I attended a conference last year in February, the middle of winter, northern Idaho, in a very small town. A conference on American history, and to make matters worse, it was on a Friday night and a Saturday. Do you know how many people were at this conference I attended? 900! For a conference on history! It consisted of biographies of great Christian Americans. It was absolutely inspiring. As I walked into the conference, you know what astounded, impressed, and encouraged me most? Do you know that 1/3 to 1/2 of those 900 people were either high school or college age kids? They were there because they were interested. I tell you, I came back home with my socks blessed off. I just couldn't believe it! Nine hundred

people, 1/3 to 1/2 of which were young people, would turn out for a conference on American history. I tell you there are great things going on!

Closer to home, they are talking about having to multiply our own Kyrie Conference. In addition, there is also the Christian World View conference, which takes place in Hampton, Virginia and is organized by Byron Snaap, a PCA pastor. They are now in the process of beginning another conference on the west coast. And yet another one here in Michigan this summer. For the Virginia Conference, young people traveled from around the country to attend a conference where they would have thirty hours of lectures in five days. And they loved it! They could not get enough. They are thrilled. And that conference has gone from a handful when it began less than five years ago to now exceeding two hundred.

Great things are going on!

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Pitching Tents Near Sodom

In Genesis 13:12, we read: “Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom.” To get the full gravity of Lot’s act of having pitched his tents near Sodom, one must read the following verse, Genesis 13:13: “Now the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord.”

Most readers, I am sure, remember the sad consequences of Lot’s choice. Lot and his family eventually came to live in the wicked city and became a part of it; only Lot, his wife, and his two daughters were rescued from Sodom before God’s judgment came upon the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah. Lot’s wife was left behind on the way while fleeing, when she became a pillar of salt because she disobeyed the angel’s command not to look back. (Genesis 19)

The words: “while Lot pitched his tents near Sodom,” I believe, have significant lessons for us. Lot’s first move of placing his tents in close proximity to the wicked city of Sodom was a dangerous position which he should have avoided for himself and his family.

The Bible tells us to flee from sin. Pitching one’s tents near Sodom is doing the opposite. Sometimes we pitch our tents in a seemingly safe place or circumstance but fail to inventory the Sodom lurking nearby, into which we can easily be drawn. Pitching tents near Sodom may place a person in a questionable or perilous area but not yet into the full-blown evil of it. God in His

Word has said that when we are tempted, He always gives us a way of escape. (I Corinthians 10:13b) We often can escape or avoid a temptation to sin by not locating our tents near the sinful area in the first place.

When our tents are carelessly pitched near Sodom, the thing in which we are involved, in and of itself, may or may not be innocent; but it is the first step toward the next move - the slide into Sodom, which makes pitching nearby so seriously dangerous. If Lot had properly evaluated his campsite, he could have spared himself, his family, and his household much physical and spiritual loss. For the Christian, checking one’s spiritual campsite location is of great importance for one’s own Christian life and that of one’s family.

In this article, examples will be given of some areas which are danger areas or beginning points to avoid, because they lead too easily and subtly into a modern Sodom. The discussion will include only some “near Sodom” campsites. As a reader, think of your personal avoidance of these and other “pitching tents near Sodom” to protect yourself, your family, and/or friends from entering a “Sodom” today.

One area in which some Christians are pitching their tents near Sodom is in their lack of discretion in choosing entertainment and recreation. Choices too often are not for wholesome and Christ-glorifying TV programs, movies, magazines and books, music, and

activities but rather for those which should make a Christian blush. One of my Christian high school teachers gave us this advice: “If you wouldn’t be comfortable in that place or participating in that activity if Jesus came, don’t do it.” That warning has helped me decide a number of times whether that really was an acceptable place for a Christian to be or an acceptable thing for a Christian to do. The more we let our guard down on our entertainment, the more we move closer and closer to the Sodom of the entertainment world - filthy and God-defying language, corrupt morals, and arrogant and ungodly attitudes, philosophies, and teachings.

Cal Thomas writes this about our present culture’s entertainment:

Oozing from every pore of our society, from the rhetoric of some political “leaders” to the garbage masquerading as entertainment that arrests the attention of the young (and too many adults), is incontrovertible evidence of our public affair with evil.” (*Grand Rapids Press*; “Date abuse a signal of cultural decay”; 8/17/01)

Another place Christians can pitch their tents near Sodom is in their language. Some church members glibly use words such as “gosh,” “gol” or “golly,” and “gee” or “geez.” These words may appear quite innocent; but, I believe, they can be classified as “danger” words. One often fails to think about where the next vocabulary step is and what a negative Christian witness this may be to others.

On more that one occasion I’ve



heard a Christian use the expletive “Gol!” which sounded like the Christian had said the word “God.” Do you want to use words that are so close to misusing God’s name that they give that kind of witness from your mouth when misunderstood? Also, how effortless it can become for a person to slip into the habit of misusing God’s name by substituting a “d” for the “l” at the end of the word.

The expression, “Oh, my Gosh!,” is used by many people who would never think of using the words: “Oh, my God!” This form of taking God’s name in vain is so common today as it rolls off the tongues of people on TV, people in the marketplace, people in the common sector of our society, as well as in music, movies, and literature. Recently I heard the exclamation, “Oh, My Gosh!” said by a woman on TV when her antique was given much more value than she had expected. Her voice tone, voice inflections, and pause effects were done precisely as those using “Oh, My God!” So much so, that I thought that was what she surely was saying until she reached the last phonetic sound of “sh.” Why use words so similar - only the ending “sh” digraph needing to be replaced by the consonant “d”? That’s about as close as one can get without specifically using God’s name - only a baby step away.

As a child, I was taught not to use the word “gee” because it had the sound of the first syllable of Jesus. I wondered at that time if it were a

real danger. One hears “gee” being used much more today. Why was the “z sound” added to “gee” rather than another of the many consonant sounds in the alphabet? All the Christian’s tongue has to add is the “uz” sound, and it sounds the name “Jesus” as an expletive.

Dictionaries included the following in their definitions for some commonly used expressions today, which, I believe, makes good food for thought for the Christian:

The American Heritage Dictionary, Second College Edition defines “gee”: “interj. Used as a mild expletive or exclamation of surprise. [Alteration of JESUS.]”

Webster’s New World Dictionary, Second College Edition included the following in its definitions:

1. “gee”: interj. [euphemistic contr. <JE(SUS)] [Slang] an exclamation of surprise, wonder, etc.
2. “golly”: interj. an exclamation of surprise, etc.: a euphemism for God
3. “gosh”: interj. an exclamation of surprise, wonder, etc.: a euphemism for God
4. “goodness”: ... interi. an exclamation of surprise or wonder: a euphemism for God [for goodness’ sake!]
5. “Sam Hill”: euphemistic slang term for HELL
6. “darn”: ... interl. [Colloq.] a euphemism for DAMN (the curse)

To better understand the given definitions, euphemism is defined: “1. the use of a word or phrase that is less expressive or direct but considered less distasteful, less offensive, etc. than another 2. a word or phrase so substituted.”

Using danger words, I believe, pitches one’s tents too closely to the Sodom of breaking God’s 3rd commandment, both by the Christian’s tongue and in the hearing of others. We must closely evaluate our speech. Is it God—glorifying and edifying for others?

Not only in speaking but also in hearing God’s name taken in vain, how dulled has your adverse reaction or conscience become when hearing God’s name misused today? As a child, hearing God’s name taken in vain was so rare, a Christian bristled at the sound of it. Today one cannot be in the marketplace, in a restaurant, or listening to TV for any length of time without hearing God’s or Jesus’ names used as expletives rather than being used in prayer or praise. It’s said so glibly today that many do not even realize they have used God’s sacred name so blasphemously. Christians must guard their listening in entertainment and in their contacts, lest hearing God’s name misused becomes so familiar to their ears that they fail to have the capability to spiritually react and hate the sound of God’s name taken in vain.

A third consideration of pitching tents near Sodom is the prac-

Guard both your location and availability. Keep your tents pitched far away from any of the substances.

tice of social drinking and being with drinking friends and acquaintances. The Sodom of alcoholism is never far away for any occasional drinker. No one plans to become an alcoholic. Through social drinking, drinking with friends, drinking in the bar, or drinking in the home, one slips into it. One guarantee or promise can be made: "If you never take the first drink, you can be assured you will never become an alcoholic." This promise also holds true for not becoming a smoker or a drug user.

The first try of alcohol, smoking, or drugs pitches one's tents nearer to the Sodom of addiction. If one is fighting any of the addictions now, or has in the past, keep yourself out of areas where you would be tempted to drink, smoke, or use drugs again. Guard both your location and availability. Keep your tents pitched far away from any of the substances.

Tents are being pitched near Sodom in one's spiritual life when a church member shows laxity in Sabbath observance, church attendance, Bible reading, and/or prayer. It begins slowly with only neglecting any or all of them infrequently. It then is easier for the person to move from only infrequent negligence of any or all of the above, to more often, to habitual or complete negligence. The process of moving from being faithful, to frequent negligence, to the Sodom of habitual or total lack of church-going, Sunday observance, Bible reading, and prayer begins rather slowly. It continues with an increased momentum of laxity until one is in the Sodom of bold and defiant withdrawal from concern for God and His commandments.

Not only has the churchgoer pitched his own tent in Sodom by then, but if a parent, he or she has taught his or her family tragically well how to do the same. Beware of the movement you are making if you are moving away from God, and into the Sodom of a law unto yourself, which is a very dangerous, downward spiral.

Another campsite which gives proximity to the Sodom of moving away from God is relocating one-

Divorce is a "Sodom" result, but the spouse who strayed likely pitched his or her tents near Sodom long before the divorce occurred.

self and/or one's family away from an area of believers and a strong biblical church. This makes it easy to move into less church attendance, less Christian fellowship, and accountability. This again does not occur as a blowout but rather as a slow leak of spiritual negligence and weakening.

Watch your tent setting also when it comes to your relationships regarding friends, dating, and marriage. Evaluate the nearness these personal relationships may bring you to a Sodom. Choose Christian friends; and in dating, don't place yourself in the temptation of being unequally yoked by dating someone whom you, as a Christian, should not be considering for a marriage partner. Wrong friends and unbe-

lieving spouses provide an easy path to the Sodom of following them rather than God. Also, poor dating choices places one closer to the eventual Sodom of divorce. In dating, concern yourself with whom you date, where, and how. The person you date, the place you are with a date, and how you date that person may be pitching you near the Sodom of fornication. Spouses, be alert to where and how you allow relationships to be set up and developed. Most infidelity could have been avoided if the initial steps of tent setting had been done with more discretion, care, concern, and commitment to one's marriage. Divorce is a "Sodom" result, but the spouse who strayed likely pitched his or her tents near Sodom long before the divorce occurred.

Compromising or broadening biblical doctrine to make it include what one wants it to approve is on a slippery slope to accepting questionable interpretations of Scripture and on a pathway to blatant heresy. One tent pitching prevalent today is broadening the interpretation of Genesis 1 (literal days to long periods of time), which leads more easily to the acceptance of evolution. I believe history confirms that this road has been traveled in Christian institutions of higher learning. Asking the question: "Did God really say that?" easily puts one into a Sodom area by broadening a host of verses in Scripture. As a result, even though God did not say as such, one makes it include that which one wants for biblical approval such as: evolution, women in office, homosexual behavior, divorce, euthanasia, abortion, embryonic stem cell destruction, univer-



salism, and more. When Scripture is distorted to make it inclusive in its interpretation, it becomes an umbrella to include anything one wants. It begins with a small inclusion and then broadening to an umbrella which is willing to encompass and endorse most anything.

White lies pitch one's tents nearer to becoming an avid liar. Taking little things moves one closer to becoming a habitual thief. Materialism puts one's campsite nearer to the Sodom of greed. Playing for money, even small amounts in card games and betting in sports, opens the gate to the Sodom of all types of gambling.



In conclusion, please evaluate where your tents are pitched in entertainment, use of language, relationships, attitudes, behaviors, habits, biblical interpretation, and spirituality. If your tents need to be moved away from or out of Sodom, please pull up stakes quickly and make the changes that are necessary, rather than continuing to edge closer or deeper into sin. Where your tents are not pitched near Sodom, guard yourself in your Christian life. Always survey the territory and see the "Sodom" that could be near. Let Lot's tragic choice help you avoid the sad consequences he and his family experienced. Don't be like Lot, pitching

your tents near Sodom! "Now the men of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the Lord." (Genesis 13:13) **DON'T JOIN THEM! FLEE FROM THEM!**

Jan Groenendyk is a retired Christian School teacher. She is the wife of Rev. Marion Groenendyk. They are members of the Bethany URC in Wyoming, Michigan.

Book Reviews

Herman Hanko. *For Thy Truth's Sake: A Doctrinal History of the Protestant Reformed Churches*. Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2000.

xxvi + 541 pp. including index. \$39.95

Seventy-five years of God's blessing! That's what the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) commemorated this last summer. In conjunction with their celebration this book was published. It is an interesting book in that, while it gives a history of this group of churches, it is more particularly, as the subtitle indicates, a doctrinal history. Very few books like this are written. More, this is not a heavy tome written only for the scholarly reader. It is a volume you can easily read in your easy chair.

This book is very timely. It needed to be written. It is well-known that this small portion of Christ's Church, called Protestant Reformed, is often unjustly criticized by people who have no idea what they stand for. There are many misconceptions of what they teach and believe. Professor Hanko has done a very good job as he has explained the cardinal teachings of the PRC.

Of course, the initial events which brought about the PRC are recounted, as are the historical roots in the Christian Reformed Church, and, before that, in the Secessionists of the Netherlands (1834). An Old Dutch proverb, quoted on page twenty, puts this in focus:

*In the past lies the present,
And today holds the future.*

These connections are very important in understanding the beginnings of the PRC. The historical facts are nicely woven through the doctrinal history. The Janssen controversy, the common grace controversy, the antithesis, and even the related controversy regarding Church government are all explained in relation to the PRC.

While many doctrinal subjects are dealt with, by far the largest portion of this volume specifically concerns the doctrine of the covenant as it has been developed in the PRC. This, of course, necessitates an explanation of Schilder's relation to the PRC and his teaching, and how these impacted the PRC in 1953. For those who are interested in coming to know their position, instead of listening to those who are just critical by nature, this section

will be very helpful as the positive position is explained. In relation to this, the Hoeksema-DeWolf controversy is also explained. Of course, not all will want to agree with what is written. Maybe they were directly involved, or have heard from those who were, or simply have a negative attitude to what some have not been willing to learn about. But, at least, they should be honest and read the other side of the story.

Sooner or later this kind of volume had to be written as a real contribution to the study of church history, and Professor Hanko has provided admirably for this need.

The last section of this volume contains many valuable items. A collection of relevant documents in English

which are important to this history appears. In fact, there are eighty pages of them: including the Acts of Secession (1834) and the Act of Agreement (1925) of the three congregations aggrieved by the decision the Christian Reformed Church Synod of 1924 concerning common grace and the related church political situation. Also appearing are copies of the documents relating to the 1953 division. In addition, a very valuable bibliography appears in two sections. The first section is general in nature, providing publications which give light on the general subject of the history and views of the PRC. Some of the listings are of Dutch publications; most are in English. The second section lists works of Herman Hoeksema. Obviously, it does not include every article appearing in the *Standard Bearer* or every sermon ever to be published in pamphlet form. He was a prolific writer, and someday this ought to be done. What we have in this bibliography is a listing of the basic theological writings which are important to this history.

In the middle of the book a collection of illustrations appears. It is very helpful, and, also, interesting. No doubt, for some readers it will bring on a bit of nostalgia.

This volume is attractive, and, even more, very helpful in understanding the Protestant Reformed Churches. It would be worth while for you to read it carefully.

Thanks, Professor Hanko, for your work!

Jerome M. Julien

Alcock, Deborah. *The Romance of Protestantism: Tales of Trials and Victory*.

Neerlandia AS / Pella, IA: Inheritance Publications. 1999. 186pp, paper.

Like it or not, the Church of Jesus Christ cannot and does not live in a vacuum. We must see ourselves as directly related to the Church through the ages. Nor can we dare think that the struggles for Biblical Truth are now unimportant or insignificant. We need to know who we are and what has transpired to bring us in God's providence where we are right now.

Deborah Alcock, daughter of a minister in the Reformed Church of England and Ireland in the eighteen hundreds, was a gifted writer who carefully used historical details to make the stories of the days of the Reformation and of the days following live for the reader. According to the publisher, this present volume contains portions from the various volumes she wrote, and which will soon be reprinted.

The author begins with an enlightening discussion of Protestantism. Then she acquaints us with the Waldensians and their struggle for the Faith. Next, she takes us to Holland and shows us the struggle for Reformation there. Mercifully, the Lord cared for His people there, in spite of antichrist's ugly head being there, along with his merciless doings.

Our spiritual forefathers in the Netherlands suffered much for the sake of Christ. Following this, the author writes of the Church of our Lord in Bohemia. Usually, we who

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have Spiritual roots in the Dutch Reformation think of the Reformation as taking place in Germany, Switzerland, England, France and the Netherlands. Seldom do we think of Bohemia and John Huss or Jerome of Prague.

This little book will help any reader to understand his Christian heritage and what our forefathers experienced for the sake of Christ. Perhaps the shocking events of those days will help us come back to the reality of the First Promise of the Gospel, the Words of Jesus about tribulation in this world, and the fulfillment of God's Promise in the last chapters of the Book Of Revelation. Also, perhaps it will, help us to understand what the Bible really means when it teaches about true comfort!

Jerome M. Julien

Jerome M. Julien is the Stated Clerk of the United Reformed Churches in North America

Ashcroft, John. *Lessons From a Father to His Son* Thomas Nelson Publishers: Nashville, Tenn. 1998. 214pp

The book, *Lessons From a Father to His Son* by John Ashcroft, is written in tribute to the instructions of Ashcroft's father, an Assembly of God minister and college president.

The flyleaf dedication describes the content of this very readable 214 page book as follows: "To my wife Janet, and all the other moms and dads who realize that the transmission of values from one generation to the next is the single most important responsibility of a culture."

The 29 short chapters are built around different spiritual/practical themes which John Ashcroft learned from the teachings of his father, both by precept and ex-

ample. John Ashcroft takes the reader on a delightful and sometimes emotional journey of a beautiful teaching relationship which a father had toward his son. The father is described as purposefully building a Christian character and value system in his son which began early in life and continued until the day his father died.

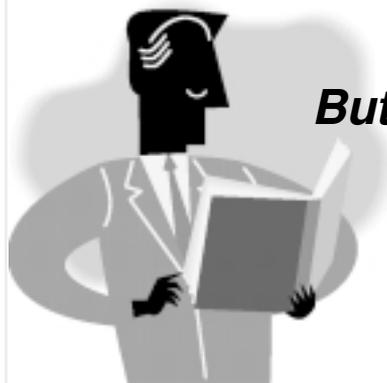
This book would make excellent reading for any age group, and in my opinion, would be a good addition to any church library.

Rev. Marion Groendyk

Rev. Marion Groendyk is an emeritus minister and member of the Bethany United Reformed Church in Wyoming, Michigan.

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