

THE Outlook

*Devoted to the Exposition and Defense
of the Reformed Faith*

March 1997



*Of All
Men Most
Miserable?*

Theme Article

I Corinthians 15 is the great chapter on the resurrection of the body. The apostle Paul bases the resurrection of the body on the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. But he does so in a strikingly interesting way. He asks us the readers to consider what our situation would be if Christ had not been raised from the dead. After he lays out all the horrible consequences of that unthinkable possibility, he concludes by saying that if Christ had not been raised from the dead, we would of all men be most miserable. We would be most to be pitied. Why is this the stark conclusion to the unthinkable suggestion that Christ had not been raised? What difference, in other words, did the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead make in the lives of God's people?

The disciples knew what difference it made for them, but they saw the resurrection of Christ only as an immediate difference. That is, they moved from abject sorrow and despair to a bright new hope that suddenly had broken upon them. But their experience was only a small beginning compared to what the Church of the New Testament found to be the earth-shaking difference that the resurrection of Christ meant. One of

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those differences is discussed by Paul in Romans 4. There he explained the great doctrine of justification by faith. He used the example of Abraham. Abraham was given the promise of descendants who would be as many as the stars. But Abraham was an old man, and his wife Sarah was well beyond child-bearing years. Yet he believed the promise of God? Why? Because he believed that

God could raise his old body, and give life through him and Sarah. That faith, says Paul quoting Genesis 15:6, was credited to him as righteousness. He was justified by faith in a God who can give life to such aged bodies as his and Sarah's.

Then Paul goes on to say that this story of Abraham's faith was not written just for him or for the people of Israel. We must have the same kind of faith that Abraham had in order for us to be given salvation. The faith that we have is also in a God who can raise from death to life. But in our case, it is the fulfillment of what was only promised to Abraham. For us, our faith is in the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Paul says that we believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.

Why does the resurrection of Christ and our faith in the God who raised Him from the dead give us justification? When the disciples saw Jesus dying on the cross, when they saw His body laid in the tomb, their hopes for salvation were dashed. As the two men from Emmaus expressed it, "We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel." Clearly there was no thought that Christ's death was the very means by which God would save His people. But Christ's death alone did not save and cannot save anyone. The question must be asked, "What did Christ's death accomplish?" Christ's death was to take away our sins. But only God can declare that our sins were paid for by Christ on the cross. The resurrection of Christ declared to all the world that God was satisfied with the death of Christ. It is the fact that *God raised Jesus from the dead*, and not simply that Jesus arose from the dead, that spells security for us. Our salvation is determined by the fact of the resurrection of Christ only because it was God who raised Him from the

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dead. That is why Paul says that we believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. The emphasis on *God's act* in raising Jesus from the dead is absolutely crucial to our salvation.

Abraham believed in a God who raised his old body so that life could come, and Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. Now you and I are to place our faith in the same God who raised Jesus from the dead. Our faith will also be credited to us as righteousness. This is why the resurrection of Christ is so important. Indeed, it is the heart of the gospel. Without this great truth, we would be of all men most miserable.

RAISED FOR OUR VICTORY

Why would the unthinkable - that Christ had not been raised from the dead - result in our being of all men most to be pitied? Romans 6 gives the second answer to this question when Paul speaks about the result of Christ's res-

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urrection in terms of our victory. Paul assures us that the resurrection of Christ means that we are born to new life. We are now able to live as victorious Christians.

Like the argument Paul used in Romans 4, his argument here in Romans 6 is also striking. He answers a common charge that was directed against the doctrine of justification by faith alone. It is that the doctrines of grace will be a license to sin. The argument goes along these lines: if a person believes that he is saved by grace alone, by the merits of Christ alone, what incentive will he have to live a Christian life? All incentives are gone. He will simply go on sinning with impunity because he knows that all his sins are already forgiven. The doctrines of grace are dangerous doctrines. Justification by faith alone apart from any good that we do will simply lead to a license to sin.

What is the answer to this attack on the doctrines of grace? The answer is the resurrection of Jesus Christ! The resur-

rection of Christ from the dead did something to us as Christians. What it did was very much like what Adam's fall into sin did to all mankind. When Adam fell, all people became sinners. Adam's corruption became our corruption. This was the case because Adam was the father of us all. Now Christ came into the world as the second Adam. He took the place of Adam in relationship to the people of God. In the same way that Adam's act of sin became our act of sin, and his corruption became our corruption, so also Christ's righteousness became our righteousness. His new life given to Him in

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the resurrection from the dead, became our new life as well. We who believe in Jesus Christ now have a new life that has been received from the resurrection of Christ. We cannot live the way we once lived because we are new people, a new creation.

The result of this new relationship with the resurrected Christ is what Paul says in Romans 6:11, "In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus." He is simply telling us that we have to believe that what happened to Christ in His resurrection, has now happened to us through faith in Christ. His death is our death to sin, and His resurrection is our resurrection to new life. It is a matter of faith. We must now live out of that reality, that relationship to Christ. We must be what we are!

But there is more. Not only does the resurrection of Jesus Christ mean that we are given His new life. It also means that we will never have to die. We do not have to be afraid of death or Satan or the grave. For if His resurrection is our resurrection, then His victory over death is our victory over death also. We do not have to be afraid of death and Satan. We are more than conquerors through Jesus Christ. This victorious life is going to be seen in the way that we live before the face of God. We will not be groveling and cowering before death and Satan. Nor will we be living in sin as if we have never been born again. This is why the

resurrection of Christ is the most powerful event in the history of the world. This is why we will never be those who are most to be pitied!

THE GUARANTEE OF OUR RESURRECTION

Are we of all men most miserable? Not if "Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep." This is Paul's third striking and persuasive argument why the resurrection of Christ has the most profound effect in the lives of God's people. Not only does the resurrection of Christ affect our salvation and our victorious living, it also affects our future, our hope of the resurrection of our own bodies from the grave.

Paul's argument in I Corinthians 15 has to do with one of the Old Testament feasts, the Feast of First Fruits. The first fruits idea is a beautiful and compelling symbol of Christ's resurrection as the guarantee of our own resurrection. In Leviticus 23:10-12 Moses instructed the people regarding the first fruits. On the day after the Sabbath of the Passover week, the people were to bring the first sheaf of harvest to the temple. This sheaf was the first of their harvest. It was to be waved before the Lord, and then given to the Lord as an offering. It was a symbol of the entire harvest. In giving the first fruits God's people were dedicating the entire harvest to the Lord.

This was done on the Sunday of the Passover week. That this has significance for the resurrection of Christ can be seen by the fact that Jesus arose from the dead on the Sunday of the Passover week. He died on the Friday when the lambs were slain in the temple for the Passover, and He arose from the dead on the Sunday after the Passover. Certainly this is the fulfillment of the first fruits concept in Leviticus 23.

There was, however, another idea that was found in the first fruits. The believing Israelite brought his sheaf to the temple and dedicated his entire harvest to the Lord. But the first fruits idea was also God's response to that gift of His people. When the people brought the first fruits to the Lord, He thereby guaranteed to them that the rest of the harvest would follow. There was a promise made by the Lord to His people that if they would bring the first fruits to Him,

He would give them an abundant harvest. There is a reference to this in Malachi 3:10 where the Lord says, "Bring the whole tithe into my storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this, says the Lord Almighty, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it."

This emphasis is what Paul makes when he calls Jesus the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. Not only was Jesus the first who was raised from the dead never to die again. But He is also the guarantee that the rest will follow. There were certainly others who were raised from the dead. Jesus raised Lazarus and the son of the widow of Nain. But these people all died again. Jesus is the first fruits of those who will be raised. Christ's resurrection represents all believers in the same way that the giving of first fruits of the harvest represented the entire harvest. Christ's resurrection is the guarantee that all believers who have fallen sleep in Christ will also be raised from the dead. This is the blessed hope of believers. It is the reason why we are not of all men most miserable.

THANKS BE TO GOD!

What ought our response be, now that we see that we are not of all men most miserable? Not only does Paul lead us in the arguments to prove that we are not of all men most miserable. He also

"When sin is not forgiven, death is a terrible antagonist."

leads us in the response that we should make to this amazing message of the resurrection of Christ. At the end of the fifteenth chapter of I Corinthians, Paul writes, "But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." We are able to give thanks to God along with Paul because, as he says, the sting of death is gone. It is hard to really believe that the sting of death is gone. We feel that sting so keenly when death strikes our home and family. How can we really believe that the sting is gone? The sting of death is sin, Paul tells us. What gives death its sting is sin. When sin is not forgiven, death is a terrible antagonist. It is an awesome enemy



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to be feared. But after Paul states that the sting of death is sin, he says, "But thanks be to God!" Why? Because the sting of death has been removed when sin has been removed. Death has lost its awesomeness. It is no longer the antagonist that it once was. The reason is our Lord Jesus Christ. He has taken our sin away, and thus removed the sting from death. Now the believer does not need to fear death, nor does he fear the sting of death.

It was the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ that has removed the sting of death. His sinless life, His atoning death, and His resurrection has made death to be the entrance to eternal life for all who believe in Him. That is why Paul can so triumphantly say, "But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

I wonder if we really believe this. We are so affected by the loss that we feel that it is difficult for us to really see what the Bible holds before us in such a passage as this. But that is what faith is all about. All of the people of God throughout the ages have had to live by faith, not by sight. That means that we live by what the Bible says and not by what we see all around us. When we live by faith in the great promises of God's Word, we see that what Paul says here is absolutely true. We have the victory! The encouragement of the Word of God for us is, "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."

Of all men most miserable? Nothing could be farther from the truth. We are rather of all men most blessed. Jesus Christ has risen from the grave and we are more than conquerors!

This article was written as a short series for The Banner and adapted for publication in this format.

Rev. Henry Vanden Heuvel, brother of Co-editor Thomas Vanden Heuvel, is pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church of Oak Lawn, IL.

It is too bad that the books of the Old Testament in our English translations are not arranged in the same way that they are in the Hebrew Bible. If they were, the Old Testament would end with II Chronicles, and Matthew would begin where II Chronicles leaves off. II Chronicles ends with a devastating indictment of Israel:

The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place. But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the LORD was aroused against his people and there was no remedy.

(II Chronicles 36: 15, 16)

Matthew begins, after the birth narrative, with the coming of one last prophet and the ringing appeal of John the Baptist to repent for the kingdom of heaven is near. Repent, because God's judgment is about to fall on an unrighteous and unfaithful Israel (Matthew 3:2, 10). This is the same Israel that God sent into exile and brought back again, but an Israel that did not learn its lesson. John tells this covenant people to repent and to produce fruit in keeping with repentance. In the way of repentance the people could experience the forgiveness of God and be restored to fellowship with him. Without repentance the judgment of God was sure to come upon the nation and its people (Luke 3:8, 9).

John the Baptist prepared the way for the public ministry of Jesus Christ, and Jesus began His ministry with the same ringing appeal for repentance: "From that time on Jesus began to preach, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near'" (Matthew 4:17). Jesus also demanded the fruits of repentance and spelled out what He meant in the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus concluded His public ministry with a commission to His disciples to carry on the same work that He had begun. They are not simply to proclaim the gospel; they are to make disciples. They will do that by calling sinners to repentance and to faith in Jesus Christ. Repentance unto the forgiveness of sins will be preached in the name of Jesus to all the nations beginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24: 47). That is what we see happening in the Book of Acts.

Peter begins his ministry on the day of Pentecost with the same ringing appeal for repentance that had characterized the ministry of John the Baptist and Jesus Himself: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call" (Acts 2:38, 39).

In the place called Solomon's Colonnade Peter addresses the men of Israel with this unambiguous demand: "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus" (Acts 3:19).

Jesus commissioned His church to make disciples not only of the Jews but of all the nations. In fulfillment of that commission Paul goes to the Gentiles in Athens and tells them that God "commands all people everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). He testifies to the Ephesian elders, "I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus" (Acts 20:21). Paul testifies before King Agrippa, "First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and

turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds" (Acts 26:20).

What we have in the New Testament is a consistent pattern of preaching and exhortation rooted in the ministry of the prophets of the Old Covenant. John, Jesus, Peter and Paul, they all come with a ringing demand for repentance and faith in Jesus with a view to forgiveness. They demand the fruit that true repentance always brings in its wake. They carry that demand not only to God's ancient people, the Jews, but beyond that to the Gentiles, to all the nations of the world.

Surely we are to learn from all of this what the pattern for preaching today must be like. The preaching of God's Word must exhibit Jesus Christ in all of His glory, majesty, love and compassion as the only Savior, the Son of God who gave His life to pay the penalty for sin, and who rose again to give the power of new life. Then must come the call to repentance and faith in Him. It must be a clear, unhesitating and unambiguous call that leaves no doubt in the mind of the listener exactly what it is that the Lord is asking of him. It must leave no doubt about the terrible consequences of not responding with repentance and faith.

It is precisely here, however, that we Calvinists sometimes run aground and are unable to follow the Biblical precedent. We recognize that there must be a call to repentance and faith, but it does not ring with the same urgency that we find in the New Testament because such a call seems to conflict with some basic convictions that we have as Calvinists.

For example, we believe in the doctrine of predestination. That means we do not first of all choose God and then have that choice ratified by God's choice of us. And we also believe in the doctrine of regeneration. We must be born again; but we do not give birth to ourselves. The new birth is a sovereign work of grace accomplished by the Holy Spirit who works when, where and how He pleases.

If we simply command people to believe in Jesus Christ, to seek pardon from Him, and to repent of sin by turning from it, it sounds as though we are telling people that they must choose for God before God chooses them. It sounds as though the new birth will follow upon

repentance and faith rather than coming before repentance and faith.

Instead of telling sinners to repent and to believe in Jesus we might, for example, tell them to ask God for the gift of faith and repentance. But even that is a problem. After all, how can we expect the sinful heart of man even to ask for these gifts? He sees no need of them and does not understand what he is missing without them.

We come to the conclusion that there is really nothing we can ask the sinner to do if we are really going to be consistent five point Calvinists. At the most, we can explain the way things are, that Jesus has died to save the elect and that the Holy Spirit will eventually give the gift of faith to the elect. We do that in the hope that at some point the Holy Spirit will work in the heart of the sinner to bestow the gift of faith and repentance.

But now we see how far removed we are from the vigorous kind of gospel proclamation that we find in the inspired text of Scripture. John, Jesus, Paul and Peter did not tell their hearers to ask God for the gift of repentance; they told them - yes, they even *commanded* them - to repent. "The time has come," Jesus said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15).

Jesus and the apostles commanded sinners to repent and to ask for pardon, not because they thought sinners had the ability in and of themselves to do that very thing. Rather, they understood that the command is issued with divine authority and in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit makes the Word of the gospel powerful to the conversion of sinners. Paul writes to the Thessalonians, "Our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction" (I Thessalonians 1:5).

Paul compares the power of the gospel proclaimed, to the power of God demonstrated at creation when God spoke, and the heavens and earth took shape. "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (II Corinthians 4:6).

Especially significant is James 1:18: "He chose to give us birth

through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created. " Here the apostle says that our salvation is first of all a matter of God's choice, His sovereign electing will. Second, election results in the new birth (regeneration). The new birth is a creative work of God. But the Lord accomplishes this marvelous transformation "through the word of truth," just as He did when the heavens and the earth were created. The difference is that human beings now speak the Word of the Lord, and they do so in the name of the Lord.

The trouble is that we Calvinists can too easily use the doctrines of sovereign grace as an excuse for not becoming directly involved in the work of evangelism, for not confronting sinners directly with the claims of Jesus, the demands of the gospel, and the promises of saving grace. Or if we do become involved, the call to repentance and faith is so hedged with doctrinal qualifications that it does not ring with New Testament clarity or power. In fact, we preach the inability of the sinner in such a way that we give him a good excuse for continuing in his sin and rebellion.

When we tell sinners to repent and to find forgiveness in Jesus, we do that, not because we are impressed with the quality of our presentation or the native ability of the sinner to respond, but because the Holy Spirit has promised to honor His word in the conversion of the lost.

Jesus has promised to build His church (Matthew 16:18). A ringing call to repentance and faith is the measure of our dependence on sovereign grace.

Rev. Norman Shepherd is pastor of the Cottage Grove Christian Reformed Church, South Holland, IL.

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That's it! I've had enough. In fact, I am basically quitting. No, I'm not going to become iconoclastic and throw the thing out the window, but I sure won't be spending much time putting my brain in neutral and just watching as I used to do. This has been coming on for some time. Yes, I've cut back over the past few years, but I've now come to the place where I'm basically cutting it out except for a few programs like Andy Griffith reruns, CNN, my wife's craft shows and a couple of die hard decent programs that somehow haven't received the Hollywood ax.

It's been a part of my life since I can remember, but I've finally admitted to myself that the "thing" has become a Trojan horse in my home. I am fed up with the sleeze that oozes into my living room when the button gets pushed to the "on" position. As a good Jewish friend of mine would say, "Enough already?" But before you go channel surfing on me, please permit me to explain why I've come to this rather radical decision?

There are a number of reasons, but let me give you the top few. First, a huge percentage of what is on television today is nothing more than legal voyeurism. When I first realized that, it was like a slap in the face. What you would be arrested for on the sidewalk, you can freely view in your living room without fear of criminal indictment. It's a legal peep show, but that fact doesn't make it morally right any more than Roe vs. Wade made abortion acceptable to God.

The Scriptures are pretty clear about what I should be thinking about. For instance, Paul told the Philippian Christians (they also lived in a moral cesspool), "...whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things." Take that

verse and paste it across your television set.

Instead of "viewer discretion advised," why don't we display the above verse right before "NYPD Blue" airs or a host of other trash that is pawned off as "entertainment"? The truth is that I cannot watch most of what is on the tube today and obey that mandate from God's Word, and I violate that verse at the risk of my own moral, mental and spiritual well-being.

Now days it hardly matters what time you turn the thing on - it's still a foul mess of garbage that gets dumped onto

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our carpets and into our impressionable minds (children and adults alike). For instance, recently on some talk shows like Sally Jesse Raphael, Ricki Lake, the Jerry Springer show (to name a few), one would have been served up the following menu: "A Mother Who Ran Off With Her Daughter's Fiance," "Women Who Marry Their Rapists," "I'm Marrying a 14-year-old Boy," a woman who claims she got pregnant while making a pornographic movie. What has America come to that even some of us are feasting on these cow droppings of human depravity?

We are allowing ourselves to gorge on base filth in far too many cases, and it has and will continue to take a toll on our nation. You can't swim with the sharks and not eventually lose something of value to your person. Likewise, you can't men-

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tally free fall in the jet stream of degenerate and degrading pollution without some lung and brain cell damage. We are not a well nation, and I, for one, refuse to simply shake my head in disgust and go on watching.

The Christian community, for a start, needs to go to the ballot box of capitalism and let the advertisers, the syndicates, the networks and the local stations know that we will not watch, we will not support their advertisers, and we will not continue to allow this rot to infect our children or our own hearts any longer. Just say "no"! If not now, when? If not you, then who? If it's on and it's true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, good, excellent, and worthy of praise, then full speed ahead, but if it's not, then don't silently perpetuate what belongs in a sanitation truck. Oh yes, I almost forgot. I need to give one word of caution: please don't protest the ungodliness of what is on the small screen only to go watch it on the big one or go rent it at a later date. That doesn't fool anybody - least of all Hollywood - and only mocks the process. That's legalism of the worst sort. And please, for the sake of what's left of our national moral fabric, just turn the thing off...and go play with your kids. Both of you will be richer and far healthier for the experience.

Gary Cox is pastor of Meadowview Presbyterian Church (PCA) and serves as chaplain for the North Carolina National Guard. This article is reprinted with permission from The Dispatch (owned by the New York Times). Rev. Cox also serves as the Southeast Regional Coordinator for the Mission to North America (MNA) of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA).

Youth Pastor Needed

Goshen Christian Reformed Church is searching for a man called to the Youth Ministry. This man will nurture the young people and young adults in the faith, guiding them toward a fuller understanding of Christ's claim on them and their response to that claim.

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Laurie Vanden Heuvel

In previous articles we have taken some brief penetrating looks at one of the fundamental elements of the corporate worship of God - the hymn, its tune, its text, its Biblical precedent as a vehicle for praise. But simply an intellectual awareness of these facts is not enough to call forth from an assembled congregation, weary and hungry, a spontaneous, joyous response of praise, or an intense and meaningful sung prayer, or a quiet hymn of meditation. Someone must be present to "stir up the gifts" of praise within them, opening wide the floodgates so that "rivers" of praise may flow up and out through their lips into the sanctuary all together making a "joyful noise" to the Lord!

Upon whose shoulders does this responsibility rest? To a large extent, it lies on the "conductor from the console," the organist. For the organists, the accompanying of hymns for congregational singing is the most serious and solemn task for the day. It takes precedence over preludes, offertories or postludes. The very life of the music (text and tune) flows through their spirits and fingertips. The organists have the key with which to open the praise gates or lock up deep thoughts and emotions which struggle in the human breast for expression. If all church organists, professional and amateur alike, would see their task in this perspective, they would kneel in humble prayer each week, entreating the Father of all mercies to let the truth of each hymn pass through the crucible of their own souls so that they might, with vigor and vision, transform perfunctory duty into prayerful delight. Spiritual preparation is the first and basic requirement. Without it both player and people languish.

But *spiritual preparedness* must express itself within the context of *musical competence* and *technical skill*. Church organists who have been duly impressed with the seriousness of their calling will

search diligently for ways to improve their music ministry. The following paragraphs are written with the prayer that they may be used to give guidance particularly to the many church organists who have been pressed into service without the benefit of extensive training. To these dedicated people the congregations owe a profound debt of gratitude.

REGISTRATION

The first decision facing the organist on each hymn to be sung concerns the choice of organ *sounds*, called registration. It is impossible to be specific in recommending organ registration for hymn playing because every organ has a different stop-list, every sanctuary has a different size and shape, and every service has a different number of people in

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attendance. All of these factors influence the organist's choice of stops to be used. There are, however, certain principles which can serve as guidelines.

There are two main classes of stops (ranks of pipes). The *flues* produce sound by means of the vibration of a column of air inside the pipe. These are subdivided into four categories: Diapasons (or Principals); Flutes and Gedacht; Strings (or gamba tone); Gemshorn (a hybrid family). The second main class of stops is called the *reeds* in which the sound is produced by the vibration of a tongue or "reed" within the pipes. The reeds are subdivided into two categories: Chorus reeds (brass, trumpet tone) and Orchestral reeds (woodwind tone). The organist should check an organ technique manual to find out which specific stops belong to each class and division.

When the organist understands the classifications of sounds and recognizes representative sounds of each, he or she is ready to combine them into a substantial and artistic accompaniment for congregational singing, often varying the combination for each hymn or even each verse by varying the *quantity* of tone (degrees of loudness) and *quality* of tone (various pitch and color combinations). Variety is important in maintaining the interest and enthusiasm of the congregation. But extremes must be avoided at all costs!

First, avoid sixteen-foot couplers as well as loud, oppressive, muddy or "thick" stops which drag down the tone and pitch level.

Second, use reeds - but sparingly. They provide a brightness which heightens the climax of a hymn thought, but they can be overdone, causing a shrillness which is irritating instead of edifying.

Third, never use tremolo for congregational singing. The "wobble-wobble" hinders a steady and decisive pitch, causing uncertainty and hesitancy in the singers.

Fourth, do not underplay. With ample volume the congregation feels secure. With insufficient volume each singer fears he or she will be heard individually and will stop singing.

As a *fifth* rule, never make abrupt or extreme changes in volume or registration during the playing and singing of the hymn. It shatters the confidence of the congregation. With vigor they have sung: "Jesus Savior, pilot me over life's tempestuous sea; unknown waves before me roll, hiding rocks and treacherous shoal; chart and compass come from Thee; Jesus, Savior, pilot me." Then lustily they launch into: "As a mother stills her child, Thou canst hush the ocean wild" only to find themselves singing a solo, the organ having dropped from a roar on "hiding rocks" and "treacherous shoal" to an imperceptible pianissimo on "stills" and "hush." The singers freeze in their tracks, clamp their lips shut, opening them only slightly for weeks and even months to come. Make changes, but make them subtle and only along the broad lines of the hymn, catching the mood and spirit of the poem and not each phrase individually.

Sixth, use the diapason or principal stops at the 8' level, duplicating the pitch

level of the singers, with 4', 2', 2 2/3' and mixtures added for brilliance.

And *finally*, plan the registration for each hymn and pencil it into the hymnal well in advance of the service. Never rely on instantaneous inspiration to vitalize your hymn-playing even though such moments may come at times.

TEMPO AND RHYTHM

Not only must the church organist plan registration, but also tempo (the fastness or slowness) and the execution of the rhythm. A careful study of the text of the hymn will suggest the proper tempo to the sensitive artist - brisk, solemn, meditative, martial.

Poorly executed rhythm lies at the root of most poor congregational singing and the causes are not hard to trace. In some cases repeated notes of chords are played legato style instead of being distinctly detached. When this happens (and it happens often), the congregation is unable to discern just where they are in a given phrase. In other cases there is a lack of accuracy in playing dotted notes. But the most common factor in the breakdown of rhythm is the failure of the organist to sustain the exact rhythm pattern throughout every stanza of the hymn and within each stanza, phrase by phrase. Organists must set the rhythm firmly in the introduction, counting all the while, *and then stick to it*. If the congregation lags a bit, they will catch up.

HYMNS THAT BREATHE

Closely related to a failure in rhythmic consistency is a failure to let the music breathe. If a narrator would read, or a preacher would preach, or a choir would sing without ever taking a breath, separating thoughts into phrases and sentences, audiences would be bored and confused. And yet, because most hymns contain no punctuation marks separating the musical phrases and sentences (which correspond to the textual phrases and sentences), many organists assume they must play the hymn without a break from beginning to end of each stanza. Such is not the case. The organist must study the text ahead of time and be prepared to break the melodic line (Not the rhythmic pattern! There is a difference.) at appropriate places with the congregation. Every comma in the text

need not be observed, but every completion of a major thought should be recognized by a slight break in the melodic line. This means that in most hymns the organist will have to play the melodic line a little differently for each stanza, remembering at the same time, not to alter the rhythm at all. If the organist has mastered these basic processes, he or she may further enhance the accompaniment with tasteful changes of registration at appropriate places.

VARIED AND CONSISTENT INTRODUCTIONS

Introductions to the various hymn selections also need planning for variety. For one selection, the four parts can be played on manual only; for another, three parts on the manual and bass on the pedal; for another, a trumpet solo stop against diapason accompaniment; and still another could be a combination of any two of these. But in each introduction the entire hymn should be played to set the mood, tempo and rhythm for the congregation. Exceptions to this might be the "response" selections used every Sunday. But regardless of



Cal Thomas

How appropriate that in the 24th-anniversary month (January) of *Roe vs. Wade*, which denied the right to life to an unborn baby, the U.S. Supreme Court heard arguments on whether individuals have a constitutional "right to die."

As with abortion, "hard cases" are trotted out by the "death-with-dignity" crowd as leverage against whatever resistance to euthanasia remains. On "60 Minutes" recently, and in newspapers, we see pictures of people who, we are told, are "terminally ill" and suffering greatly. They are portrayed as innocent

which method of introduction is chosen, the organist should not restrain the introduction and use the last few measures as a green light for the congregation to rise and sing. The volume must be ample and consistent throughout the entire introduction and the congregation should rise when the introduction begins.

MODULATION

There is a pitfall to be avoided when playing for worship services which we have not yet touched on. It concerns modulation. An organist should never modulate from one key to another unless he or she has a thorough understanding of harmonic progression and the technical skill to achieve it artistically. No one need apologize for pausing briefly between two selections. Celebrated organists do this all the time.

STIR UP THE GIFTS!

Psalm 150 challenges all of us to "Praise the Lord with trumpet, psaltery...harp...timbrel...strings...pipes...cymbals." The organ is the "king of instruments" with the ability to reproduce many of these sounds. May God be pleased to use the efforts of all faithful organists to "stir up the gifts" of God's people to His glory!

victims of outmoded laws, and prisoners of medical technology that keeps them alive. There is often a subtle suggestion that they have become "less human." Persuaded by doctors or relatives of the "hopelessness" of their condition, many say they want to kill themselves and think doctors should help them.

Abortion proponents argued in *Roe vs. Wade* that a change in the law was needed because 12-year-olds were getting pregnant by their drunken stepfathers. Now we won't stop the killing of a child as it emerges from the birth canal. It will be the same with euthanasia

and any other category of life deemed "difficult" or "inconvenient" or a "burden." Once it is established that some lives are less valuable and less meaningful than other lives (as happened in Roe), the rest is merely who's next and how quickly we can move forward with the disposal process.

In the past, the assault has been directed at Jewish lives and at those whose skin pigmentation was darker than the majority's. Now the threat is directed toward the "terminally ill." If doctors are allowed to become killing agents at the end of life, as they are at the beginning of life, the next assault will come against the otherwise healthy elderly, the disabled and, depending on the spirit of the age, who knows who else.

Professor William Brennan of the School of Social Service at the University of St. Louis has written a book, the title of which ought to warn us where we are headed. It's called *Dehumanizing the Vulnerable: When Word Games Take Lives*. Brennan says that the lies associated with the "right-to-die" movement were sown in medical and intellectual publications even before Roe vs. Wade. Brennan cites an editorial in the September 1970 issue of *California Medicine*, which advocates lying in the service of killing. Brennan says, "The editorial proposes a linguistic strategy of *semantic gymnastics* — 1) avoidance of the scientific fact, which everyone really knows, that human life begins at conception, and 2) separation of the idea of abortion from the idea of killing, — as essential for obtaining widespread acceptance of not only abortion, but also euthanasia. Further, the article dubs semantic gymnastics as a schizophrenic sort of subterfuge."

Regarding euthanasia, *The Hastings Center Report* carried an article in October 1983 by ethicist Daniel Callahan, who wrote that "a denial of nutrition may in the long run become the only effective way to make certain that a large number of biologically tenacious patients actually die." Brennan says, "This expression conveys the image of the patient as a relentlessly grasping species that clings as tenaciously to life and life-support technology as would a parasite to its host."

Are there people who are terminally ill and who should be granted their wish to let "nature take its course" or "God

take them"? Of course. There are methods, including drugs, that can minimize their pain. But this is a far cry from a doctor "assisting" a patient in dying. And it is a farther cry from doctors actually performing the "coup de grace."

Former Surgeon General, C. Everett Koop, has written, "The whole thing about euthanasia comes down to one word: motive. If your motive is to alleviate suffering while a patient is going through the throes of dying, and you are using medication that alleviates suffer-



Norman DeJong

Some years ago I got involved in a discussion with some colleagues, presumably friends, about the age of the earth. In the course of our discussion (debate, maybe?), I offered the proposition that the earth was relatively young and certainly not millions or billions of years old. As one form of proof, I suggested that the genealogies given to us in the Bible did not allow room for a creation that was more than 6000 years old. I had also contended that the word "day" in Genesis 1 and 2 was a normal, twenty-four hour day as you and I know them.

The response was not very pleasant. They were barely able to hide their derision. I was told that the genealogies could not be used for such calculations because they were full of gaps, holes and missing persons. Since I had not studied them intensively, and did not then have a degree in theology or Biblical studies, I felt a bit ashamed for putting my ignorance on display in a public meeting. I quickly clammed up and retreated into a protective shell of silence.

More recently, because of new demands for leadership, I once again conjured up my courage and broached the subject. On consulting my *New Geneva Study Bible*, I was informed by the editors that "many scholars argue that there

ing, even though it might shorten his life by a few hours, that is not euthanasia. But if you are giving him a drug intended to shorten his life, then your motivation is for euthanasia" The Supreme Court can begin to reverse the culture of death it helped foster 24 years ago if it can still read the Constitution. Or the Justices can consider the Ten Commandments on the wall of the Court.

Los Angeles Times syndicate

are gaps in these genealogies, and that they therefore cannot be used to compute a precise chronology."¹ The editorial commentary seemed to suggest that most Bible scholars would laugh at the claim of Bishop Ussher that the earth was created by God 4004 years before Christ (BC).

In a recent heresy trial involving a ruling elder and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the charge was made that it is contrary to the teaching of Scripture and to the *Westminster Standards* to argue that Adam had primate ancestors. Such an assertion, it soon became apparent, was built on a set of presuppositions which implied that the earth is millions and even billions of years old. Dr. Terry Gray, the defendant, in his appeal to presbytery, claimed that scientific evidence showed the earth to be old enough for such evolutionary development to have occurred. One of his grounds for the old earth, he claimed, is that "the genealogies have been shown to be stylized and with gaps."² The NIV Study Bible adds to this impression by stating, "The fact that there are exactly ten names in the Genesis 5 list [as in the genealogy of 11:10-26] makes it likely that it includes gaps, the lengths of which may be summarized in large numbers. Other ancient genealogies outside the Bible

exhibit similarly large figures."³ The logic of the NIV argument escapes me, for there is no apparent reason why the number ten should lead to the conclusion that "it includes gaps." If we are ever to refute such claims, we will have to examine them carefully and determine whether they have any validity. In Fig. 1 below we will begin to examine those genealogies carefully to find their relevance and validity.

If we only look at the genealogies as found in Genesis 5 and 11, we run the risk of encountering the charge that these first 11 chapters of Genesis are not historical accounts and cannot be treated as chronologically or mathematically precise. Even such a reputable source as the *NIV Study Bible* fails to treat the period prior to Abraham in its opening time lines, suggesting thereby that the first 11 chapters of Genesis are not history, but myth or some kind of literary or theological framework. To avoid such argument, we need to look at other books of the Bible against which such charges have not been leveled. Do they corroborate or refute Genesis 5 and 11?

There have been repeated assertions from many theologians that the genealogies cannot be used to date the earth because there are these supposed gaps, missing links and contradictions. Our study so far, though, shows nothing of the sort. Maybe an examination of the remaining segments will uncover these "problems" that our scholar friends claim to exist. If there truly are significant gaps and differences, we may have to adjust our beliefs concerning the age of the universe in which God has placed us. The following table will help us decide.

Fig. 1 THE GENEALOGIES OF GENESIS 5/11

Genealogies	Elapsed	Born	Lifespan	Died
Adam	130	0	930	930
Seth	105	130	912	1042
Enosh	90	235	905	1140
Kenan	70	325	910	1235
Mahalalel	65	395	895	1290
Jared	162	460	962	1422
Enoch	65	622	365	(987)
Methuselah	187	687	969	1656
Lamech	182	874	777	1651
Noah	500	1056	950	2006
(flood)	100			1656
Shem	100	1556	600	2156
Arphaxad	35	1658	438	2096
Shelah	30	1693	433	2126
Eber	34	1723	464	2187
Peleg	30	1757	239	1996
Reu	32	1787	239	2026
Serug	30	1819	230	2049
Nahor	29	1849	148	1997
Terah	70	1878	205	2083
Abram	100	1948	175	2123 ⁴
Isaac	60	2048	180	2228

Elapsed time refers simply to the number of years between the time of a patriarch's own birth and the birth of the next generation that is mentioned, e.g., "When Adam had lived 130 years, he became the father of ... Seth" (5.3).

The year in which the person died is determined simply by adding the elapsed time for the previous generations to the lifespan given in the Bible, e.g., in the case of Seth we add Adam's elapsed time to the lifespan of Seth to get 1042.⁵

Some interesting questions:

1. How many generations of grandsons could Adam have held on his knee?
2. What were some of the benefits of having Adam around that long?⁶

3. How many people would you estimate were living on the earth at the time of the flood? Suppose, for the sake of your calculations, that the population doubled every 100 years. Next, suppose that it doubled every 50 years.
4. Which of the men on the above list were dead before the flood? Who died in the year of the flood?
5. Why did men live so long before the flood?
6. Why did man have children earlier after the flood?
7. Did Noah know Abram?

Fig. 2 A COMPARISON OF BIBLICAL ACCOUNTS

Genesis 5\11	I Chron. 1	Matthew 1	Luke 3
Adam	Adam		Adam
Seth	Seth		Seth
Enosh	Enosh		Enos
Kenan	Kenan		Cainan
Mahalalel	Mahalalel		Mahalaleel
Jared	Jared		Jared
Enoch	Enoch		Enoch
Methuselah	Methuselah		Methuselah
Lamech	Lamech		Lamech
Noah (flood)	Noah		Noah
Shem	Shem		Shem
Arphaxad	Arphaxad		Arphaxad
			Cainan
Shelah	Shelah		Shelah
Eber	Eber		Eber
Peleg	Peleg		Peleg
Reu	Reu		Reu
Serug	Serug		Serug
Nahor	Nahor		Nahor
Terah	Terah		Terah
Abram	Abram	Abram	Abram
Isaac	Isaac	Isaac	Isaac

Fig. 3

THE GENEALOGIES FROM ABRAM TO DAVID

Ruth 4:18-21	Matthew 1	Luke 3
	Abraham	Abraham
	Isaac	Isaac
	Jacob	Jacob
	Judah	Judah
Perez	Perez	Perez
Hezron	Hezron	Hezron
Ram	Ram	Ram
Amminadab	Amminadab	Amminadab
Nahshon	Nahshon	Nahshon
Salmon	Salmon	Salmon
Boaz	Boaz	Boaz
Obed	Obed	Obed
Jesse	Jesse	Jesse
David	David	David

the Jews, who had all the historical records and public tables to do so, nor by any of the early enemies of Christianity, even though many of them examined them minutely.

During the time of the Reformation, the Protestant Reformers argued for an infallible, inerrant Scripture, which led John Calvin to conclude that the earth was created 3943 years BC.⁷ Martin Luther, operating on similar Biblical principles, came to the conclusion that God created the earth in 3960 BC, while Melancthon said that it occurred in 3963 BC. Given the 1996 years since Christ, Calvin, Luther, Melancthon and their contemporaries would all today be arguing that the earth is less than 6000 years old.

Most of this has been forgotten because of the assaults of evolutionists who find it essential to have a very old earth in order to find any credibility for their theory. It is because of evolutionary assumptions that the genealogies of the Bible have come under such unrelenting attack during the last two centuries. Now, when evolutionists want to ridicule the creationists' cause, they will ask if we still hold to Bishop Ussher's date of 4004 BC. We could tweak their noses by claiming that Ussher probably allowed a little more time than necessary, but should certainly remind them that the great Reformers, no scholarly slouches, predated Ussher and held to a younger earth than did he. We should remind them, too, that Bible-believing Lutherans, Baptists and Presbyterians are still strongly committed to the Biblical account of creation, as given to us in Genesis 1-11.

After examining all the evidence, we ought to come to the same conclusion as reached by *Barnes Notes* "There is no reason for doubting the correctness of the chronology submitted by the Hebrew Masoretic text. This is and is intended to be a complete chronology, complete as far as marking the actual laps of time is concerned. No other nation has anything to compare with it. Yet, strange to say, the only reliable chronology which we have...is being questioned, corrected, amended and condemned in favor of fallible documents...The claim that the

Scriptures do not give a complete and accurate chronology for the whole period of the Old Testament that they cover is utterly wrong, dangerous and mischievous."⁸

For all of us, it ought to be no shame to stand on the infallible, inerrant claims of Scripture, given to us in not one isolated incident, but corroborated in many places. The God of the Bible has given us His Word. That is good enough for me!

FOOTNOTES

- 1 *New Geneva Study Bible*, p.17, note Gen. 3:3-32.
- 2 Terry Gray, Ph.D., *Appeal to the Presbytery of the Midwest, Orthodox Presbyterian Church*, Sept. 14, 1995, p. 11.
- 3 *New International Version Study Bible*, p. 13, note 5:5.
- 4 *The NIV Study Bible*, in a frontispiece entitled "Old Testament Chronology," places Abram's birth date as 2166 B.C. and his death at 1991 B.C. In Fig. 1 the author is using the creation event as year 1 and adding to that date, in the same manner as do the Jews today. If, for the sake of discussion, we added the 2166 years of the NIV to the 1948 that I have calculated, we would have a total of 4114 years, only 110 more than Ussher's date.
- 5 For similar charts and analyses of these genealogies, consult *Barnes Notes, Exposition of Genesis*, Vol. I, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1953, p. 236-248, 395, and Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament, Vol. I, The Pentateuch*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1981, pp. 121-122.
- 6 Concerning this, see John Calvin, *Commentaries on The First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, Vol. 1, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1993, p.229. Calvin there says, "Through six successive ages, when the family of Seth had grown into a great people, the voice of Adam might daily resound, in order to renew the memory of the creation, the fall, and the punishment of man; to testify to the hope of salvation which remained after chastisement, and to recite the judgments of God by which all might be instructed."
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 231. Calvin there concludes that the age of the world was 987 at the time that Enoch was translated to glory.
- 8 *Barnes Notes*, Vol. I, pp.237-8.

Dr. De Jong is pastor of the Covenant Orthodox Presbyterian Church in Palos Heights, IL.

Still no problem! No disagreements!! What then, are these higher critics talking about?

When we look beyond David, then it cannot be denied that there are significant differences between the genealogies as given to us by Matthew and by Luke. If one were to lay them side by side, as does John Calvin in his *Commentary*, there would be many obvious differences, but only from David to Christ, where no disagreements exist among secular and sacred historians concerning the time of existence! There are no differences from Abraham to David, just as there are no differences from Adam to Abraham, with the exception of the name of "Cainan," which is easily explained as a textual difference peculiar to the Septuagint (LXX) source, in contrast to the more reliable Hebrew Masoretic text.

Calvin reminds us that Matthew is writing to a Jewish audience who is concerned about the Kingdom of Christ, and is therefore following a line of legal descent, showing that Christ is the lawful heir to David's throne, as per God's promise to David and Solomon (II Chron. 7:17,18). Luke, on the other hand, is concerned with showing the natural, biological connections. Furthermore, it is clearly demonstrable from the studies of Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah that, after the Babylonian captivity, the same persons are given different names by their captors. These two gospel genealogies were never called into question by



William Dennison

As long as the Christian lives in the "present evil age," he will struggle to focus his life completely on Christ. Christ Himself referred to the Christian's struggle in His kingdom parables. Although the fulfillment of the kingdom of God begins with the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, the believer must understand that the righteous and the unrighteous will continue to grow together until Christ consummates His kingdom at His second coming (cf. Mt. 13:24-30, 36-43). Until the consummation of Christ's kingdom, the evil one will continue to seduce the minds and hearts of man. Throughout history Satan has especially enticed man to think that his destiny is merely a product of his own environment and that man must assert his autonomy if he expects to survive within that environment. Christians attempt to shun Satan's enticement, however, and they bow in humility before the sovereign plan of God concerning the creation, realizing that for man to claim autonomy is not only foolish but blasphemous. Moreover, the Christian maintains that the existence of everything, including himself, begins and ends with God.

It would be absurd and naive to assert that our environment fails to influence our thought life. Our thinking is definitely shaped by the thoughts of our parents, by our social and religious traditions and by our formal education. We must be careful, however, not to lay undue stress on our environment as the shaper of our minds. The effects of both environment and heredity are, of course, impossible to discern or to delineate accurately, and therefore, the debate on this subject goes far back in history.

PELEGIAN ERROR— PAST AND PRESENT

In the early church the debate engaged the celebrated church father, Augustine,

and the pronounced heretic, Pelagius. Pelagius argued that the origin and practice of evil in human society arise from man's environment—from bad examples in the adult world. Augustine, on the other hand, contended that evil in human society originated with Adam's first sin and that all of humanity was subsequently tainted by that sin. Clearly, Augustine's position finds no credibility today among non-Christians, the Pelagians of our time. From the man

"Everyone knows that non-Christians have attempted to construct a world without God. The critical question is whether Christians will fall prey to non-Christian thinking."

on the street to the intellectual in the university, modern man continues to believe in and to expound the Pelagian myth that to redeem mankind we must change his environment. If we change man's environment, they argue, the goodness of man will arise victorious. Almost all theories of education in western civilization are built on this Pelagian theory. This theory provides a safe and yet dangerous avenue for addressing the problems of humanity—safe because it demands that we analyze and change the structures of our environment, yet dangerous because it does not demand that we examine the sinful heart of man. From the viewpoint of Augustine, who accepted Saint Paul's teaching on sin and its remedy (found in such passages as Rom. 5:12-21), the Pelagian position is like putting a band-aid on a severed artery—man will still die, although he might think that he has stopped or reduced the bleeding. The frightening ele-

ment in all of this is that many Christians accept both the Pelagian analysis and the Pelagian solution to man's problems.

Not only does the Pelagian heresy appeal to Christians because it offers a solution to the problem of sin; it also appeals to Christians because it asserts that man is autonomous. The notion of personal autonomy dominates the philosophy of the unbeliever. Because he does not know and fear the Creator, the unbeliever feels that he is a law unto himself. In Renaissance humanism an autonomous view of human existence emerged in which man asserted himself over against the authority of both the church and God. In the modern era, *rationalism* and *empiricism* have *strengthened* the notion of man's autonomy. The rationalist and empiricist world view assert that nature is a reasonable phenomenon which man can know through his sensory and rational powers without the aid of the external authority—God or the church. In this framework God is no longer necessary for an understanding of the world, since the world is a coherent and rational structure in itself. One must not imagine that this western conception of autonomy leaves no place for structure in society and culture, however. Rather, proponents of this view insist that the structure of civilization must be based upon the exaltation of man and also upon the harmony of the natural world, free from God and from the institutional church. The rationalist and the empiricist stress that if man desires to be truly free in this world, he must be in tune with nature and reason.

CHRIST — OUR STARTING POINT

It is difficult for the Christian to escape the impact of this form of idolatrous thought. Often Christians attempt to understand man's existence and to solve man's problems by using tools derived from the natural world (reason, experience, the common good) instead of by using principles which conform to the mind of Christ Jesus.

Everyone knows that non-Christians have attempted to construct a world without God. The critical question is whether Christians will fall prey to non-Christian thinking. The Bible confronts anyone who questions the existence of

God, viewing himself as isolated by his environment or as being autonomous (Ps. 14). The challenge or question is this: where do we begin our pursuit of knowledge? Or, to put the question more definitely, where does our Creator demand that we begin? Do I begin by worshipping and serving the creature, or do I begin by worshipping and serving the Creator (Rom. 1:25)? Scriptural revelation is clear: "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The Scripture begins with God; the creation exists because of God, and all persons exist because of God.

As we contemplate this point, we realize that mankind's first mistake, the sin of Adam and Eve in the garden, was to establish themselves as the first source of truth. They believed that the serpent was correct when he told them that they could know, understand, and interpret the creation without the Creator. They also believed that the creature could understand and interpret the world as well as the Creator. They thought that the starting point of truth lay within themselves. But a serious problem arose: once Adam and Eve believed that they could understand and interpret the world without God, they became isolated, running from the truth of God's own revealed interpretation of His creation. Realizing their sin, they felt shame and fled. They came to rely on themselves as the reference point of truth: they sought autonomy.

We find the non-Christian always doing this, but the person who lives in faith-union with Christ avoids this pitfall. For in the fullness of time God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, who proclaimed the paradoxical truth that the only way to personal freedom is by the complete denial of self (cf. Lk. 9:23-27). Thus, Paul states that it is no longer he who lives, but Christ who lives in him (cf. Gal. 2:20). The only basis of truth concerning the Creator and all of His creation is Christ—"for from him and through him and to him are all things" (Rom. 11:36 NIV).

The mind and heart of the believer must rest, therefore, in Christ; that is God's eternal plan. From the beginning the focus of the redemptive plan of the Godhead has been the exaltation and glorification of the second person of the Trinity, Christ Jesus, for all things were created through Him and by Him: "without Him nothing was made that has been made" (Jn. 1:3 NIV). The creation is the handiwork of Christ, and one must stand in the palm of His hand if one is to interpret His creation correctly. For example, it is not entirely accurate to base the as-

sertion that two plus two equals four solely upon laws within the creation order. Although it would be absurd to deny the existence of natural laws and the truth of mathematical propositions, nevertheless, it would be equally absurd to maintain that two plus two equals four without Christ as the Creator of all things. For nothing, including mathematical propositions, exists outside of Christ. As the apostle Paul writes: "For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all

"The only basis of truth concerning the Creator and all of His creation is Christ— 'for from him and through him and to him are all things.'" (Rom. 11:36 NIV)

things, and in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:16,17 NIV).

Unless a person's knowledge begins with Christ, his understanding remains shallow. The picture he constructs is only partial, and therefore, it is clouded and deceptive. This thought leads us directly to another point concerning our knowledge: not only does true knowledge begin with Christ, it also ends with Christ. Not only is Christ the Creator of all things; He also transforms the universe and His people into a new creation. When the transformation is complete "every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea ... will sing: 'To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power forever and ever!'" (Rev. 5:13 NIV). Remember that it is Christ Himself who proclaims from the throne that He is "the Alpha and the Omega—the First and the Last—who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty" (Rev. 1:8,17 NIV). Beyond a doubt, Christ is the beginning and the summation of all things.

Though God created all things and powerfully governs His creation, men constantly worship objects of creation rather than Christ. Although God is the creator of stones and trees, men worship images of God made of wood and stone. Similarly, though God is the creator of laws within the creation order, men often look upon those laws as the ultimate

source of truth. Again, though God is the creator of the rational faculty of man, some men revere reason or logic as the ultimate source of truth. To make any part of creation the ultimate source of truth is idolatry, whether the object of veneration is wood or stone or whether it is reason or logic. The Christian does not bow before any object within the creation: instead the believer bows only to His Creator.

CHRIST — THE SOURCE OF TRUTH

My discussion thus far reflects Saint John's view of truth. At this point I am not concerned with meanings of truth such as the correctness of perception or the validity of statements; nor am I concerned with personality traits such as sincerity, honesty or reliability. Rather, I want to focus on the truth as it comes to perfect and eternal expression in the person of Christ. This foundation, this source of truth is the Son of God. This is John's testimony: "We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth...for the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (Jn. 1:14,17 NIV). Jesus Himself said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (Jn. 14:6 NIV), and before Pilate Jesus said, "...in fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

In his confusion Pilate responded, "What is truth?" (Jn. 18:38a NIV) for he could not fathom the depth of Jesus' statement. For Pilate, truth was a concept discussed by the philosophers. It had nothing to do with a person in whom all things hold together. Indeed, Absolute Truth was confronting Pilate face to face, but he was blind to it! The danger that snared Pilate can snare the Christian as well. Like Pilate the believer is tempted to turn his eyes from Christ as he seeks a starting point for truth in the created objects or in the haunts of philosophy, such as reason, experience, language, and law. When he is so tempted, the believer should remember where blindness ultimately led the Pharisees. Because their ultimate source of truth was their own interpretation of the law and the prophets, they were convinced that Jesus was not the Christ. Like Pilate, they failed to see Him. Because they rejected Him, Christ delivered His judgment upon them: "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to

carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why do you not believe me? He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God" (Jn. 8:44-47 NIV).

The challenge is clear: we are either committed to the truth or to a lie; we either begin and end with Christ or we begin and end with Satan. If we belong to God, we hear the testimony of God and shape our thinking and our lives in the truth, Jesus Christ. If we do not belong to God, we attend to the voice of Satan, the old liar, who subtly provides idolatrous sources of truth.

Scripture clearly reveals that two persons, heads of two kingdoms, are battling for the lives of men: God and Satan. This leaves no neutral ground on which one can develop his own ideas of truth. The days of ignorance are past; God's verdict has come. God now commands all people everywhere to repent (cf. Acts 17:30). When the apostle Paul spoke to the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers in Athens, he made it very clear that the God who created the heavens and earth is not an object made with human hands. After all, God is not an image made by man's design and skill, nor does He live in temples built by man's hands (cf. Acts 17:24, 25, 29). According to Paul, all such thought is foolishness (cf. I Cor. 1:20), and he commands the believer to "demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God" (II Cor. 10:5 NIV). Thus, standing in the light of Jesus Christ, the Wisdom of God, Paul had nothing to fear from the philosophers of Athens. In another passage Paul reminds his readers that it is written: "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." He continues: "Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age?" (I Cor. 1:19, 20 NIV). For Paul—and for the Christian—wisdom without Christ is foolishness and the philosopher without Christ merely conveys the meandering of a frustrated mind.

Dr. Dennison is Associate Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies at Covenant College, Lookout Mountain, GA.



Lessons from Haggai #11

"On that day I will take you, my servant Zerubbabel... and I will make you like my signet ring, for I have chosen you," declares the Lord Almighty.

(Haggai 2:23)

God here stresses His care over the ruler of the nation, Zerubbabel, in the midst of international upheavals. God would make him like a "signet ring." The signet ring was a symbol of authority; it was used like a signature or a seal today, used to authenticate something. It was worn on a ruler's finger or on a cord around his neck (guarded thus with his person).

Zerubbabel was going to be like that to God, who was placing him on His finger or hanging him around His neck so that, though heaven and earth were shaken, Zerubbabel would be safe. He would be secure to fulfill his God-appointed destiny.

God had rejected Zerubbabel's grandfather, King Jehoiachin (Jer. 22-24), but is now renewing the Messianic promise to Zerubbabel and his family as descendants of David. The promise made to David, "Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever" (II Sam. 7:16), is revived in Zerubbabel.

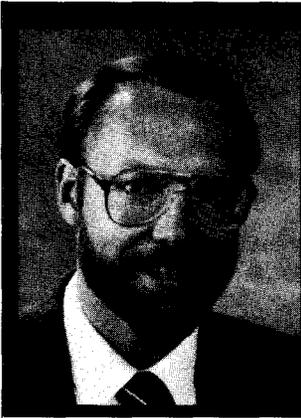
He, like all of us, was not thus blessed by God because of any merit of his own, but because God said, "I have chosen you." Oh, the marvelous grace of God! Those whom He has chosen are eternally secure.

The honor bestowed on Zerubbabel was not realized in him as a person, but in his office and lineage as ancestor to Jesus Christ. Christ is the signet ring in whom all God's purposes are seated. After the final shaking of the nations, the unmovable, unshakable kingdom of Jesus Christ will be established, and He shall be all in all.

In expectation of that glorious day, may we be encouraged by the message of Haggai to build the spiritual Temple of the Lord, strong in Him and His promises.

Elaine Monsma

Dear Editors,
I was surprised to read the *Inside Insights* of the January issue of *The Outlook*, which arrived today, that I, Donald J. Duff, speak "heart to heart" with the declining Christian Reformed Church." On pages 11-13 I find a copy of a letter which the 63rd General Assembly of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church sent to the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church. This was a letter drafted by the Committee on Ecumenicity of the General Assembly, approved in the final form by the General Assembly, and then sent by me, the Stated Clerk of the General Assembly, to the Synod. It is not my letter. I think it should be made clear to your readers that it is a letter from the Orthodox Presbyterian General Assembly in which the Assembly writes with "heavy hearts" to their brethren in the Christian Reformed Synod. I am not the spokesman for the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. I merely try to do what the General Assembly asks me to do for them.
Yours in Christ,
Donald J. Duff



What We Believe

GOD'S ONE PURPOSE OF SALVATION FOR HIS PEOPLE

The basic reason dispensationalism wrongly speaks of the church as a "parenthesis" in history or of the "postponement" of the kingdom, is that it fails to see that God has one purpose of salvation for His people in the old and new covenants. Contrary to the dispensationalist view, the people of God, the Israel of God of the old covenant, is one people in direct continuity with the people of God, the church of Jesus Christ, of the new covenant. Israel and the church are different ways of referring to the one people of God. To put it as straightforwardly as possible: *Israel is the church, and the church is Israel.* This can be illustrated in various ways from the New Testament.

In 1 Peter 2:9, the apostle Peter gives a summary statement regarding the New Testament church. Writing to the scattered believers and churches throughout Asia Minor, Peter defines the new covenant church in terms that are drawn from the old covenant descriptions of the people of Israel. He writes:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.⁵

What is so remarkable about this description of the church is that it *identifies* the church with the exact terminology used in the Old Testament to describe the people of Israel with whom the Lord

Cornelis P. Venema

covenanted. The only legitimate reading of this language is one that takes it "literally" to mean that the new covenant church is altogether one with the old covenant church. The Lord does not have two peculiar peoples, two holy nations, two royal priesthoods, two chosen races — He has only one, the church of Jesus Christ.

Similarly, in Romans 9-11, the apostle Paul discloses God's purposes of redemption in the salvation of the Gentiles and subsequently of "all Israel" (Rom. 11:25) in a way that makes it unmistakably clear that the people of God are one,

"The Lord does not have two peculiar peoples, two holy nations, two royal priesthoods, two chosen races — He has only one, the church of Jesus Christ."

not two.⁶ Dispensationalists try to argue that the salvation of "all Israel" mentioned in Romans 11:25 refers to the future national conversion of Israel and her restoration to the land of Palestine. This salvation will occur in the context of God's resumed dealings with His earthly people, Israel. The great problem with this reading of the apostle Paul's argument in Romans 9-11 is that *the argument depends upon the most intimate inter-relationship between elect Israel and the elect Gentiles in God's purposes of redemption.*

The main thrust of the argument in these chapters is that the unbelief of many of the people of Israel has been, in the purpose of God, the occasion for the conversion of the "fullness of the Gentiles." This conversion of the "fullness of the Gentiles," however, will in turn under God's blessing, provoke Israel to jealousy and lead to the salvation of "all Is-

rael." There is nothing in any of this regarding the restoration of the nation of Israel, as a racial entity, to the land of Palestine. Nor is there anything about the establishment of an earthly form of the Davidic kingdom. To the contrary, the salvation of all of God's people, Jew and Gentile alike, is described in terms of their belonging to the *one olive tree*, the church of Jesus Christ. All who are saved are saved through faith in Jesus Christ and are incorporated into the one fellowship of His church. This passage militates, therefore, in the strongest possible terms against the idea of the existence of two separate olive trees or of two separate purposes of salvation (a present one for the Gentiles, a future one for the Jews).

I have already noted that, in the account of the growth of the church in the book of Acts, the earliest members of the church were drawn predominantly, though by no means exclusively, from among the Jewish people. Indeed, there was even some considerable resistance initially to the incorporation of Gentile believers into the one fellowship of the church. It is especially striking, then, to read the account of the apostle Paul's preaching at the synagogue (note well!) in Antioch. In his preaching, the apostle Paul announces that the "holy and sure blessings of David" are being fulfilled through the proclamation of the gospel of the forgiveness of sins in Jesus Christ. In this sermon, the apostle declares that Jesus is the promised Davidic King and Savior through whom the promised blessings to the fathers are now being realized in the community of those who believe. No more clear identification of God's purposes with Israel through David and His Son and His purposes with the church through Jesus Christ could be imagined. The words of this sermon speak for themselves:

And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, "Thou art My Son; today I have begotten Thee." And as for the fact that He raised Him up from the dead, no more to return to decay, He has spoken in this way: "I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David" (vv. 32-34).⁷

In these respects, as well as in those previously mentioned, it is apparent that God's purpose of redemption in history focuses upon the gathering of one people, all of whom are the spiritual descendants of Abraham (Gal. 3:28-29), the "father of all believers." The Lord has one people, not two. Indeed, it is His purpose to join this people together in the most perfect unity (Eph. 2:4), not to leave them forever separated from each other into Israel and the church.

CONCLUSION: WHO BELONGS TO THE "ISRAEL OF GOD"?

Admittedly, each one of the preceding points could be enlarged upon in order to complete the argument against the dispensationalist view of a separation between Israel and the church. These points have only been offered in the form of a kind of summary of the primary biblical considerations that militate against the dispensationalist view.

However, I have deliberately reserved to this point, consideration of a text, Galatians 6:15-16, which constitutes *by itself* a sufficient refutation of the dispensationalist position. With our consideration of this text, we will conclude this part of our evaluation of dispensationalism.

"...it is apparent that God's purpose of redemption in history focuses upon the gathering of one people, all of whom are the spiritual descendants of Abraham (Gal. 3:28-29), the 'father of all believers.' The Lord has one people, not two."

In Galatians 6:15-16, a text that comes toward the end of the epistle to the Galatians and that draws upon many of the emphases previously set forth in the epistle, the apostle Paul makes this solemn and sweeping declaration:

For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And those who will follow this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.

In the context of the argument of Galatians, it is clear that the apostle Paul is emphatically rejecting the idea that what commends anyone to God is his obedience to the law, particularly the law prescribing circumcision as a sign of the covenant. He is opposing the false gospel of the Judaizers who were teaching that, in order for a person to be acceptable to God, to be justified or found innocent before Him, they had to submit to the requirements of the law, specifically the stipulations regarding circumcision. Against this false gospel, the apostle places the gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, a gospel that is equally valid for Jew and Gentile alike. Consequently, he sums up his argument in the epistle in the formulation, "neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation."

Having stated this governing principle, however, the apostle Paul goes on to pronounce a kind of benediction upon "those who will follow this rule:" "peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God." The language he uses in this benediction is striking. The blessing of God rests upon those and those only who follow this specific *rule* or *canon*.⁸ Conversely, those who do not follow or acknowledge this rule or canon may not expect to receive God's peace and mercy. But, for our purpose, what is even more striking is *the apostle's identification of the church, comprised of Jew and Gentile alike, as the "Israel of God."* The Israel of God in this text refers to the church as it honors this rule or canon, making no distinction so far as justification before God is concerned, upon the basis of considerations such as circumcision or uncircumcision. Or, to put the matter rather bluntly, the apostle Paul is here setting forth a canon or rule for the whole people of God, the church consisting of Jews and Gentiles, that *fundamentally opposes anything like the dispensationalist separation between Israel as an earthly people and the church as a heavenly people.* Such a separation makes the matter of circumcision and uncircumcision a fundamental principle of distinction between those who are of Israel and those who are not.

Now, it is possible to argue that, when the apostle speaks in this text of "peace and mercy upon them, and upon the Israel of God" (emphasis mine), he is actually distinguishing the Gentile church (the reference of the words, "upon

them") and the Jewish believing community (the reference of the words, "and upon the Israel of God"). This has in fact been proposed by dispensationalist authors.⁹ However, the problem with this suggestion should be clear: it excludes believing Jews from "all who will follow this rule," an exclusion which would be contradictory and self-defeating. *Were*

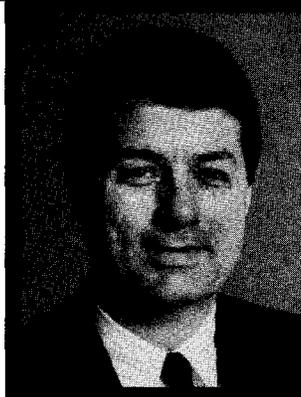
"By the standard of this apostolic teaching and rule, dispensationalism can be said to be in serious error."

the word "and" here to have this sense of "and also," as dispensationalists maintain, the apostle Paul would be pronouncing a benediction not only upon those who follow this rule, but also upon others, believing Jews, who may or may not follow it! The apostle would thus be denying the very rule or canon that he has asserted previously. Believing Jews would be exempt from this rule or canon, thus rendering it null and void as a rule for faith and practice among all the people of God. For this and other reasons, the New International Version translates these verses as follows: "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is a new creation. Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God" (emphasis mine). Here the NIV is following a long tradition of interpreters, including Calvin, who rightly take the connector, "and," as equivalent to "even" or "that is."¹⁰

The sense of this text, accordingly, is that the apostle extends peace and mercy to those who follow this rule or canon, that in the church of Jesus Christ circumcision and uncircumcision count for nothing so far as our standing with God is concerned. He pronounces this benediction "to all who follow this rule, even to the Israel of God." Thus, he answers the question, who belongs to the "Israel of God" by declaring emphatically that the Israel of God is comprised of all believers, Jews and Gentiles, who subscribe to and live by the principle that what alone counts before God is a "new creation."

In short, no more emphatic word could be spoken, least of all by someone more qualified to do so than an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, that in the church no

distinctions are permitted any longer to be made along the lines of Jew and Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised. This should not surprise us, coming as it does from the same apostle who reminded the church in Ephesus that Christ "Himself is our peace, who made both [Jew and Gentile] one, and broke down the barrier of the dividing wall" (Eph. 2:14). By the standard of this apostolic teaching and rule, dispensationalism can be said to be in serious error.



Past Times

FOOTNOTES

- 5 In those two verses alone, the apostle explicitly refers to the following Old Testament passages: Isa. 43:20ff.; Ex. 19:6; Hos. 1:10; 2:23.
- 6 For a more complete treatment of this passage, I would refer my readers to an earlier article in this series: "The 'Signs of the Times': Preaching the Gospel to the Nations(III), 'And So All Israel Shall be Saved'," *The Outlook* 45/4 (April) 1995, pp. 19-23.
- 7 It is interesting to note how matter-of-factly the oneness of the people of God is expressed by our Lord in His answer to this question, Jesus not only stresses the need to "strive to enter," but concludes with the confident declaration that "they will come from east and west, and from north and south, and will recline at the table in the kingdom of God." This description of the growth of the kingdom uses the imagery of a banquet hall and table, in which a great throng gathers, of Jew (Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God," v. 28) and Gentile ("from east and west, and from north and south"), *all of whom are reclining at the same table in the same kingdom*. This kind of natural identification of the one people of God is typical of the biblical teaching regarding the unity of God's purpose of redemption. Dispensationalism cannot do justice to this identification and unity.
- 8 Literally, the word used here for "rule" is the Greek word for "canon." It has the sense of a binding and absolutely authoritative rule or principle of faith and practice.
- 9 E.g. John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Findlay, OH: Dunham, 1958), p. 170.
- 10 This is one of the instances in which the NASV, the version I have been customarily using, may be liable to misunderstanding, since it simply translates the connector (*kai* in the Greek) with "and." The context makes it crystal clear, however, that this connector has here the sense of "even" or "that is." This sense is one of the normal senses of this connector in the Greek language. It should also be noted that the NIV is not alone in making clear the sense of the connector here. This is also true, for example, in the Revised Standard Version, the Jerusalem Bible and the New English Bible.

Dr. Venema teaches Doctrinal Studies at Mid-America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, IN.

W. Robert Godfrey

In Luther's refutation of Erasmus, "The Bondage of the Will," Luther attacked the theological impulse behind Erasmus' defense of free will. That impulse, Luther believed, undermined the Bible's authority and distorted the character of God as revealed in the Bible. Luther insisted on strong assertions of Christian truth against the tolerant and skeptical approach of Erasmus.

Erasmian impulse is not unique to the sixteenth century. That spirit is alive and well today among theologians that see themselves as evangelical and Reformed. Consider some of the current thinking on the Bible and God.

On the Bible Luther said that the Bible was clear in itself, but was sometimes unclear to us because of faults in us. The first fault he mentioned was *laziness*.

Many Christians are lazy today. They say that the Bible is not clear so that we must rely entirely on Biblical scholars. In many discussions in recent years about a variety of theological topics, I have discovered that people have not even tried to study an issue for themselves, but are very content simply to rely on the conclusions of some professor. Even if you point out that the work of that professor has been rejected by several other professors on the basis of clear evidence, they are unimpressed. They have their professor who says what they want to hear and they will stick with him.

This attitude bears an interesting resemblance to the seventeenth-century Jesuit ethical theory called probabilism. This theory stated that if one learned doctor held a particular view, even if rejected by all other learned doctors, a confessor could follow the views of one learned doctor. This theory allowed for moral laxity and made some Jesuits very

popular as confessors. This theory was finally condemned by the Roman Catholic Church. But something like it seems to have developed in evangelical and Reformed circles.

Our modern probabilism was certainly not learned from the Jesuits. It rather comes from a culture that has little interest in any claims to exclusive truth and is determined to find a rationale for what it wants to believe. For many Christians such an attitude is born basically of laziness. Such lazy Christians have lost a passion for God's truth.

Luther's second contention about the Erasmian impulse on the Bible is the *misuse of reason to judge the Bible*. Today also many misuse reason allowing it to determine how the Bible functions for Christians. The radical application of the impulse today embraces the idea of the deconstruction of texts and argues that texts mean only what readers conclude that they mean. Therefore the Bible does not have any objective meaning at all and its meaning derives from what readers find in it for themselves. This attitude exceeds even the serpent in the garden of Eden in its cleverness. The serpent asked, "Did God say...?" Deconstructionists say, "God could not have said...."

A somewhat less radical application of the impulse is to *allow reason to distinguish what in the Bible is important and directs us from what is unimportant and does not bind us*. This distinction is often expressed in terms of whether a teaching of the Bible is a salvation issue or not. But the presumption to judge which parts of the Bible are important is profoundly unchristian. The sons of Aaron thought the type of incense used in the tabernacle was not important. Uzzah thought whether he touched the Ark of

the Covenant or not was unimportant. Ananias and Sapphira thought that telling one lie was unimportant. They were all very wrong (whether they were saved or not!). Reason (or our sense of what is right) is not a reliable judge of the Bible and tends simply to tell us what we want to hear.

Luther's *third* observation about the Erasmian impulse was that it *evaded the clear meaning of the Bible by redefining the Bible's words and contexts*. The process of redefinition has happened again and again in the controversy over women in ecclesiastical office. Every text that relates to that issue has been examined and turned on its head by proponents of women in church office. Against the best evidence words have been wrenched to new meanings (e.g., "authority" in I Tim. 2:12) and speculative new contexts for passages of Scripture have been invented (e.g., the suggestion that I Tim. 2 is only local, temporary advice to the Ephesians because of some special problem there).

Luther was adamant that the Bible was clear and so must we be. Dr. J. Gresham Machen in his defense of the Bible once observed that words do not "wobble." Such a statement in our day seems naive, because so many have adopted attitudes towards words that not only make them wobble, but make them wax noses. Yet Machen and Luther were right. The sovereign God who created words can and does use them with clear and effective meaning to reveal Himself and His truth.

Luther insisted that the clarity of the Bible was inextricably connected to the character of God. *If we do not know what the Bible teaches, then we cannot know the true God*. Today the Erasmian impulse is eroding our knowledge of God and His character.

The Erasmian impulse again today is attacking the Reformation understanding of the power of God. Again God's power and activity in salvation is being limited by false teaching about man's power. Consider the recent statement called "Evangelicals and Catholics Together." That statement suggests that there are no basic differences between Roman Catholics and Evangelicals on grace and faith. The statement implicitly rejects the importance of the great Reformation doctrines of grace alone and faith alone. Man - his decisions and his

actions - again stand at the center. A truly God-centered theology is abandoned.

This impulse also attacks the power of God in its teaching on the final judgment. The reasonable theology of the Erasmians tends to insist that a God of love will not send anyone (or at least only a very few) to hell. *God's holiness and justice evaporate in the heat of an unbiblical understanding of love*.

Not only the power of God suffers at the hands of this impulse, but so also does His person. God Himself must be redefined. The language used for God must be feminized and the Trinity become Parent, Sibling and Spirit. But such radical changes are not enough. "Evangelical" theologian Clark Pinnock embraces a theology called process, declaring that God has no fixed, immutable nature. God is always rather in the process of change. Process theology intends to suggest that this

changing God is more sympathetic, understanding and responsive. In reality such a god is simply unreliable. The promises of God in Christ in a process theology can count for nothing.

If Luther were writing today, he would be appalled at the extremes to which the Erasmian impulse has gone in theology. But he would not be surprised. He knew that the Erasmian impulse opened the door to the most radical distortions of the Bible and of God. He knew that only strong assertions of Biblical truth would preserve the Gospel. He knew that the church of Jesus Christ would flourish only as God raised up strong preachers who would not compromise the Bible's message. May God bless His church in our day with leaders who will courageously make the strong assertions of God's Word.

Dr. Godfrey, editor of this department, is President of Westminster Theological Seminary in CA.

Bibles are in High Demand in Cuba

HAVANA, Cuba (EP) - "There is something like an explosion in Cuba because everyone wants to have a Bible," says Rev. Jose Lopez of the Bible Commission in Cuba. The Bible Commission, the official channel for all Scriptures sent to Cuba, distributes Bibles to universities where they are used as textbooks; to bookshops and libraries which are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture; and to churches, Roman Catholic and other denominations.

In the 1970s, official permission was granted for 2,000 to 3,000 Bibles per year to be brought to Cuba for distribution among the churches. In the 1980s, the Bible Commission requested that the supply be increased to 10-15,000 per year. Now, in the 1990s, Cuba has been receiving more than 100,000 Bibles per year. Last year, they received 156,000 Bibles and 200,000 New Testaments as well as 700,000 Gospels.

In 1991, the United Bible Societies was given permission to print Scriptures in Cuba and began printing Gospel portions, and Scripture leaflets. In 1993, the German Bible Society sent two printing presses which now print many Scriptures in Cuba.

In 1992 and 1994, the Bible Commission distributed the Bible at the International Book Fair where it was the best selling book, says Lopez. "It's very interesting that people who do not belong to a church buy the Bible. This is because of the very low price made possible because Bibles come to Cuba as a donation from the United Bible Societies."

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CLASSIS CALIFORNIA SOUTH ENDORSES CLASSES GROUPED BY THEOLOGICAL AFFINITY INSTEAD OF GEOGRAPHY

Organizers Hope a Tenth of the CRC May Join New Conservative Classes

(February 5, 1997) URNS —When Escondido CRC tried last year to get Classis California South to endorse the concept of a classis organized by theological affinity, the classis rejected the overture by a voice vote. This year, a similar overture from Escondido calling for four such classes rather than a single classis passed by a three-to-one margin at Classis California South's January 15 meeting.

Since November 1995, the concept of a classis composed of churches organized on the basis of theology rather than geographical proximity has been a key part of the stated strategy of conservative Christian Reformed leaders who want to remain members of the denomination despite its 1995 decision to allow the ordination of women. Endorsed by the 1995 Interclassical Conference of CRC conservatives meeting in South Holland, Illinois, the concept was endorsed again by the November 1996 Interclassical Conference as an alternative to secession.

Elder Keith Vander Pol of Escondido CRC, who also serves as vice-president for development of Westminster Theological Seminary in Escondido and has been charged by the Interclassical Conference with implementing the theological classis proposal, said he thought the change in the classical vote reflected a recognition that something needed to be done to keep conservatives in the Christian Reformed denomination. "The positive vote at this point in my opinion merely points out that people are becoming sensitive to that fact that many churches would leave and/or split if they are not provided a haven of rest within the denomination," said Vander Pol. "I think that was definitely on the minds of many people at the time of the vote."

The overture draws a close parallel between the proposed theological classes and the already-existing synodical decision allowing each of the CRC's 47 classes to declare itself in favor of

women's ordination by declaring the relevant article of the CRC church order barring women's ordination to be inoperative. If the overture is adopted by synod this June, the CRC General Secretary will be directed to "maintain a list of theologically identified classes as well as those which have declared 'that the word male in Article 3-a of the Church Order is inoperative for their constituent churches and will publish that list annually, along with the presentation of candidates for the ministry, in *The Banner*. (*Acts of Synod 1996*, p. 735, item 'e')." "

Vander Pol said that based on preliminary estimates, nearly a tenth of the CRC's 841 organized churches could eventually end up requesting to join a classis composed of conservative churches opposed to the ordination of women. "I have 90 churches that have indicated a desire to carefully consider a theological classis," said Vander Pol. "With that number, we obviously hope we can have a pool of many more so we can in the end have a significant number of churches and existing classes."

According to Vander Pol, the theological classes could take two forms. Just as any of the CRC's existing 47 classes can now declare itself to be in favor of women's ordination, the overture would allow existing classes to declare themselves opposed to the ordination of women and endorse the "United Reformed Affirmations," a series of statements drafted by the Interclassical Conference addressing current issues in the CRC. In addition, the overture provides for Synod 1997 to appoint a committee to implement the creation of new classes when necessary, by September 1. If new classes are formed, they would "initially be geographically defined by and consist of those churches which have indicated their desire to join a theologically identified classis as noted in an addendum to be added to his overture prior to Synod 1997" and would "receive until January 1, 1998, without further need for classical or synodical action, any

CRCNA church within its geographical boundaries agreeing with the above requirement and wishing to join."

The United Reformed Affirmations, an extended document adopted by the 1996 Interclassical Conference, addresses a number of other issues in addition to women in office. "It sets forth the historical position of the Christian Reformed denomination on issues such as the foundation of our faith and practice, inerrancy of Scripture, the church and its worship, its unity, matters of evangelism, homosexuality, feminine language for God, and women in the offices of the church," said Vander Pol.

Vander Pol said he hoped a number of existing conservative classes — possibly including Classis California South — would adopt the United Reformed Affirmations as a body and become a theological classis.

"I would say that if people are to a point where their classis is in line with the goals of a theological classis, the classis as a whole could declare itself a theological classis," said Vander Pol. "Situations and circumstances do change and they can change quickly. By being declared a theological classis, they can ensure their theological convictions for years to come. Frankly I would plead with them as a fellow brother who is searching out solutions for all congregations in the CRC that they would be of great encouragement by declaring themselves a theological classis, or alternatively go on record saying they would support that for churches that need them."

Some in Classis California South who changed their vote this year and decided to support the Escondido overture weren't prepared to go as far as declaring the entire classis to be a theologically identified classis, however.

"I recognize that something has to be done but I'm not sure it's the right answer," said Rev. Bart van Eyk of San Diego CRC. "We certainly don't want the denomination to fragment any further. I

think the problem with the overture, while I voted for it, I had some concern because in one's own mind it's very difficult to separate the overture from the affirmations of faith that came out of South Holland."

According to van Eyk, the problem with the United Reformed Affirmations is that they represent an additional creed beyond the CRC's doctrinal standards to which all ministers, elders, and deacons must subscribe. "Even though those who put together those affirmations perhaps did not intend it to do so, unfortunately what they boiled down to is a creation of another creed," said van Eyk. "I have a real problem with being expected to sign on the dotted line to another creed. I am as conservative theologically as most other people but I would have a difficult time adhering to that statement of faith and therefore as a conservative I would find myself left out in the cold, unable to really place myself in either camp."

Dr. Henry De Moor, professor of church polity at Calvin Seminary, seconded van Eyk's concern. "What basing a classis on theological affinity would do is to draw the lines beyond the creeds to theological issues," said De Moor. "If you do that, you can do that on both sides of the hot button issues, not just women in office but also homosexuality and probably other issues as well."

De Moor warned that the effect of conservative churches joining theologically identified classes would be that the existing classes would lose theological accountability on the right and risk drifting into positions diametrically opposed to those of the conservatives.

"What you're doing by having a classis of theological affinity is to defeat the very purpose of a classis. It is to be a governing body where the leading of the spirit is discerned in matters that are not clearly taught by Scripture or the creed," said De Moor. "We are saying it is a lovely airplane we have here, and we're going to take the left wing and separate it from the right wing, and we're going to make it fly. It can't fly that way. In the life of the church you need theological accountability."

De Moor proposed the Biblical model of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 as an example of how the church should settle disagreements. "I don't think it would have helped the cause of Christ

BRITAIN MAY BE LOSING ITS CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

LONDON, England (EP) - Britain may soon lose its identity as a Christian nation, according to a report prepared for the Church of England and the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland.

The Mission Theological Advisory Group found that while many Britons profess a belief in God, there is an increasing drift away from church membership, accompanied by a growing interest in such New Age phenomenon as horoscopes and soothsayers.

"A very large number of people still claim to believe in God, to pray, to believe reasonably traditional things about the person of Christ," said Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali of the Church of England's diocese of Rochester, "but that does not work out into belonging to a Christian church."

for Antioch to say if Jerusalem insists on circumcision, let's just let them go their own way, we will be in our own classis and they will be in theirs," said De Moor. "To me it's a biblical model of mutual accountability and mutual deliberation we're dealing with."

The Escondido overture would lead to further fragmentation rather than unity, said De Moor. "What is to prevent the starting of a classis based on the form of worship?" asked De Moor. "There is no stopping at that point. Where do you draw the line? I draw the line at the creeds. If a church goes outside the bounds of the creeds we've got a disciplinary case on our hands, but we never let each other go and we retain accountability to each other."

Vander Pol noted that Synod 1995 had already formally recognized a multiplicity of views in the denomination and argued that the Escondido proposal allowed not just churches favoring women in office but also churches opposed to the practice to implement their preferences on the classical level. "One person asked if we were saying there are two different positions within the denomination, and I said 'Yes, Synod said there are two different perspectives,'" said Vander Pol.

Vander Pol also emphasized that he was trying to find a way to keep his church and others in the CRC, not to lead a secession. "I can state that this effort is not with a purpose to or for churches to be anything other than CRCNA over the long term," said Vander Pol. "This movement to theological classes is not being promoted nor is it intended on my part to be any precursor to a movement to leave."

De Moor, however, emphasized that Synod 1995's decision acknowledging the legitimacy of two positions on women in office was permissive rather than restrictive. "Synod took a position on women's ordination that allows congregations to do certain things but does

not force congregations to do anything; nobody's telling Escondido or any other church that they have to have women ministers and elders," said De Moor. "I wish that were also more widely acknowledged that synod allowed certain things but is not taking a position that legitimates only one."

De Moor urged Escondido and other churches opposed to women's ordination to follow the model of the widely publicized Pine Creek case, where a conservative church in Holland followed Synod 1996's rules and received permission from both Classis Holland and Classis Zeeland to transfer to Classis Zeeland. "They said they could not remain in Classis Holland as a matter of conscience due to their opposition to women ministers and elders, and I'm pretty certain synod will approve it as well," said De Moor. "It's exactly the kind of thing synod had in mind. Local congregations which are in similar straits as Pine Creek should explore that option as opposed to this giant scheme of having at least four theological classes."

Vander Pol, however, noted that the Pine Creek model wouldn't work in all areas. He dissented from the argument that the United Reformed Affirmations were a new and different creed from that historically confessed by the CRC and said he hoped to work for passage of the Escondido overture as an elder delegate to this summer's synod. "I think some have suggested that the affirmations of faith are supercreedal, that they are something on top of the creeds," said Vander Pol. "The only thing I know to respond to that is there is nothing in the affirmations that contradict or contravene any of the historically held positions of the Christian Reformed Church, and therefore do not make a new creed."

*Darrell Todd Maurina, Press Officer
United Reformed News Service*

SUPREME COURT SEEMS UNIMPRESSED WITH ARGUMENTS FOR ASSISTED SUICIDE

WASHINGTON, D.C. (EP) - The US Supreme Court signaled both restraint and skepticism during oral arguments on physician-assisted suicide Jan. 8. Two cases before the Court seek rulings striking down state banning the practice of physician-assisted suicide.

Six of nine justices were openly skeptical of the idea of physician-assisted suicide during oral arguments. Justice Clarence Thomas did not speak during arguments on the case, but is also believed to oppose the idea.

"Where should we draw the line?" demanded Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. "Is this ever a proper question for courts as opposed to legislators?" Justice Anthony M. Kennedy added, "You're asking us, in effect, to declare unconstitutional the laws of 50 states."

Justice Antonin Scalia, who made it clear that he does not believe there is a constitutional "right to die," demanded, "Is all this in the Constitution? This is lovely philosophy."

Justices William Rehnquist, Sandra Day O'Connor and David H. Souter also voiced concerns about permitting the court to interfere with state efforts to prevent abuse by physicians. Souter, a leader of the Court's liberal wing, suggested that the Court should wait until the nation has developed a social and legislative consensus on the issue. "Why not wait?" he asked one pro-suicide lawyer. "We are not in the position to make the judgment now that you want. It would just be guesswork."

Acting Solicitor General Walter Dellinger, speaking on behalf of the Clinton administration, urged the court to uphold the two state laws forbidding physician-assisted abortion, citing "a common-sense distinction ... between killing someone and letting them die."

Former Abortionist Writes About Your Choice For Others in the Abortion Industry

ST. PAUL, Minn. (EP) - Former abortionist Joan Appleton, who directed the Planned Parenthood clinic in Falls Church, Virginia, for five years, has just completed a brochure for employees of abortion clinics called, "About Your Choice."

The brochure asks its readers to consider the facts, says Appleton. "In 1973, abortion was seen as 'The Great Panacea' - there would be no more unwanted children, no more child abuse, no more spouse abuse. But statistics show these have increased dramatically. Even suicide among teenagers has risen dramatically. A society that kills its children cannot survive."

The brochure doesn't use a condemning approach, says Appleton, who left the abortion industry years ago when she realized the effect abortion had on the lives of young mothers. She knows first-hand the agony of facing the guilt of abortion. She also knows the loneliness. When she resigned from the Falls Church clinic and walked away from the abortion industry, she found that all her former friends and allies had deserted her. "I knew that some of them - maybe most of them - would leave. I didn't know that every friend I had would abandon me."

Appleton, who speaks to pro-life groups across the nation, notes that one of the things that makes it difficult to leave the abortion industry is giving up the recognition and acclaim that it offers. "People admire you for what you do," she says. "They say, 'Oh, that takes so much courage.' But the fact of the matter is, most of our friends would never do the dirty work of abortion."

Appleton continues, "When it becomes unpopular to do abortions, the politicians aren't going to be there, the feminists aren't going to be there, the administrators aren't going to be there, the friends aren't going to be there. They are going to be distancing themselves from the guilt. But it's not going to be as easy for those of us who have participated - and unless you've been there, you cannot imagine the pain."

While the Society of Centurions in New Brunswick, Canada, offers help for people leaving the abortion industry, no US equivalent has yet been founded, says Appleton. "The church needs to be a place of healing and reconciliation," she notes. Her new brochure is one step in the establishment of an outreach for former abortionists.

William L. Williams, Washington state senior assistant attorney general, argued, "There is a strong interest in regulating the medical profession The state has an important interest in maintaining a clear line between physicians as healers and curers, and physicians as instruments of death of their patients."

The nation's most visible proponent of physician-assisted suicide, Dr. Jack Kevorkian, is not involved in either of the cases before the High Court and did not attend the arguments. He said earlier that he had no wish to "go down there and face nine religious kooks."

Outside the Supreme Court building, demonstrators from both sides of the issues carried signs and debated the merits of doctor-provided suicide. Former US Surgeon General C. Everett Koop told fellow demonstrators, "It is a tragic commentary on our society when we talk about the right to assisted suicide and we don't have a right to health care."

Even if the court votes to uphold state restrictions on physician-assisted suicide, states would still be free to pass laws explicitly permitting the practice. That's already happened in Oregon, although a court challenge has kept the law from going into effect.

Following Supreme Court arguments on physician-assisted suicide, Sens. Byron Dorgan (D-N.D.) and John Ashcroft (R-Mo.) announced plans to introduce a bill to keep federal funds from being used for the practice. They said such a law was needed because Oregon officials plan to use federal funds to pay for physician-assisted suicide as "comfort care."

WISCONSIN SCHOOL CHOICE PROGRAM RULED UNCONSTITUTIONAL BY JUDGE

MADISON, Wis. (EP) - In a school choice case that is expected to eventually reach the US Supreme Court, a Wisconsin judge ruled that including religious schools in a voucher program violated the constitutional principle of separation of church and state.

Dane County Circuit Judge Paul Higginbotham acknowledged that Milwaukee's public schools have "performed dismally," but said that using tax dollars to send poor children to church-affiliated schools was not an acceptable solution. "We do not object to the existence of parochial schools or that they attempt to spread their beliefs through their schools," he wrote. "They just cannot do it with state tax dollars."

Higginbotham also struck down an expansion of Wisconsin's existing voucher program that would have used public funds to help more children attend nonreligious private schools. Higginbotham ruled that there was "no compelling reason" to expand the program beyond its present scope. That ruling will have little effect, since eliminating religious schools from the program made it unlikely that additional children could have found places in private schools.

A quick appeal was promised by a spokesman for Wisconsin's Gov. Tommy Thompson. "The program is not intended and does not in fact benefit religious institutions. It benefits education, public education, and that's the test as we see it," said attorney Ed Marion.

Ohio also has a pilot program for school vouchers in effect. In that program, qualifying Cleveland students can use vouchers to attend the private school of their choice, including church-affiliated schools.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM WANING IN RUSSIA, SAYS EXPERT

WASHINGTON, D.C. (EP) - Religious freedom is declining in Russia, and government agents are threatening the rights of religious minorities, according to Lawrence Uzzell, a Moscow representative of the Keston Institute of Oxford, England, which studies religious freedom in formerly communist nations.

Freedom of worship was widespread after the collapse of the Soviet Union five years ago, but that freedom has been lessened since 1993, Uzzell told the US Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe, a body charged with monitoring compliance with the 1975 Helsinki Accords.

"In religious freedom as in many other areas of life, Russia is to a large extent a lawless state," said Uzzell, who urged the US and other Western nations to make it clear to Russian leaders that they cannot expect to gain full partnership with the Western world "while they continue and even intensify violations of fundamental rights, including rights guaranteed by their own constitution."

Although Russia's 1993 constitution guarantees religious freedom and makes all religions equal before the law, "this guarantee has turned out to be largely meaningless in practice," according to Uzzell. Many of Russia's provincial governments have enacted laws regulating religious activities, and are returning power to bureaucrats who were previously employed by the Soviet government to "control religious life in the interests of the state."

Russia's Orthodox Church is free of such restrictions, says Uzzell, and some Orthodox clergy seek to use the power of the state to suppress competition from non-Orthodox faiths. For instance, churches can lose their accreditation if their actions create "religious dissension" - in other words, if they preach against the Orthodox Church.

NEW JERSEY CHRISTMAS DISPLAY IS RULED UNCONSTITUTIONAL

PHILADELPHIA, Penn. (EP) - A federal appeals court ruled Jan. 13 that a Christmas display in Jersey City, N.J., violated the constitutional principle of separation of church and state. The display featured both a Christian creche and a Jewish menorah.

The appeals court also ruled that a lower court was wrong when it found that the city had successfully "secularized" the display by adding non-religious holiday symbols.

"Jersey City's display of the creche at the seat of City government power impermissibly conveyed a message of government endorsement of religion. And, in our view, the City's addition of Santa, Frosty and a red sled did little to secularize that message," said a three-judge panel of the US Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit.

The ruling came in a 1994 law suit brought by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). The ACLU is seeking to end the three-decade-old tradition of displaying a creche and menorah in front of Jersey City City Hall.

The city added secular holiday symbols when a lower court ruled in favor of the ACLU. It also added Kwanzaa symbols to the Christmas tree, and erected a sign noting that the display was part of a year-round celebration of cultural diversity. The lower court ruled that the city had successfully "demystified, desanctified and deconsecrated" the religious message of the display.

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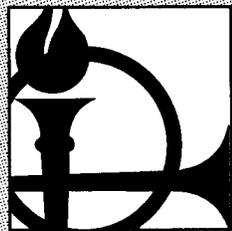
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