

## PENTECOST: AN ACT OF GOD

Thomas C. Vanden Heuvel

I would like to look with you at the event of Pentecost as an act of God, described for us in Acts 2. The third Person of the Holy Trinity was poured out upon the church. The church is not a rootless thing. It goes back to the Old Testament, in fact, it goes back to the Garden of Eden. In the work of the Holy Spirit we have what our Lord Jesus Christ continues to do and to teach after He ascended into heaven.

### AN ACT OF POWER (ACTS 2:1-3)

Pentecost is an act of power. God is acting again as He acted in crucial times of the Old Testament. "When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them." Here is power. God is at work. His work is accompanied by wind and fire. These two things accompanied God's work before. As Israel left Egypt God led them with a pillar of cloud and fire, and the wind dried up the Red Sea. On Mt. Sinai, God came to Moses and Israel in a violent storm; smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace and the whole mountain trembled violently. On Mt. Carmel, God answered the prophet Elijah's prayer with fire on the altar and then the wind and the rain came in the storm to end the three-and-a-half-year draught. Now on Pentecost God is acting again.

### AN ACT OF RESTORATION (ACTS 2:4-12)

"All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them." The people from all the nations under heaven that came together could understand those filled with the Spirit. They spoke authentic languages they didn't know before. This takes us back to Genesis 11 and the Tower of Babel where there was confusion of tongues. The division and confusion came because man was trying to build a tower to heaven. He wanted to get to heaven with his own effort. He was trying to build a kingdom for himself, with man at the center. God confused the tongues; the people were scattered so their wicked devices came to naught. But here at Pentecost is God's *act of restoration*. It is a reversal of the Babel process. God repairs the divisions. Those filled with the Holy Spirit declared the mighty acts of God. In Babel the languages divided and confused the people. At Pentecost there was *one message communicated in many tongues*. The one message was the declaration of the wonders of the Lord, the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the blood of Christ that breaks down the dividing walls (Ephesians 2:14). Through the cross of Christ there is reconciliation with God and with one another. The *races* must meet at the cross. After Pentecost Philip went to Samaria and to the Ethiopian eunuch. Peter went to Cornelius. The church at Antioch, a

Greek city, sent out the first missionaries. Paul went to Europe. All the racial barriers began to crumble.

### AN ACT OF FULFILLMENT (ACTS 2:13-21)

Some in the crowd that came together made fun of those filled with the Spirit and said: "They have had too much wine." Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who are in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning. No; this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel." Then follows the quotation from Joel 2:28-32. The Old Testament was preparing for this event. God declared: "I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy." Pentecost is an act of fulfillment. God had given insight into His whole plan of salvation to the prophets so that the people would recognize it when it came. Now the last days have arrived. All the promises of God find their "Yes" in Christ. Through Him the "Amen" is spoken by us to the glory of God (II Corinthians 1:20).

### AN ACT OF HISTORY (ACTS 2:22-36)

In Acts 2:22-36, Peter recounts the events of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. These historical facts comprise the *foundation* of Pentecost. They are the mighty acts of God about Jesus of Nazareth, a man accredited by God. "This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge, and you, with help of wicked men, put Him to death by nailing Him to the cross. But God raised Him from the dead, freeing Him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on Him...God has raised this Jesus to life... exalted Him to the right hand of God. He has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear." The conclusion is: "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ." All of this came together on Pentecost. The whole of history had been moving toward the crucifixion of Jesus and His exaltation to be Lord and Christ. Now on Pentecost Christ pours out His Spirit for the empowerment of the church. Let us all be assured of this: All this is true; it happened on a definite date in history.

### AN ACT OF PROCLAMATION (ACTS 2:37-40)

When the people heard the message of Peter they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles: "Brothers, what shall we do?" The *proclamation* was the response. "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." The gift of the Holy Spirit and forgiveness of sins is not for the privileged few like the apostles and the 120, but the message must go out to the whole world. "It is for you and your children and for all that are far off, for whom the Lord our God will call." The *roots* of the proclamation go back to Abraham to whom God said: "In your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." Jesus Christ is the seed of Abraham. The proclamation of this gospel must go forth from every pulpit till Jesus comes again.

## PENTECOST MEDITATION

2 **Thomas Vanden Heuvel** opens the Scriptures on the beautiful truth of the Holy Spirit's work in the hearts and lives of believers.

## CORNELIUS VAN TIL - THE CENTENNIAL OF HIS BIRTH

4 Nephew **Fred H. Klooster** warmly recalls personal memories of Uncle "Kees" (Cornelius) Van Til and underscores the qualities of thought which won for him the title "prince of the twentieth century Christian apologists."

7 **Joel R. Beeke** demonstrates Van Til's skill in dismantling flawed apologetics and constructing a presuppositional apologetic which assumes a self-attesting triune God who has revealed Himself authoritatively in the Bible.

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12 **Daniel Brouwer** pleads with the Christian Reformed Synod 1995 to "follow the Church Order."

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17 *Church and World* features a variety of significant classical decisions being sent to CRC Synod/95, and the organization of a regional fellowship by western independent churches.

## AN ACT OF CREATION (ACTS 2:41-47)

A new society was created on that day of Pentecost. It came to concrete expression in the conversion of 3000 people who accepted the message and were baptized and added to the church on that day. The New Testament church was born. Its practice of worship and church life form the pattern for the church to follow: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayers." Here is a creation of God, a new society characterized by love, generosity, kindness and fellowship. Pentecost is the day of God's mighty acts.

How does the church today compare with what happened on Pentecost? Is there still a true church of Jesus Christ? YES INDEED. Where the Word of God is purely preached, the sacraments Biblically administered, and Christian discipline exercised according to the Bible, the church of Jesus Christ is alive and well. When I saw Peter Jennings' special on ABC entitled "In the Name of God," I thought of how far some expressions of Protestant Christianity have drifted from the New Testament model. Let us be vigilant and faithful to the Word of the Lord lest the days come when there will not be famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord (Amos 8:11).



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"And the three companies blew the trumpets...and held THE TORCHES in their left hands, and THE TRUMPETS in their right hands...and they cried, 'The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon!'" (Judges 7:20).

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## Dr. Cornelius Van Til The Centennial of His Birth

Fred H. Klooster

*Both Dr. Cornelius (Kees) Van Til and his wife, Rena Klooster, were born in 1895—he in May and she in October. On the occasion of the Van Tils' eightieth birthday(s), the editor of this journal asked me to write an article to commemorate that event (Torch and Trumpet, Oct. 1975, pp. 19-21). In response to the request of the current editors, I agreed to revise and update that article for the centennial commemoration. Since I am a nephew of the Van Tils, "the reader should realize," as I wrote in 1975, "that objectivity is never possible, least of all among relatives."*

Cornelius Van Til was born on May 3, 1895 in the village of Grootegast in the province of Groningen, the Netherlands. The first volume of Herman Bavinck's Reformed dogmatics (*Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*) was published that year. Abraham Kuyper's powerful Reformed theology and kingdom perspectives were impacting the Netherlands and beyond. The Free University, founded by Kuyper and the "common people" (*kleine luiden*), was moving forward. Gerhardus Vos had declined Kuyper's invitation to teach at the Free University; after teaching at Calvin Seminary for five years, Vos was already in his second year of teaching "Biblical Theology" at Princeton Theological Seminary in 1895.

Kees Van Til, the sixth of eight sons, spent the first ten years of his life in the Netherlands where his father farmed. In 1905, the year in which the sixty-eight year old Abraham Kuyper lost the election and the office of prime minister, the Van Til family immigrated to the United States and settled on a farm in northern Indiana, the Munster-Highland area. The family joined the Christian Reformed Church and helped to establish a local Christian school. Although Kees enjoyed farming (gardening remained his hobby), he felt called to prepare for the ministry of the gospel. High school and college costs were difficult to meet for a large farming family. Eventually Kees was able to enroll at Calvin College in a program that included both a "prep school" and regular college courses. He graduated from Calvin with an A.B. degree in 1922 at the age of 27.

The year 1922 was a difficult one at Calvin Seminary because of the "Jansen case." A number of Christian Reformed students, including Van Til, his close friend (and eventually my father-in-law) John deWaard, as well as Dave Bonnema and Richard Frens decided to study at Princeton Seminary which was still considered a stronghold of Reformed orthodoxy in the line of the Hodges

and Warfield. Besides, Gerhardus Vos was still teaching there and he attracted Christian Reformed students with his courses in the area of "Biblical Theology." Gerhardus Vos made a lasting impression on Van Til. A picture of Vos graced his study. He and deWaard were present at the burial of Gerhardus Vos in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania in 1949.

In 1924 Van Til received the Th.B. degree from Princeton Theological Seminary as well as the M.A. degree from Princeton University. The following year he was awarded a Th.M degree in Systematic Theology. During those years at Princeton Van Til had good relations with Professor Wm. Brenton Greene, Jr. who taught apologetics; he also appreciated J. Gresham Machen who was teaching New Testament subjects there. He received the doctoral degree in 1927 after the defense of his dissertation on "God and the Absolute." In the fall of 1925 Kees married his longtime girl friend from Munster, Rena Klooster. Since Rena was my father's oldest sister, that marriage made Kees Van Til my uncle before my second birthday. Together now, "Kees and Rena" (as I heard their names long before I was able to identify them) returned to Princeton to complete his Ph.D. program in philosophical studies.

At the age of thirty-two, and armed with a prestigious Ph.D. from Princeton University, Dr. Cornelius Van Til was called and ordained in 1927 as the pastor of the small Christian Reformed Church of Spring Lake, Michigan. By then trouble was brewing at Princeton as modernism was making inroads. Dr. J. Gresham Machen was elected by Princeton's Board to be Professor of Apologetics to succeed Dr. Greene. But the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., under President J. Ross Stevenson's urging, did not confirm Dr. Machen's appointment. In that context Dr. Van Til was offered a one-year appointment as Instructor in Apologetics in place of his former professor, Dr. W.B. Greene, Jr. Reluctantly Van Til asked for a one-year leave of absence from his Spring Lake congregation and went to Princeton in the fall of 1928—a move that was to change the course of his life and tie him in with Machen's history. In the spring of 1929 Princeton was reorganized so that modernists were in control. Although Van Til was offered a regular professorship after his one-year term as instructor, he declined the appointment and returned to his Spring Lake congregation at the end of the 1928-29 academic year.

He was not to remain long in the Spring Lake parsonage, however. Under the leadership of Dr. Machen, a new seminary was being organized to carry on the historic Reformed position of old-Princeton. Dr. Van Til, as well as two other Christian Reformed men, Rev. R.B. Kuiper and Dr. Ned B. Stonehouse were invited to join the origi-



*Dr. Fred H. Klooster is the retired Professor of Systematic Theology from Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, MI.*

nal faculty of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. C. Van Til began his work as Professor of Apologetics at Westminster in September 1929. Although his love for the Christian Reformed Church never waned, his life work was teaching at Westminster. On at least two occasions, 1943 and 1952, the Synod of the Christian Reformed Church offered him an appointment to teach systematic theology and other courses at Calvin Seminary. In 1952 he did teach contemporary theology at Calvin for a semester. He was a fraternal delegate from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church on several occasions and as late as 1959 expressed the hope for union between the two churches. Yet Westminster Seminary represented a cause which he could not abandon. He officially retired at the end of the 1972 school year while continuing to serve as a part-time lecturer for several years. His life was intimately bound up with the history of Westminster Theological Seminary where he was known as an outstanding leader and a "defender of the faith."

Dr. Van Til came to be known especially for his efforts to develop a consistently Reformed apologetics. He was thoroughly grounded in the Reformed theology of Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck and Gerhardus Vos. He gradually came to see that the apologetics of the Hodges, Warfield and Greene involved a synthesis with Scottish realism and other forms of non-Christian thought. A reformation of apologetics was needed to break away from every form of a nature-grace dichotomy. Every thought, also in apologetics, must be conformed to Christ. This has been Van Til's major contribution in attempting to develop a consistently Reformed apologetic for the defense of the Christian faith.

Van Til argued that the defense of the Christian faith cannot proceed from a neutral or a rationalistic type of apologetic; it must proceed from the presuppositions of the Christian faith itself. In this project Van Til was helped by and allied with his Dutch contemporaries, Professors Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd although their relations were not without later tensions. Van Til's attention was primarily focused on apologetics and the defense of the faith. In that role he was unique; he was indeed the "prince of twentieth century Christian apologists," as Meredith Kline of Gordon-Conwell Divinity School described him. Even today, especially in the Evangelical world, debates concerning apologetics tend to be related to Van

Tillian positions. His influence on his students and on the Reformed/Evangelical world, has been profound.

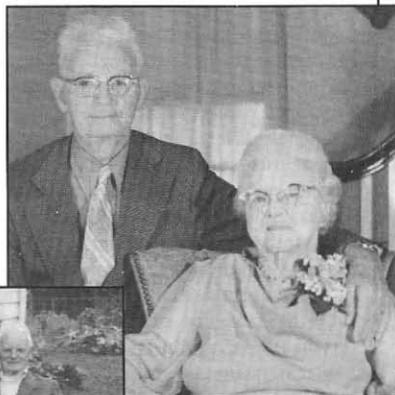
Cornelius was a controversial figure during his academic lifetime and remains so even today. His handsome, white haired and goateed father lived his retirement years near the state line between Indiana and Illinois. That state line between Munster, Indiana and Lansing, Illinois is a very straight line. Kees always tried to draw straight lines, especially when dealing with theology and apologetics. The line between truth and error, between Christianity

and non-Christianity, between Reformed and non-Reformed, he insisted, is a straight line. In such matters there is no room for compromise. With his penetrating intellect Van Til, like Machen, became a sharp critic of modernism as well as of Roman Catholicism, Arminianism and Neoorthodoxy. In his first major publication in 1946 he labeled the theology of Karl Barth and Emil Brunner *The New Modernism*. In his battles for the uncompromised truth, Van Til sometimes found it necessary to criticize Reformed colleagues whom he judged to be

following dangerous routes. That included friends like G.C. Berkouwer and H. Dooyeweerd as well as H. Kuitert and J. Daane. Although it was not always evident to others, this was painful for him. It was usually with a heavy heart that he pursued these critiques within the Reformed family.

After graduating from Calvin Theological Seminary, it was my privilege to spend two and one-half years in graduate work at Westminster. In the 1940s

*"Kees always tried to draw straight lines, especially when dealing with theology and apologetics."*



Westminster's faculty (N. Stonehouse, J. Young, P. Woolley, J. Murray, R. B. Kuiper, C. Van Til) was perhaps the most gifted and influential Reformed faculty in the world. My wife and I lived in a small apartment in the home of Uncle Kees and Aunt Rena. Those were delightful and extremely profitable years for me as I engaged in daily dialogue with Uncle Kees and regularly enjoyed afternoon coffee and cake with them while my good wife worked in the city to support us. A fiend for exercise, Uncle Kees was always ready for a hearty walk through the rural countryside of his Chestnut Hill home in suburban Philadelphia. Those walks were an important part of my education. He always talked about theology and theologians, past and present, and about the past and present struggles of the churches. From such conversations I learned how difficult it was for him to say what he was convinced had to be said in criticism of fellow Reformed theologians. Those matters cost him many sleepless nights and a good deal of psychological anguish.

Van Til's life-style was simple and his energies surprising, especially in view of constant health problems. He was an authentic person, a genuine Christian, godly and devoted. He was a Christian pastor to his neighbors and to his students and friends. He called on sick neighbors regularly and witnessed to them in simple ways as he presented the gospel. He understood his academic discipline of apologetics to have evangelistic goals. He felt most at home with the common people and he prized his summer visits to Indiana with family and farmer friends. Yet his influence was worldwide and many of his former students throughout the world carry on with "an epistemological self-consciousness" awakened by this former Indiana farmer.

Cornelius Van Til was a prolific writer. During the 1930s he began to produce syllabi for his seminary courses. These were regularly revised. During his retirement years several syllabi were revised and published. He lectured frequently at conferences and other seminaries and made his case for the Reformed faith in several of the major universities in the country.

On the occasion of his seventieth birthday in 1965, Dr. Van Til was honored with a special issue of the *Presbyterian Guardian* which contained articles by colleagues and friends. I especially enjoyed the article by Professor Paul Woolley, his longtime colleague at Westminster and the only other living member of Westminster's original faculty at the time. In 1970, at the time of his seventy-fifth birthday, an impressive "Festschrift" of almost five-hundred pages was published; its title is *Jerusalem and Athens: Critical Discussions on the Theology and Apologetics of Cornelius Van Til* (1971). This is an important book for students who wish to hear from critics as well as admirers of Van Til's apologetics. The word "critical" in the title is accurate; the book contains praise and thanks as well as critique from a variety

of scholars—Reformed and others. The twenty-five contributors include the names Stoker, Dooyeweerd, Packer, Berkouwer, Zuidema and Ridderbos as well as Jack Rogers, Paul Jewett, R. Rushdoony, J. Montgomery and C. Pinnock. Van Til has a written response of varied length to fourteen of the contributors and a nineteen-page opening essay called "My Credo" in which he sets himself "to explaining in non-philosophical terms precisely what he proposes as a consistently Christian apologetic," as editor E.R. Geehan describes it. A seven-page bibliography of Van Til's numerous publications arranges them chronologically under five headings: books, articles, reviews, syllabi and pamphlets.

Van Til's eightieth birthday was celebrated at Westminster with a concert in his honor. On that occasion the Board of Trustees officially named its new classroom-chapel building, "Van Til Hall." Thus, in the providence of God, two men whose lives began to be entwined at Princeton in the 1920s now have their names enshrined in adjoining buildings of the Westminster campus—Machen Hall and Van Til Hall. The May 1975 issue of the *Presbyterian Guardian* carried a laudatory commemorative article by a Chinese Christian Reformed minister, the Rev. Paul Szto, who was greatly influenced by Van Til's apologetics.

1978 was one of Van Til's most difficult years. On January 11, Rena, his devoted wife of fifty-three years, died. She cheerfully and lovingly cared for her busy husband in his tension full life. Taken far from her immediate family and relatives, she adapted well to the academic life of faculty and students. Summers meant extended visits to Indiana with her husband and their son, Earl Calvin. Those were months of renewal with family and friends that strengthened the family again for the academic year ahead. I vividly recall the night before their return to Philadelphia as all the Klooster relatives gathered to say farewell, and we all sang "God be with you till we meet again." Tears flowed like a river by then and we younger ones really doubted that we would ever see each other again!

The final decade of Van Til's life was one of aging—yet surprising resilience. He continued occasional lectures and speeches. He accepted invitations to visit friends in California as well as Indiana and elsewhere. There was another valley through which he had to pass however. His only child, Earl, was also taken away suddenly by death. In spite of health problems during most of his mature life (he referred humorously to his "pill doctor" for one week and his "rub doctor" for the following week), the old warrior went to his eternal reward on April 17, 1987, just a few weeks short of his 92nd birthday.

"He understood his academic discipline of apologetics to have evangelistic goals."

# Van Til and Apologetics

Joel R. Beeke

The name of Cornelius Van Til is inseparable from Reformed, presuppositional apologetics. Due to the importance yet complexity of Van Til's thinking and of the discipline of apologetics in general, I aim to provide in this brief article a few sketchy notes on this Reformed apologist's background and basic thought, as well as a capsule summary of apologetics and its primary methodologies.

## BACKGROUND

Cornelius ("Kees") Van Til was born one hundred years ago (May 3, 1895) at Grootegast, in the province of Groningen, the Netherlands, as the sixth son of godly, Bible-centered parents. Raised in a "lovingly strict" Calvinistic home, the Three Forms of Unity (i.e., *Belgic Confession*, 1561; *Heidelberg Catechism*, 1563; *Canons of Dort*, 1618-1619) served as formative influences on Van Til and his interpretation of Scripture. In 1905 the Van Til family immigrated to Highland, Indiana to farm in a more prosperous area. They were devout members of a conservative Christian Reformed Church. As a teenager, young Van Til felt the weighty call of God to His service. Shortly thereafter, he attended Calvin College in Grand Rapids, Michigan, where he immersed himself in the treatises of philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Hegel and Schopenhauer. After receiving an A.B. from Calvin, Van Til moved to Princeton, New Jersey for five additional years of study. In 1922 he matriculated at Princeton Theological Seminary where he earned a Th.M. degree. Subsequently, he acquired his Ph.D. from Princeton University in 1927. His doctoral dissertation was entitled, "God and the Absolute." Throughout his Princeton years Van Til studied under an impressive array of leading Reformed thinkers including Geerhardus Vos, Caspar W. Hodge, William P. Armstrong, Robert D. Wilson, Oswald T. Allis, W. P. Greene and J. Gresham Machen.

The 1920s proved to be a time of crisis for the once staunchly Reformed seminary at Princeton. The tradition of Archibald Alexander, Charles and A. A. Hodge, and Benjamin B. Warfield was being challenged increasingly by the infiltration of more liberal-minded professors. After a brief pastorate at Spring Lake Christian Reformed Church, Muskegon, Michigan (1927-1928), Van Til taught apologetics for one year at Princeton (1928-1929), and at its close was elected Professor of Apologetics in Princeton Theological Seminary by its Board of Directors, but was not confirmed by the 1929 General Assembly on account



Dr. Joel Beeke is pastor of the Heritage Netherlands Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids, MI and editor of the periodical, *Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth*.



of the Assembly's authorization of Princeton's reorganization. Van Til returned to Spring Lake, determined to refuse teaching at either Princeton or the newly organized Westminster Seminary which aimed to carry on the tradition of "old" Princeton under the able leadership of Dr. Machen. Nevertheless, he was prevailed upon to join the Westminster faculty by Drs. Machen and Allis who traveled to Michigan to seek his and R. B. Kuiper's services. From the founding of Westminster Seminary in 1929 until his emeritation in 1975 at the age of eighty, Dr. Van Til taught Reformed apologetics and related courses from a uniquely Biblical perspective and within

the confines of traditional Reformed theology. His thinking on Reformed apologetics, philosophy and theology exerted a steadily growing influence on many graduate students and conservative Reformed evangelicals throughout the world. Today, his views continue to be developed by some of his students and are still frequently debated among orthodox Reformed theologians and apologists.

Van Til wrote more than twenty books during his teaching career, in addition to thirty unpublished class syllabi which were widely circulated and are still valued. Even in his eighties Dr. Van Til continued to stay abreast of developments in Reformed apologetics and contributed as enabled. His passing away in 1987 at the ripe age of ninety-two signaled the end of an era for both Westminster Seminary and Reformed presuppositional apologetics. (For additional detail on Van Til's life, see the authorized biography of William White, Jr., *Van Til: Defender of the Faith*, 1979.)

## VAN TIL'S THOUGHT

Two fields of study, distinguishable and yet closely related, have molded the person and work of Cornelius Van Til: theology and philosophy. Theologically, Van Til's

contours were always unequivocally Reformed in principle and practice. *First*, John Calvin, upon whose spiritual manna Van Til was nurtured throughout his life, was his *primary theological influence*. *Second*, the teaching of the *Heidelberg Catechism* via his Dutch Reformed upbringing and the theology of the Westminster Assembly, due to connections with conservative presbyterianism at Old Princeton and Westminster seminaries, also cast their dye on the theological mind-set of Van Til. Moreover, in 1936 Van Til switched his church membership from the CRC to the newly organized Orthodox Presbyterian Church where he remained for the rest of his life. *Third*, Van Til's theological convictions were self-admittedly influenced by the Dutch theologians Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920) and Herman Bavinck (1854-1921). Though Van Til rejected Kuyperian presumptive regeneration, he did embrace a number of Kuyper's significant theological principles such as the centrality of the absolute sovereignty of God over all creation; the focus of all of life's strands drawn to the heart of man as the center of his existence and relationship to God; the conviction that all of life is consequently religious and is acted out in either a Godward or anti-Godward direction; and the necessary pursuit of Christian philosophy in every subject area by examining its created order, dysfunction through sin and fall, and post-lapsarian restoration in Christ. Though Van Til often sought to rework and go beyond Kuyper and Bavinck, the Kuyper-Bavinck line of thought which proposed the principal thesis that "the Christianity set forth in the Bible is the one God-revealed religion, and that Calvinism is the clearest and most consistent expression of that religion—both in content and in its life-and-world presentation," he accepted unmitigatingly all his life (White, p. 35).

Philosophically, Kuyper's Calvinistic principles made a major impact on the school of philosophic thought sometimes denominated "Amsterdam Philosophy" or "Calvinistic Philosophy," which in turn also influenced Van Til, particularly in his early Westminster years. Developed in the second quarter of this century, "Calvinistic Philosophy" grew out of the writings and teachings of Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977) and Dirk Hendrik Theodore Vollenhoven (1892-1978), brothers-in-law who were simultaneously appointed to the chairs of jurisprudence and philosophy respectively at the Free University of Amsterdam in 1926. Dooyeweerd posited the following four ground-motives as functional throughout the course of history: *first*, the form-matter dualism in Greek philosophy; *second*, the nature-grace synthesis in medieval philosophy; *third*, the nature-freedom dualism in modern philosophy; *fourth*, the truly Christian ground-motive based on the radical, Biblical motif of "creation, fall, and redemption through Jesus Christ in the commun-

ion of the Holy Spirit" (cf. Herman Dooyeweerd, *In the Twilight of Western Thought: Studies in the Pretended Autonomy of Philosophical Thought*, pp. 39-52). For Dooyeweerd, only this fourth ground-motive can function in Christian philosophy; consequently, he seeks to build his philosophical system, known as "The Philosophy of the Idea of Law" or "Cosmonomic Idea" after one of his early major works, *De Wijsbegeerte der Wetsidee*, on the basis of the creation-fall-redemption ground-motive.

In the last decades of his life, however, Van Til became critical of several aspects of the "Amsterdam philosophy," despite his indebtedness to it. For example, he criticized Dooyeweerd for moving away from a radically Christian and Calvinistic philosophy to an approach that allows more accommodation to, or at least more congenial dialogue with, non-Christian thinking (see Edward R. Geehan, *Jerusalem and Athens*, where Dooyeweerd and Van Til engage in a lengthy interchange relative to their differences).

Nevertheless, salient points of Kuyperian thought have directly affected Dooyeweerd, Vollenhoven and Van Til in greater or lesser measure. Among others, these include the following: 1) science is dependent on philosophical considerations and underlying principles to function rightly; 2) to obtain a sense of totality in science or theology, a philosophical starting point is necessary, derived by spiraling down to the depths of any given; 3) non-Christian philosophy can have no point of transcendence, but must essentially remain within the cosmos; 4) faith and thought operate always as functions moving either in a right or wrong direction; 5) logic must not be elevated in philosophical thinking.

## VAN TIL'S APOLOGETICS

Against this background, Van Til developed his "new apologetic" in which he defends "old truth." Though preeminently a preacher of the Word, Van Til has become known primarily through his pioneer work in the field of apologetics (cf. Dr. E. Clowney, *Westminster Theological Journal*, fall 1984; John H. Piersma, *Outlook*, 35, 5 [1985]:16-17). Rightly, he has been called "the old guardian of a new apologetics" (Paul C. H. Szto, *Outlook*, 35, 5 [1985]:12-13).

Apologetics has been defined as a branch of scientific theology which deals with the history and possibility of efforts to establish an effective defense of the Christian faith against any attack from those outside of that faith. As a subdivision of Christian theology, apologetics is a systematic, argumentative discourse in defense of the divine origin and authority of the Christian faith. Van Til himself has defined it as "the vindication of the Christian philosophy of life against the various forms of the

"...apologetics is a systematic, argumentative discourse in defense of the divine origin and authority of the Christian faith."

non-Christian philosophy of life" (*Apologetics*, p. 1).

The English word, *apologetics*, is derived from a Greek root meaning "to defend, to make reply, to give an answer, to legally defend oneself." In New Testament times, an *apologia* was a formal courtroom defense (2 Tim. 4:16). The Greek verb (*apologeomai*) occurs ten times in the New Testament, and the Greek noun (*apologia*) occurs eight times. In nearly every case, the key element involved is that of *defense*. This coincides with Van Til's major work on apologetics, aptly titled, *Defense of the Faith*, which also provides the best summary of his thought.

The notion of some well-intentioned Christians that they are under no obligation to propound and defend their faith before a hostile world is not supported by Scripture. Besides the obvious fact that both Jesus and Paul repeatedly defended their claims of Messiah (Matt. 22) and apostle respectively (Gal. 1, 2; 1 Cor. 9; Acts 22-26), the classic Petrine admonition certainly implies that the Christian faith is capable of reasonable defense: "Be ready always to give an answer [i.e., a defense] to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15b).

Though the Scriptural mandate is clear that the Christian faith must be defended, that is, that apologetics is a significant and necessary task, how the method of apologetics ought to be carried out has often been and still remains a matter of intense debate. At least three different major schools of thought have emerged in addressing the "how" of Christian apologetics.

First, there is the school of *revelation or presuppositionalism*. This school has as its motto: *Credo ut intelligam* ("I believe in order that I may understand"). It presupposes the supernatural revelation of God's Word as providing the only basis for the entire theological enterprise. Dr. Robert Reymond succinctly states: "Group characteristics here are convictions that 1) faith in God precedes understanding everything else (cf. Hebrews 11:3), 2) elucidation of the system [of truth] follows faith, 3) religious experience must be grounded in the objective Word of God and the objective work of Christ, 4) human depravity has rendered autonomous reason incapable of satisfactorily anchoring its truth claims to anything objectively certain, and 5) a special regenerating act of the Holy Spirit is indispensable for Christian faith and enlightenment" (*The Justification of Knowledge: An Introductory Study in Christian Apologetic Methodology*, p. 8). This school is represented by the Augustinian and consistent Reformed tradition, including Van Til.

Van Til's role has been one of developing presuppositionalism along Reformed lines beyond any before him. Harvie Conn provides an excellent summary: "Van Til constructed a presuppositional apologetic based on two fundamental assertions: 1) the Creator-creature distinction that demands human beings presuppose the self-attesting triune God in all their think-

ing; 2) the reality that unbelievers will resist this obligation in every aspect of life and thought. Insisting that all thought is analogical and self-consciously dependent on the reality of the Biblical God and the authority of His revelation, Van Til opposed autonomy, the attempt to think and live by some criterion of truth other than God's Word" (Daniel Reid, et al., *Dictionary of Christianity in America*, pp. 1211-1212).

Second, there is the *objective or evidentialist* school, which may be represented by the motto, *Intelligo et credo* ("I understand and I believe"). The methodology of evidentialism stresses some form of natural theology as the point at which apologetics commences. As Reymond sums, "Group characteristics here are the following: 1) a genuine belief in the ability and trustworthiness of human reason in its search for religious knowledge, 2) the effort to ground faith upon empirical and/or historically verifiable facts, and 3) the conviction that religious propositions must be subjected to the same kind of verification—namely, demonstration—that scientific assertions must undergo. The Thomistic Roman Catholic tradition, the (inconsistent) Reformed evidentialist traditions, and the Arminian tradition are representative of this group" (*Justification of Knowledge*, p. 9).

Van Til has done much pioneer work in exposing the fallacies of this methodology. He has shown that this approach neglects the radical effects of the Adamic fall, for it advocates that reason was only weakened but not crippled by the fall. Van Til attacked two major proponents of evidentialism frequently: Thomas Aquinas, Roman Catholicism's primary medieval theologian, and Bishop Butler, an eighteenth-century Anglican. Aquinas sought for a common ground between religion and philosophy by insisting that God's existence, revealed in the Scriptures,

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"...apologetics is a significant and necessary task..."

### Mid-America Reformed Seminary Bids Farewell

Mid-America Reformed Seminary is hosting an evening of reminiscing and reflection marking the Seminary's farewell to our friends in Northwest Iowa, on Tuesday, May 2, 1995 at 7:30 p.m. in the Faith Christian Reformed Church of Sioux Center, Iowa. All are welcome to attend. Refreshments will be served after the evening's program.

For more information, contact the seminary office at (712)-737-3446.

also be demonstrated by reason. His aim was to synthesize natural and supernatural thought, Christian and pagan thought, Augustinianism and Aristotelianism. Van Til argued that the Thomistic approach of going part way with the natural man and then leading him to supernatural truth, undermines the entire Biblical structure of one system of truth. Similarly, Van Til exposed the fallacy of Bishop Butler's work, *Analogy of Religion* (1736), for arguing the truth of Christianity on the grounds of "mere probability."

Third, there is an apologetic denominated as *subjective methodology* or *experientialism*. Its motto is: *Credo quia absurdum est* ("I believe because it is absurd"). Experientialism stresses inward religious experience as the foundation of all theology. Its tradition accents the paradoxical character of Christian teaching to the point that it asserts that Christian truth is not capable of rational analysis. Typical of this school is the Barthian tradition which underscores the "otherness," the transcendence, and hiddenness of God at the expense of His concrete Scriptural revelation of truth. Van Til has also done extensive work in exposing the fallacy of Barth, Barthians and others who espouse experientialism as independent of, or superior to, the objective character and authority of Scripture for establishing truth.

Van Til has played a major role in uncovering non-presuppositional methods or attitudes in both non-Reformed and also in otherwise Reformed thinkers—particularly in the Old Princeton apologetic as advocated by Warfield, et al. He has even detected signs of inconsistency in this regard in Kuyper and Bavinck. In short, Van Til has done able work in presenting a thoroughly consistent and Biblical Reformed apologetic, and in purging Reformed theology from non-Reformed apologetics. He has also provided a Reformed foundation for Christian ontology, epistemology and ethics. There is much for us to learn from Dr. Van Til, and we cannot recommend too highly his *Defense of the Faith* and *Introduction to Systematic Theology* for those who are serious about understanding Scripture and advancing in the knowledge of Reformed truth.

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# What Is Home Without a Mother?

The title of this article, "What Is Home Without a Mother?" is the caption of a picture which hung in my grandparent's home when I was a child. The picture showed a mother and child, depicting tender, motherly love. As a child, I answered that question for myself many times. I loved my mother and grandmother, and when I would read the caption: "What Is Home Without a Mother?," my answer to the question would always be: "An empty house!"

At the time I was a child, children may have had the fear that their home could become an empty house through the death of their mother, but the fear of a child's home becoming an empty house through divorce or a mother's career or work outside the home was not even present for most children. God granted my prayer request as a child and spared the life of my mother so that I did not have to endure an empty house in my childhood. Many children today are experiencing loneliness in the feeling of an empty house, not due to death, as an act of God, but by an act of the mother, the father or both parents in choices for the mother to have a career or work outside the home and/or divorce.

Loneliness has become a definite reality for children in our present-day family life. Many families are smaller with a child possibly having no sibling of the same gender near in age and the mother being out of the home much through career, work outside the home, recreation, socializing and/or divorce. In the publication *Nexux* (February, 1993), a woman tells the story of how she became a lesbian and later found the Lord and was healed. I quote her paragraph describing her childhood in her story:

In my family there was Mom and Dad and my three brothers. I was the only girl and youngest in the family. Dad traveled and Mom was busy raising all the little kids. I was starving for female attention from my mom, but she was very busy. I was not sexually abused as a kid, raped or molested. My parents were not alcoholic and were married thirty-one years before my mom died. I like guys and always have. So my upbringing was somewhat normal by society standards. But my life lacked one thing that I desired more than anything. I wanted and needed some sisterly, motherly, female companionship and love. At sixteen I set out to find it. Surely I would be satisfied in life then.

The above paragraph illustrates the important role of a mother in a child's life. Children need the security, stability, interaction, companionship, the love and the consistent discipline and guidance of a mother in their lives. Many schedules both of parents and children are so hectic that even though most often children's physical needs are being taken care of, children suffer emotionally from

the tenseness of racing with time between the schedules of their parents and their own and being left again and again with babysitters, day care workers, siblings, father or alone, all of which can feel like a home without a mother—Mom's not there. A frequent "empty house" feeling for a child can become an emotional problem for an adult.

I recall one mother saying: "I don't claim to be a good mother, but I am there." Much of the argument used today for "quality time" has little weight with the "empty house" feeling. Quantity time with children is the greatest factor in removing the "empty house" feeling.

Mothers who leave children today to follow what women will even claim as a calling, a need for self esteem, a need for more money or the desire for a career, often leave their children for others to instruct, care for and fill the child's time. With the time taken out of the day or week for work, it often leaves the mother less patient, less willing with the hours left in the day or the week to have time and take time pleasantly and without frustration for her children, spouse and home. When Mom is home, if she has so many duties to perform, the child still may feel lonely and a burden. Continual extreme busyness easily gives to others a feeling of isolation and separation and brings on restlessness and uneasiness. A very busy person through body language—fast speech, fast movements, hurrying and scurrying and telling all of his/her "did's and must do's" gives the unspoken message: "Don't take too much of my time. My time is too valuable for that!" I appreciate visiting the Amish people in Indiana for their priority of time for people rather than living in a dither in pursuit of things and

activities. Perhaps we could learn from them in this important area.

"What Is Home Without a Mother?" It sounds lonesome and morbid, doesn't it? Mothers, value your calling from God. The only possession God has given you on this earth that can go with you or follow you to heaven is your children. *God has given you a work with eternal value.*

In my autograph book which I had as a child my mother wrote the following verse (author unknown) to me:

*"May those pearly gates of heaven  
So far beyond the sea,  
Open wide one day, my darling,  
To welcome you and me."*

My mother has entered the joy of heaven. One day by God's grace I will follow her there. She was a full-time mother for which I am thankful. She gave us loving quantity and quality time by giving of herself to be our caretaker, companion and teacher so that her children neither in childhood nor adolescence had to experience a "home without a mother."



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# A Plea for Synod 1995 to Follow the Church Order

by Daniel Brouwer

A number of overtures will be brought to Synod 1995 to open all the offices of the church to women. I hope the delegates to Synod 1995 will carefully weigh the requirements of the Church Order as they consider these overtures. The requirements of the Church Order for revising (changing) previous decisions may easily get lost in all of the contentions and controversies surrounding last year's decision.

Although I do not want these contentions to result in losing sight of the Church Order's requirements, it may be helpful to very briefly examine the merits of two commonly heard objections to the 1994 decision.

## *That Controversial Little Word — "Clear"*

I think it is fair to assume that Synod 1994 meant exactly the same thing by the word "clear" that Report 31 and Synod 1993 meant by it. Both report 31 and Synod 1993 said, "There is no clear and unquestionable testimony of Scripture to compel the church to prohibit women in their equality in Christ from church office in all times, places, and circumstances."<sup>1</sup> In saying this, Synod 1993 was implying that only clear teaching of Scripture can compel people to act contrary to their own ideas of what is right.

Synod 1994 agreed with that implication, but disagreed on the question of whether such Scriptural teaching exists. Synod 1994 decided that *there is indeed Scriptural teaching that legitimately compels people to act contrary to what they may otherwise think is right in this matter.*<sup>2</sup> Since Synod 1993 demanded more than "apparent" Scriptural teaching to justify not changing Article 3, Synod 1994 was, in some sense, *compelled* to characterize such teaching as "clear."<sup>3</sup>

I think people read far too much into this little word when they imagine that Synod 1994 meant to imply by it that a synodical decision is going to result in complete agreement on what Scripture teaches about women in office. That is obviously not the case. I think it is fair to assume that most (if not all) of the delegates to Synod 1993 and Synod 1994 had a firm grasp of this reality.

In spite of the obvious fact that disagreement about whether or not Scripture permits women in all the offices is sure to continue, Synod 1993 and 1994 agreed that whether or not Article 3 should be changed depends on whether or not Scripture permits women in all the offices. One synod answered the question of Scriptural teaching one way, the other synod answered it the opposite way.<sup>4</sup> *The mere fact that some people disagree with the answer of Synod 1994 does not mean that Synod 1994 was working with an unreformed view of Scripture.*

## ARE THESE GROUNDS "UNREFORMED"?

The charge has been made repeatedly in the past year that the grounds for the 1994 decision are "unreformed" — that they give evidence of a "rationalist" or "fundamentalist" way of understanding Scripture. *Such a charge is much easier to make than it is to substantiate.* Unfortunately, some of the proponents of women in office too easily assume that anyone who understands the relevant Scripture passages differently than they do is reading Scripture with an unacceptable hermeneutic.

Most of our great grandparents would have thought that these grounds were so solid that they could hardly be debated. Does that mean that they were unreformed rationalists and fundamentalists? I think not.

It is just as unwarranted to assume that Synod 1994 had an "unreformed hermeneutic" when it decided not to change Church Order Article 3. In doing so, Synod 1994 merely adopted our grandparents' understanding of certain Scripture passages. Furthermore, it did this as a basis for continuing to do what Reformed churches have traditionally done for centuries in respect to women in office.

## DO FAULTY GROUNDS NECESSARILY REQUIRE A REVISED DECISION?

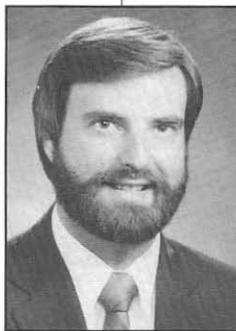
Without conceding that the 1994 grounds are seriously flawed, what would be the consequence if they were? Would that necessarily mean that the 1994 decision should not be allowed to stand?

There are many who seem to assume that the answer to that question is an unqualified "yes." However, that answer is not supported by the Church Order. Article 29 is perfectly clear about the conditions which require the revision of a previous decision, and there is no mention of the adequacy of the decision's grounds. *Notice that Article 29 places the burden of proof upon those who wish to change the decision.* Notice also that *exact nature of the proof required is very clearly spelled out.*

## Article 29

**Decisions of ecclesiastical assemblies shall be reached only upon due consideration. The decisions of the assemblies shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proved that they conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order.**

Article 29 requires that the decision be proved contrary to the Word of God or the Church Order. Disagreement with the *grounds* for a decision is different from proof that the *decision itself* conflicts with the Word of God. It is important to distinguish between the decision and its grounds, and to recognize that the grounds do not have the same binding status as the decision.



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This is rather easy to illustrate by looking at some things that happened at last year's synod. The morning after the decision not to ratify the change in Article 3, many of the delegates who were strongly in favor of women in office feared that they would not be allowed to understand the relevant texts differently than synod did when it made its decision. The resulting discussion on the floor of synod is recorded in Article 83 of the *Acts of Synod*.

A series of procedural questions and motions seeks clarification on the meaning and legitimacy of certain elements in the previous day's synodical actions.

The president of synod declares that no synodical delegate or officebearer is disallowed from serving in his office because he interprets Scripture texts differently than synod did in using these texts as a basis for its decision on Church Order Article 3.<sup>5</sup>

As this record indicates, synod interpreted certain Scripture texts "as its basis for its decision on Church Order Article 3."

The delegates could not make their decision without considering and interpreting relevant Scriptural teaching. The prevailing interpretation is recorded in the grounds.

This declaration by the president of synod implies that the grounds for the decision have a different status than the decision itself. It is important to notice that synod's interpretations of Scripture (i.e. the grounds) are not binding in the same way that the decision itself is.

Article 29 requires that the *decision* (not the grounds) either be accepted as "settled and binding," or proved contrary to the Word of God or the Church Order. *I hope that the delegates to Synod 1995 will clearly distinguish between personal indignation at the grounds for the 1994 decision, and substantive Biblical arguments against the decision itself.*

### NOT ADEQUATELY SUPPORTED BY SCRIPTURE OR CONTRARY TO SCRIPTURE?

Classis Grand Rapids East is sending an overture that argues that Synod 1994 did not adequately support its decision with Scripture.<sup>6</sup> *It is important to distinguish between the contention that synod did not adequately support its decision with Scripture, and the contention that Scripture militates against the decision.* Article 29 requires the latter. It requires more than proving that Scripture is *not a close enough friend* of the decision. It requires that those who seek to change the decision prove that Scripture is the *enemy* of the decision.

Because of the requirements of Article 29, Synod 1995 cannot legally revise the 1994 decision unless it is proved that *not* changing Church Order Article 3 "is contrary to the Word of God or the Church Order." The only way a decision not to change the Church Order can be "contrary to the Word of God" is if the Word of God *requires* that it be changed. If there is no compelling Biblical case that Church Order Article 3 *must* be changed (or if there is no evidence that the decision was made in violation of the Church Order), Article 29 requires that the decision must be considered "settled and binding."

In addition to Article 29, I hope that the delegates also seriously consider the requirements of Article 31.

### Article 31

**A request for revision of a decision shall be submitted to the assembly which made the decision. Such a request shall be honored only if sufficient and new grounds for reconsideration are presented.**

There has been a great deal of controversy over the correct understanding and application of Article 31. In the past few years quite a few overtures have been brought to synod, charging that the Synods of 1990 and 1993 violated this article.

Synod 1994 said that the Synod of 1993 violated Article 31 when it revised the 1992 decision.<sup>7</sup> However, Dr. Henry De Moor, the seminary's Professor of Church Polity, spoke to the Synod of 1993 during its deliberations and led the delegates to believe that synod would not be acting contrary to Article 31 if it revised the 1992 decision. So we now have a Church Order article which

is interpreted and applied in contradictory ways by synod and by our Professor of Church Polity.

Last year Classis Minnesota South brought an overture asking synod to "clarify" Article 31.<sup>8</sup> I was on the advisory committee that dealt with the matter. We recommended that synod not accede to the overture, largely on the advice of our faculty advisor (who had been in close contact with Dr. De Moor). He assured us that Article 31 is sufficiently clear in its present form. Synod 1994 decided not to modify Article 31, one of its grounds being, "The overture does not demonstrate that Articles 29 and 31 are sufficiently ambiguous to warrant additional clarification."<sup>9</sup>

I hope my explanation of Article 31 does not muddy these clear waters.

Notice that Article 31 speaks of two different things — "revision" and "reconsideration." Before the decision of any synod can be revised by a following synod, *that following synod must first decide to reconsider it.* In other words, before Synod 1995 can change the 1994 decision, *it must first decide to open up the question to be discussed again.* After synod decides to reconsider the decision, synod then takes up the next and separate matter of whether or not to change it. This is exactly the procedure that Synod 1993 used when it decided to revise the 1992 decision.<sup>10</sup>

Article 31 requires that synod honor a request for revision only if "sufficient and new grounds for reconsideration are presented." *This is a restriction on the first question that Synod 1995 will face. It may decide to "reconsider" the 1994 decision (open up the decision for discussion and possible change) only if "sufficient and new" grounds are presented.*

When are grounds for reconsideration "sufficient and new"? Although different answers have been given to that question in recent years, Synod 1994 (as we have seen) decided that the phrase does not need to be clarified with an official definition.

Nonetheless, applying this rule requires that we have some working definition of this phrase. I think that the

*"It requires that those who seek to change the decision prove that Scripture is the enemy of the decision."*

meaning of the phrase is indeed rather obvious. *New* means "previously unconsidered." *Sufficient* means "of such a nature as to call into question whether or not the decision is contrary to the Word of God or the Church Order."

Article 31 is saying, in effect, that synod may not reconsider the decisions of previous synods unless there is reason to believe 1) that the assembly which made the decision failed to consider something relevant; and 2) there is a substantial possibility that considering the matter again in the light of these new considerations may reveal that the decision is in conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order, and so result in change. The first condition is another way of saying that the ground for reconsideration is "new." The second condition is another way of saying that the ground for reconsideration is "sufficient."

Both conditions are important. If there is no real likelihood that the decision will not be proved to be in conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order, then why waste time and energy reconsidering it? After all, Article 29 requires that it be "considered settled and binding" unless it is in conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order.

Furthermore, if a previous synod already considered a whole set of issues, and decided on the basis of these considerations that the decision was not in conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order, then why believe that a *different* synod, considering the *same* issues, would decide that the decision is in conflict with the Word of God or the Church Order?

Of course, one might possibly hope that, at *this* synod, a sufficient number of delegates will see the issue in the "right way." Unfortunately, in that case nothing would ever be "settled and binding." If those who disagreed with a decision could forever require the assembly to consider the same thing over and over again, no doubt they would do so until the assembly decided the issue according to their liking. Furthermore, those who had agreed with the *first* decision could then ask for the *revised* decision to be reconsidered, in the hope that, *this* time around, the *re-revised* decision would be to their liking.

Article 31 is intended to give a certain *flexibility* — a flexibility that comes from the recognition that human assemblies are fallible, that they may consequently "miss something" as they make a decision; and furthermore, that in doing so they might decide something in a way which is contrary to God's Word or the Church Order. In such a case, the decision can be changed.

Article 31 is also intended to give a certain *stability* — a stability that comes from recognizing that the assemblies made their decisions with the "due consideration" required by Article 29; and, consequently (unless their consideration was so incomplete that they may have inadvertently violated God's Word or the Church Order) the decision stands.

## IS IT "NEW"?

This means, for example, that an overture that argues on the basis of conscience to revise the decision of Synod 1994 may not be honored unless it is *substantively different from conscience-based arguments that have been considered previously*. There were three overtures before Synod 1994 (Overtures 22 — 24)<sup>11</sup> that asked that Church Order Article 3 be changed. All three appealed to conscience.

Overture 22, in ground "6," states: "Congregations that feel conscience bound to ordain women to the offices and to remain loyal to denominational decisions will be placed in an untenable position by another delay."

Overture 23, in ground "B," states: "Where Christians conscientiously and in good faith disagree and the matter cannot be settled definitively by Scripture or Christian principle, freedom must be allowed."

Overture 24, in ground "4," states: "To delay ratification of this change further may well bind the consciences of members and

churches for whom opening all the offices to women presents a positive contribution to their faith and life."

Synod 1994 declared that the decision not to ratify the proposed change in Church Order Article 3 is its answer to Overtures 21-24.<sup>12</sup> This declaration implies that synod had considered the question of conscience as it was raised by these three overtures; and, in spite of such considerations, decided not to ratify the change in Article 3.

There are overtures coming to synod this year that argue that conscience is a reason to change Church Order Article 3. Their arguments may or may not be substantively different than arguments that have been considered previously. If they are not *substantively different*, then they are not new, and Article 31 requires that a request for revision based on them shall not be honored. The matter should not even be opened up for discussion on the floor of synod until *new* considerations are presented.

Any grounds for reconsideration which are substantively the same as previously presented arguments are not "sufficient and new." Thus, the following assertion (among others) would not be acceptable to justify reconsideration of the 1994 decision:

Study of this issue for almost a quarter century has shown that, while Reformed Christians can and do disagree about some texts, nothing in Scripture definitively excludes women from any of the ecclesiastical offices (Overture 23, Ground "A")<sup>13</sup>

Synod already considered the fact that sincere Christians disagree about certain relevant texts and was not persuaded by this consideration to draw the conclusion that "nothing in Scripture definitively excludes women from any of the ecclesiastical offices." Synod concluded that Scripture does in fact forbid what many think it doesn't forbid, and on that basis decided not to ratify the change in Article 3. This ground has been considered and rejected. Thus, future grounds that are substantively the same as this one are not new.

"Article 31 is intended to give... flexibility... stability..."

## IS IT "SUFFICIENT"?

So far we have applied only one of the required preconditions for reconsideration, and there are two. The second condition is that the ground for reconsideration must be *sufficient*. The following ground not only fails the test of being new (since it was presented last year), it also fails the test of being sufficient.

To delay ratification of this change further may well increase confusion and disunity in the church (Overture 24, Ground "3").<sup>14</sup>

The operative definition of "sufficient" in Article 31 is (as I have offered it), "of such a nature as to call into question whether or not the decision is contrary to the Word of God or the Church Order." *Speculation about what may or may not cause confusion and disunity in the church does not, in and of itself, call into question whether a particular decision is contrary to God's Word or the Church Order.*

Evaluating the potential for confusion and disunity in the church is a matter of judgment. *In the judgment of Synod 1994, the best way to avoid confusion and disunity in the church was to make the decision it did.*

Of course, "second-guessing" synod's judgment is a very common thing in the life of the church, and sometimes necessary. However, the only "second-guessing" that synod may honor with a reconsideration of its decision is the "second guessing" which calls into question whether or not synod's decision is contrary to the Word of God or the Church Order. That is what Article 31 means when it requires that the grounds for reconsideration be "sufficient."

In summary, Article 31 requires the delegates to Synod 1995 to ask themselves two questions: (1) Does this request for revision contain grounds that synod has not considered before? (2) Does this request for revision contain grounds that raise the possibility that synod may have acted contrary to the Word of God or the Church Order when it decided not to ratify the change in Article 3? Reconsideration and revision of the 1994 decision is in accord with Article 31 only if the answer to both questions is "yes."

## FOLLOWING THE CHURCH ORDER IS GOOD FOR THE CHURCH

Obviously, not everyone thinks that the 1994 decision is a good decision. But if lack of unanimous agreement means a decision should be called into question, then practically every decision an assembly makes is suspect!

This long conflict will never end if we keep making the same arguments over and over again (which is what Article 31 forbids). No conflict will ever be resolved if everyone insists that the matter is never finally decided until they have prevailed (which is what Article 29 forbids). Although no decision is beyond correction, the decisions of the assemblies are required to stand *unless* and *until* they are corrected according to the provisions of the Church Order.

These two Church Order articles are designed to protect the primary authority of God's Word in the life of the church, as well as the secondary authority of the church's assemblies. The church will not fare very well if either of these authorities are broken down through careless disregard of the rules that are designed to protect them. Running roughshod over the Church Order is not likely to result in order in the church.

## FOOTNOTES

1. 1993 Acts of Synod, p. 596.
2. See Ground "g," 1994 Acts of Synod, p.516.
3. See Ground "b," 1994 Acts of Synod, p.514.
4. It must be noted here that Synod 1993 made a provisional decision to change the Church Order — one that required ratification by the following synod. Synod 1994 made a decision which *does not need to be ratified* by a following synod. Synod 1994 closed the question that Synod 1993 opened.
5. 1994 Acts of Synod, p. 517.
6. It seems that during the past year Classis Grand Rapids East has adopted a higher standard than it had previously for what amounts to adequate Scriptural support for a Church Order decision. In its overture to Synod 1994 (cf. 1994 Agenda, p. 282), Classis Grand Rapids East asked synod to ratify the 1993 decision to change Article 3. Classis declared in its first ground, "Biblical grounds for this decision have been provided for synod and have been adopted by synod (Acts of Synod 1993, p. 596)." It is helpful to actually go back and see what Synod 1993 did when it adopted its "Biblical grounds." Synod 1993 opened the offices to women and declared, "This action is permitted by Scripture." Then it tells us to see Report 31 and two other past study reports, and quotes the summary conclusions of Report 31. *The synods who first considered these three study reports were not persuaded by them to open all the offices of the church to women.* Synod 1993 seems to assume that if we actually went back and looked at these reports today, we would draw *different conclusions* from them than did the synods who first considered them. *Why* we would do that, or *why* we should do it, the Synod of 1993 does not explain. We are just supposed to take synod's word for it. If that method of Scripturally supporting a decision about the Church Order was acceptable to Classis Grand Rapids East following the Synod of 1993, then it is obvious that Classis Grand Rapids East is now applying quite a different standard to Synod 1994.
7. See Ground "e", 1994 Acts of Synod, p. 515.
8. 1994 Agenda, pp. 240-241.
9. 1994 Acts of Synod, p. 487.
10. 1993 Acts of Synod, p. 595-598.
11. 1994 Agenda, pp. 282-285.
12. 1994 Acts of Synod, p.518.
13. 1994 Agenda, p. 284.
14. 1994 Agenda, p. 284.

*"Article 31 requires the delegates to Synod 1995 to ask themselves two questions..."*

## Why is *The Banner* so Negative?

W. Robert Godfrey

In January 1994 John Suk began his tenure as editor of *The Banner* (the weekly periodical of the Christian Reformed Church) with an apparent commitment to a positive spirit. The format of *The Banner* was reworked to make it look more contemporary. The new graphics were intriguing.

The new *Banner* also focused on the churches and their stories. More pages were given over to news from local CRC congregations and to news about a variety of denominations around the world. I worried that theological instruction in *The Banner* would suffer, but reminded myself that I must not be too negative.

New names appeared as authors in *The Banner*. I thought that this might mean a greater range of opinion would be represented - something beyond the confines of Classis Grand Rapids East. But several of the new names came from mainline churches. My negative feelings began to surface again.

Regular editorials on the importance of unity and love appeared from the pen of John Suk. Unity and love are important themes, especially in a divided denomination. But it seemed most of the editor's examples of failures of love and unity came from the actions of conservatives in the CRC. Are we conservatives the only negative ones?

Conservatives certainly can be negative and probably are too often. But I have been amazed at the number of negative articles and editorials that have appeared in *The Banner* under the new editor. The negative articles are especially strange in light of the lead article published on May 9, 1994 entitled, "Criticism Never Helps." But the editor has felt free to criticize many features of the CRC.

*The Banner* has criticized historic Reformed worship (May, 16, 1994, October 17, 1994, November 17, 1994). "Traditional" worship has been criticized and contemporary worship largely praised. Drama, dance, worship on another day than Sunday, and minimal use and exposition of Scripture have been seen as legitimate. Most worship issues have been described as a matter of style. No serious engagement with the full, historic Reformed reflection on worship has taken place.

Worship today in many parts of the American church (both in traditional and contemporary services!) has become theatrical, self-indulgent, sensuous and sentimental. We need a vigorous reassertion of the theocentric, Word-filled, simple, spiritual worship of our Reformed heritage, and more importantly of the Bible. We need a clarion call to study the Bible carefully to discover anew what pleases God in worship. *The Banner* has not helped.

*The Banner* has criticized pastors functioning as counselors (December 5, 1994). Several items in this editorial were valid and helpful. But there were serious flaws in

his argument. The editor did not reflect on the value and need of pastors to co-operate with other professionals in an integrated way to insure that the Biblical message of morality and holiness is present in all the help that a suffering person receives. Nor did he reflect on the antithesis between Christianity and most of the counseling that goes on in our society. Secular and pseudo-Christian counseling that operates under the basic rubrics of self-esteem and self-fulfillment cannot be harmonized with a Christian vision of self-discipline and self-sacrifice.

*The Banner* has criticized the CRC Synod of 1994 and its decision on women in church office (July 4, 1994). The



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editor accused the synod of giving proof texts without following a redemptive-historical method of interpreting the Bible. He called for local option on this matter. But he offered no real engagement with the Biblical material on this subject. He did not admit in an honest way that this matter cannot be left to local option because of our classical and synodical organization as a church. He did nothing to uphold our synodical church government or advance the legitimate authority of the synod. He did not even present well the position of the synod. In matters such as this the church needs real instruction on the teaching of the Bible on church office and ecclesiology. But *The Banner* chose to be negative.

*The Banner* has criticized the CRC's stand on the inerrancy of Scripture (October 3, 1994). The editor tried to link the idea of inerrancy exclusively to one philosophical notion (Scottish Common Sense Realism). But inerrancy was taught before this philosophical tradition arose and continues to be

taught by those far from this tradition. The most important historical background to inerrancy is the massive assault on the truth and trustworthiness of the Bible that came from liberal Protestantism. These assaults were not just "disturbing" as the editor calls them, but were brutal attacks on the very heart of Christianity. Inerrancy has proved to be a useful touchstone of orthodoxy as the CRC synod reiterated as recently as 1979. If *The Banner* is really committed to the authority and reliability of the Bible, why is it negative about the long-standing commitment of the CRC to inerrancy?

*The Banner* has criticized the CRC Form of Subscription (March 13, 1995). In a "Soapbox" article, George Stob attacked the Form of Subscription arguing it should be eliminated because 1) it is not read, 2) it does not reflect the new insights of scholarship, 3) it not understood, 4) some do not agree with it, 5) some have perjured themselves in signing it, 6) it is not needed. The article is simply amazing. It really accuses many in the CRC of being forsworn and suggests that others cannot or will not understand the Form. It takes no account of the history of the Dutch Reformed churches which shows that every decline in orthodoxy is accompanied at last by a change in the Form of Subscription or that every renewal has led to a return to the Form of Subscription. The Form of Subscription is a crucial bulwark of our confessional integrity. Why would *The Banner* print such a negative, superficial attack on a treasure that has served the Dutch Reformed churches since 1619?

*The Banner* has criticized the confessional standards of the CRC (February 6, 1995). The editor argued that real confessions must "scramble from the heart to the tip of the tongue." (The mind did not seem to enter into the confessional process for him in any significant way.) Using that approach to confession, he argued that the *Belgic Confession* and the *Canons of Dort* should be abandoned. (Did the *Canons of Dort* ever spring to the tip of the tongue?) The CRC should keep the *Heidelberg Catechism* as "our confessional memory" since it "still works today." The CRC should also adopt the *Contemporary Testimony* of 1986 which is "widely accepted in the church." (Its wide acceptance certainly is not true in my experience, but perhaps I am being negative.)

The editor suggests that we need confessions that will speak to the issues raised by Muslims and Mormons. But the *Belgic Confession* and the *Canons of Dort* are much fuller on the Trinity, the work of Christ and salvation by grace alone than is the *Contemporary Testimony* and those topics are what Muslims and Mormons need to hear.

The editor suggests his proposed change will "touch off a church-wide examination of our confessional roots and a renewal of interest in being a confessional denomination today." But is it really likely that the CRC will be renewed in studying its confessional roots by eliminating those roots? Let us work for such a renewal by studying the marvelous confessions that we have. Our hearts will be warmed if our minds are engaged with these great works.

So why is *The Banner* so negative? Why has it criticized such a wide range of constitutive elements of the CRC? *The Banner* simply does not seem to understand or appreciate historic Reformed Christianity. Rather it has adapted itself to many of the prevailing fads, fashions and religious ideas of the contemporary American scene. Its analysis is often just a shallow, negative critique of great, historic Reformed doctrines and practices.

*The Banner's* approach borders on classic liberalism that insisted real Christianity was life, not doctrine. *The Banner* wants to celebrate the life of the church with news, stories and appeals for love, unity and evangelism. But the church rests on the truth of the gospel, painstakingly articulated in the historic confessions of the CRC. The confessions, the Form of Subscription, the Church Order, decisions of synod define the CRC as a church, yet each of those is attacked in *The Banner*. Not only is the basic character of the CRC attacked, but no space has been given to those who might defend our historic positions. There is no dialogue in *The Banner*, but rather recurring, destructive criticism.

*The Banner* must change if it is to serve the real needs of the CRC. We need Reformed truth, not negativism.

## Minnesota South Asks Synod to Disenfranchise Churches with Women Elders and Terminate Members from CRC Committees

PIPESTONE, Minn. RBPS — Acting on an overture from Luverne (MN) Christian Reformed Church, Classis Minnesota South submitted a three-part overture to Synod 1995 that would ban churches with women elders from sending delegates to synod, ban members of those churches who agree with their church decision from serving on denominational boards and committees, and ban Classis Grand Rapids East from sending any delegates to synod until it rescinds its support for churches which have women elders.

The grounds for the overture, which classis adopted at its March 2 meeting, warned that "an officebearer of a church which does not follow the Church Order and the decisions of synod should not be allowed to share in making synodical decisions which other churches and their officebearers are expected to follow."

The first part of the overture banning delegates from churches with women elders passed unanimously. Much of the discussion noted that the overture was more moderate than other overtures urging stronger action against churches in ecclesiastical disobedience.

"I think this is the kind of action we should be taking," said Rev. Terry Genzink, pastor of Pipestone (MN) CRC. "I think it is a wise and rather moderate approach compared to others."

Rev. Eric Verhulst, pastor of Hull (ND) CRC, noted that supporting women in office was not the same as disobeying synod. "These actions are moderate attempts to deal with these churches," said Verhulst. "This particular overture is a response to the decisions of some churches to simply say we are going to do what we want and do our own thing, and that can't be tolerated."

The second part of the overture, however, met with some stiffer opposition. In its original form, it would not only have banned members of churches which agree with women in office from serving on denominational boards and committees, but also have banned such persons from being hired or continuing their employment with denominational agencies.

Genzink warned that the overture could create serious problems if it passed. "I called Gordon Van Harn, provost at Calvin College, and asked what effect this would have on their tenure policy, and he said it would be devastating," said Genzink. "Dr. Van Harn said it would result in us losing our accreditation with the accreditation agencies, all federal grants, and probably even result in us losing student aid funds."

"I also called Dr. Henry De Moor, the professor of church polity at our seminary, and he said it would produce a lawsuit from a terminated employee," said Genzink.

Following Genzink's speech, Verhulst moved to delete the language which would terminate employees but to retain the language terminating members of denominational boards and committees.

In the final form of the overture, which was adopted unanimously and sent on to synod, members of churches which have women elders are required to "send a letter to his (her) church council expressing disagreement with the council's violation of the Church Order, Article 3 and decisions of synod and send a copy of this letter to the Christian Reformed Church in North America Board of Trustees." In the absence of such a letter, the denominational board of trustees is to "terminate (or refuse to begin) this person's service on a denominational board or committee."

The third part of the overture fared even better; classis voted down an attempt to strike the specific reference to Classis Grand Rapids East and instead asked synod to "declare that Classis Grand Rapids East is not allowed to send delegates to the synod during the time that it continues its official decision made on September 15, 1994, not to fulfill the responsibilities assigned to it by Church Order Article 27b and 42b in dealing with its churches which have women elders."

The relevant Church Order citations address articles which require each classis to use its church visitors to ensure compliance with denominational decisions.

In a later interview, Elder Ken Vos, a member of the Luverne congregation which submitted the overture, said he was pleased the overtures met with widespread support from delegates. "We are concerned about the unity of the church," said Vos. "The concern is that if we stand back and allow people to defy synod, we will lose our unity."

*Darrell Todd Maurina, Press Officer  
Reformed Believers Press Service*

## A New Approach to Women in Office: Classis Grand Rapids East Asks Synod to Allow Women Elders, Ministers in Local Churches but Permit Classes to Ban Women Delegates

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. RBPS — No observers who are familiar with the Christian Reformed denomination could have been surprised that Classis Grand Rapids East decided at its January 19 meeting to send overtures to synod regarding women in office. Women in office has long been an issue for a classis in which six of 15 churches have disobeyed synod by electing women elders. The sheer volume of paperwork, however, may be a surprise: after plowing through fifty pages of documentation with the aid of a classical ad hoc committee on women in office, Classis Grand Rapids East voted to send a 23 page overture to synod.

First on the agenda, however, was a proposal to answer communications from Seymour CRC and Shawnee Park CRC objecting to Classis Grand Rapids East's July 21 decision "in principle" to "permit its individual churches to decide whether or not the word 'male' in Article 3a of the Church Order is operative in their particular settings." Classis unanimously adopted the ad hoc committee's proposal to "note the objections raised by these churches and declare they were met by the actions classis took in September." The September decision referenced by the motion was a declaration that "recognizing synod's legal right to insist on the retention of the word 'male' in Church Order Article 3a, [classis] nevertheless acknowledges its congregations' moral right of conscientious objection (with any attendant consequences) to that insistence with respect to the office of elder."

*"...if we stand  
back and allow  
people to defy  
synod, we will  
lose our unity."*

## Banner of Truth

The 1995 USA Ministers Conference sponsored by Banner of Truth will be held at Messiah College, Grantham, Pennsylvania, May 23-25, 1995.

Speakers and their Subjects are as follows:

Irfon Hughes	Christ's Comforts and Christ's Challenge
Sinclair Ferguson	The Ministry of the Spirit
Ray Lanning	Application in Preaching
Iain Murray	C.H. Spurgeon and Hyper-Calvinism
Joey Pipa	The Work of Ruling Elders The Training of Ruling Elders

Registration information may be obtained by contacting:

Conference Secretary, P.O. Box 621, Carlisle, PA 17013

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Classis then forwarded to synod an official protest by Eastern Avenue CRC which "informs synod of its disagreement with the decision of 1994 and communicates that it cannot in good conscience discontinue the terms of office of those women elected and presently serving as elder, nor can it close the offices to women in the future." Since Eastern Avenue CRC did not specifically ask for classical endorsement, the classis unanimously followed the committee recommendation to simply note the protest and forward it to synod without comment.

However, a committee recommendation blending overtures from Neland Avenue CRC and First CRC met with considerably more opposition and was finally replaced by the original Neland Avenue overture.

Delegates to synod differed on whether the committee report or the Neland Avenue overture was more pastoral. "We thought our document was a respectful tone of presentation, but the revised document without the foundational material makes it more strident," said Dr. Andrew Bandstra, a retired Calvin Seminary professor and president of the Neland Avenue council. Rev. Morris Greidanus, pastor of First CRC and a member of the ad hoc committee, received laughs when he told the delegates that "we thought we took the stridency out of Neland."

The key issue in dispute between the two reports was that the original Neland Avenue overture included different guidelines for implementation of women in office, along with a provision whereby each classis and synod could adopt a provision banning delegation of women to its meetings for up to a three year period. While the three year ban could be renewed an indefinite number of times, any classis which failed to initially adopt a ban on women elders or allowed a previously adopted ban to expire would not be able to renew the ban at a later date. By contrast, the revised overture asked for

immediate ratification of women in office without the one-year ratification process and argued that synod does not need to wait one year before ratifying Church Order changes which have been discussed for a number of years. Waiting in the wings was another overture from Woodlawn CRC, also intended as a compromise approach to minimize offense to conservatives while allowing

women to serve at least some Christian Reformed congregations. The Woodlawn overture, citing certain precedents in Christian Reformed history, would have allowed classes, by way of exception, to authorize women in office on the regional level.

While both Bandstra and Greidanus sought to reach the broad middle of the denomination, others said the time had come for decisive action. "We have been for twenty years here in the wilderness on this thing. Are we going to be in the wilderness another twenty years?" asked retired Calvin College professor Rev. Clarence Vos, a member of Neland Avenue and of the ad hoc committee. "No one is being compelled to make women deacons, elders, or anything like that; that is the monstrous arrogance of 1994. I say let's enter the promised land right away!"

However, Dr. Henry De Moor, Calvin Seminary professor of church polity and chairman of the ad hoc committee, strongly warned classis against hasty actions and called attention to his officially recorded res-

ervations about the committee report.

"I've had the personal conviction for many, many years that justice must be done on this issue; however, I did detect in the Neland Avenue overture a spirit of persuading the rest of the church," said De Moor. "If this church, this denomination, continues to move toward polarization, much will be destroyed in the way of local ministry, classical and denominational ministry, on the way to justice."

## Editors' Response

We should not be deceived by the "softsell" approach of the Neland Avenue overture. The "nuts and bolts" of the overture asks for a change in Church Order Article 3a to open the offices of minister and elder to women - nothing new. To soften the impact of this decision on the conservatives in the church, the overture offers classical and synodical option to ban women delegates to the meetings of these bodies. But there are limits: the ban is to be for only three years. It may be renewed, BUT if a body (classis or synod) 1) fails to *initially adopt* a ban, then a ban cannot be adopted later; 2) if a ban is allowed to *lapse* (even if inadvertently), it can *never* be renewed. These are the terms of the "truce" which Neland Avenue CRC and now Classis Grand Rapids East is offering the church. But if this is adopted, who has won the war? It's only a matter of time before a synod fails to initiate or renew the ban, or classes one by one fail to initiate the ban or forget to renew it, and women in office will be intact denomination-wide.

Not only are the *limits* attached to this overture unacceptable, but the overture itself is *completely flawed*: 1) it seeks to *negotiate* a Scriptural matter without the use of Scriptural grounds; 2) it fails to recognize the fact that Synod 1994 *settled* the matter after twenty plus years, and *it is finished*. If the pushers for women in office are not satisfied to live with last year's decision (which is in accord with the Scriptures, with the practice of the CRC its entire history, and with Christendom the past 2000 years), there are other options for them. There are other church fellowships which will welcome them. Why should they be allowed to destroy the rest of us?

The Editors

In his written reservations, De Moor also noted that "to ask Synod 1995 for immediate implementation may well be interpreted as an act of impatience and intolerance similar to that inherent in the decision of Synod 1994. The Neland Avenue overture, unrevised, has a greater chance of being perceived as a prophetic, yet pastoral, attempt to persuade on the basis of the text of Scripture."

A number of delegates came to De Moor's side in the issue, particularly voicing his concern about suggesting that synod could immediately ratify women in office without waiting for ratification by a subsequent synod. "In the mind of the broader church, there is a two year process," said Rev. Carl Kammeraad of Neland Avenue CRC. "To remove that process suddenly and say, wow, you were wrong all these years, there doesn't need to be a ratification process, you talk power politics and in your face; that is what people will think."

"We all agree that the promised land is a goal," said Rev. Peter Jonker of Woodlawn CRC. "People who are

already against this will view this as a violent wrenching and dig in their heels."

Dr. Peter Borgdorff, CRC Executive Director of Ministries and president of the Shawnee Park CRC council, also expressed his concern that the classis not be perceived as moving in a radical direction. "One of the real difficulties is in the way we have lost the art of deliberating," said Borgdorff. "We have increasingly seen people come to synod with their minds made up."

"Classis Grand Rapids East is increasingly being perceived as one of those poles," said Borgdorff, noting that Classis Illiana "voted just recently to send an overture not to seat our delegates no matter who we sent to synod."

At the end of the debate, Classis Grand Rapids East voted by a 14 to 11 margin to defeat the revisions proposed by the committee report and subsequently adopted the original overture by Neland Avenue.

Darrell Todd Maurina, Press Officer  
Reformed Believers Press Service

## Classis Wisconsin Overtures Board of Trustees to Unseat Classis Grand Rapids East for Ecclesiastical Disobedience

KENOSHA, Wis. (March 15, 1995) RBPS — Classis Wisconsin became the CRC's fourth classis to call for disciplinary action against churches with women elders when it passed a motion on March 14 asking the CRC Board of Trustees to "rule that delegates from Classis Grand Rapids East be given the privilege of the floor, but be denied the privilege of voting on all matters before synod until such time as Classis Grand Rapids East complies with the decisions of synod on this matter."

Most delegates to Classis Wisconsin strongly supported the overture — including some regarded as moderates on the women in office issue. "Now that these people have started to become impatient, it has become a matter of conscientious objection and some of these people are willing to split the church over this," said Rev. Clifford Bajema, a key architect of a Classis Wisconsin overture which led to the 1992 synodical decision allowing women to "teach, expound the Word of God, and provide pastoral care" without ordination.

"I respect the principles of these people, but in taking this position, you also have to be willing to take the consequences," continued Bajema. "We're in the midst of a political situation now; in the midst of that, Classis Grand Rapids East is not only making a *conscientious* statement but also a *political* statement."

A former minister of Classis Grand Rapids East came to the defense of the classis, however. "As someone who served in Classis Grand Rapids East for seven years, I object to the statement that Classis Grand Rapids East is letting churches do whatever they want," said Rev. Ed Laarman of Covenant CRC in Appleton. "They are not taking the Church Order lightly. What if the vote [on women in office] went the other way? Would we want classes with women officers to take this kind of discipline against, say, our classis?"

Despite opposition, the overture passed by a margin of 18 to 13 and will now be sent on to the CRC Board of Trustees for consideration.

According to CRC General Secretary Dr. David Engelhard, who also serves as secretary of the CRC Board of Trustees, the Classis Wisconsin request raises some procedural concerns.

"I haven't yet seen the overture and would want to study it more before speaking definitely, but the Board of Trustees has been very wary of asserting to itself any of the prerogatives of synod," said Engelhard. "Even if that were not true, the report of the Board of Trustees is processed through an advisory committee as with all other reports of denominational committees. I'm not sure the synod has ever acted to give the Board of Trustees special status."

Engelhard also noted that the board had recently decided against adding members to denominational study committees on the ground that only synod had the right to do so.

If the delegates from Classis Wisconsin — who include the author of the overture — choose to press their case at synod, the first items of business may be crucial. Scheduled to be convened in Grand Rapids on June 13 by Rev. Cal Bolt of Twelfth Avenue CRC in the Grand Rapids suburb of Jenison, Synod 1995's first item of business will be to elect its permanent officers — a task which assumes that synod has determined which delegates have presented proper credentials and are entitled to be seated. Bolt's role in reading the roll of delegates, declaring synod to be officially constituted, and presiding until officers are elected — normally a procedural formality — may become a hotly disputed item at this year's synod.

Darrell Todd Maurina, Press Officer  
Reformed Believers Press Service

## Classis Hudson: Remove Churches with Women Elders from Christian Reformed Denomination, Effective Immediately

(March 6, 1995) RBPS — Classis Hudson has submitted the strongest overture yet asking Synod 1995 to discipline Christian Reformed congregations "refusing to remove women from authoritative office and to change their practice of ordaining women into authoritative office." At its January 19 meeting, the classis adopted an overture with regard to churches which would "adopt a policy, effective immediately, that all members of such congregations not be allowed to function as synodical delegates, synodical deputies, members of denominational boards or committees, or classical delegates" and "declare that all churches which refuse to submit to the urging of Synod 1994 be declared outside the CRC and removed from the official registry of the Christian Reformed Church of North America effective immediately."

In the grounds for the overture, Classis Hudson declares that "strong action by synod is legitimate," noting a number of prior precedents in which synod disciplined local congregations for ecclesiastical disobedience.

"The widespread abuse of the Church Order in the CRC and the refusal of classes to respond appropriately makes a denominational response imperative," the overture continues. "Failure to respond to violations of Church Order Article 3 will render the authority of Synod null and void. Our denominational unity will be broken and congregationalism will replace it. 'In those days Israel had no king, everyone did as he saw fit' (Judges 21:25)."

According to Rev. Casey Freswick, pastor of Newton (NJ) CRC which submitted the overture to synod, the intention of classis was simply to ask synod to be consistent with its prior discipline of conservative churches. "Classis Hudson, in principle, has already operated with this in a situation I found inappropriate where we gave only two weeks notice to Messiah's Congregation; I disagreed with the application, but not with the principle," said Freswick.

Why ask synod to immediately expel all congregations with women elders rather than taking a less drastic approach or allowing another year before expulsion of the churches? "It's the only consistent next step," said Freswick. "Not only do we believe the Bible with words, but with deeds. If we have any kind of denominational covenant that means anything, those who are violating the denominational covenant on this kind of issue, they can't remain."

Freswick also noted that much more than women in office is at stake. "If you fail to act in this area, you have failed to exercise the keys of the kingdom," said Freswick.

Rev. LeRoy Christoffels, pastor of Preakness (NJ) CRC, said the overture passed by a wide voice vote margin despite its militant language. "The problem we felt as a classis is that these churches were obviously disobedient and flagrantly so," said Christoffels. "I suspect there will be a lot of pressure to draw the process out."

"Synod, having made up its mind, should stick to it," said Christoffels.

*Darrell Todd Maurina, Press Officer  
Reformed Believers Press Service*

## Lake Erie: Allow Immediate Implementation of Church Order Changes Proposed by Synod

TOLEDO, Ohio (March 8, 1995) RBPS — Firing the opening salvo in what may prove to be a heated debate, Classis Lake Erie submitted a twelve page overture arguing that synod has never officially adopted and should not use the practice of requiring that all Church Order changes made by one synod be ratified by a subsequent synod.

Instead, the classis argues that the proper interpretation of the Christian Reformed Church Order would allow synod to act on changes which were proposed by a study committee reporting to that synod without submitting the change to a subsequent synod for ratification. The overture also asks synod to declare that "if a proposed change not adopted by one synod is still part of the ongoing discussion, it need not be proposed a second time before another synod adopts it since the churches and classes have had prior opportunity to consider its advisability."

Unlike almost all other Reformed and Presbyterian denominations, the CRC does not have a clear-cut and unambiguous process by which changes proposed by the denomination's broadest assembly are ratified by a subsequent assembly or by a majority of the classes or presbyteries. The lack of a clear ratification procedure dates back to the Church Order first adopted by the Synod of Dort in 1619, which was intended to be amended only on rare occasions and remained unchanged for almost two centuries. Article 95 of the original Dort Church Order, a provision retained by the CRC in a slightly modified form until 1965, stated that "these Articles, relating to the lawful Order of the Churches, have been so drafted and adopted by common consent, that they, if the profit of the Churches demand otherwise, may and ought to be altered, augmented, or diminished. However, no particular Congregation, Classis, or Synod shall be at liberty to do so, but they shall show all diligence in observing them, until it be otherwise ordained by the General, or National Synod." After adopting a modified form of the Dort Church Order at its organization in 1857, the Christian Reformed synod made only a few changes in the Church Order until a revised Church Order was adopted in 1965.

The only relevant language in the current Christian Reformed Church Order is Article 47, stating that "the task of synod includes the adoption of the creeds, of the Church Order, of the liturgical forms, of the Psalter Hymnal, and of the principles and elements of the order of worship, as well as the designation of the Bible versions to be used in the worship services. No substantial alterations shall be effected by synod in these matters unless the churches have had prior opportunity to consider the advisability of the proposed changes." However, a Church Order Supplement adopted by Synod 1979 stated

that "prior opportunity to consider the proposed change(s) by the churches is defined as 'the time between the adoption of the proposed change by one synod and its ratification by a following synod.'"

A general understanding exists in the Christian Reformed denomination that major changes in the Church Order are to be ratified by a subsequent synod, usually the synod held the year following the initial decision to make a Church Order change. The result has been that women in office was proposed by Synod 1990, not ratified by Synod 1992, proposed by Synod 1993, and again not ratified by Synod 1994. Frustration with the process led to a number of overtures to Synod 1993 calling for immediate ratification without a one year delay and despite the rejection of the proposals by the previous synod. Synod president Rev. Peter Brouwer ruled such proposals out of order at Synod 1993, but similar proposals are again being forwarded by a number of classes to Synod 1995.

Of all the proposals, Classis Lake Erie's is the most detailed. In eight pages of documentation, the classis tracked 88 changes and attempted changes made to items governed by Article 47 by 26 synods during the years following adoption of the 1965 revised Church Order to

the present. In its summary of the data, the classis notes that the first case of ratification occurred in 1974 and the process only became standard in 1982. The classis also notes that the same synod which defined the term "substantial alterations" and "prior opportunity" in 1989 gave immediate ratification to three Church Order changes proposed by Synod 1987 which Synod 1988 chose not to ratify.

"The use of the term 'ratification' has probably politicized the process described in Article 47 and contributed to its misunderstanding," the classis stated. "Ratification is a common term in the secular world. In United States constitutional law an amendment adopted by Congress must be ratified by state legislatures. The ecclesiastical equivalent of this procedure has been proposed and defeated frequently."

The classis also alleged that Article 47 "has been used in this way primarily because of the influence of one issue with which the church has wrestled since 1970, the issue of women in office."

As a result, Classis Lake Erie proposes to synod that the Article 47 supplement be revised to allow synod to immediately adopt any change in the Church Order made on the basis of a study committee report which is received

## Editors' Response

We want to respond to the statement of Dr. Clayton Libolt that the idea of ratification "has sort of snuck in by the back door" and "that is nowhere in the Church Order."

We point our readers to the *Manual of Christian Reformed Church Government* (1987 Revision by William P. Brink and Richard R. De Ridder), Article 47, 1b (p. 228): "Synod decided in 1979 'that Church Order Article 47 implies that whenever changes in the Creeds and/or substantial changes in the Church Order are made by synod, the churches shall be given adequate opportunity to consider the advisability of the changes before they are ratified by a following synod' (*Acts of Synod* 1979, p. 90). It should be noted that the decision of synod applies to *substantial* changes and not to minor changes which do not radically affect either the principle expressed in the article or its application to the life of the church." Note particularly the use of the word "ratified." Note also the use of the words, "substantial changes." Of the 88 incidents tracked by Classis Lake Erie, most, if not all, of the changes made without ratification were on minor matters. One could not possibly conceive of the women in office issue falling into that category.

We call further attention to the *Church Order Rules for Synodical Procedure* which was prepared by the office of the general secretary of the CRC in North America. It "incorporates the revisions adopted/ratified by the

Synod of 1990." It includes the following clarification of Article 47 (p. 52): "1.) A *substantial alteration* is defined as 'any alteration which changes the essential (or actual) meaning of the creeds and/or the articles of the Church Order...'; 2.) *Prior opportunity* to consider the proposed change(s) by the churches is defined as 'the time between the adoption of the proposed change by one synod and its ratification by a following synod.'"

The process of "ratification" is very clearly stated in these documents contrary to Dr. Libolt's claims. Further, the integrity and credibility of the synodical assembly would be seriously jeopardized by the adoption by Synod 1995 of the Classis Lake Erie overture regarding Article 47. If adopted, Church Order changes would (even those of major "substantial" proportions) "sneak in the back door." For example, the church, having been settled by the decision of 1994, would suddenly be informed, post Synod 1995, that "tables were turned" on the women in office issue and the Church Order had been irreversibly changed. What a betrayal that would be! No. 2 quoted in the above paragraph clearly requires a year notification of any impending change (and that for good reason) and the adoption of the overture from Classis Lake Erie would wipe that out. Beware of the Lake Erie proposal to change Article 47.

The Editors

by November 1 of the year before synod meets, but to submit all changes made on the basis of an overture or standing committee report in the synodical agenda to a following synod which will consider its advisability.

When the proposal was submitted to Classis Lake Erie, Dr. Clayton Libolt of River Terrace CRC in East Lansing, Michigan, made a brief presentation on its merits.

"That idea of ratification has come up many times at synod; that has always been rejected," said Libolt. "But the idea has sort of snuck in by the back door that you have to have one synod ratify the decisions of a previous synod. That is nowhere in the Church Order."

According to classical stated clerk Pastor George Vander Weit, the women in office issue was not the reason his classis submitted the overture on ratification to Synod 1995. "The intention is to address a number of problems that the church has experienced over the past few years with the ratification process because it has not been carefully thought out," said Vander Weit in a later interview.

However, the overture will definitely affect the women in office debate if it is adopted by synod. "What this means is when 1993 made the changes it made, it should have been able to implement those changes immediately. There was no need to require ratification by Synod 1994," said Vander Weit. "If Synod 1995 decides to revise Article 3 to allow women to serve in all the offices, there is no need for that to be resubmitted to 1996 for ratification."

Vander Weit also noted that the overture will affect only a very limited number of Church Order changes. "Most of the Church Order changes that come to synod come via overture and thus nothing will change in terms of what the church currently knows as the ratification process," said Vander Weit. "All of those changes that are proposed via overtures will go to another synod; one synod proposes and the following synod adopts. What we're saying also is in the case of study committees, the requirement of Article 47 for prior opportunity is fulfilled because the churches and classes have those already by November 1."

While the overture will undoubtedly be controversial at synod, it met with little controversy in Lake Erie and passed by a unanimous voice vote.

*by Darrell Todd Maurina, Press Officer  
Reformed Believers Press Service*

## Western Independent Churches Organize Regional Fellowship

CALGARY, Alberta (March 6, 1995) RBPS — Following up on a recommendation made by the Alliance of Reformed Churches, eight independent Reformed churches in western Canada met in Calgary, Alberta on February 3 and 4 to lay the groundwork for a regional fellowship.

The purpose of the fellowship, like those previously organized in Michigan and Ontario, is to serve as a vehicle for mutual accountability and assistance among churches in certain geographical areas. Mission projects, youth fellowship, pulpit exchanges, candidacy and ordination examinations, church visiting, and hearing of appeals are among the matters that could be brought to the meetings of these fellowships.

Called by Edmonton Orthodox Reformed Church in Alberta and hosted by Bethel Independent Christian Reformed Church in Calgary, participating churches included Telkwa and Agassiz from British Columbia, Winnipeg from Manitoba, and Neerlandia, Edmonton, Ponoka, Calgary and Lethbridge from Alberta. Churches in Lynnwood, Washington, Salem, Oregon, and Smithers, British Columbia were also invited. Although Smithers did not send representatives, the church did express its desire to be part of the fellowship. A newly formed church in Abbotsford, British Columbia also sent greetings.

The business of organizing the fellowship took up Friday evening. The assembly organized on the basis of proposed articles of fellowship closely modeled after those approved by the Lake Michigan Regional Fellowship. It adopted as its formal name, "Western Regional Fellowship of Reformed Churches."

The majority of the meeting, however, involved a discussion of the proposed church order presented to the churches at the November 1994 meeting of the Alliance of Reformed Churches in Lynwood, Illinois.

A number of proposals included in the agenda became the subject of discussion. Proposals to change the church order included:

1. that Biblical principles of church government, supported by Scripture references, be incorporated into the body of the church order itself;
2. that the church order be arranged to reflect the fact that Scripture demands the existence of the local church and specified its government but that the federation of local churches does not have the same Scriptural warrant;
3. that the church order be less prescriptive in areas where there is no Biblical warrant. Examples cited were holding two worship services per Sunday, using the Three Forms of Unity in preaching, listing specific forms to be read for communion, and the preaching of preparatory and applicatory sermons;
4. that the role of the classis in the internal affairs of the church be modified;

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5. that the church order make clear that baptized, non-professing members of the congregation are subject to discipline;

6. that the church order contain no theological assertions that are not clearly taught in the confessions.

After a lengthy discussion focusing on proposal 3, delegates adopted a statement advising the church order study committee "to take a less prescriptive approach" and it was left up to individual churches to communicate specific concerns. The other proposals were adopted unanimously with little or no amendment.

Discussion also focused on the May 31 meeting called by Lynwood to discuss plans for federation. The consensus among the delegates was that that the meeting in May could be postponed until November of this year to save on the cost of travel.

Among other business, the churches made decisions regarding the provision of financial help for needy churches, accepted the offer of Rev. Theo Hoekstra of Neerlandia to produce sermons for reading services, and asked Trinity Reformed Church of Lethbridge to study the question of a Youth Convention or retreat in Western Canada.

by John Van Dyk, Managing Editor, Christian Renewal  
Reported by Rev. Dick Wynia

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## Classis Lake Erie Sends Forty Pages of Overtures to Synod

TOLEDO, RBPS — For many years, Classis Lake Erie of the Christian Reformed denomination has distinguished itself by detailed and lengthy overtures, generally addressing issues of concern to the "progressive" wing of the CRC. Not uncommonly, the extensively researched Classis Lake Erie overtures have become the foundation for positions later adopted by synod.

This year, Classis Lake Erie appointed committees of pre-advice, added additional hours to its March 3 agenda, and finally sent over forty pages of overtures to synod.

What positions will Synod 1995 adopt? If Classis Lake Erie has its way, those positions will include such items as the following:

- Rejecting the committee appointed to study feminine language for God because all ministers and theologians on the committee oppose that practice.
- Establishing a policy to ensure that committees have members "who reflect the gender, ethnic and racial diversity of our denomination and, where applicable, the range of opinion that exists in our denomination on a particular matter to be studied."
- Ending the CRC practice of having Church Order changes ratified by a subsequent synod.
- Revising the 1994 decision against women in office to allow women to serve immediately as ministers, elders and evangelists.

• Rejecting the recommendations of a study committee report which says that women exponents may not fill pulpits in the CRC.

In addition, Classis Lake Erie held an intensive debate on officially delegating deacons to its own classis, finally postponing action to its next meeting in October 1995 amidst concerns that the proposal would violate the Church Order.

Darrell Todd Maurina, Press Officer  
Reformed Believers Press Service



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