

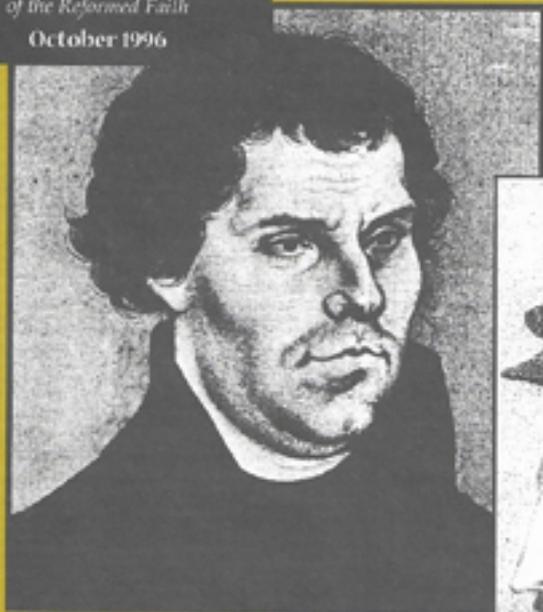
THE Outlook

*Devoted to the Exposition and Defense
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Luther &

Calvin



*On
Biblical
Interpretation*



Editorial

Luther and Calvin on Biblical Interpretation

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In the early 1520's Elector Fredrick the Wise commissioned Martin Luther to prepare a homily for each Sunday throughout the year. In one of his homilies for the Christmas season, Luther suggested a somewhat peculiar interpretation of Luke 2:16: "And they found both Mary and Joseph and the babe lying in the manger." Luther held that Mary is to be understood as representing the Christian church, whereas Joseph represents the bishops and pastors of the church.¹ Herein, Luther concluded that it is not a mistake that Mary is mentioned before Joseph since the church is more important than the hierarchy of the church, a position which Rome would detest in the early 1520's. Although Luther's understanding of Mary and Joseph may seem odd to us, it would not have been surprising to his listeners in the 1520's. He was using a method of interpreting Scripture which had a long tradition in the church. It was commonly referred to as the allegorical method. The allegorical method attempted to *search beneath the literal meaning of a text in order to find the true meaning of the text*. In the field of Biblical exegesis, its roots are usually traced to the famous Jewish exegete, Philo Judeaus of Alexandria (20 BC-40 AD), who, for example, thought it was utter nonsense to take the text in Genesis 2:8 literally which states: "God planted a garden in Eden." In Philo's estimation the meaning of the phrase, "God planted a garden in Eden," is to be understood as God implanting terrestrial virtue (implanting goodness) in the human race [Eden = virtue (goodness)].² In other words, allegorically speaking, the author of Genesis wrote one thing but intended something else by it; or to put it another way, the text presents a metaphor which requires a symbolic interpretation to understand its true and

hidden meaning. Therefore, allegory takes an event, person, or institution and dissolves it of its historical character, in order to find a hidden meaning behind an event, person, or institution. Whether you agree with the allegorical method of interpreting Scripture or not, you cannot overlook Philo's profound influence upon the fathers of the early church and the Middle Ages, making its mark even upon the reformer, Luther. But it goes even further: it is alive today! This same principle of allegory is found in many teachers and preachers of the Word of God today, including evangelicals and Calvinists. This principle is found in what I want to refer to as the spiritualizing, or moralizing of the text.

THE BIBLE AS MORAL LESSONS

Specifically, I would like to refer to the spiritual or moral principle of interpretation as "neo-practical mandate," which sees its purpose as providing practical insights that are *relevant* for man living in his contemporary surroundings. There is one common denominator for those who approach the text for the express purpose of gleaning its practical insights: one is to go *beyond* the literal-historical meaning of the text in order to find the relevant, or "real" meaning of the text for the people of God living in their particular situation today. Herein, the allegorical *principle* is at work. In other words, the real meaning of the text is found in timeless principles of practical living which the exegete can glean from the text. This approach is clearly endorsed by the popular works of Charles Swindoll. After he notes the story of Israel crossing the Red Sea, he states for his readers the application of the story: "Old Testament experiences

have modern day lessons. They pass on timeless truth from which we can learn."³ Swindoll proceeds to enlighten his readers concerning the "timeless truths" of the exodus; there are four: 1) "it takes tight places to break lifetime habits," 2) "when hemmed in on all sides, the only place to look is up," 3) "If the Lord is to get the glory, then He must do the fighting," 4) "'Red Seas' open and close at the Lord's command, not until."⁴ Such an understanding of "timeless truths" makes trivial the revelation of the event itself since the believer's continuity with the text is not found in the revelation-life of the narrative itself, but in the principle abstracted from the narrative for modern life. The text is merely a point from which to leap or jump off into the practical dictums of life.

THE REFORMERS RESPOND

If we reflect upon the two principle figures of the Reformation - Luther and Calvin - we will come to realize that although Luther eventually found this method of allegory distasteful, it was Calvin who strongly attacked the allegorical method of Biblical interpretation.

Calvin realized that the allegorical method was so popular in his day that he accused the church of being "addicted to allegories."⁵ In spite of its popularity, this did not prevent Calvin from expressing candidly his opinion of those who were fascinated by its method. In a very perceptive manner, he noted that such people have "and always will prefer speculations which seem ingenious, to solid doctrine."⁶ They will never perceive that the method is "undoubtedly a trick of Satan to impair the authority of Scripture and remove any true advantage out of reading it."⁷ For Calvin, the sad fact of the situation is that the method continues to receive the highest applause as it goes "unpunished" in the church.⁸ Thus, he soundly rejected the method of allegory which he believed "Satan with the deepest subtlety, has endeavored to introduce into the Church, for the purpose of rendering the doctrine of Scripture ambiguous and destitute of all certainty and firmness."⁹

What did Calvin and Luther put in the place of the allegorical interpretation of Scripture? First, they agreed that the Bible testifies to its own authority since

its final author is the Holy Spirit; this same Spirit testifies within the believer—the interpreter—that the Bible is the Word of God.

Second, the interpreter must keep away from “deadly corruptions” which “lead us away from the literal sense” (a literal sensu) of the text.¹⁰ For Calvin as well as Luther, this meant that the text must be interpreted in terms of the literal grammatical meanings of the Hebrew and Greek words in the text. Furthermore, the literal understanding of Scripture meant that the narratives of Scripture must be understood to have occurred in time and space; and thus, the language of a given text must be interpreted in its historical context.

Furthermore, it must be noted that Calvin and other reformers used the word “literal” in contrast to the allegorical method. For them, the meaning of a text must remain within the confines of a literal-grammatical and historical production of the Biblical narrative by the Holy Spirit. One is not to assume that the language of the text has a hidden meaning beyond the perimeters of the narrative. Otherwise, one would return to the allegorization of the text.

Third, Wilhelm Pauck refers to Luther’s method of interpretation as the “literal spiritual.”¹¹ We have seen what “literal” means; now, what does “spiritual” mean? Luther thought that the in-

tion. According to Calvin, we are to seek out this “simple and natural meaning.”

Luther realized that it was not enough to say that I have a literal/historical understanding of a text, nor was it enough to acknowledge that the exegete must discover the reason why the Holy Spirit included a text in Scripture. Rather, the “spiritual-literal” method of interpreting the text had, as its focus, the salvation of Christ as the text calls for a moral response on the part of the reader.

Luther believed that he must listen to Christ in the text; for Luther, Christ was the absolute authority over against the “authoritative” traditions of men (especially the authority of Rome). From his perspective, Christ is the main subject of the entire Bible. From the beginning of Scripture until its end, Christ is its inherent authority far above the traditions of man; He is the unification of the canon of Scripture.¹²

Calvin also was clear concerning the centrality of Christ in the message of the entire Bible, although he did not use the doctrine of Christ for the justification of canon. Moreover, as Calvin pledged himself to a simple and natural (literal) meaning of the text, he did not want to overlook that Scripture is written by the Holy Spirit; and from beginning to end it is entirely inspired by the Holy Spirit. It is one essential document; it has one essential message, i.e. the story of redemption in Christ.

More specifically, the Old Testament unfolds the promise of Christ and the New Testament unfolds the fulfillment of that promise. For Calvin, the message

of the Bible has a continuity: it has one covenant. The new covenant varies from the old covenant only in administration; i.e. it is a fuller revelation of the identity of Christ. Thus, Emil Kraepling is correct when he writes that for Calvin “the whole history of Israel, including the Mosaic legislation, is viewed as a revelation of the redeeming God through the Pre-existent Mediator, Christ.”¹³

These four principles of interpretation enabled Luther and Calvin to combat and basically overcome the medieval concept of allegorizing the text. Again *these four principles* are: 1) The Bible is the blueprint of the Holy Spirit; 2) The Bible

is to be understood literally, meaning that the words are to be understood within the domain of its historical context; 3) that the Spirit intends us to receive one meaning from a given text; and 4) that Christ is the focus of the entire Bible. The final point, was the definitive point to keep Calvin and Luther from falling back into allegory. Likewise, I would suggest that if we are to withstand the temptation of allegory we must follow Calvin and Luther’s lead.

CHRIST-CENTERED INTERPRETATION

Specifically, we must come under the conviction of Christ’s own principle of interpreting Scripture. As Christ meets men on the road to Emmaus, Luke comments: “And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He (Christ) explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning Himself” (Lk. 24:27). In the same chapter, Luke records that Christ used the same principle of interpretation before His disciples: “He (Christ) said to them, ‘This is what I told you when I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about Me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms.’ Then He opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures” (Lk. 24:44,45). Christ understood the central place He occupied in the Scripture: *we must do the same*. Christ must be seen in each text of Scripture. If Christ is not made visible in each text of Scripture, then the teacher and the preacher has violated Christ’s own hermeneutical principle of interpreting God’s Holy Word. After all, Christ’s centrality in the entire scope of Scripture is essential to the very fabric of the Biblical revelation.

In order to comprehend the presence of Christ in the Old Testament, the reformers used the hermeneutical device of “typology.” For the Reformers, typology and allegory are not the same thing, although some exegetes view typology as another form of allegory. Often the Old Testament priestly functions and their association with Christ in the Epistle to the Hebrews as well as Paul’s interpretation of Sarah and Hagar in Galatians (4:21-31) are employed to prove their point. This was not the view of Calvin and Luther. In particular, Calvin clearly denounced the viewpoint that typology in Galatians is to be understood as allegory. In application of Calvin’s point of view, the distinction between allegory and typology is stated clearly by Sidney Sowers:

“One is not to assume that the language of the text has a hidden meaning beyond the perimeters of the narrative. Otherwise, one would return to the allegorization of the text.”

terpreter must search for the literal meaning which the Holy Spirit intends the text to teach. By using the original languages of Scripture, the exegete was obligated to make every attempt to understand what the Holy Spirit intended to say. Herein, Calvin complemented Luther. Calvin had pointed out that a given text had one essential meaning which is to be extracted from its literal, historical terminology. A given text does not bear multiple meanings which are to be extracted from the subjective feelings and emotions of a given Bible study. Rather, the text has one meaning, one intent, in the purpose of God’s revela-

We should add that typology does not assert, as allegory does, that the text means something other (allos) than what it says. Typology presumes nothing more than that an event, person, or institution occurring at one point in Biblical history will find a *counterpoint* at a later point in history. It does not *dissolve* the historical character of the event, person, or institution to find another meaning behind it [such as allegory].¹⁴

For the Reformers, therefore, typology is interwoven into the process of revelation in history, always finding its counterpoint in history. Herein, *Scripture interprets Scripture*.

In typology, there are many ways in which we can see the presence of Christ in the Old Testament. For example, we can analyze names, (Joshua is the Hebrew word for Jesus. Joshua means Savior in Hebrew.); character traits (David is a warrior, so it is that Christ is the final warrior against the great enemy of God, Satan), and experiences (God saves His people, Noah and his family, from His judgment in the flood; thus God saves His people from judgment through Christ). Although such things as names, character traits, and experiences are important for us to consider in discovering Christ's presence in the Old Testament, nevertheless there is a clear reality of Christ's presence in the Old Testament. We must understand that the *eternal Christ Himself is at work in and through the Old Testament saints*. Specifically, we must keep in mind that the saints of the Old Testament are not modeled after the person of Christ, *rather it is Christ working through them* that causes a resemblance between the Old Testament figure and Christ. Note, for example, how God the Father and Christ reveal their relationship in Moses and Aaron: "Then the LORD said to Moses, 'See, I have truly made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet'" (Ex 7: 1). In this case, God defines the types: Moses will take on the presence of God the Father to Pharaoh, and Aaron will take on the presence of Christ—prophet before Pharaoh. As you read about Moses and Aaron, you will notice that this image is even carried over before Israel.

But we must also carefully note that all the types in the Old Testament are anti-types—they fail to live up to Christ. The type is still a sinner, in need of redemption. Thus, the type is never the Christ, our redeemer.

Moreover, a Christocentric interpretation of Scripture also enlightens how an event in the Old Testament resembles an event in the life of Christ. Many of the historical events in the Old Testament are repeated in the life of Christ. The story of redemption ties together Israel's wilderness journey and Christ's temptation (Deut. 6:8, Mt. 4: 1-11); Abel's blood cries out from the ground (Gen. 4: 10, I Jn. 3: 11-20); the ram takes the place of Isaac and is sacrificed on the altar (Gen. 22; Jn. 1:29; 19:28-30); at his birth, Moses is hid while Pharaoh slaughters the little children (Ex. 1:22-2:10; Mt. 2:11-18); the distress of David before all his enemies (Ps. 22:1-5; Mt. 27:46; Mk. 15:34). The coming of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ is paralleled in Elijah and Elisha. In Mal. 4:5, the Lord states: "I will send the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord." Jesus says that Elijah came in the person and the work of John the Baptist (Mt. 11:14; 17:11,12). John the Baptist is like Elijah — a voice crying in the wilderness, a voice of warning Israel to repent before the Lord. As John the Baptist and Elijah are prophets of warning and judgment, likewise Jesus Christ and Elisha are the prophets of peace and miracles. [Through the ministry of Elisha, the Shunamite's son is raised from the dead; Christ feeds a hundred people with just twenty loaves of barley bread, while some is left over (II Kings 4; Lk. 8:49-56; Mt. 14:13-21; 15:29-39)].

Finally, if the presence of Christ is a crucial element in understanding the Old Testament and its continuity with the New Testament, then the central work of Christ's redemption must also be present: His death and resurrection. Christ's death and resurrection are important in understanding the redemptive acts in the Old Testament. For example: the promise in Gen. 3:15 is the resurrection of Adam and Eve. Seth is the resurrection of Abel's righteousness, Noah experiences new life (resurrection) as death encompasses him and his family (cf. I Pet. 3:18ff.), Abraham's faith is a resurrection faith as he receives his son (under the pronouncement of death) back from the dead (cf. Heb. 11:19), Joseph serves as the resurrection of his brothers and his father who are under the pronouncement of death—famine (Gen.45:5,6), and the great event of the Old Testament—the exodus (the Easter event of the Old Testament)—Israel moves from bondage to new life (promised land). Christ is present in each of these events, bringing those under the pronouncement of death to life.

It was the centrality of Christ that kept the reformers from falling back into allegory. Everything came together: from Genesis to Revelation the Scriptures are the holy, infallible, inerrant Word of God, written by the Holy Spirit in the grammatical-historical context of the people of God, with the intent of bringing the people of God into the narrative of the text by beholding their redemption in Christ.

Thus, our discussion presupposes that we cannot separate the authority of Scripture from interpreting the Scripture. In other words, it is not enough for us to say that the Bible is holy, infallible, inerrant, God-breathed, inspired, written by the Holy Spirit and Christ's letter to us. Just as crucial as maintaining our doctrine of Scripture is the following simple statement: "God is the interpreter of Scripture." Note the subject: it is not man; it is God!! The reformers gave us the four principles of how we are to focus upon God as interpreter of Scripture; those principles are reduced to a simple battle cry: "Scripture interprets Scripture." In other words, the interpreter/reader must be engulfed/immersed in the flow of revelation/the Scripture itself. Once you try to understand Scripture by standing outside of Scripture—you are dead!! Your interpretation/understanding will be bound to humanness. The issue today is to deny self; deny self so that you open yourself to the thoughts of God in His Word—as He wrote His Word from Genesis to Revelation.

CONCLUSION:

People of God, we must be committed to this principle of interpretation set forth by the reformers today, or else we will reap the demise of the Word of God in our midst. For this is what we see:

Critics of Biblical authority:

1) From the liberals

They have returned to allegory, spiritualizing, and moralism because the Bible as it is written does not meet the needs of the intellectual in our post-enlightenment, scientific age. Science, and the critical investigation of the Biblical narrative has shown, so they think, that the narratives have questionable reliability.

2) From the conservatives

Conservatives are found using allegory, spiritualization, and moralization (e.g. Swindoll, devotionals) because they are obsessed with

meeting the practical everyday needs of the person in the pew—built on modern relevance reinforcing traditional and conservative values. But this leads to a pietistic movement of elitism and arrogance of a subjective, autonomous understanding of the Word of God for me. But the real danger is that this leads to liberalism, because people are trying to find the meaning of the text outside our four principles of interpretation set forth by the reformers.

The issue is simple: Scripture must be interpreted within the understanding of the Sovereign God unfolding His revelation and redemption in history. Here is the meaning of the text, the power of God, the power of the Word, the power of preaching, because you are entering into the fabric of the revelation of the Word; by the Spirit you are entering into a personal letter written to the church by the Christ.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 *Sermons of Martin Luther*, ed. and trans. John Nicholas Lenker. I. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 169.
- 2 See *Philo: Questions and Answers on Genesis*, trans. Ralph Marcus, I. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), 4-6.
- 3 Charles Swindoll; *God's Man For A Crisis*; (Waco, Texas: Word Publishing, 1985), 67.
- 4 *Ibid.*, 67-68.
- 5 *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, trans. John King, I. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1948), 114.
- 6 *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, eds. David W. Torrance and Thomas T. Torrance, trans. T.H.L. Parker; (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1965), 84.
- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 *Ibid.*
- 9 *Genesis*, 114.
- 10 See Calvin, *Galatians*, 85.
- 11 "General Introduction," *Luther: Lectures on Romans*, ed. and trans. Wilhelm Pauck. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), xxxiii.
- 12 See Emil G. Kraeling, *The Old Testament since the Reformation* (London: Lutterworth, 1955), 9.
- 13 *Ibid.*
- 14 *The Hermeneutics of Philo and Hebrews: A Comparison of the Interpretation of the Old Testament in Philo Judaeus and the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Zurich: EVZ-Verlag, 1965), 90.

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Feature Articles

BERKOUWER: Interpreting the Scripture (II) Confessions of a Disciple

Carl W. Bogue

Due to space constraints in this issue, we will place a wrap-up editorial on Dr. Berkouwer's views and their echo in the *Christian Reformed Church in the November issue of The Outlook*.

I have elsewhere referred to Berkouwer as "the hole in the dike" through which a flood would come.¹⁶⁹ Of the many small streams that are making up that flood I have selected Jack Rogers of Fuller Seminary for particular reference. A variety of circumstances has made him something of a spokesman for Berkouwer's thought in this country. The inclusion here of a disciple is justified in that disciples are sometimes quicker to draw conclusions and thus are frequently bolder in stating their goals than are their masters.

Rogers is certainly a zealous supporter of Berkouwer, and he is not without impressive credentials. His doctoral dissertation on the doctrine of Scripture in the *Westminster Confession* was under Berkouwer's supervision, and he is the translator of Berkouwer's *Holy Scripture*. Furthermore, he sees himself as leaving behind his "conservative" background and its "rigidity" while finding deliverance in Berkouwer. "It is possible to avoid the extremes of both conservatism and liberalism and yet develop into an outstanding evangelical theologian. My example is G. C. Berkouwer of The Netherlands."¹⁷⁰

Rogers claims to have been "a straight, upright, conservative Christian." While his self-deception often sounds like pietistic moralism rather than healthy orthodox Christianity, his critique does not distinguish between the two. He wants to be "less conservative and more evangelical." Before being enlightened by

Berkouwer he "needed an idealized Bible."¹⁷¹ No more:

I can no longer be conservative and talk about what the Bible must be, or ought to be—reasoning logically from some idealized human notion of perfection. I want to be evangelical and accept the Word that God has given me, with all its magnificent surprises in both content and form.¹⁷²

The reason there are such "surprises" for Rogers is found in the subjectivism of his philosophical presuppositions. Convinced of Hume's skepticism, he finds a way to "keep the faith" in Kant's philosophy which "turns our attention from the objective world outside to what we subjectively bring to it."¹⁷³ The "way out" becomes the "way up" to "supra-history" where one is not bound to the logic of space and time, cause and effect. Or, to use Berkouwer's expression, he is seeing things "in faith."

The imprint of Berkouwer on Rogers was clearly seen in 1966, when his published dissertation, *Scripture in the Westminster Confession*, appeared. There was tremendous research involved, giv-

"Rogers has thus found a comfortable, platonic, Kantian home in Berkouwer's 'evangelical middle way.'"

ing us important information on the background of the *Confession*. In my judgment, however, it is most significant as a *reinterpretation* of the *Confession*, making it read like Berkouwer on Scripture. The difference is that the attack, I fear a slanderous attack, was fully in the open. According to Rogers, "Princeton Theology's . . . emphasis on the inerrant original autographs of the Bible signaled a change from the approach of the

Westminster Divines."¹⁷⁴ How was it different? "Princeton Theology undervalued the witness of the Holy Spirit" and relied on rationalism. There was "a lack of emphasis on the living dynamic Word of God in preaching," and there "was an underemphasis on the *scopus* or purpose of Scripture." There was "an under-valuation of the human element in Scripture."¹⁷⁵ Furthermore, the New Princeton theologians in the then "proposed" "Confession of 1967" for the United Presbyterian Church, "acted rightly in restoring the emphasis on the witness of the Holy Spirit and on Jesus Christ the Savior as being the central content of Scripture," an emphasis Rogers thought lost in "American Presbyterian orthodoxy."¹⁷⁶

Not surprisingly, Jack Rogers appears in the current battle for the Bible. Significantly, he is the editor of *Biblical Authority*, a collection of articles specifically attacking Lindsell's book, by men opposed to inerrancy. Rogers' own article purports to be an historical survey of biblical authority. In reality it is a vehement polemic against inerrancy which is open to challenge on almost every page. Apart from an amazing zeal to promote a Platonic-Augustinian philosophical foundation for his doctrine of Scripture,¹⁷⁷ the article is characterized by repeated quotations or paraphrases of Berkouwer's work on Scripture. The primary conclusion, aimed at Lindsell's *The Battle for the Bible*, is that "it is historically irresponsible to claim that for two thousand years Christians have believed that the authority of the Bible entails a modern concept of inerrancy in scientific and historical details."¹⁷⁸ However one might view Lindsell's book, it is apparent that Rogers has entered the battle in opposition to inerrancy.

To return again to Rogers' "confessions," we find him asserting that Berkouwer did indeed change his position on Scripture and that in doing so he was following the "good" Dutch Reformed tradition as opposed to the "bad" American Reformed tradition. Of Berkouwer's *Holy Scripture* he writes: "I believe that this work on Scripture really does break the liberal-conservative dilemmas we have wrestled with for a century. It offers a genuinely evangelical middle way." Then, referring to Berkouwer's early work on Scripture, he says:

It encourages me to see how his thinking has changed and developed in this mature work...The extremes—formalism and subjectivism, rationalism and existentialism—have been rejected. We do not have to choose one or the other of those extremes as so much of our American theology has suggested.¹⁷⁹

"Warfield left on his followers the imprint of the apologist and polemicist. Bavinck influenced the generations after him to be theological scientists and churchmen. Berkouwer reflects this influence."¹⁸⁰ "In the nineteenth century, while Hodge and Warfield were building defenses against Biblical criticism, Kuypers and Bavinck were meeting the issue openly and constructively."¹⁸¹ "G.C. Berkouwer has taught that the choice between conservatism and liberalism is a false dilemma."¹⁸² Rogers has thus found a comfortable, platonic, Kantian home in Berkouwer's "evangelical middle way."

On the theory that reading Berkouwer into the *Westminster Confession* salvaged it from the "conservatives," Rogers collaborated with one of his former students to work the same "magic" on much of church history. Desiring to demonstrate to the reader that inerrancy is not the historic position of the church, Rogers and McKim did not narrow their focus. Norman Geisler has described *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible* "as the most complete attempt by non-inerrantists to reinterpret church history in their favor."¹⁸³ Again, Berkouwer provided the model.

Though spoiled by the Aristotelian Scholasticism of Aquinas, Rogers and McKim see a basic consensus in the early church in Neoplatonic Augustinianism with no thought of inerrancy.¹⁸⁴ After a bad Scholasticism in the Middle Ages, nominalism and mysticism "helped pave the way for a return to Neoplatonic Augustinianism."¹⁸⁵ The Reformers focused attention, not on inerrancy, but on the Bible's saving function.¹⁸⁶ Reflecting the neo-orthodox view, Rogers and McKim write: "For Calvin, the Bible was God's Word. But he knew that God did not address human beings directly with divine words."¹⁸⁷ The Bible is God's

Word but not divine words! In contemporary terms, the Word is manifested in human (i.e., errant) words.

The real villain emerges in post-Reformation "Protestant scholasticism"¹⁸⁸ with its Aristotelian-Thomistic approach where "Scripture came to be treated as a compendium of propositions from which logical deductions could be drawn."¹⁸⁹ Remarkably, the Westminster Divines were exempted from such scholasticism, but Great Britain generally went the way of the Continent via Owen, Bacon, Newton, Locke, Thomas Reid,

"It is perhaps misleading to speak of 'a hole in the dike.' The dike has already been breached, and the flood has come."

and John Witherspoon, who imported errant inerrancy to America.¹⁹⁰

In America, Reformed Scholasticism was continued preeminently in Princeton Theological Seminary with the teaching of Turretin's theology and under the leadership of A. Alexander, the Hodges, B. B. Warfield and J. G. Machen.¹⁹¹ Rogers and McKim assert that though the leaders of that tradition thought themselves to be followers of Calvin and the Westminster Standards, "in actuality they believed and taught a theological method regarding the authority and interpretation of the Bible that was rooted in a post-Reformation scholasticism, an approach almost the exact opposite of Calvin's own."¹⁹²

The direction that such historical revisionism takes for Rogers and McKim, as well as Berkouwer's influence, becomes evident when the more modern counterparts of Rogers' approved theologians are named. Charles Briggs, suspended from the Presbyterian ministry, is said to be "historically correct."¹⁹³ The Auburn Affirmation is implicitly approved in opposition to Machen and the conservatives.¹⁹⁴ T. M. Lindsay and James Orr in Scotland are praised as "evangelical reactions to Reformed Scholasticism," and so also are Kuypers and Bavinck (not Hepp) in The Netherlands and P. T. Forsyth in England.¹⁹⁵

More recently Barth, Berkouwer, and the *Confession of 1967* carry the banner for Rogers and McKim. Karl Barth "founded the authority of the Bible on its divine function" and in so doing "pro-

vided a way back to the Reformation focus.¹⁹⁶ Berkouwer's difference from Barth is that he reacted to Scholasticism while Barth had reacted to Liberalism.¹⁹⁷ They both arrived at a Reformation focus on the Bible's saving function in a way that excluded inerrancy. In the United Presbyterian Church "Barth provided a core of consensus," and the *Confession of 1967* restored "the Reformation focus on Christ as the content of Scripture."¹⁹⁸ With pride Rogers and McKim declare of the *Confession of 1967*: "The final document was a worthy modern version of the Reformation vision of the Bible."¹⁹⁹

INTO A STORM-FREE HARBOR

We return in closing to the teacher. A look at the disciple has produced nothing to alter our evaluation of the professor. Armed with Berkouwer's view of Scripture, one who professes to be a conservative evangelical, in time embraces Briggs and Barth as the true descendants of the Reformation. Not surprisingly, neo-orthodox and liberal Roman Catholics have increasingly embraced Berkouwer, while relations are strained within his own tradition.

The word "change" repeatedly appears as we survey Berkouwer's "half century" of theological reflection. Rogers is "encouraged" by this change and finds support for his hostility to American Presbyterianism in what he calls Berkouwer's "evangelical middle way." Berkouwer's evolution is from a conservative, orthodox, Reformed theologian to a contemporary theologian for whom conservative and liberal is a false dilemma.

The way out of that dilemma is not a "way" at all in the traditional sense. One of my professors described the post-Kantian developments in modern theology as "piety within the framework of the enlightenment." Being convinced that rational investigation left faith defenseless, they sought a way to retain their "faith" anyway. Truth was equated with "encounter," and the realm of the so-called "suprahistorical" became a "storm-free harbor" to avoid the "critical historical flood tide." Berkouwer's "middle way" of doing theology "in faith" is meaningful only in this anti-meaning philosophical framework.

As alluded to earlier, the shadow of Immanuel Kant hangs heavy over Berkouwer. "The principle of causality is valid only within the limits of our experience."²⁰⁰ Causality is thus valid only in what Kant calls the "phenomenal" realm, not the "noumenal" realm of "suprahistorical." It is this new view of causality that has resulted in Berkouwer's growing criticism of the treatment of election in the *Canons of Dort* as well as his criticism of the traditional Reformed doctrine of Scripture. Revelation is in the "noumenal" realm where logic is not applicable, and therefore all theology must be done "in faith." "The function of human reason is not to investigate revelation but to draw logical conclusions."²⁰¹ *All revelation is thus lifted out of the rational, logical, causal investigation and placed in the "noumenal" realm.*

Van Til has leveled strong criticism against Berkouwer. The fundamental charge is that Berkouwer is influenced by the "philosophy of the utter relativism of history" with the "modern view" of a "would-be autonomous man."

This man lives and moves and has his being in Kant's noumenal realm. The existentialist philosophers and their theological followers today often speak of this realm as being that of *Geschichte*. The realm of Kant's phenomenal world is now often called *Historie*. In order to escape the charge of contradiction, of determinism, man now says that the distinctions between determinism and indeterminism do not concern him. He now lives in a free world, the world of person-to-person confrontation. He now has no theory of reality, no concept of God or of man, no metaphysics. He is now in the realm of ethical relations.²⁰²

Such strong criticism may seem severe as one surveys the bulk of Berkouwer's writing and sees many seemingly sound expositions of biblical doctrines. It is justified, however, in that something is at stake which is more significant than what Berkouwer says on any given topic. It concerns the "continental divide" of modern theology. It is perhaps misleading to speak of "a hole in the dike." The dike has already been breached, and the flood has come. Even statements that sound orthodox must be viewed in light of what Berkouwer means by "in faith,"

and all theology must be evaluated anew as pointing to "truth" rather than being "true."

Berkouwer, then, has anchored his ship in the "storm-free harbor of suprahistorical" to be safe from the "critical historical flood tide." But if Berkouwer's "middle way" is utterly illusive by the very nature of its subjectivism, the storm-free nature of his harbor is no less so. *For in that harbor the only standard by which we may test anything is our own experience with "every man doing whatever is right in his own eyes."* In that harbor there is no safety from being "tossed here and there by waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming."²⁰³

FOOTNOTES

169 Carl Bogue, *A Hole in the Dike* (Cherry Hill, N.J.: Mack Publishing Co., 1977), pp. 25-26.

170 Rogers, *Confessions of a Conservative Evangelical*, p. 134.

171 *Ibid.*, pp. 9, 12.

172 *Ibid.*, p. 26.

173 *Ibid.*, p. 125.

174 Rogers, *Scripture in the Westminster Confession*, p. 448.

175 *Ibid.*, p. 449. American Presbyterian orthodoxy "underemphasized the witness of the Spirit and the saving purpose of Scripture" (pp. 449, 450). "While the Princeton theology felt obligated to defend Scripture's statements on every subject, the Westminster Divines emphasized that Scripture did not deal with matters of art and science" (p. 452).

176 *Ibid.*, p. 453. "The proposed Book of Confessions, including the 'Confession of 1967,' offers the United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. a fresh opportunity to understand its heritage and confess its faith" (p. 454).

177 Rogers, *Biblical Authority*, pp. 18-45. "Post-Reformation Protestants" used "the same Aristotelian-Thomistic arguments which Roman Catholics used...Thus a significant shift in theological method occurred from the neo-Platonic Augustinianism of Luther and Calvin to the neo-Aristotelian Thomism of their immediate followers" (p. 29). "The old Princeton tradition...is a reactionary one...wedded to a prior commitment to Aristotelian philosophy" (p. 45). Norman L. Geisler, *Summit Papers*, pp. 11.2-11.4, gives some elementary philosophical teaching which destroys the credibility of much of what Rogers has to say. Concerning "the alleged Aristotelian background of inerrancy," Geisler lists several inconsistencies: "First, the 'Aristotelian' Turretin did not originate the doctrine of inerrancy. The Platonic Augustine...clearly held to inerrancy... Secondly, Augustine...was not the fideist Rogers would make him to be...Thirdly Rogers speaks as if Aristotle invented the law of non-contradiction...Fourthly, even Rogers and other errantists use the law of non-contradiction as a pillar of their

position...Finally, it was not Aquinas nor Turretin who first applied logic to God's revelation. The biblical writers themselves warned the believers to 'avoid ...contradictions' and anything 'contrary' to sound doctrine." Geisler then makes this telling critique of Rogers' preference for Platonic presuppositions: "A further irony in Rogers' position is his assumption of a relative harmlessness of platonic presuppositions as they bear on the inerrancy of Scripture. While Rogers consciously rejects Turretin's 'Aristotelian rationalism,' he unconsciously adopts a kind of platonic 'spiritualism.' ...Now Rogers is apparently not aware of the fact that this dualistic separation of the material and spiritual worlds is a philosophical presupposition at the root of the errancy position." The implication of this philosophical preference of Rogers is indeed manifest throughout much of what he writes.

- 178 *Ibid.*, p. 44.
 179 Rogers, *Confessions of a Conservative Evangelical*, p. 136.
 180 *Ibid.*, p. 135.
 181 *Ibid.*, p. 137.
 182 *Ibid.*, p. 147.
 183 Norman L. Geisler, "A Critical Review," I.C.B.I. Update (Summer 1980), p. 1. That review, though brief, is a devastating critique of the philosophical presuppositions and inconsistencies of Rogers and McKim.
 184 Rogers and McKim, *Authority and Interpretation*, pp. 3-71.
 185 *Ibid.*, p. 73.
 186 *Ibid.*, pp. 73-145.
 187 *Ibid.*, p. 116.
 188 *Ibid.*, pp. 147-198.
 189 *Ibid.*, pp. 187-188.
 190 *Ibid.*, pp. 200-260.
 191 *Ibid.*, pp. 265-379.
 192 *Ibid.*, p. xvii.
 193 *Ibid.*, p. 358.
 194 *Ibid.*, pp. 364-365.
 195 *Ibid.*, pp. 380-405.
 196 *Ibid.*, p. 425.
 197 *Ibid.*, pp. 426-437.
 198 *Ibid.*, pp. 437 and 439.
 199 *Ibid.*, p. 442.
 200 G. C. Berkouwer, *General Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1955), p. 68.
 201 *Ibid.*, p. 75.
 202 Van Til, *The Sovereignty of Grace*, p. 86.
 203 Ephesians 4:14.

Dr. Bogue, pastor of the Faith Presbyterian Church (PCA) in Akron, OH, lecturer and author of numerous books, articles and papers, graduated Cum Laude from Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. Subsequently he earned his Th.D. from the Free University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands. His major professor was Dr. G.C. Berkouwer whose thought is the subject of this discourse.



What Home-schoolers and Traditional Schoolers Have in Common

Connie Sikma

The issue of education has caused a lot of dissension lately, especially in the secular world; but it has even entered our church families with regard to our covenant children. There are those who are staunch supporters of our Christian day schoolers, who disapprove of homeschooling. On the other hand, there are homeschool parents who accuse other Christian parents who send their children to a day school of their choice, of relinquishing their God-given duty to train their children. Neither of these views is accurate; yet both exist within our Reformed community.

There are many variables involved in the decisions of how and where to educate our children. But whatever our choice, our first duty is to raise our children in the fear and the admonition of the Lord. Within this context we need to teach our children obedience, self-denial and the willingness to serve. Second, we as parents have the obligation to teach our children life skills, ultimately how to provide for themselves. Within this second goal, we seek to make the most of the talents and opportunities that are within the grasp of our children. However, in this skewed generation, that sub-goal has become the ultimate goal and in both circles, home and day school families fall into the trap of teaching the child to become self-centered and self-seeking, obliterating the former focus and vow we made at the baptism of these covenant children.

I think my point is a humbling one for all of us. Neither homeschool or dayschool families should have room to criticize the other. Rather, we should seek to serve each other and to pray for each other's children. If one or the other happens to take an extreme view, we must be patient and forgiving rather than taking offense. Both approaches to schooling have enormous challenges. Parents of dayschoolers need to be constantly vigilant to offset that self-absorbing current that inevitably seeks to overtake this generation. Home-schoolers can also be swept up in that current in our small world where the pressure to do all and be all can be overwhelming. Both types of families need to constantly re-evaluate their own spiritual standards and example within the family because, ultimately, the family's direction is generally the direction the children take. We can encourage and support one another practically by attending functions of both homeschoolers and dayschoolers; we can support the Christian education fund if able, encourage another in the Lord, and outdo one another, not in accomplishments, but in service.

Connie Sikma and her husband Douglas are members of the Seventh Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, MI. Mrs. Sikma homeschools her four children, ages 12, 9, 7 and 5.



Home-schooling: An Educational Choice (II)

Laurie Vanden Heuvel

INTRODUCTION

In this part of our discussion, I want to share the results of two interviews done with two fine homeschool moms. The names of the two moms I chose to interview are Cathy Arrick and Joan Buitter. I chose them because I know each one personally and admire them as Christians and as models of the courage, convictions, commitment and consistency which homeschooling requires.

INTERVIEWS

Our first subject for discussion concerned the primary responsibility for a child's education. Both moms were emphatic in their insistence that God gives children to parents, not to the state, not to the church. Cathy felt that government could insist that a child begin school at a certain age. She pointed out that some states say, "Show me that your child has been in school x amount of hours, show me what they have studied and demonstrate the progress they have made." Cathy could live with that kind of information exchange, but would not tolerate any government prescribed curriculum or programs. Joan pointed out that any parents today that have a real concern for their children, are going to think twice about public education. Even though there may be Christian teachers in public schools, by law they are not allowed to articulate their perspectives. Christians begin the educational process with God and continue to build on that premise. This the public schools cannot do. Joan also stated that the primary opposition to homeschooling has not come from teachers in the public schools but from their powerful union which has attempted to "put their fingers into many pies."

Joan also acknowledged that the government has a right to want a literate and productive citizen to come out of the

educational process. They want citizens that are able "to make their own way and be discerning." But that's where government involvement has to stop. Final responsibility for the option chosen to educate lies with the parents.

On the subject of legal threats today, both moms indicated that there appeared to be none at the moment. Cathy was happy for the new representation in Congress but expressed fear that that could change. She sees a Democrat majority as wanting to take control of education away from parents. But she also feels that the initial battles are over and the outlook for homeschooling looks good. She indicated that even a member of the present United States Supreme Court is homeschooled, so she finds a certain favorability to homeschooling built into that final court of appeal. Joan indicated that their family is a member of the Home School Legal Defense Association and that furnishes some security for them. She was very pleased with the fact that at the onset of the H R 6 crisis, early in 1994, the office of Vern Ehlers (R-MI) called their home to alert them to the threat contained in its provisions.

In answer to the question of the government's right to expect certain subject matter to be taught and level of achievement to be demonstrated, Cathy asserted that this is not the responsibility of government. Joan felt that some level of achievement ought to be demonstrated.

Both moms see to it that their children are tested at regular intervals but they also indicated that this is not true of many homeschool families. Joan and her husband have the Stanford Achievement Test administered to their children every other year. The provider of the testing service requires that the test be administered by a certified teacher and the testing service also sets up the other rules. Joan said that there are standard-

ized tests available which are geared to homeschool children, but Joan and her husband want the same kind of standardized test that is administered to other school children in this country. They have found that the results of the testing confirm what they observe at home - one child tests far above the average, another is average, and these same characteristics are demonstrated at home. Joan also pointed out that many homeschoolers do not administer standardized testing. But she and her husband want to know what and where the strengths and weaknesses of their children and their programs are.

Cathy tests her children yearly by administering the California Achievement Test. She is also exploring other standardized tests at the present time.

The charge is often made that homeschooled children are socially deprived. Both moms indicated that this criticism is rarely heard anymore because studies have shown that this charge is not true. Cathy pointed out that too many times social contacts in the school are negative influences creating an undesirable peer pressure. Joan described herself and her husband as very social people and that impacts their children.

The criticism is also often made that homeschooled children do not have the opportunities to develop their leadership qualities. Both moms stated that to a certain extent, leadership qualities are or are not part of each child's natural endowments by God. But Cathy indicated that they make each child responsible for family devotions on a regular basis. Children recite poetry and do other leadership things in front of each other, in front of grandparents and in church and other networking situations.

Joan, on the same subject, indicated that there is a season of protection and nurturing needed before children are ready to assert leadership, and their home is providing that. As the children grow older, they are demonstrating leadership in other contexts such as church, and other networking situations. Joan also feels that her primary objective is that her children be good discerners and discerning thinkers. She also made the point that parents who model leadership at home and outside the home will impact their children greatly.

When asked whether they feel that

homeschooling is the solution for all families, both moms answered "No" emphatically. Cathy said it has to be a calling from God. It is very time consuming. Joan offered four criteria for parents who are considering the homeschooling option for their families.

- Homeschooling should only be chosen after much prayer.
- Ask the question, do both parents want to do this? This is very important. Homeschooling is a tremendous time sacrifice for a mom, and the result is that sometimes other things in the house do not get done. The husband must be very understanding of this. The husband should also be willing to shoulder some of the educational responsibility. Joan noted that the ones who are putting their children back into regular school are often the ones where the husband is not supportive or involved. Also, Joan and her husband talk every evening about where each child is in his/her program, what difficulties and successes there are, what materials to use and/or buy and discipline.
- Homeschool homes must be structured homes. Routines for meals and duties should be well established so children are in the habit of knowing what to expect. That produces a well-ordered, secure environment for learning to take place.
- Obedience must be an ingrained response from children who are to be homeschooled. If a child does not obey simple household rules, the child certainly is not going to respond obediently to the rigors of home administered education.

On the matter of style in education—structured, unstructured or both, the moms both indicated a structured style, and basically one patterned after the organization of the textbooks.

Cathy explained that they are actually part of a satellite school and thus they have deadlines for getting yearly work completed and monetary fines if the work is not completed on time. Joan explained that, whereas the textbook is their curriculum, she is now launching out and doing independent units as offshoots of the curriculum. She cited Indians as one unit in which they networked

with another homeschool family, playing some Indian games, doing projects and writing reports.

Both families do some networking. Cathy's children are enrolled in a new homeschool network program being offered through Grace Homeschool at Seventh Reformed Church facilities on Leonard Street in Grand Rapids, MI. Here the Rev. Charles Krahe offers a course in Latin and one in Church History. I visited his Latin class composed of five seventh graders. Not only is Rev. Krahe an excellent linguist, but he integrates a good deal of history (both the secular mythology and the Christian influence on the world of that day) into his language study work. The students seemed very motivated the day I was there. Mrs. Krahe, a former supervisor for English and American Literature Studies in a public school district in New Jersey, and framer of a program called "Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages," teaches Spanish in the Grace Homeschool. Cathy also told me of networking classes in science, language arts and band being offered at Lowell Baptist Church. She also mentioned sporting events in which her children participate. From December - March, families get together for skiing; other activities include softball, a Michigan state tournament for different age groups in basketball and a girls' volleyball league to begin next school year. Joan's children have been networking on science for three years and she is thinking about enrolling her children in the courses offered by Grace Homeschool.

Both mothers indicated educational experiences they provide for their children outside the home - day excursions to the nature center, the museum, and others.

When asked about things they had learned about the educational process, both moms referred to the frustration of teaching a concept, testing on it, having the children do well on the test, and then forgetting it and failing to transfer it to applied areas. They also experience frustration at the varying abilities of children, some learning at a faster rate than others. As a teacher I assured them that these problems were universally true in regular classrooms around the world, a fact they already knew but seemed pleased to hear.

For curriculum, the moms use a variety of choices: Christian Liberty, A Beka, Saxon math and others. These materials

are very good at developing higher thinking skills and providing for writing activities across curriculum, even though the moms do add a number of their own questions and writing projects.

Both moms indicated that the biggest advantage of homeschool training is the opportunity to integrate Christian knowledge, experience and values into the education of their children. Both warmly testified to the closeness of family ties which the experience engenders. Joan mentioned that because father works until six each evening, some of the education in which he is involved, particularly the spiritual training in the Bible, is saved for early evening hours. For this reason, the children go to bed a little later, but sleep later in the morning. Dad takes the day off on all the children's birthdays and they spend the day doing something special together as a family. Thursday noons they meet Dad at a Burger King as a family and Friday is library day.

ANALYSIS/ CONCLUSIONS

My visits with Cathy and Joan confirmed my "hunches" that both were committed competent moms whose children are only thriving under their tutelage. It was not surprising to me how parallel their answers were to the questions I asked. Both believe strongly, as I do, that children are given to parents and not the government. Both take very seriously the task of integrating faith, education and life. Both are structured and follow a curriculum, but are also creative in supplemental ways. Both are committed to accountability and pursue a program of testing. Both are sensitive to differences in children in learning styles, rates and abilities. Neither mom recommends homeschooling to every family and each tries hard to provide a home environment which is conducive to learning. Both have caring and cooperative husbands, committed to the academic, social and spiritual well-being of their families. My conclusion is that there will likely be no negative results from the homeschooling received by their children; rather the children will become strong trees "planted in the house of the Lord" (Psalm 92:12-14).

There remain areas of concern which need to be handled. As both moms indicated, there are homeschoolers who are not covering the academics and are not

building accountability into their programs. Some may even be examples of truancy violations. In this day of "kids having kids" and demonstrated parental irresponsibility on a rather large scale, a way needs to be found to guarantee the highest degree of literacy possible to tomorrow's leaders and voters. Romans 13 does grant to government the right to curb evil, and inasmuch as ignorance breeds evil—laziness, contempt and even violence—the government may take measures to ensure that every child of school age is in fact, getting an education of whatever option the parent will choose.

I also feel that networking for homeschoolers could be expanded in specialty areas such as music (skills, appreciation, theory, literacy), science, foreign languages, art, and for Christians—subjects like Church History and Bible studies.

Developing leadership potential would also be a concern of mine if I were a homeschooler parent. Although I agree that, to a certain extent, leadership ability is a natural, God-given ability, I often see latent talents brought out in specially designed activities; I also see that success in communication motivates students to cultivate new and sometimes unexpected avenues of leadership.

Homeschooling is undoubtedly a wave of the future, especially in view of the rapid decline in public schools as academic institutions and seed-beds for moral degeneration. Even Christian schools need to be constantly vigilant to ensure that their teaching is distinctively Christian, and the environment teaches and re-enforces the truth of Scripture.

Regardless of the educational choice parents make for their children, the obligation to "train up a child in the way he should go" is still in tact. And the promise remains: "When he is old, he will not depart from it."

For the Love of His Church

John Markus

I have chosen to share a few of my thoughts after speaking to the editors who encouraged me to write this article. In God's providence I have had the privilege of serving on Christian school boards, as an elder for two terms and at present I am the president of the Christian Farmers Federation of Ontario. I have been a member of the Christian Reformed Church all my life.

As a servant of the Lord, I would like to share some observations I have made while in the public arena, on where we are going as a Christian Reformed denomination. I will focus on two key areas, the *authority of Scripture* and living a *Christian lifestyle*.

OPINION vs. AUTHORITY OF THE WORD OF GOD

Many in the Christian Reformed church have, perhaps unintentionally, shifted from the authoritative Word of God to their *personal opinion* of the Word of God. Why do I say this? When I discuss kingdom vision and direction with those who believe in the authoritative Word of God, there is a common ground. Even though we may not agree initially, we eventually develop a consensus through the mutual study of Scripture since the authority of Scripture is foundational. Agreement may be reached even if we do not fully comprehend the Word of God.

As a personal observation, I have noticed that a living relationship with God is generally very closely connected to an acknowledgement of the Word of God as authoritative. The most discouraging and difficult discussions are with those that have a *personal opinion* of the Word of God. One never comes to a consensus on a given issue because there is no common ground on the authority of Scrip-

ture. One can spend many hours discussing and debating, but one cannot persuade others to change their position because they do not believe in the authoritative Word of God as it is written. In other words, God's Word is black and white even if we do not understand it; but some make it gray so they can have their way. We must not pursue our ways, but rather God's ways.

ABSENCE OF CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE

Another major problem in the Christian Reformed church is that many of its members have a very strong intellectual understanding of doctrine and Biblical interpretation, but fail to incorporate their intellect into their walk with God and interactions with society. Why do I say this?

A few examples of this problem in our Christian community may bring to light what is happening. One example is a Christian school play which I attended. The theme of the play was that all religions lead to salvation.

Another example concerns what I saw at a banquet where I picked up my son. The banquet looked more like Hollywood than a Christian school banquet. I ask: What has happened to the *Heidelberg Catechism*, question and answer 109? We have the knowledge but we lack the personal integrity to practice what kingdom living is all about. This is not first of all a problem of the board or the teachers, but it is rather a direct reflection of the parents and how they think and live. What is the message an evangelical, born-again Christian receives when he or she, thinking that Christian doctrine and lifestyle are one, walks into the above settings? My guess is that in these scenarios, we have canceled out all the promotional efforts, money and manpower we have put into Christian edu-

cation because these people see no evidence of a committed lifestyle.

Another example is that of sabbath observance. Sabbath observance and salvation go hand in hand. We can all read the Ten Commandments and most of us hear them regularly. Why do so many people allow homework and dining out on Sunday? It is becoming accepted practice among many to work in local fast food restaurants since our children need tuition money. Is not obedience more important?

I have discovered that the greatest evangelism occurs through foundational lifestyle preaching from our pulpits, guided by the Holy Spirit, whereby members are compelled by the preaching of the Word to perform their everyday activities in such a way that others around them realize that they are subjects of the one true King and are accountable to Him. All of the church's evangelism budgets and programs will accomplish precious little if the above does not occur. In other words, if the world does not see the difference Christ makes in us, the church's outreach program is hindered a great deal. As Christians we must be torchbearers for the King.

CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE

The following examples illustrate the difference that a recognizable Christian lifestyle makes on our world (and I only cite them because the editors asked me to do so).

The first example occurred when I was at a meeting in Winnipeg. I stated our Christian Farmers' position on an issue. Upon leaving that day's meeting, even though no one knew me, six people were standing by the door ready to greet me. Their first question was, "Are you a Christian?" The next question was, "Are you born again?" to which I answered, "Yes." I then asked them a question: "How did you sense I was a Christian since I did not mention Jesus Christ or God?" They answered, "Your statements gave you away!" We experienced rich fellowship the next few days.

The second example occurred in New Brunswick at another conference. I spoke about our positions as a Christian Farmers organization. An individual approached me afterwards and asked if I would pray with him; I took him to my

room, wondering why he had asked me. His response was that he was relatively new to the faith and he sensed from my statements that I was one of those who were "from the faith." As it turned out, he was going through a divorce while at the same time becoming a child of God. That contact turned into a four-hour visit where we spent the time going through the Scriptures and we finished by praying together. It was just like family visitation in a very powerful way, outside the established church.

The third example occurred a short time later. I was in Ottawa at another conference. I sensed that things were not right. I spent some time in prayer, struggling and wondering about what to do. The next day a lady tapped me on the shoulder and asked, "What is Christian Farmers all about?" I told her that we wear our faith commitment on our shirtsleeves, and by God's grace we try to develop agricultural policy based on Christian principle. The next question, as always in evangelical movements, was, "Are you born again?" which to her was a qualifier. Again I had no problem answering in the affirmative. She then

said that we as an organization must be careful not to get drawn into some of the methods of lobbying government that were presently being used by other farm leaders. I must admit that I agreed with her but had not been able to put my finger on the real issue. My curiosity surfaced and I asked, "Sheila, why did you tell me this?" She responded, "John, the kingdom of God is at stake and we have to protect one another." This was the Holy Spirit providing an answer to prayer through her. Subsequently she opened many doors for us whereby we have been able to present our policies from a Christian perspective.

I came to understand that many church people have no concept of protecting one another from the evils of this world because the kingdom of God may be at stake. Most often their reply to confrontation is, "Do not judge!" or "That's just your opinion!" I have experienced this many times while serving as an elder. Too many people overlook the concept of the kingdom and kingdom responsibility for personal gain.

All of the examples cited above illustrate that walking the Christian lifestyle

PUBLIC LECTURE

The Reformation Betrayed

Friday, Oct. 25, 1996

8:00 p.m.

Immanuel Lutheran Church
Aldergrove, B.C. Canada
3232 272 St.

&

Thurs., Oct. 31, 1996

7:30 p.m.

Lynden PRC
312 N. Park St.
Lynden, WA 98264

Speaker

Rev. M. Joostens

(Pastor of Lynden PRC)

Free cassette tape requests can be sent to above US address.

is an incredible witness to those around us. We as a Christian Reformed community must go beyond intellectual knowledge to a lifestyle that radiates Christ and His kingdom. I had not grasped this before in my life, even when I was an officebearer of the church, but now I realize that this is the very core of the Christian outreach.

The real issue and problem for the Christian Reformed Church is that *opinion* of the Word of God and lack of Christian lifestyle have robbed us of personal relationship with each other and the Lord. Since this is happening, I believe God will take our lampstand away as indicated in Revelation 2.

For a long time I believed very strongly that believers in the authority of Scripture could have major influence in the direction of the Christian Reformed Church. Painfully I have come to realize that the church cannot mix authority and *opinion* and expect to receive God's blessing and direction in moving the kingdom ahead.

In closing, I believe that we have come to a point in the Christian Reformed Church where we must be willing to stand up and form a federation alongside the denomination, if this is possible; or it may be time to entertain serious reservations about staying in the denomination for these reasons: first, if we do not act, our torch will be taken away; second, we will rob ourselves of the blessing of obedience; third, salvation and redemption will be at stake. We must have as a foundation of our church, the authority of the Scripture; and the Christian lifestyle must be an open book to society around us for all to read.

Synod and the Republican National Convention

Richard J. Blauw

Recently Ted Koppel, TV reporter for ABC news, announced that he was leaving the Republican National Convention and probably would not attend the Democratic Convention because they had become staged media events. It was hard to find an interesting story since everyone was parroting the party line. Since the candidates had been selected well in advance by the primaries, party conventions have deteriorated into political coronations. The media which had formerly manipulated the conventions for their news machines are now being skillfully manipulated by the political parties to get their message across via the media. Ted Koppel, for one, is unhappy with this role reversal.

In reflecting on this it seems to me that an interesting parallel is taking place in the synodical meetings of the CRC. In the last two years a number of decisions have been made, which taken collectively, mark a significant shift in the way synod will conduct the business of the churches. The *first* is a 1995 decision that the delegates to synod may no longer submit nominations from the floor for

positions that must be approved by the synod. For the synod to give up a right that it had

possessed for decades, the right to nominate from the floor, is a betrayal of the classes and the churches it represents. Synod did not necessarily have to exercise that right, but to surrender it without a whimper reflects a kind of powerlessness that bodes ill for the future. *Second*, recent synods have quiescently accepted single nominations presented by carefully chosen but unknown nominating committees. This was the case with the editorship of *The Banner* and also with the presidency of Calvin College. *Third*, synods will no longer periodically reassess whether or not certain employees may continue in their positions. Formerly, someone like the editor of *The*

Banner would be given a two-year appointment and then his job performance would be reassessed by synod every four years. This task has now been turned over to the boards of the respective agencies. Synod has been effectively frozen out of the appointment and the reappointment process.

This management of synod has been most flagrantly demonstrated in the fact that there is presently a five-year moratorium on overtures regarding women in ecclesiastical office. Synod is a deliberative body. Article 29 of the Church Order states that "Decisions of ecclesiastical assemblies shall be reached only upon due consideration." Article 30 reads, "Assemblies and church members may appeal to the assembly next in order if they believe...that a decision conflicts with the Word of God."

The deliberative nature of synod has been significantly altered by cutting off avenues of appeal. If one is bent on changing Article 3 of the Church Order and declaring the word male "inoperative," it may become a bit tiresome hearing the overwhelming Scriptural evi-

*"Closing our eyes to sin
doesn't make it disappear."*

dence against this year after year. So we choose not to talk about it any longer. We do not even agree to disagree. We enforce an illegitimate silence in the assemblies of the church as if this will promote unity. But the Word of God doesn't change. Closing our eyes to sin doesn't make it disappear.

A new pressure that will be brought to bear on our broadest ecclesiastical assembly is the constraint of time. Next year synod will meet for one week instead of two. This will greatly reduce the opportunity for sustained discussion and deliberation on any matter on the agenda. As a result more and more matters will be referred to boards or com-

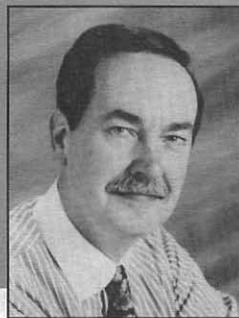
mittees and synod will increasingly become nothing more than a rubber stamp for decisions that will be made elsewhere in smaller select groups.

This trend can also be seen in classical meetings. Last year a conference was held in Estes Park, Colorado sponsored by Home Missions and CRWRC. One of the objectives of the conference was to have classis meetings become more positive and less theological or issue-oriented. Classis should be a forum where the various ecclesiastical agencies could keep the churches informed about their various programs. This used to be accomplished by classically elected representatives of the various boards or agencies. The trend is to reduce the size of the boards and have area representation so nominees from a classis must be approved before their names can be placed in nomination. This is true of the Calvin Board, and the Board of Trustees of the denomination, which is assuming a significant amount of denominational power. The latter is, if not self-perpetuating, at least, hand-picked. Any classical nominee who might hold divergent views would be quickly weeded out in the nominating process.

In the Reformed tradition, ecclesiastical assemblies, the consistory, the classis and the synod were considered to be deliberative in nature. By common consensus it was acknowledged that this was the means by which the Lord governs His church. Deliberation involves discussion, disagreement and debate.

Sometimes it's heated, sometimes it wanders from the issues and appears a bit unruly, but that is the nature of deliberation. Unfortunately, there is a trend to denigrate synod, and to some extent the classis, to the status of an "infomercial" for the boards and agencies of the denomination. They will no longer be places of deliberation but sources of well managed information ostensibly designed to promote unity while ignoring theology. The consequence will be that they will become as irrelevant as our political party conventions where the results have already been predetermined by the primaries. Maybe it makes good media and good press, but it does not advance discussion, discourse or debate. Such trends are not good for our nation, nor are they good for the church.

Rev. Blaww is pastor of the First Christian Reformed Church of South Holland, IL.



ABORTION'S 'SILVER BULLET'

Cal Thomas

A Food and Drug Administration (FDA) panel has recommended approval of the drug mifepristone, known as RU486 or the "abortion pill." Those who want the FDA to approve the drug have so highly politicized the debate that sound medical treatment and moral reasoning have become the first two casualties. In fact, FDA Commissioner David Kessler admonished the panel to consider "only science" in making its decision. It was "only science" that has led to some of modern history's most outrageous and immoral acts.

RU486 kills human tissue, so it should come as no surprise that the drug also causes "collateral damage" to the woman who ingests it. It is such damage that those who see this pill as a "silver bullet" in the abortion wars want to minimize, even cover up.

The *Des Moines Register* reported on the pill's dirty little secret last September. It documented the serious risks women who take the drug, face. And it showed how the promoters of RU486 have displayed a tendency to be less than forthcoming about the drug's nastier side effects because their primary interest is its political benefits.

We know from the American trials as well as the earlier French ones, that this two-plus drug process (the plus means the often multiple visits to a doctor's office) can be, as *Time* magazine noted, "painful, messy and protracted." Nausea, pain, heavy and lengthy bleeding are standard, even for a woman in excellent health. Bleeding is so bad that some women require transfusions. The Population Council, which won the "right" to market RU486 in this country, dismisses the experience of an Iowa woman who nearly died and required surgery, as being "within the context of what happened before" in France — in

other words, normal! Planned Parenthood and the Population Council told the press that the Iowa part of the trial had been completed with "no complications."

The Clinton administration politicized the FDA by putting RU486 on the fast track for approval two days after the president took office. In a July 10 letter to Commissioner Kessler, pro-life groups asked that several members of the panel examining the drug be recused for conflicts of interest. They charged that Kessler, "who is supposed to be the neutral government arbiter looking out for the health and safety of American citizens, took a pro-active role in negotiations with the French manufacturer, Roussel Uclaf, to get them to donate rights to the Population Council and file a New Drug Application ... for RU486."

Kessler, they alleged, assured members of Congress the application could be processed in only six month's time, though other lifesaving drugs usually languish for 19 months or more while awaiting approval. Critics charge the panel is stacked with Planned Parenthood supporters, sympathizers and "even possibly employees," which compromises the approval process and jeopardizes the health of pregnant women.

Many researchers supportive of "abortion rights" vehemently oppose RU486 as a threat to women's health, but their objections are largely ignored by the press.

Approval of RU486 would probably lead to even greater numbers of abortions. According to a survey by the Kaiser Foundation, one-third of obstetrician/gynecologists who don't currently perform abortions said they would be likely to prescribe the drug for abortion. Among family practice physicians, the figure is 28 percent.

The Shepherd's Staff

Able to Teach: A Requirement for Every Elder!!



John R. Sittema

There have been 34 million legal abortions in America since 1973 when the Supreme Court invalidated laws preventing the procedure. Think of the loss to humanity and, in colder terms, to society in diminished productivity. Killing a baby at an earlier stage does nothing to quell the moral argument, especially if the woman who uses the drug puts her own health in danger and if her mothering and nurturing instincts are further dulled by a "pill."

Abortion is a product of *deception* — created by a generation that thought it could live as it pleased with no consequences. If an "unwanted" child is conceived, the solution is to kill it, while denying that killing is taking place and that a developing baby is, in fact, a baby.

When conscience is extinguished, human life becomes easier to extinguish. If the FDA approves RU486, it will be doing more than speeding up the killing process of babies and possibly some women. It will make it easier to exterminate other "unwants."

Los Angeles Times Syndicate

As I write these words, I am sitting at the computer of a friend in a seminary office where I have been teaching a course in Church Education and Catechetics for the last two weeks. The experience has been most instructive for me as it has, I trust, for the students. It also steeled my resolve to write about something the Bible makes clear, but which, by many elders, is doubted, debated, or flatout denied. That is the clear statement by the Apostle Paul in his letter to Timothy (I Tim. 3:2) that one of the requirements for elder is that the elder — every elder, without exception — must be "able to teach."

I've heard many elders react rather strongly to that. "Preachers are trained; we aren't." "Some elders have the 'gift of gab' and can teach, but not all of us can." "It's expecting too much of every elder to teach. Why, many of us are farmers or factory workers. It's simply not fair to have that level of expectation for us."

Sorry, it may hurt, but you have to deal with the real truth of the passage. It doesn't say all *currently sitting elders* are by that very fact good teachers. It doesn't say that unqualified-to-teach elders ought to suck it up and get into a classroom irrespective of their inability and discomfort. It says, simply, that if you can't teach, you have no business being an elder! I quote the Apostle, inspired by the Holy Spirit: "Now the overseer **must be...able to teach.**"

The sad fact is that many churches have gotten themselves into real problems by installing into office men who, on this issue alone, are disqualified Scripturally from the requirements for the office of elder. Now they're stuck with a current, functioning eldership that is not qualified for the New Testament duties of the office. That serves to explain why, as I travel about to conduct seminars for elder training in local churches, I receive so many reactions that would imply (politely but nonetheless urgently) that I'm a bit nuts if I really expect elders to do all I write that they should. Well, friends, the problem is not that my expectations are out of whack; it may be instead that men are currently in office who do not possess the Biblical qualifications for the work the Holy Spirit expects them to do. And if that is the case, you may have to become brutally honest with yourselves about that, confess your disobedience to the I Tim. 3:2 passage before the face of

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God corporately with your brothers, and begin immediately to train the men you have in office now so as to remedy, as best you are able, your former disobedience.

DISCOVER TEACHERS

But that doesn't address the future. Every church faces the duty to nominate and propose men for the office of elder. Some do it yearly (still clinging to the tradition of term eldership despite a lack of Biblical warrant for the practice); but all do it. So, the first thing that must be done is to nominate according to the specific teaching of the passage. How does the local church go about finding out whether men are "able to teach"? Surely, a degree in education is not requisite, is it? Surely, not only professional teachers with years in classroom experience is not expected, is it?

No, of course not. Rather than looking to the secular model, we should look again to Scripture. First, notice (in Romans 12:7) that the Lord's spiritual gift of teaching is given to individuals within the church, and the church is to "let him teach" so that the church may benefit from the Lord's grace. That is to say, within the body of believers, the local church will surely see demonstrated in the lives of some men the spiritual endowment that makes them eager to and enabled to communicate effectively the message of Scripture, the doctrines of the faith, the practical instruction of the Christian life. The question elders ought to be asking about potential candidates is not: "Could he teach if we make him an elder?" but rather, "Has he been teaching already, and how effective is he in that ministry?" To be sure, most who teach or disciple could stand to be cultivated and developed in their ministry skills; you don't only look for accomplished classroom instructors, nor is that what the text requires. But to find men who are "able to teach" you must look to men who are already teaching.

I suggest you consider this exercise. Just like some believers simply cannot stop encouraging the weak and the timid, simply cannot avoid putting an arm of comfort around a broken-hearted believer crushed by the pains of life, simply cannot avoid exercising the "gift of encouragement," so also some believers are endowed by the Holy Spirit with this

gift of teaching. They seemingly turn every experience into a lesson, an opportunity to help a youngster or a new believer grow in grace and knowledge. They simply cannot "not teach," and seem to think always on the level of discovering ways to communicate more effectively what the church believes, and what they know of Christ and His Word. Look for that kind of man, and, in the words of Rom. 12:8, "Let him teach." As you do so, your evaluation of his gift of teaching will help you determine, in connection with the other requirements listed in I Tim. 3, whether you have elder material or not!

CULTIVATE TEACHERS

The second practical matter I would suggest to you as you commit yourselves to obey this requirement is to cultivate teachers within the local body of believers. Take seriously Paul's words to Timothy (II Tim. 2:2) and seek out "reliable men" and cultivate them for the future. That is, have mature and seasoned elders and pastors take young men under their wing for leadership development. I know of a large and effective church in Denton, Texas where, besides preaching and giving leadership to the elders, the only thing the Senior Pastor is asked to do is to cultivate men who will give future spiritual leadership. He trains young men who must make formal written application to apprentice under his ministry, meeting with them 5 mornings per week from 6 AM to 7:30 AM for the duration of a one year commitment. Honestly! Over the last few years, he has personally trained over one hundred

men of God who are now thoroughly educated in Biblical knowledge, doctrinal training, and who have been equipped and trained for youth ministry, teacher-training and education ministry, singles' ministry or some similar ministry within the local church. A good percentage go on to seminary; every one without exception is involved in an active and leadership way in local church ministry, with oversight and high expectations. And from that group of ministering servants, elders are later selected.

Perhaps you aren't ready to release or reassign your local church preacher for such a commitment. But the duty to cultivate and equip elders and ministering servants of God is no less urgent in your church than in the church in Denton. The Bible says clearly that the task of the officebearers in the local church is principally to "equip the saints for ministry" (Eph. 4:12). Do it where you live!

Dr. Sittema, editor of this department, is pastor of Bethel CRC in Dallas, TX and author of the new book, With a Shepherd's Heart.

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A Big Tent

W. Robert Godfrey

The Republican National Convention recently met in San Diego and one of its dominant themes was that the Republican party is a big tent. The convention stressed that the party had room for women and minorities as well as men, for pro-choice as well as pro-life voters. The speakers emphasized that the convention was reaching out to be inclusive and tolerant. To insure that tolerant spirit certain members of the right-wing of the party, like Pat Buchanan, were not permitted to speak.

No doubt the Democratic National Convention will also declare that it is a big tent. And it will probably not permit any pro-life member of the party to speak.

Perhaps a political party should practice such politics of inclusion. But should a church? Should not a church stand uncompromisingly for the teaching of the Word of God? Should it not encourage preaching that is clear and faithful to that Word?

The Christian Reformed Church seems determined to be a big tent today. That tendency was illustrated powerfully by two answers in the "Q & A" section in the August 12, 1996 issue of *The Banner*. One question asked if Roman Catholics now accepted the truth that salvation is by grace through faith. The answer was that they did. The authorities cited were the editor of *The Banner* and one book by a Roman Catholic author written in 1981.

That one book notes that Roman Catholicism is "characterized, therefore, by a both/and rather than an either/or approach." This judgment is certainly correct. Rome in many ways has sought to include and combine a wide variety of elements in its understanding of Christian truth and life. It is a "both/and" denomination. The only ones Rome

seems to exclude from its big tent are those who insist on an "either/or" approach. Protestants were anathematized by the Roman Catholic Church at its Council of Trent in the sixteenth century for teaching that Christians are justified by grace alone through faith alone.

Has Rome changed its position on justification? What evidence would demonstrate that it has changed? One cannot prove such change by citing one or two Roman Catholic authors. One author cannot speak for Rome unless he is the pope. (Just as neither Robert Godfrey nor George Vander Weit can speak officially for the CRC!) Rome's position can be known only through the official teachings of its popes and councils. No pope or council has withdrawn the anathemas of Trent. Rome's official position is still both/and: salvation is by free will and good works cooperating with grace and faith. The Protestant either/or is still condemned.

The answer in "Q & A" is not primarily troubling, however, because it gives false information about Roman Catholicism. It is troubling because it reflects that the CRC too has become a big tent. The CRC - at least as represented in many articles by its leaders and in decisions by its synods - increasingly takes a both/and approach to Christianity. Think of these examples: according to *The Banner* both Protestants and Roman Catholics agree on the essentials of salvation; according to synod both those in favor of women in office and those opposed read the Bible correctly; the CRC both opposes abortion by synodical decision and permits faculty at its college to support abortion. The only folks who do not seem welcome in the CRC big tent are the either/or conservatives.

The size of the CRC tent is even better illustrated by the other answer in the

same "Q & A". The questioner asks if it was appropriate for a woman to perform the role of Jesus in a dramatization of the crucifixion performed during a communion service. The answer basically says that casting a woman in such a role may not have been wise or tasteful, but was not morally wrong. The questioner is advised: "Put your gnat strainer away, my friend, and let's get on with it. Such occasions call for much forbearance."

What is stunning about the question and the answer is how far both are from the historic principles of Reformed worship. Neither suggests that having *anyone* play the role of Jesus in a drama during a worship service is wrong. Worship is assumed to be both drama and sacrament, both theater and preaching.

These inclusivist assumptions violate our Reformed heritage and the teaching of our *Heidelberg Catechism*. The *Catechism* in its own Q & A 96 explains the second commandment: "That we in no way make any image of God nor worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his Word." Worship may do only what God has commanded. Has He commanded drama for the worship of His church? Is the portrayal of Jesus in a drama in a worship service really different from having an image of God there?

The *Catechism* goes on to make clear that teaching aids like images (and drama) are not permitted, Q & A 98: "But may not images be permitted in the churches as teaching aids for the unlearned? No, we shouldn't try to be wiser than God. He wants His people instructed by the living preaching of His Word—not by idols that cannot even talk." The *Catechism* is an either/or document. Preaching is the means of teaching, not images or drama that the "wiser than God" think will be more effective in communicating God's truth.

Is it fair, however, to link drama to images? Yes, it is. What substantial difference is there between a wooden image portraying Christ and a living image portraying Christ? No one believes that either image is actually Christ. They are only helps to knowing and serving God, right? But precisely this is forbidden according to Q & A 97: "Although creatures may be portrayed, yet God forbids making or having such images if one's intention is to worship them or to serve God through them."

Now some might ask if drama would be legitimate in a church service if Christ were not portrayed. Could not drama be a form of preaching? Did not the prophet Ezekiel use drama in his ministry? The answer must be that drama is not legitimate in worship. Drama in worship is an invention of man, not a divine commandment and therefore must diminish rather than enhance the divinely appointed means of grace. Actors cannot really be preachers in worship because they have not been called and ordained by God and His church to that office. Ezekiel's actions were not part of public worship and were the response to specific commandments from God. They were part of God's judgment on a people who would not listen to the Word, not a form of entertainment. To generalize a principle from Ezekiel's actions would be like justifying images in church because Moses once used a bronze serpent.

Faithfulness in worship and the avoidance of idolatry is a very serious matter in the *Catechism*. Indeed, it is a salvation issue! Remember Q & A 94: "What does the Lord require in the first commandment? That I, not wanting to endanger my very salvation, avoid and shun all idolatry, magic, superstitious rites, and prayer to saints or to other creatures." Is not drama in worship a superstitious rite?

The best authority available to us on the meaning of the *Catechism* is the commentary written by its principal author,

"For Ursinus idolatry is not only the worship of a false god, but also the false worship of the true God."

Zacharias Ursinus. Listen to Ursinus on worship and the second commandment. He warns solemnly: "We are, therefore, prone by nature to the sin of idolatry...." Human, even Christian, instincts cannot be trusted on the matter of worship.

For Ursinus idolatry is not only the worship of a false god, but also the false worship of the true God: "The other species of idolatry is more subtle and refined, as when the true God is supposed to be worshiped, whilst the kind of worship which is paid unto him is false, which is the case when any one imagines that he is worshiping or honoring God by the performance of any work not

prescribed by the divine law. This species of idolatry is more properly condemned in the second commandment, and is termed superstition, because it adds to the commandments of God the inventions of men. Those are called superstitious who corrupt the worship of God by their own inventions. This will-worship or superstition is condemned in every part of the Word of God." If drama is an invention of man rather than the command of God, it is superstition. And if it is superstition, it endangers the salvation of the worshiper. Here the either/or of the *Catechism* is clear. Here is the spirit of genuine Reformed faith. Does it fit in the CRC big tent or would Ursinus be told that he is "straining at gnats"?

Imagine for a moment a communion service in which Christ's crucifixion was acted out. Suppose no attempt was made to be realistic (no pounding of nails, no blood, no bodies lifted on crosses), but rather arms were simply stretched out and some conversation between Christ and others at Calvary was acted out. If it were done effectively, would not its visual power and emotional impact completely overshadow the communion? How can bread and wine compete with the action and dialogue of a good drama? Communion, after all, is not a drama. Its meaning is not in any dramatic actions. Communion is not the re-enactment of the Last Supper. Communion is a covenant meal where the congregation takes the

divinely appointed elements to commune with the living Christ. By the Word and sacrament Jesus comes to

His people and blesses them. Drama would not enhance that occasion, but would only be a distraction.

Drama would also diminish preaching. Preaching may have some dramatic qualities, but the preacher is not acting. He is appointed to speak the Word to the hearts of God's people. The simplicity and straight-forwardness of preaching must not be compromised by activities that may claim to be interesting and effective, but are only the inventions of man.

Ursinus rightly observed "...images have never resulted in any good to those who have had them." Neither the images

of the Roman Catholic Church nor the dramatic liturgy of Eastern Orthodoxy have made those denominations more Biblical, but rather have contributed to superstition and corruption. Drama will have the same effect in Protestant churches. The inventions of men are not wiser than God and will not help His people more than God's institutions.

Today American churches are experiencing the results of their worship inventions. The divinely appointed means of grace, preaching and sacraments, have been sadly affected by the experiments of these times, which range from drama to extravagant cantatas to holy laughter. Preaching has been perverted often to a combination of comedy, moralism and psychological tips. The sacraments are largely ignored in terms of being a central spiritual benefit for the people of God. The CRC seems bent on following the worship practices that increasingly prevail in the American churches generally.

A still deeper question must be asked of the CRC big tent. Are developments like drama reflecting a church that is God-centered or man-centered? Some will answer that the CRC needs to be both. Again it is both/and, not either/or. The true Christian wants to be God-centered alone in worship. The true Christian wants God's will above everything, and so carefully and thoroughly he searches the Scripture to determine God's will. Q & A 94 on the first commandment concludes: "In short, that I give up anything rather than go against his will in any way." A passionate, Biblical desire for God's ways seems sadly lacking for too many in the CRC.

Reformed churches must be big tents in the sense that they welcome all persons regardless of gender, race, ethnic background, or sinful beliefs or lifestyles that they want to put behind them. But Reformed churches, especially in their worship, must not seek to satisfy unconverted desires for entertainment and self-gratification. They must teach, worship and live according to the Word of God alone. It is not both-and; it is either/or.

Dr. Godfrey, contributing editor of The Outlook, is president and professor of Church History at Westminster Seminary in Escondido, CA.



What We Believe

A-millennialism

Cornelis P. Venema

Throughout this series of articles on the major millennial views, I have been stressing the fact that there are two major types of views, each of which has two distinguishable expressions. The first two views considered, classical premillennialism and dispensational premillennialism, share the conviction that Christ's return will *precede* the period of the millennial kingdom. Despite their many differences on other, related issues, they share this fundamental understanding of the future course of events. Similarly, the view considered in my last article, post-millennialism, and the view to be considered in this article, a-millennialism, share the conviction that Christ's return will *follow* the millennium.

However, despite this fundamental similarity between post-millennialism and a-millennialism, there are a number of respects in which these two positions can be distinguished. To complete our survey of millennial views, therefore, we need to consider the view commonly known as a-millennialism. Following the pattern of previous articles, I will begin with a comment on the terminology of "a-millennialism," and then consider briefly the history and a number of the main features that especially distinguish this view from post-millennialism.

YET ANOTHER COMMENT ABOUT TERMINOLOGY

On more than one previous occasion, I have commented upon some of the terminological confusion that surrounds the subject of the various millennial views. Nowhere does this problem of terminology prove more difficult than in the case of the view commonly known as "a-millennialism."

Perhaps the most obvious and immediate problem with the term, "a-millennialism," is that, literally, it means "no millennium." At first glance, therefore, it would appear that a-millennialism is a position that rejects the idea of the millennium altogether. This would suggest that it is not so much a millennial view at all, as it is a rejection of all forms of millennialism. However, this is not the case, since a-millennialism has a distinctive view of the millennium, as we shall see.

The terminology of "a-millennialism" has been coined, however, because this view rejects the *chiliasm* of the other major millennial views. A-millennialism identifies the millennium with the entire period of history between Christ's first and second coming. Accordingly, it does not look for a *golden age millennium* either after the return of Christ, as in premillennialism, or in the period just prior to the return of Christ. Unlike the traditional chiliasm of post-millennialism, which distinguishes the millennium as a particular period of history prior to the return of Christ but not encompassing the entire era of the New Testament church, a-millennialism regards the present age in its entirety to be the period of the millennium. Because it rejects the idea of a distinguishable millennium or golden age which commences at some point after the early history of the Christian church, this view has been given the name a-millennialism.¹

In order to prevent misunderstanding of this view, some have suggested alternative terminology. Jay Adams, for example, in his study of the book of Revelation, *The Time is At Hand*, has proposed the terminology of "realized millennialism."² This terminology reflects the real emphasis of a-millennialism, that the millennium is a present

reality, having commenced with the events of Christ's ascension and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Still another proposal has been made by Gordon Spykman who, in his *Reformational Theology*, offers the terminology of "pro-millennialism" as a more appropriate and positive term for this eschatological view.³ It is not a negative view which denies the reality of the millennium, but a positive view which affirms the presence of the millennium here and now before the return of Christ. Of these two proposals, Spykman's is the more attractive, particularly since it retains a parallelism with the other millennial views, each of which is denominated by a prefixed form of the term "millennialism." However, terms have a life of their own and it is highly unlikely that any of these or other candidates will displace the traditional language of a-millennialism.

We will continue to speak, accordingly, of "a-millennialism," though in the awareness of its inadequacy and liability to misunderstanding.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF A-MILLENNIALISM

The view which today is known by the terminology of a-millennialism has a long history of advocacy going back to the beginning of the Christian era. Since the fourth and fifth century, it has been the predominant position within the Christian church. Though premillennialism has had its advocates throughout the history of the Christian church and has enjoyed a resurgence recently among conservative evangelicals in North America, it is safe to say that a-millennialism has been the consensus position of the largest portion of the Christian church. Louis Berkhof is correct, when he remarks as follows regarding a-millennialism:

Some Premillennarians have spoken of *A-millennialism* as a new view and as one of the most recent novelties, but this is certainly not in accord with the testimony of history. The name is new indeed, but the view to which it is applied is as old as Christianity. It had at least as many advocates as Chiliasm among the Church Fathers of the second and third centuries, supposed to have been the heyday of Chiliasm. It has ever since

been the view most widely accepted, is the only view that is either expressed or implied in the great historical Confessions of the Church, and has always been the prevalent view in Reformed circles.⁴

Though Berkhof does not mention the claim of many present-day post-millennialists that a-millennialism, not post-millennialism, is the relative newcomer, his observations are equally valid in response to this claim.

It is generally agreed that, though the view known today as a-millennialism was already present in the earliest period of the Christian church, the great church Father, Augustine, was instrumental in establishing this view as the predominant one. By treating the millennium of Revelation 20 as a symbolical description of the church's growth in the present age, Augustine gave impetus to the a-millennialist contention that the millennium does not follow chronologically the early history of the New Testament church. With the exception of some exponents of pre-millennialism, the tenets of a-millennialist teaching prevailed throughout the Middle Ages and during the Reformation. The Reformers were aligned with this broad tradition, though, as we noted in our previous article, there were, soon after the Reformation, advocates of post-millennialism especially within the Reformed tradition.

However strong the influence of post-millennialism may have been within the

are more congenial to an a-millennialist view than to the other major millennial views. This is true of the Reformed confessions, though they do not explicitly address some of the differences between a-millennialism and post-millennialism.⁵

THE MAIN FEATURES OF A-MILLENNIALISM

Because there are significant areas of agreement between post-millennialism and a-millennialism, my summary of the main features of a-millennialism will often focus upon those things which distinguish these two views. Just as with the other millennial views, this summary will be very general, recognizing that there are many differences in emphasis and on particular issues among a-millennialists.

The millennium is now

Perhaps the most important way in which to distinguish a-millennialism from the other millennial views is to note that it teaches the *present reality of the millennial kingdom*. A-millennialism regards the millennium of Revelation 20 to be a symbolical representation of the present reign of Christ with His saints. During the period of time between Christ's first advent and His return at the end of the age, Satan has been bound in such a way as no longer to be able to deceive the nations. The millennium, therefore, is not a literal period of one thousand years. The period of one thousand years (ten times ten times ten) represents the *complete period within God's sovereign disposition of history during which He has granted to Christ the authority to receive the nations as His inheritance* (compare Psalm 2; Matt. 28:16-20).

A-millennialism is, accordingly, opposed to all forms of "chiliasm," that is, the teaching that the millennium is a distinguishable period which concludes the period of history between Christ's first and second coming. This view rejects the idea that at some point in the history of the church the millennial kingdom will be established. Though there are a variety of opinions among a-millennialists as to the nature of the millennium — some are more "pessimistic," others

more "optimistic," as to the triumph of the gospel of Jesus Christ among the nations — a-millennialists do not typically believe that there will ever be a period in history when Christ's kingdom will prevail upon the earth in the post-millennialist sense. A-millennialists ordinarily reject the post-millennialist conviction that the millennium will be a period marked by universal peace, the pervasive influence and dominion of biblical principles in all aspects of life, and the subjection of the vast majority of the nations and peoples to Christ's lordship. A-millennialists believe that the Scriptural descriptions of the inter-advent period suggest that the world's opposition to Christ and the gospel will endure, even becoming more intense as the present period of history draws to a close.

The signs of the times

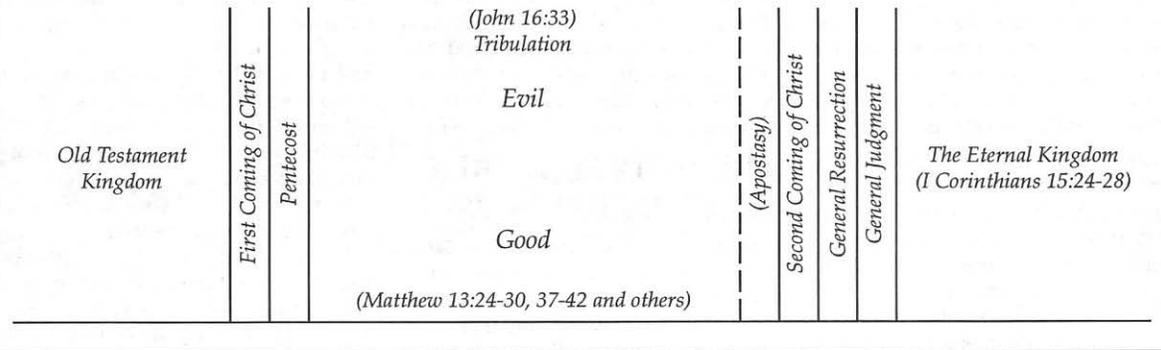
In the position of a-millennialism, there is a common understanding that the signs of the times, including in particular the signs of opposition to Christ's gospel and people (e.g. tribulation, apostasy, the spirit of anti-Christ), are *present and future* realities. During the entirety of the period between the ascension of Christ and His return at the end of the present age, there will be an on-going conflict, sometimes more intense, sometimes less intense, between the church and the world, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the evil one. Though there may be in different places or countries and at different times, periods of relative peace and prosperity for the church and people of God, there will never be a time, certainly not a millennial period, in which the cause of Christ will so triumph in the earth that suffering and distress will no longer be experienced by the church of Jesus Christ.

This view of the signs of the times regards them as characterizing the history of redemption in the entire period during which Christ is gathering His church by His Spirit and Word. Post-millennialism, by contrast, regards many of these signs to have been (or to be) fulfilled at some point prior to the millennium. It is common, for example, among post-millennialists to regard the signs of the times enumerated in Matthew 24 to refer to the events prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.⁶ This means that, from the point of view of the mil-

"A-millennialism identifies the millennium with the entire period of history between Christ's first and second coming."

Reformed churches, especially in North America during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the predominant view today is that of a-millennialism. Though there are advocates of post-millennialism among the Reformed churches, and though the majority of conservative evangelicals in North America are pre-millennialists, the prevailing view among the Reformed churches and the Christian church, broadly conceived, remains that of a-millennialism. It is commonly agreed that, where the historic creeds and confessions address themselves to the subject of the future, they

Amillennialism



lennium, signs of opposition to Christ, like tribulation and apostasy, will no longer characterize history, at least for the duration of the millennium until Satan's "little season" just prior to Christ's return at the end of the age.

Revelation 20

Throughout this series of articles on the millennium, the teaching of Revelation 20 has always been close at hand. In the final analysis, the various millennial views can only be tested and justified on biblical grounds, and the key biblical text is, undoubtedly, Revelation 20. Consequently, we will be devoting one or more articles in this series to this key passage. Without settling the exegetical questions here, however, I would like only to summarize the standard view of Revelation 20 among a-millennialists.

Most a-millennialists read Revelation 20 as a passage which, in parallel with several sections of the book of Revelation, describes a vision sequence which covers the entire period from Christ's first coming to His second coming. Unlike many post-millennialists who read Revelation 19 and Revelation 20 as though they were in chronological succession (Revelation 19 describing the commencement of the millennial period in history, Revelation 20 describing the millennium itself), a-millennialists view the vision of the millennium as a kind of symbolic portrayal of the period of the church's mission in the world. The binding of Satan described in this vision is a picture of the restraint God has placed upon Satan, preventing him from deceiving the nations, and the certain prospect of the church's success in disciplining the nations.

Though there are differences of opinion among a-millennialists regarding the "first resurrection" and the "coming to life" of the saints who reign with Christ, most a-millennialists understand the first resurrection to be a spiritual one in which all believers participate, particularly the martyred and deceased saints who reign with Christ in heaven. By virtue of this first resurrection, believers are no longer subject to the power of death and have a share in Christ's reign over all things. Only at the end of the period of Christ's gathering His church and the reign of His saints will Christ return, the dead be raised, and the resurrection of the body (the second resurrection) occur. The reign of Christ and His saints described in this vision is not a reign of the saints upon the earth, but a reign of the saints who are with Christ in heaven. Thus, Revelation 20 does not describe an earthly millennium, a golden age in the post-millennialist sense, but the history of the progress of Christ's kingdom upon the earth, as the gospel is preached to the nations, and believers, especially those who are deceased, even martyred for the faith, are given to reign with Christ in the expectation of His triumph at the end of the age.

The Christian's hope for the future

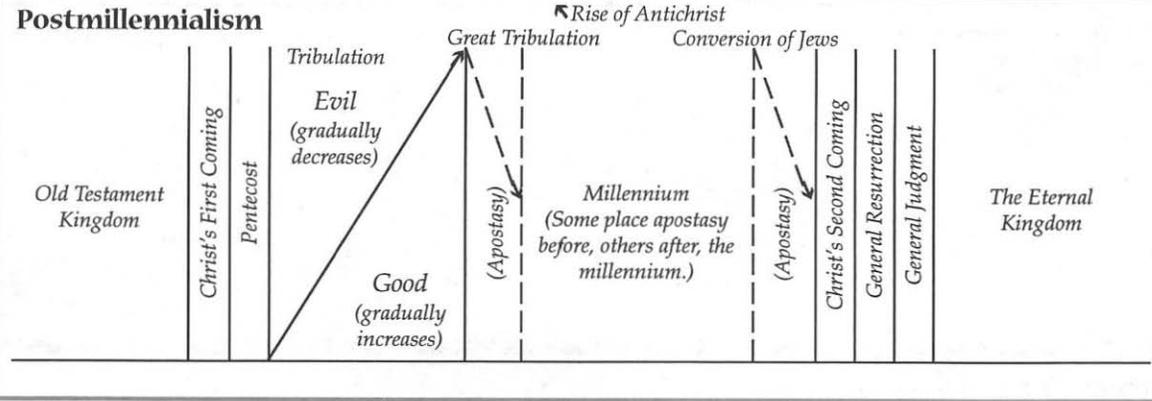
Another feature of a-millennialism that distinguishes it from post-millennialism is its insistence that the *great hope of the Christian and the believer for the future is the return of Christ at the end of the age*. Though post-millennialists would regard Christ's return to be the final, consummating event at the end of this present age, they tend to view history in such a way as to deflect attention from this event to the expectation of a

future millennial age. A-millennialists, on the other hand, anticipate that the victory of Christ, and the triumph of the kingdom of Christ, will only occur when Christ returns.

This is a somewhat elusive and difficult point to make. Often times, post-millennialists will decry a-millennialists for their pessimism about the prospects of Christ's kingdom in this present age. A-millennialists, conversely, will scold post-millennialists for being too optimistic and unjustifiably so. A-millennialists are said to be too "other-worldly" in their expectations for the future. Post-millennialists are said to be too "this-worldly" in their expectations.

Without attempting to resolve this dispute here, it certainly is true that there is a real difference on this score between these two views. A-millennialism always insists that, in the biblical descriptions of the future, the great and final hope of every Christian focuses upon the event of Christ's return, His "revelation from heaven" when He will subdue all of His enemies and bring relief to His troubled church (2 Thess. 1). Unlike the expectation of post-millennialism, which teaches a future millennium of one thousand years (or more) of Christ's reign upon the earth, an expectation which undoubtedly diminishes the urgency and eager anticipation of Christ's second coming, a-millennialism does not expect any substantial or qualitative change in the circumstance of the church prior to Christ's return. Indeed, one of the ways in which post-millennialism and a-millennialism may be distinguished, is to say that a-millennialism has a more clear expectation of the *imminence* (the "soonness") of Christ's coming again than does post-millennialism. Post-millennialism regards the return of

Postmillennialism



Christ to be a distant reality, one whose fulfillment can only follow upon the millennium or golden age to come.

CONCLUSION

If these main features of a-millennialism are brought together, it is evident that a-millennialism is really a form of post-millennialist teaching absent the "chiliasm" that characterizes classic post-millennialism.⁷ With post-millennialism, a-millennialism believes that the return of Christ will occur after the millennium. However, against post-millennialism, a-millennialism rejects the notion that Christ's return will follow a distinct millennial period that comprises only a segment of the period of history between the first and second comings of Christ. A-millennialism, as we have seen, regards the millennium as the equivalent of the entire period of history between Christ's resurrection and ascension and His coming again. Unlike the expectation of a millennial age, a "golden age" in history before the return of Christ in which the kingdom of God will be realized upon the earth (though falling short of absolute perfection), the a-millennialist expectation is for a continuing history of growth as well as struggle, of advance as well as of temporary retrenchment, for the church of Jesus Christ in this present age. Only at the end of the age, with the return of Christ in glory and power, will every enemy be subdued and Christ's reign be openly acknowledged in all the earth.

With this summary of the main features of a-millennialism, we have concluded our survey of the four major views of the millennium. No doubt more could be said regarding any one of these views, and it would be possible to note

various differences that exist among their advocates. It has been my intention only to provide a sketch of the most important distinctives of each of the four major millennial views.

However, having summarized these four positions, the most difficult task still remains. And that is to evaluate each view by the standard of the Scriptures. To that task, the Lord willing, we will turn in the months to come.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 Some post-millennialists are fond of calling this view "pessi-millennialism" because it does not teach that the cause of Christ's kingdom will necessarily triumph and prevail throughout the earth for a lengthy period of many centuries. This language is an example of partisan labeling that does not promote understanding or communication among those who hold differing views, particularly among post-millennialists and a-millennialists.
- 2 Philadelphia, PA: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1970, pp. 7-11. Adams' position is a kind of amalgam of post-millennialist and a-millennialist views, though it is with the latter that his position is most clearly to be identified.
- 3 Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992, pp. 540-43. It is not difficult to anticipate the objection to this terminology that will come from advocates of the other views: what right does a-millennialism have to the proud title of being "pro-" millennial?
- 4 *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI Eerdmans, 1941), p. 708.
- 5 The one exception to this pattern may be the *Second Helvetic Confession* of 1566 A.D. This confession was first written by Heinrich Bullinger, Zwingli's successor and an influential Reformer in his own right, and later adopted by the Swiss Reformed churches as a confession of their faith. Next to the *Heidelberg Catechism*, it has been the most popular Reformed confession among the international family of Reformed churches. This confession seems to condemn post-millennialism, when it declares: "We further condemn Jewish dreams that there will be a golden age on earth before the Day of Judgment, and that the pious, having subdued all their godless enemies will possess all the kingdoms of the earth. For evangelical truth in Matt. chs. 24 and 25, and Luke, ch. 18, and apostolic teaching in II Thess., ch. 2, and II Tim., chs. 3 and 4, present something different" (quoted from *Reformed Confessions of the 16th Century*, ed. Arthur C. Cochrane [Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1966], chap. 11).

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- 6 In my previous articles on the signs of the times, I have already addressed this issue and taken a position that is at odds with this one. Though I did not say so at the time, my view of the signs of the times, if correct, supports an a-millennialist and not a post-millennialist view. We will come back to this issue in a subsequent article.
- 7 Some readers might wonder why I have not included a certain view of the conversion of "Israel" as a feature of a-millennialism. Just as many post-millennialists teach the future conversion of the preponderance of the Jewish people, so many a-millennialists reject this teaching and take the reference to "all Israel" in Romans 11:26 to be a reference to all the elect Jews (and perhaps even Gentiles) gathered into the church through the centuries. However, as I noted previously, the advocacy or rejection of this view of the conversion of the Jews is not a sufficient condition for being a post-millennialist or a-millennialist.

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